

# Barking - The Excavation

Excavations at Abbey Retail Park, Abbey Road, Barking

## Digging back through time

**Before any excavation can begin, archaeologists will conduct a desk-based assessment of the site and the surrounding area. This involves gathering together as many documents relating to the site as possible. This can include aerial photographs, LIDAR, maps, historical descriptions and archaeological reports from previous excavations on the site and in the local area.**

If a site is determined to have a high chance of surviving archaeology, an archaeological evaluation may be ordered. This means that a series of long, thin trenches are dug across the site to try and determine how much archaeology is present, and to gain an idea of the kind of finds, features and age of the deposits.

The current excavations were required in order to fulfil planning conditions placed on the redevelopment of the former Abbey Retail Park site. This phase of excavation re-examines and expands on areas which have previously been excavated. The purpose of this project is to learn more about the Saxon and Medieval abbeys, as well as to understand more fully any earlier activity on the site.



The upper layers of the site are the most modern, and consist of the remains of the retail park. These layers (often large deposits of concrete, foundations, and pipe trenches) are removed by machine until the earlier, post-medieval deposits were uncovered. Once the post-medieval layers had been cleaned and recorded, excavation continued by hand to expose the medieval, Saxon and, in some places, prehistoric layers.

The earliest artefact discovered is an Upper Palaeolithic flint core used to produce long, razor sharp blades. This is by far the oldest artefact from the site, dating to roughly 12,000 years ago. The oldest features on site date to the Bronze Age (2,100 BC – 750 BC) & Iron Age (750 BC - 43 AD). The majority of the archaeological material on the site, however, dates to the Saxon and Medieval periods. Although no Roman features have been found, a reasonable quantity of Roman building material has been re-used in later Saxon and medieval construction.



## Key features (see plan)

1. Abbey walls: The main purpose of this excavation is to better understand the extent of Barking Abbey and its surrounding structures. Across the road to the East of the site the partially reconstructed remains of a portion of the abbey are visible. During the excavations on this side of the road we have discovered a series of large wall foundations constructed from chalk and flint. These are almost certainly related to the abbey, as is evidence of a large structure beneath the medieval walls, perhaps associated with the earliest construction of the abbey in the 7th century AD.



2. Timber revetments: a series of timbers are preserved in situ at the edge of the old river channel running north-south at the west of the site. Wood is rarely preserved in archaeological contexts because it rots, but where a site is waterlogged (as is the case here) it can sometimes survive. A further series of timbers jutting out into the river channel may be the remains of a jetty or other riverside structure.

3. Dog Burial: the remains of a domestic dog were discovered at the base of a medieval ditch. The skeleton is complete and articulated. Dogs were highly valued in both the Saxon and medieval periods, with Britain being renowned for the quality of its hunting dogs.



4. Tile floor: a tile floor constructed partially using Roman tiles was discovered near the river's edge to the west of the site. Re-used Roman building material has been found across the site in features and structures of Saxon and medieval date. Rivers would have been important routes for transport of goods and people, and riverbanks would have been areas of high activity.

5. Glass kiln: near the centre of site lies an intensely burnt deposit. Initially discovered during evaluation trench, this structure is currently thought to be a glass kiln. Glass kilns are exceptionally rare, making this one of the most important features on the site.