

FURNESS ABBEY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT



Furness Abbey : Barrow in Furness : Cumbria

Description of earthworks within the Precinct Wall

Two areas were surveyed. The first of these was Amphitheatre Field, bounded on the W and N by Manor Road and the closeboard fence to the S of Abbey Park Cottage and to E and S by the Precinct Wall. The second area, on the N side of the railway, was bounded by the post-and-wire fence on the E of Tunnel Cottage and to the S of Manor Road, by the Precinct Wall on the E and by the Mill Beck and railway on the S.

Outside these areas the only earthwork remains noted were some traces of quarrying in the garden of Tunnel Cottage and further N on the E side of the Vale of Nightshade.

Amphitheatre Field (NGR SD 219 715)

The earthworks in Amphitheatre Field consist of quarries, boundary banks, tracks, cultivation remains and miscellaneous small features. The quarries are substantial and presumably provided stone for the Abbey buildings.

The four boundary banks and ditches at the top of the slope survive up to about 0.7m high though one has been severely reduced by cultivation. They may predate the precinct wall but the relationship is uncertain. They appear to postdate the upper trackway as they block it, completely or partly. The trackway, which is very broad, also appears to be earlier than the W quarry which lies across its line. The terraceway on the slope is also cut and blocked, in this case by the E quarry and a rectangular platform. This platform may simply be a building stance but it has a curious feature in the form of a gully, 0.5m wide and 0.05m deep, at the base of its backscarp.

The E quarry is a very large feature, now almost entirely turf-covered. The quarry floor is divided by stony scarps and banks, up to 0.5m high, into a series of rectangular enclosures and a substantial terraceway runs along its N side. The purpose of these enclosures is uncertain. The W quarry is also a massive feature and retains some exposed vertical rock faces. It is surrounded on the uphill side by an earth bank, 0.7m high, with faint traces of an external ditch, now no more than 0.2m deep. Slippage of the quarry face has resulted in the destruction of this bank at one point. This slippage is possibly due to a relatively late re-working of the part of the quarry which is still a vertical exposure. A hollow way leads from the centre of the quarry floor down to Manor Road.

The flat valley floor on the N side of Amphitheatre Field contains a number of very slight scarps and hollows, all of less than 0.2m. The purpose of these features is uncertain though they are probably of recent date and the hollows are possibly tree holes. A great depth of archaeological deposits is sealed by alluvium in this area (Jason Wood, pers. comm.).

A possible building platform (SD 2189 7154) stands at the foot of the slope near the

lower end of the terraceway with a slight stone rickle along its downhill side.

The narrow ridge-and-furrow above the E quarry is probably later than the quarry as it seems to respect its edge, though this is not absolutely clear, and it overlies one of the boundary banks. The cultivation is cut by a regular shallow slot, possibly a Home Guard trench overlooking the railway cutting itself. These ridges are very straight and narrow.

More rig occurs at the W end of the hilltop above the W quarry but it is too fragmentary for detailed study. Two slight mounds, less than 0.2m high, occupy the same area. A natural knoll, possibly modified by cultivation or the addition of quarry waste, has a V-shaped slot 1.1m wide and 0.1m deep, another possible Home Guard trench overlooking the valley to the S, cut into its top.

Field N of the railway (SD 222 716)

On the north side of the railway are tracks, boundary banks, building platforms, a small quarry and several indeterminate remains in the valley bottom.

The most obvious feature is the well-established track running diagonally across the field to the NE corner of the precinct wall suggesting the possibility of a postern gate at this point. This track, which is on a causeway in the wet valley bottom and is a terraceway on the hillslope, may represent the earlier, pre-railway, line of Manor Road. In its current form this track appears to overlie some other features, notably two banks, but many other earthworks appear to be laid off from it.

The boundary banks and ditches on the steep hillslope are insubstantial and have been badly abraded or partly masked, probably by natural hillwash. None of them stands more than about 0.2m high. Though on plan these have the appearance of close boundaries the steepness of the hillside may preclude this interpretation.

A group of building platforms cluster at the W corner of the field between the foot of the slope and the track. A terrace to what might be a back lane runs behind these buildings which are rectangular and clear but of very low relief, none of the scarps being more than 0.2m high.

Further E a quarry has been cut into the foot of the slope and its flat floor may subsequently have been used for building.

To the S of the main track a number of very slight earthworks occupy the flat, waterlogged valley floor. The date and purpose of these features is uncertain though a role in some form of water management seems to be indicated. St John Hope suggested that the monastic fishponds lay in this part of the valley (1900, 232). As the course of the Mill Beck has clearly been substantially altered and the construction of the railway has changed the valley considerably this must remain in doubt. Given the depth of waterlogged stratigraphy known to exist on the far side of the railway (Jason Wood, pers.

comm.) these features probably represent the very top of substantial archaeological remains covered by both colluvium and alluvium.

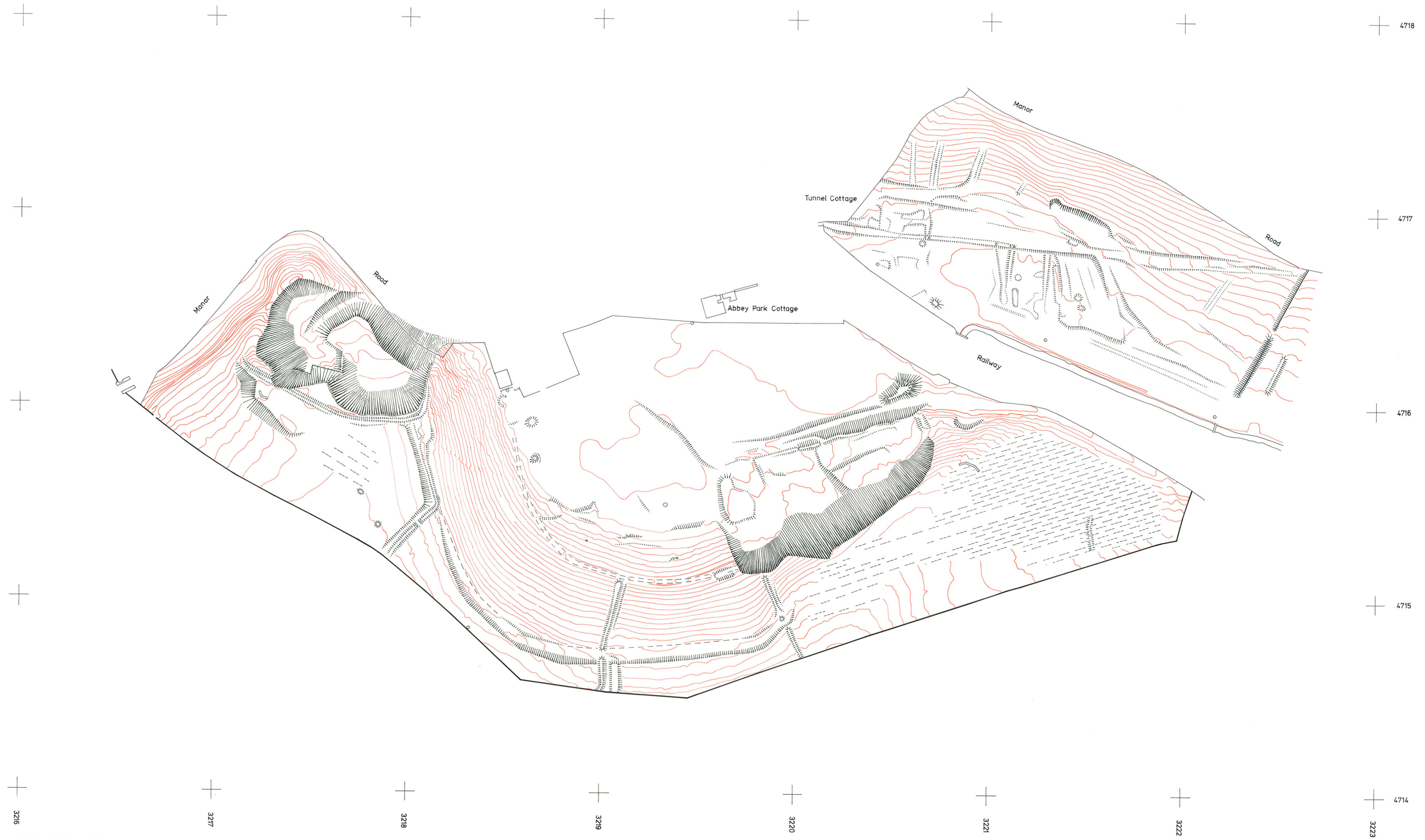
Reference:

St John Hope, W H 1900. 'The Abbey of St Mary in Furness, Lancashire', *Trans Cumberland Westmorland Antiq Archaeol Soc* **16**, 221-302.

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FURNESS ABBEY BARROW IN FURNESS CUMBRIA



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