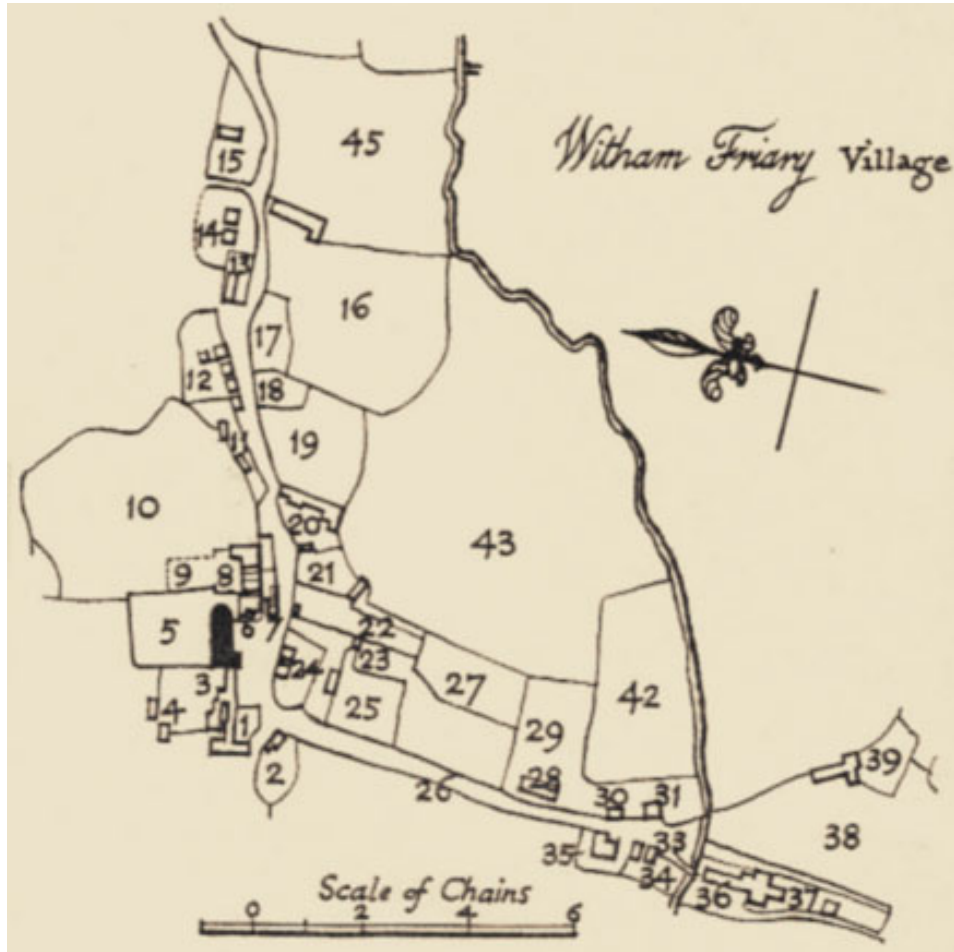


Land adjoining Gramarye, Witham Friary, Somerset.

An Archaeological Evaluation



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

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Land adjoining Gramarye, Witham Friary, Somerset.

An Archaeological Field Evaluation

for Mr C J Humphries

by



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COAS reference: COAS/EVA/03/WFS

Planning reference: 116166/000

National Grid Reference: ST 74478 41176

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Report: Richard McConnell

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March 2004

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Cover image: Transcription of a survey by Francis Webb in 1812 of Witham Estate (after McGarvie, 1981)

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Non-technical summary

Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Field Evaluation on land adjoining 'Gramarye', Witham Friary, Somerset (NGR ST 74478 41176) on 2 December, 2003 in order to assist the Local Planning Authority (Mendip District Council) determine a planning application for development on the site comprising the erection of a detached house and garage (Planning Application reference: 116166/000). The investigation was commissioned by Paul Humphries, Architects on behalf of the landowner, Mr Carl Humphries.

The evaluation was requested by Mr Steve Membery, Development Control Archaeologist at Somerset County Council as there was reason to believe that archaeological remains may exist on the site but their extent and state of preservation could not be adequately assessed on the basis of currently available information. In this instance, the site lay within the historic core of Witham Friary and in close proximity to the Lower House for the lay brethren of an early Carthusian monastery located just outside the village.

It was therefore advised that the proposed development in its current form would severely damage or destroy any archaeological remains that may be present on the site and that an archaeological evaluation consisting of a trench measuring 20m x 1.5m should be carried out to obtain further information on the presence and preservation of any archaeological deposits.

The request for the archaeological work followed advice given by central Government as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1), General Policy and principles, 1997 and Planning Policy Guidance: Note 16 (PPG16) issued by the DoE in 1990. It also conforms to Policies 11-13 of the Somerset & Exmoor National Park - Joint Structure Plan Review (adopted April 2000) and Policies EN11 and EN12 of the Mendip District Local Plan (adopted December 2002).

Despite the location of the proposed development site in the medieval core of the village and the hypothesis that it may have comprised medieval features and deposits relating to one of the earliest Charterhouse complexes in England, the evaluation revealed no corroborative archaeological evidence for this. Instead, excavation revealed an undulating depression that graduated in depth from the road frontage to the rear incorporating deposits that were characterised by alluvial sediments at the deepest section with an outlying layer of building rubble. These deposits produced a small assemblage of cultural material that generally dates from the 17th century onwards.

It is likely that this feature represents part of a natural hollow that has been subjected to long periods of sitting water or episodes of flooding, perhaps originating from natural springs that were evident during the excavation. The layer of building rubble probably relates to numerous and enduring attempts to firm the ground around the hollow with locally imported waste.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Context One Archaeological Services (COAS) carried out an Archaeological Field Evaluation on land adjoining 'Gramarye', Witham Friary, Somerset (NGR ST 74478 41176) on 2 December, 2003 in order to assist the Local Planning Authority (Mendip District Council) determine a planning application for development on the site comprising the erection of a detached house and garage (Planning Application reference: 116166/000). The investigation was commissioned by Paul Humphries, Architects on behalf of the landowner, Mr Carl Humphries.
- 1.2. The evaluation was requested by Mr Steve Membery, Development Control Archaeologist at Somerset County Council. The reasons for the requirement were detailed in a *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation* issued by Mr Membery on 19 November 2003, which advised;

"The village of Witham Friary is mentioned within Domesday Book as supporting eleven villagers, smallholders and cottagers. Its importance increased in 1182 with the granting of a foundation charter for a Carthusian monastery. One of the two earliest Carthusian monasteries was built to the north east of the present village. The Priory was divided into the Upper and Lower Houses, the Lower House accommodating the lay brethren, and this was located at what is now the parish church within the village, and from which the village takes its name (frererie - brethren). It is suggested that parts of the village date to the mid 15th century when the system of lay brethren declined and the monks brought in outside labour to work their estates." (Para. 4.1)

"The proposed development in its current form would severely damage or destroy any archaeological remains that may be present on the site. It has therefore been recommended that an archaeological evaluation should take place to obtain further information on the presence and preservation of any archaeological deposits before any decision is reached as to whether planning consent should be granted on this or any modified proposal." (Para 5.1)

- 1.3. The request for the archaeological work followed advice given by central Government as set out in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1), General Policy and principles, 1997* and *Planning Policy Guidance: Note 16 (PPG16)* issued by the DoE in 1990. It also conforms to Policies 11-13 of the *Somerset & Exmoor National Park - Joint Structure Plan Review* (adopted April 2000) and Policies EN11 and EN12 of the *Mendip District Local Plan* (adopted December 2002).
- 1.4. This report summarises the topographical, geological, archaeological and historical setting of the site, and presents the results of the field evaluation.

2. Definition and purpose of a field evaluation

- 2.1. An archaeological field evaluation is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) as;

"...a limited programme of non-intrusive and/or intrusive fieldwork which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater. If such archaeological remains are present field evaluation defines their character, extent, quality and preservation, and enables an assessment of their worth in a local, regional, national or international context as appropriate" (IFA, 1994, rev.1999)

- 2.2. The purpose of a field evaluation is similarly defined by the IFA and is;

"...to gain information about the archaeological resource within a given area or site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date integrity, state of preservation and quality), in order to make an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, leading to one or more of the following:

- *The formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource*
- *the formulation of a strategy to initiate a threat to the archaeological resource*
- *the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research*
(IFA, 1994, rev.1999)

3. Topography and geology

- 3.1. Witham Friary is located c.19km south-east of Shepton Mallet and c.10km south-west of Frome, in the parish of Witham Friary. The archaeological evaluation was specifically carried out on land adjoining Gramarye on the northern side of the main road through the village. (**Figure 1**). The site (c.500 sq. m) occupies roughly level ground (c.92m OD) with hedge and fencing marking its boundaries on the south-western, north-western and north-eastern flanks with open access onto the road. At the time of the investigation, the site was covered in thick scrub vegetation. The underlying solid geology is Middle Jurassic Cornbrash.

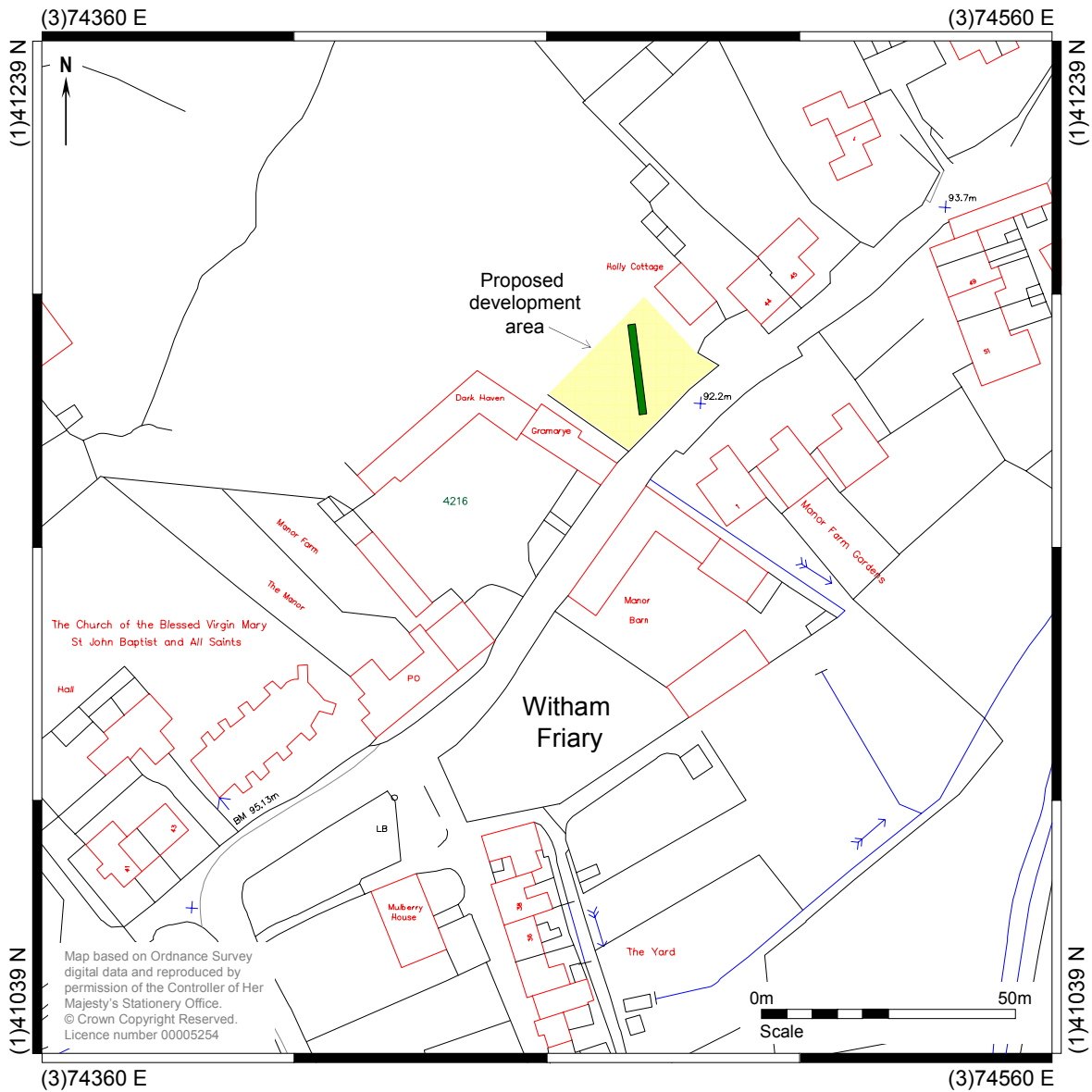
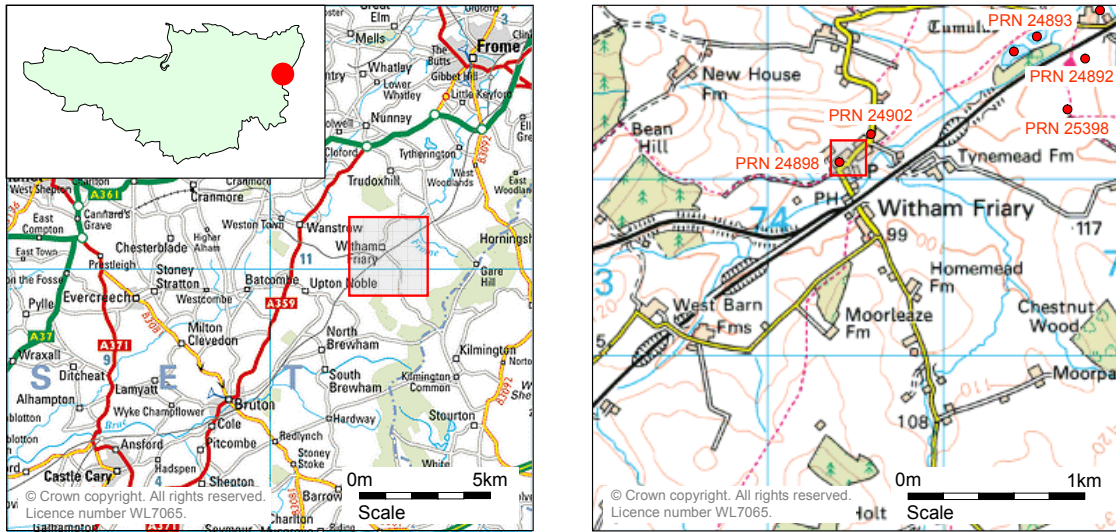


Figure 1. Composite map: Site setting, trench location and Somerset Historic Environment Record data

4. Archaeological and historical setting

- 4.1. The archaeological and historical background for the development area is largely drawn from secondary sources and comprises a data search of archaeological records held by Somerset County Council as part of their Somerset Historic Environment Record (SHER) together with a trawl of key published texts. Primary cartographic sources held by Somerset Record Office (SRO) have been used to analyse the development area over time although, as is often the case, these were only available from the early 19th century.
- 4.1. Despite an absence of archaeological data for the proposed development area itself, the SHER lists five sites/events within the environs ranging in date from the prehistoric to post-medieval periods (see **Figure 1** for locations and **Appendix 1** for details). Not surprisingly, there is an emphasis on the monastic connection with the village and includes the site of the Carthusian Priory (PRN 24892) and associated fishponds (PRN 24893) together with the Church of St. Mary where the lay-brothers lived and worshipped (PRN 24848). Documentary evidence indicates that Henry II issued a charter for the founding of the Priory in 1182 on ground to the north-east of the village approximately 1.4km from the development site and also bestowed an area of land thought to equate to the present parish. One of only nine Carthusian houses in England, the Priory survived until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 during the reign of Henry VIII. Excavations in the 1920s and 1960s confirmed the presence of the Priory and the remains survive today as a complex of earthworks that have been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- 4.2. The Church of St. Mary which probably served as the lay brothers' chapel still survives, although only elements of the medieval structure remain following radical restoration in the 19th century. The chapel would almost certainly have been associated with domestic housing for the brethren and there is documentary and cartographic evidence to suggest that these survived until the early 19th century at least. Located on the present site of Manor Farm adjacent to the church, they are described in a grant to Sir Ralph Hopton in 1544 as 'the Grange called Frayry' and included a hayhouse, oxenstall, Dovecote, granary, mowberton (rickyard), calves house, carpenter's shed and yard (Mcgarvie 1981, 41). Two leases dating to the mid-18th century testify to the continued existence of the grange referring to it as the '...Captial Messuage of the ffriery...' (Mcgarvie 1981, 42) whilst a survey of 1812 show five adjoining buildings on the site described as 'Jenkins' or Mayor's Tenements' (Mcgarvie 1981, 41). Although it is conjectured that these represent the grange buildings, it is not clear whether they were later demolished or re-modelled to create Manor Farm which is shown as a single building on maps from the late 19th century.
- 4.3. In spite of the proximity of the church and grange to the proposed development site, there is an absence of documentary evidence to suggest any further associated structures/features or other early settlement activity here whilst map regression analysis has only been helpful in establishing that the plot has been sited on open ground since the early 19th century.

5. Methodology

- 5.1. The programme of archaeological works was in accordance with the *General Specification for Archaeological Work in Somerset* issued by Somerset County Council in March, 1995 and under the terms of *Standard and Guidance for archaeological field evaluations* published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) in October, 1994 (rev. September, 1999). COAS adhered to the *Code of Conduct* issued by the IFA in October, 1997, and *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology* (1990, rev. September, 2000), at all times during the course of the investigation. The current Health and Safety legislation and guidelines were followed on site.
- 5.2. It was recommended that the archaeological evaluation should consist of one trench measuring 20m x 1.5m in order that the proposed development area was appropriately sampled for archaeological evidence. However,

due to the presence of a hedge at the rear of the site that was not represented on Ordnance Survey maps, the trench was shortened to 18m so that the preferred orientation could be maintained (Figure 1).

5.3. A machine with a 1.5m toothless bucket was used to remove vegetation and overburden under the supervision of archaeological staff. Machine excavation continued until the natural geology was encountered, with manual excavation taking place when suspected archaeological features were identified. The following procedures were then adopted:

- A representative number of excavation contexts were excavated by hand
- All excavation was undertaken with a view to avoiding damage to any archaeological feature or deposits which appeared to be worthy of preservation *in situ*
- All archaeological features were planned on dimensionally stable media at a scale of 1:20 and sections drawn at a scale of 1:10
- All archaeological deposits were levelled to Ordnance Datum by means of a temporary bench mark transferred from an Ordnance Survey bench mark at a height of 95.13m located on the south-western corner of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist and All Saints.
- A photographic record of the evaluation was prepared and involved the use of colour transparencies and digital images. This included images illustrating in both detail and general context, the principal features and finds discovered. The photographic record also included working shots to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological operation mounted
- All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using standard COAS pro-forma context recording sheets
- On conclusion of the excavation, the trench was back-filled and the surface levelled and firmed

6. Results

6.1. The archaeological stratigraphy for the trench is presented in the table below (Table 1) followed by a description of deposits encountered. Where a feature is discussed, it is referenced with its deposit number enclosed by standard brackets.

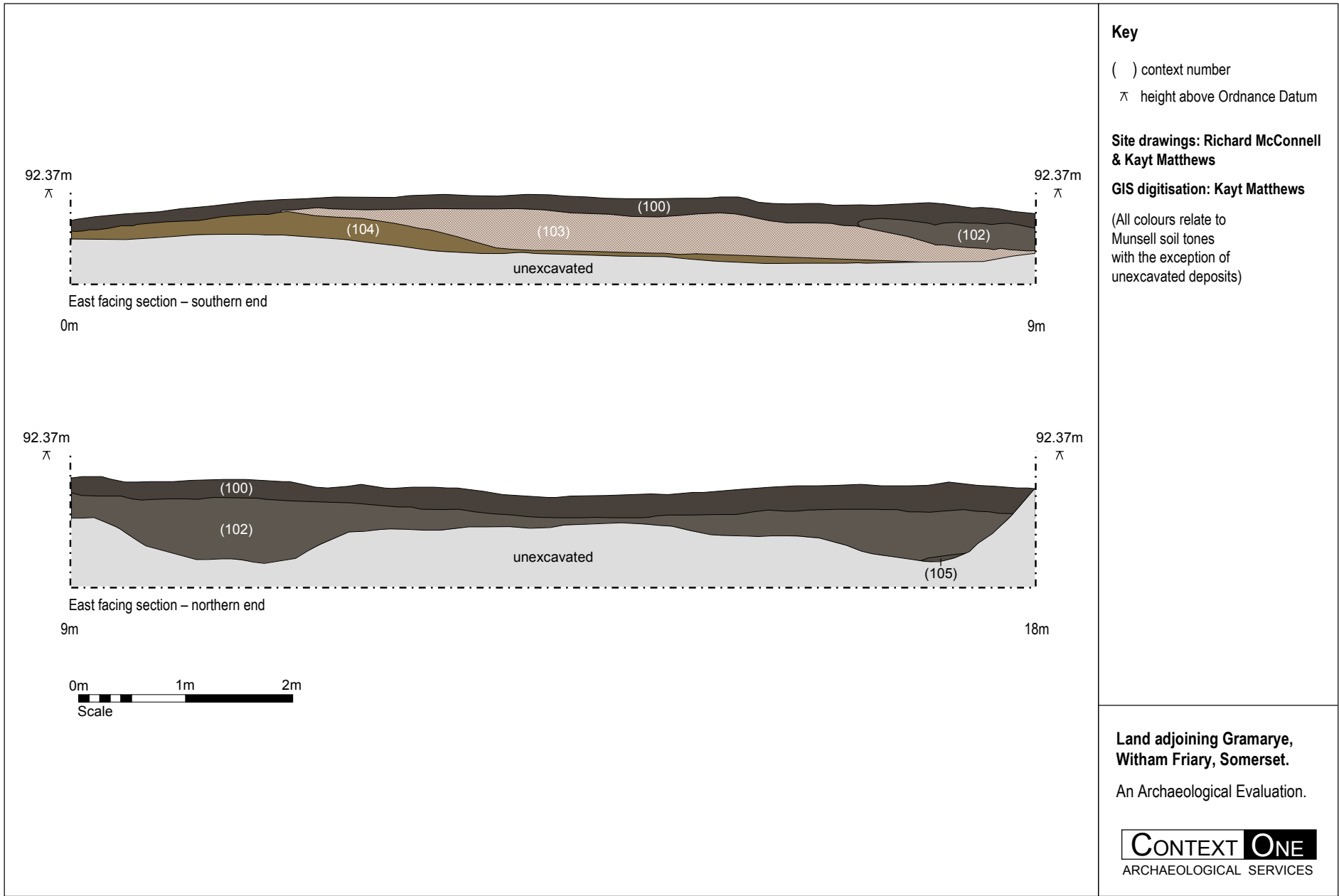
Context no.	Type	Description	Dimensions			Stratigraphic relationships
			Length	Width/ Diameter	Thickness/ Depth	
100	Layer	Soft, black (10YR 2/1) silt/clay	18.00m+	1.50m+	0.12-0.26m	Covers (102), (103), (104)
102	Layer	Soft, very dark grey(2.5Y 3/1) silt/clay	10.50m	1.50m+	0.04-0.56m	Covered by (100), Covers (103), (105)
103	Layer	Firm, very dark grey(2.5Y 3/1) and reddish brown (5YR 4/4) silt/clay with large fragments of building rubble (brick, stone, tile)	6.80m	1.50m+	0.02-0.40m	Covered by (100), (102), Covers (104)
104	Layer	Firm, olive brown (2.5Y 4/4) silt/clay	18.00m+	1.50m+	0.04-0.22m	Covered by (100), (102), (103)
105	Layer	Firm, black (2.5Y 2.5/1) silt/clay	96cm+	1.50m+	0.10m+	Covered by (102)

Table 1. Trench Stratigraphy

- 6.2. Excavation of the topsoil (100) revealed deposits filling a shallow depression that extended throughout much of the trench and graduated in depth from the southern to the northern end. The primary fill (103) was concentrated over the southern half of the trench and incorporated a mix of post-medieval/modern building rubble. Excavation towards the rear of the site became very wet when the natural clay was reached, clearly the result of rising groundwater, probably from a spring. The deposits here (103) and (105) were situated in the deepest part of the hollow and were characterised by alluvial sediments containing a small assemblage of cultural material (see **Section 7.**). Further rising groundwater was encountered throughout the rest of the trench but less active. The natural clay rose nearer the surface as excavation proceeded towards the road frontage although even here land drains crossed the trench to dissipate water levels.

Trench drawings

- 6.2. A representative section of the trench was drawn at a scale of 1:10 and reproduced in **Figure 2**. Levels are presented with a height above Ordnance Datum. All colours displayed in the figures relate to Munsell soil tones.



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Figure 2. Trench section

7. The finds

- 7.1. Finds recovered from the evaluation were washed and marked, where possible, with a code issued by Somerset County Museums identifying the site (TTNCM 14/2004), followed by the context number. The finds were separated into artefact types and quantified by context, number and weight in grams. Bulk finds such as post-medieval and modern brick and tile were noted on context sheets but were not collected. A request has been made to the site owner to transfer the title of all finds recovered to Somerset County Museums.
- 7.2. **Finds Assessment Report by Lorraine Mepham and Stephanie Knight (Wessex Archaeology Finds Service)**

Introduction

Pottery, ceramic building material and animal bone was recovered from a single context (102) during the evaluation. These finds range in date from medieval to post-medieval.

Pottery

The 22 sherds recovered are all post-medieval; details of the different types present are given in **Table 2**. In chronological terms this is probably a fairly mixed group. The coarse earthenwares, both redwares and Verwood types, cannot be dated particularly closely within the post-medieval period, although the Verwood types are likely to date to the 18th century or later as it was at this period that the Verwood industry started to market its products widely across Wessex and the West Country. The redwares could include products of more than one production centre: the nearest is Wanstrow, about 3 km to the west, with Crockerton about 12 km to the east. The Staffordshire-type slipware sherds, both deriving from press-moulded dishes, are most likely to be of 18th century date, although production of these wares could have extended as late as the early 19th century in Bristol. The bone china and refined whiteware are of 19th century date or later.

Ware type/comments	No. sherds	Weight(g)	Date range
Coarse redwares, mostly open forms	12	221	post-medieval
Verwood-type earthenware, all open forms	6	113	18 th C+
Staffordshire-type feathered slipware; open form	2	43	17 th /18 th C
Bone china	1	4	19 th /20 th C
Refined whiteware	1	1	19 th /20 th C
TOTALS	22	382	

Table 2. Pottery types

Ceramic Building Material

Three joining pieces of a medieval ceramic roof tile were identified amongst the ceramic assemblage. These have traces of mortar on both faces and one (abraded) edge and so are likely to have been reused. The tile is in a moderately coarse fabric, handmade and relatively low-fired (the section shows an incompletely oxidised core).

Animal Bone

The five pieces of animal bone recovered comprise two cattle metapodials (one metacarpal and one metatarsal in three joining fragments) and one pelvis fragment from a large mammal (cattle or horse size). The metatarsal is from an immature animal; the other bones cannot be assigned to age group. Both the metapodials have possible chop marks, and there are unusual butchery marks on the pelvis which appear to have been made by a toothed implement. This fragment also has the marks of a cleaver blow at one end.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. Despite the location of the proposed development site in the heart of the village and the hypothesis that it may have comprised medieval features and deposits relating to one of the earliest Charterhouse complexes in England, the evaluation revealed no corroborative archaeological evidence for this. Instead, excavation revealed an undulating depression that graduated in depth from the road frontage to the rear incorporating deposits that were characterised by alluvial sediments at the deepest section with an outlying layer of building rubble. These deposits produced a small assemblage of cultural material that generally dates from the 17th century onwards.
- 8.2. It is likely that this feature represents part of a natural hollow that has been subjected to long periods of sitting water or episodes of flooding, perhaps originating from natural springs that were evident during the excavation. The layer of building rubble probably relates to numerous and enduring attempts to firm the ground around the hollow with locally imported waste.

9. Archive

- 9.1. The site archive is currently held at the offices of Context One Archaeological Services and consists of 2 colour transparencies, three digital images in .jpg file format, 1 sheet of site drawings, pro-forma site context sheets and a photographic register. Arrangements will be made to deposit the archive with the relevant receiving authority within 12 months following the submission of this report.
- 9.2. Copies of the evaluation report will be deposited with:

Paul Humphries Architects
 Leycroft House
 49 Salterton Road
 Exmouth
 Devon
 EX8 2EF

**Department for the Environment Architectural and
 Historic Heritage Group**
 Somerset County Council
 County Hall
 Taunton
 Somerset
 TA1 4DY

10. COAS acknowledgements

- 10.1. Context One Archaeological Services would like to thank Paul Humphries for his co-operation throughout the course of the investigation; Lorraine Mephram and Stephanie Knight (Wessex Archaeology Finds Service) for finds assessment; Steve Membery, Development Control Archaeologist, Somerset County Council for curatorial advice; staff at Somerset County Record Office for their assistance in locating historical material and Paul Millard Plant Hire for mechanical excavation.

11. Bibliography

**British Geological
 Survey, 2001**

Solid Geology Map – UK South Sheet, 1:625000 (4th edition)

Membery, S. 2003

Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation (unpublished document on behalf of

Somerset County Council (Cultural and Heritage Directorate, Architectural and Historic Heritage Group)

McGarvie, M. 1981 *Witham Friary*. Frome Society for Local Study pp.40-42

Maps

The following list relates to maps examined for the site and environs held at Somerset Record Office, Taunton, Somerset.

Date	Title/description	Somerset Record Office reference
1821	Map of the Estate of William Beckford in Witham Friary	DD\X\MGR/1
1888	Ordnance Survey 25" (1 st edition)	Sheet 55:1
1903	Ordnance Survey 25" (3 rd edition (rev.))	Sheet 55:1

Appendix 1: Somerset Historic Environment Record report for significant archaeological events within the environs of the proposed development site.

© Somerset County Council 2004.

PRN: 24898

Site Name: Church of St Mary and churchyard, Witham Friary

Civil Parish: Witham Friary

Grid Ref: ST 744 411 (ST 74 SW)

Public access:

As far as we are aware this site is open to the public at certain times. [Information last updated on 10 December 2002]

Details:

Originally thought to be the Carthusian monastery (PRN 24892) but only formed the 'domus inferior' where the lay-brothers lived and the more secular parts of the charterhouse were situated. The present church retains parts of the medieval structure and was probably the laybrothers' chapel. {1}

Graveyard in use since at least medieval times. {3}

The church is the work of St. Hugh of Lincoln, Prior of Witham, 1179 - 1186. It was built in the transitional period when the heavy Romanesque of the Normans was giving way to early English Architecture.

Above the font on the west wall is the coat of arms of Sir Arthur Hopton, Lord of the Manor of Witham, Ermine two bars sable, on each three mullets or, impaling those of his wife Rachel Hall, argent, on a chevron engrailed stable, between three talbots heads erased, an estoile or. It is dated 1586, but is probably Victorian. It was donated to the church in 1978. The font itself was originally installed in 1459 under licence from the bishop. It was thrown out during restoration in 1859 and used as foundations for the church. In 1875 when the tower was demolished the font was rediscovered and reinstalled in the church.

Down the nave, the first window in the north wall contains two quatrefoils of medieval glass. One shows two figures worshipping radiance from above. There is suggestion of a sheep and it may portray Sheppard's in the field. The plain glass in this and the succeeding windows was produced by the Frome firm of Horwood Bros, and installed about 1865 in memory of Michael John Festing, land steward to the Duke of Somerset. The third window contains various fragments of 15th century glass, donated to the church (originally it was from Burton Hall Leicestershire) in 1917 by the Duke and Duchess of Somerset.

Near the First World War memorial can be found the lower and upper entrances to the rood loft. The arches are perpendicular in style and were constructed after the Friary Chapel became a Parish Church in 1459 when it became necessary under Carthusian rule to separate monks from the congregation.

The church underwent a drastic restoration in 1828 and 1829 under the Revd. Festing. The west wall was completely rebuilt with a tower. A Mr Wheatly in 1845 noted that 'on looking at the present structure one would naturally suppose that the party who gave the design and those who sanctioned it, studied to give and erect one of the great deformitys (sic) that could be built in the shape of a church'.

In 1875 the tower was found to be unstable and it was decided to take advantage of this fact by the Revd. Alexander Burney to bring the church 'back as far as possible to the simple dignity of its original form'. In place of the tower was constructed a massive bellcote and the roof was replaced with a much steeper pitch. The architect was William White. {4}

References:

1 Mention - Pevsner. N Somerset and Bristol 341

2 Mention - Burrow, I and C Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 134 1990 141-182

3 Personal communication - Aston, M SCPD 21.09.77

4 Guide book - McGarvie M Witham Friary: Church and Parish Frome Historical Research Group Church Histories No. 1 (1981): in HER files

Record created by:

Ed Dennison in November 1985

PRN: 24902

Site Name: Neolithic axe find, Witham Friary

Civil Parish: Witham Friary

Grid Ref: ST 7458 4126 (ST 74 SW)

Public access:

The public accessibility of this site has not been checked. Please check locally and do not visit without permission. [Information last updated on 21 May 2003]

Details:

A neolithic axe of medium grained igneous rock was found in November 1959 when removing a hedge. {1}

References:

1 Detailed records - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division 1964 ST74SW4 SCPD

Record created by:

Ed Dennison in November 1985

PRN: 25357

Site Name: Roman road from Mendips to Old Sarum

Civil Parish: Ashwick, Chewton Mendip, Cranmore, Croscombe, Doultling, Emborough, Priddy, St Cuthbert Out, Trudoxhill, Wanstrow, Witham Friary, Cheddar

Grid Ref: ST 4900 5621 (ST 45 NE) ST 5025 5610 (ST 55 NW) ST 5350 5380 (ST 55 SW) ST 5690 5105 (ST 55 SE) ST 5900 4930 (ST 54 NE) ST 6377 4610 (ST 64 NW) ST 6600 4525 (ST 64 NE) ST 6870 4410 (ST 64 SE) ST 7315 4240 (ST 74 SW) ST 7800 4020 (ST 74 SE) ST 4660 5676 (ST 45 NE)

Public access:

The public accessibility of this site has not been checked. Please check locally and do not visit without permission. [Information last updated on 21 May 2003]

Details:

Roman road shown on OS maps running from the western Mendips through the Charterhouse complex, crossing Fosse Way (PRN 25358) north of Shepton Mallet and leaving the county to the south-east. {1}

The road can be traced on APs and in places on the ground. The best preserved section is between the Mendip Golf Course and the A37, where it is cut as a platform into the hillside. A change of alignment occurred on the eastern boundary of the golf course to create two straight sections along the overall course. It is overlaid in two places by later hollow-ways, at ST 619 471 on the golf course and at ST 629 466 near the A37, which may indicate that the road went out of use in the post Roman period. It is best seen in aerial photographs from 1946-1979, since then ploughing has destroyed much of the road, slight scarps or low banks can be seen in fields at ST 605 482, ST 608 479 and ST 611 477. A short, but well preserved, length of agger and side ditches can be found at ST 618 472, running under the enclosure field bank and across the fairway of the golf course to around ST 619 481. {2}

A well preserved stretch of the Roman road approximately 200m long, at ST 6353 4508. The agger is approximately 1.5m high and topped by a modern field boundary {3}

Three trenches were cut through the road in 1906 (PRN 16126) near Chewton Mendip. {4}

References:

1 Map - OS 1:10000

2 Detailed records - Powlesland, I, "Heathland and hollow Ways: a landscape survey of East Mendip, near Maesbury, Somerset" unpublished BA dissertation (1997) in HER files [PRN 12172]

3 Detailed records - Powlesland, I Beacon Hill, Somerset, An Archaeological Survey Unpublished report (1996) in HER files [PRN 12241]

4 Personal communication - Matthew Nicholas (28/4/2003)

Record created by:

Chris Webster in January 1991

PRN: 24892

Site Name: Carthusian Priory, House and Garden, Witham Hall Farm, Witham Friary

SCHEDULED MONUMENT: Witham Priory [No:357]

Civil Parish: Witham Friary

Grid Ref: ST 7580 4169 (ST 74 SE)

Public access:

The public accessibility of this site is unknown but it should be visible from a public right of way. Please assume that the site is private property. [Information last updated on 18 December 2002]

Details:

Witham was the first of nine Carthusian houses in England and was founded by Henry II as penance for Thomas a' Becket's murder. The first reference to the Priory is in 1179-80, and the foundation charter was probably issued in January 1182. This gave an area roughly equivalent to present parish to the Priory, with total exemption from all taxes and forest law of Selwood. The site is also important for its association with St Hugh of Avalon or Lincoln, a monk of Chartreuse brought to Witham at Henry's request as the third Prior after a disastrous beginning. Dissolved 1539. {1}

Confusion existed for some time over the location of the site. Witham Friary church was for a long time regarded as the site. But documentary study suggested a different, actual location which was later confirmed by excavations. Part excavation in 1921. Two trial trenches dug, one unlocated and the other 40ft from the SW corner of the "great quadrangle". Revealed buttressed wall foundations about 8ft apart and 1.5ft - 1.75ft wide. Between the two foundations was a mass of building debris and a considerable amount of glazed roof and floor tiles. Two iron gateposts were also found. The whole field was covered with a layer up to 1ft thick of iron slag laid apparently for drainage purposes. Following the excavation, everything was replaced and covered over. {5}

Further excavations in 1965-68 done by trenching. Concentrated on the area of the cloister as defined by earthworks, mostly in area of ST75854176. Several structures found: (i) N-S building 25ft by 15ft with a N annex 6ft wide towards the NE corner of the cloister which could have been the Chapter House. (ii) Possible church on N side of cloister defined by robber trenches 8.5ft and 6.6ft wide which defined a building measuring 88ft E-W and 40ft N-S externally. (iii) Cell or other building towards the N end of the W cloister wall. Also numerous small finds. (iv) Cloister alley on N, E, W and S sides, 4.5ft - 5ft wide and floored with green tiles. Arcade wall c2ft wide and outer wall 4ft wide. {7}

Apart from destruction by a railway which crosses the site, the main precinct is in good condition. The SW boundary of the rectangular field in which it lies appears to correspond to an earlier boundary. The field contains prominent rectilinear earthworks possibly defining the main cloister with associated cells and other buildings, and outer enclosures. {14}

The area to the N of the railway and W of the farm contains three large fishponds and other earthworks, and a massive earthwork dam of a fish or millpond lies NE of the farm at ST759420 (PRN 24892). Scheduled as AM 357. {16}

The excavations of the 1960s have been published from the original notes. {21}

Detailed survey by RCHME has shown that the earthworks at the site relate to the post-medieval use of the site for a house and a mid C17 formal garden based on the monastic plan. The excavated evidence appears also to relate to post-medieval building although some medieval fabric seems to have been incorporated. The first house on the site would appear to be an adaption of the monastic buildings by Sir Arthur Hopton and other members of the Hopton family. There is only ambiguous evidence for the house but the design of the garden would appear to date to this period and imply a house. The estate passed to the Wyndham family who

rebuilt the house early in the C18. A plan of 1717 survives which suggests that only small parts of the medieval priory were incorporated (as indicated by thicker walls). In 1762 a new house was begun to the SW (PRN 25398) but it would appear from the alignment of a new drive for this house that the priory site was still visible and used as an eyecatcher. The ruins remained as a farmhouse until the railway was built in 1854 when the present farm was built to the N. {22}

Most of the monument is in good condition under permanent grass although there is slight erosion at the end of a concrete apron in the S area and some badger activity. Along the N side a concrete road has been constructed (c1992) without Scheduled Monument Consent. {29}

References:

- 1 Mention - Knowles, R.N and Hadcock, D "Medieval Religious Houses..." (1956), 123
- 2 Detailed records - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division (1979) ST74SW1 SCPD
- 3 Description - Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society Armitage Robinson, J "The Foundation Charter..." vol 64 (1918), 1-28
- 4 Description - VCH Somerset vol 2, (1911) 123-128
- 5 Excavation report - Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset Palmer, T "The Site of Witham Priory or Charterhouse" vol 17, (1921) 90-92
- 6 Excavation report - WELLSAR Reid, R.D and Barlow, P "Witham Priory", (1965-6) 5-7
- 7 Excavation report - WELLSAR Reid, R.D and Barlow, P "Witham Priory", (1967-8) 7-11
- 8 Mention - Medieval Archaeology vol 14 (1970) 170
- 9 Measured plan - HBC 2.063.-1, 2.063.-2, 2.063.-3
- 10 Mention - Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset vol 1 (1889), 129
- 11 Mention - Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset vol 5 (1897), 239 (expulsion of tenants)
- 12 Description - Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset vol 6 (1899), 302 (foundation date)
- 13 Description - Knowles, D 1961 "The Monastic Order in England", 380-382 (foundation and role)
- 14 Personal communication - Burrow, I SCPD (15.10.82)
- 15 Measured plan - HBC 1:500 2.063.-4 SCC (September 1982)
- 16 Personal communication - Dennison, E SCPD (28.11.85)
- 17 Management file - ARX 11 SCPD
- 18 Aerial photographs - NMR ST7541.1.183 (August 1972) SCPD
- 19 Aerial photographs - Slide SCPD 2.63.1-2 (no date)
- 20 Aerial photographs - Slide SCPD 2.63.10-14 (July 1985)
- 21 Detailed records - Burrow I and C Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 134 (1990) 141-182
- 22 Survey report - Wilson-North, R. Unpublished RCHME report (1994)
- 23 Measured plan - RCHME (1994) in HER files and HBC.2.63.5
- 24 Survey report - Geophysical Surveys of Bradford Report 94-21 (1994)
- 25 Aerial photographs - WAP BU 1746\3 (no date) in HER files
- 26 Aerial photographs - NMR AP ST7541.1.183 (16.8.1972) in HER files
- 27 Aerial photographs - Cambridge University Collection of aerial photographs AQB29, 30 (1966) in HER files
- 28 Description - Wilson-North, R. "Witham" Current Archaeol 148 (1996) 151-156 in HER files
- 29 Detailed records - Field Monument Warden's report (22.7.1998) in HER files
- 30 Mention - Wilson-North, R in Webster, CJ and Croft, RA "Somerset Archaeology 1994" Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 138 (1995), 171-2

Record created by:

Ian Burrow in October 1982

PRN: 24893

Site Name: Fishponds, Witham Priory, Witham Friary

Civil Parish: Witham Friary

Grid Ref: ST 7588 4200 (ST 74 SE) ST 7540 4165 (ST 74 SE) ST 7550 4175 (ST 74 SE)

Public access:

The public accessibility of this site is unknown but it should be visible from a public right of way. Please assume that the site is private property. [Information last updated on 18 December 2002]

Details:

"Fishponds" printed on OSAD 6" map. {1}

Connected with the Friary (PRN 24892). {2}

The largest pond was cleaned out in the summer of 1986 to improve the fishing (the ponds are used as a trout fishing area) but nothing was observed. The operations were carried out by a large mechanical digger but did not disturb the sluice arrangement or the line of the medieval pond. {3}

A survey by RCHME showed that the fish ponds are basically monastic in origin although adapted after the dissolution to form water features visible from the house at the priory. This particularly applies to the diversion of the River Frome. {4}

References:

- 1 Map - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division 1960 6" ST74SE SCPD
- 2 Detailed records - Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division 1979 ST74SW1 SCPD
- 3 Personal communication - Dennison, E SCPD 09.09.86
- 4 Survey report - Wilson-North, R. Unpublished RCHME report see PRN 24892
- 5 Measured plan - RCHME 1994 in HER files PRN 24892

Record created by:

Ed Dennison in November 1985

PRN: 25398

Site Name: Mansion site, S of Witham Priory

Civil Parish: Witham Friary

Grid Ref: ST 757 414 (ST 74 SE) ST 76 39 (ST 73 NE)

Public access:

The public accessibility of this site has not been checked. Please check locally and do not visit without permission. [Information last updated on 21 May 2003]

Details:

Site of second mansion built at the site of Witham Priory in c.1762 by William Beckford. On his death work stopped and the remains had been removed by 1791. It has been doubted that the house was ever built. {1}

Survey by the RCHME has indicated that the construction of the house was started and a transcription of the 1947 aerial photograph indicates that it was as shown in the architect's (Robert Adam) drawings. The house consisted of a central block of two storeys with a full height portico supported on four ionic columns. Two symmetrical wings with open colonnades connected with a south-east and north-west pavilion, housing brewhouse and bakery. The whole building was about 280ft (85m) long. The surviving features are a mound some 2m high, 110m long and 55m wide. The walling has been robbed forming a quarry-like trench 95m long and 14-17m wide. At the centre the trench widens to 28m or about 30m showing the location of the central block. It is suggested that the basement of the house was built at ground level and earth piled around. Associated with the house is an entrance drive 2.8km in length which still survives as cambered surface with flanking ditches for part of its length. The southernmost 2km are aligned on the earlier house at the priory site (PRN 24892). The drive then turned, crossed the river on a (now destroyed) bridge and ran up to the house. There is no evidence that the landscape park through which the drive should run was ever started. {2}

References:

- 1 Description - Burrow I and C "Witham Priory..." Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society 134 (1990), 141-182
- 2 Survey report - Wilson-North, R. Unpublished RCHME report (1994) in HER files (PRN 24892)

3 Measured plan - RCHME (1994) in HER files (PRN 24892)

4 Description - Wilson-North, R. "Witham" Current Arch 148 (1996) 151-156 in HER files (PRN 24892)

Record created by:

Chris Webster in December 1993