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Priory Gardens, Dunstable, Central Bedfordshire: An Analytical Earthwork Survey

Sarah Newsome, Matthew Bristow, Rebecca Pullen, Martyn Barber and Neil Linford

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PRIORY GARDENS, DUNSTABLE, CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

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SUMMARY

In May 2021 Historic England began a research project aimed at better understanding the nature, extent and significance of the buried remains of Dunstable Priory, located in Priory Gardens, Dunstable. It was undertaken as part of the Dunstable High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) in order to inform a revision of the National Heritage List for England entry for Dunstable Priory and ensure that the priory's historic remains fully contributed to the HSHAZ and the future regeneration of the High Street, promoting understanding and appreciation of the medieval priory in the wider community. Research undertaken by Historic England's Archaeological Investigation team included: analytical earthwork survey of the surface remains visible in Priory Gardens (including via a drone-derived Structure-from-Motion model); Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey of Priory Gardens and the Priory Academy playing fields to the south; assessment of the available aerial photographs and also documentary research using select primary, as well as secondary, sources. The research has shown that the priory church was more elaborate than previously thought and has added to previous understandings of the layout of the priory buildings, the wider monastic landscape and also to the story of Priory Gardens in the 20th century.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Newsome, Matthew Bristow and Rebecca Pullen undertook the analytical earthwork survey. Martyn Barber assessed the aerial photographic sources. Neil Linford and Andy Payne undertook the GPR survey (published separately, *see* Linford et al. 2022). Matthew Bristow completed the drone survey and created the Structure-from-Motion model. Chris Redgrave photographed St Bartholomew the Great, Farringdon, and Sharon Soutar produced the illustrations unless otherwise stated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Michelle Collings and John Crawley from Dunstable Town Council for facilitating the survey and to numerous members of the local community for their advice and insight. Thanks go to Dr Simon Townley for the translation on page nine of this report and to the verger of St Bartholomew the Great, Farringdon, for giving permission for photography.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

The project archive will be deposited in the Historic England Archive, Swindon. The investigation has been registered under OASIS Id: nmr1-505788.

DATE OF SURVEY

The analytical earthwork survey was undertaken in May 2021, the drone survey in April 2022 and the research between May 2021 and September 2023.

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2021 Historic England began a research project aimed at better understanding the nature and extent of the buried remains of Dunstable Priory (NHLE 1004676; Beds HER 131). Most of the known remains of the priory are located in Priory Gardens (a public park), centred on NGR TL 0215 2181, in the town of Dunstable, Central Bedfordshire (Fig. 1). The project was undertaken as part of the Dunstable High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) in order to inform a revision of the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) entry for Dunstable Priory, which takes the form of an 'Old County Number' (OCN) scheduling. The entry therefore holds no information about the nature, extent and significance of the priory's buried remains, beyond the definition of the scheduled area which encompasses most of Priory Gardens to the east of High Street South. The Dunstable HSHAZ highlighted the need to revise the priory scheduling and associated Listed Building entries so that these assets can fully contribute to the HSHAZ, and the future regeneration of the High Street, by articulating the important historic link between it and the priory. The extensive remains of the priory complex are visible as earthworks in Priory Gardens and are known from geophysical surveys and excavations. This project aimed to clarify the nature, extent and significance of the archaeological remains in order to: support the revision of the OCN scheduling; clarify if possible the relationship of Priory House to Dunstable Priory; and promote understanding and appreciation of the remains in the wider community.

Figure 1: Priory Gardens (looking north) with the Priory Church of St Peter (centre right) and Priory House (centre left). The white lines painted on the grass are an interpretation of the probable positions of the priory buildings based on geophysical surveys. Photograph: Matthew Bristow 21-APR-2022

The project involved a number of pieces of research undertaken by Historic England's Archaeological Investigation team: analytical earthwork survey of the surface remains visible in Priory Gardens (including via a drone-derived ground model); Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey of Priory Gardens and the Priory Academy (formerly Priory Middle School) playing fields to the south (Linford et al. 2022); assessment of the available aerial photographs and also documentary research using select primary, as well as secondary, sources. The secondary sources included extensive earlier research carried out by the Manshead Archaeological Society, particularly earth resistance surveys of the Priory Gardens undertaken around 2005 and 2012. The analytical earthwork survey and GPR survey were undertaken in May 2021.

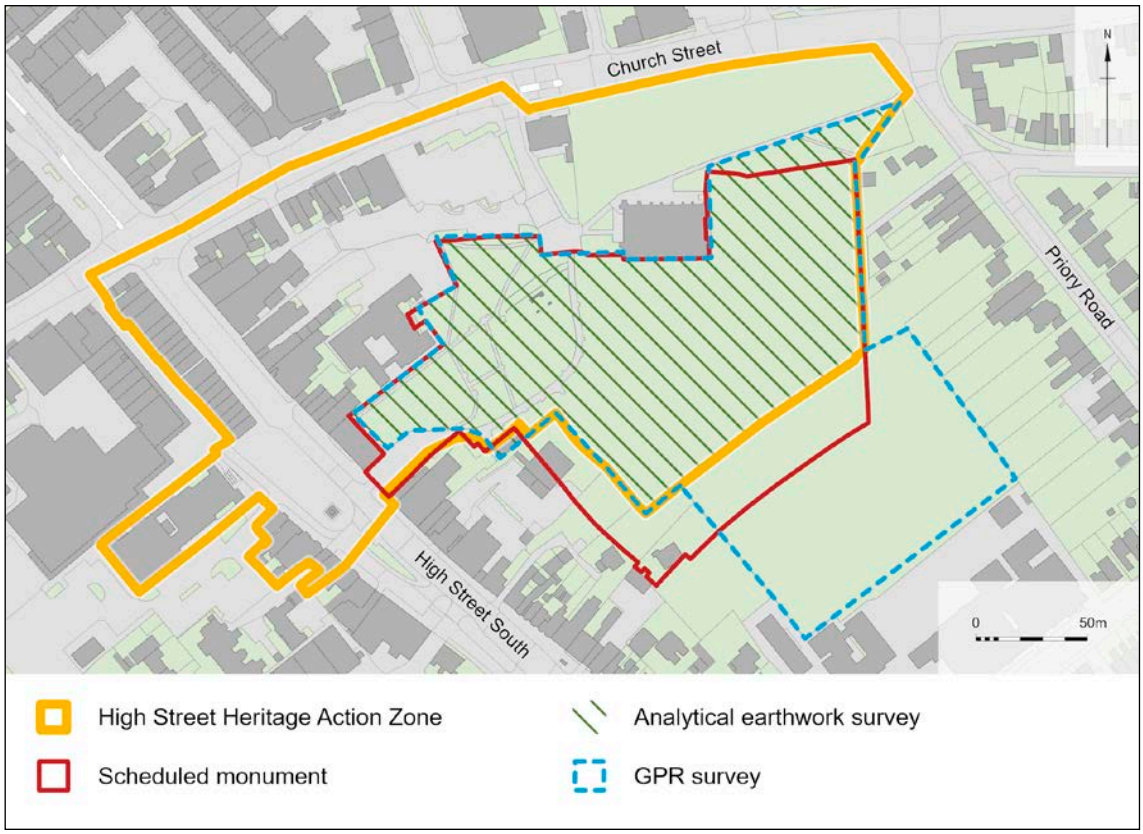

Figure 2: The Dunstable High Street Heritage Action Zone, extent of GPR survey, extent of analytical earthwork survey and the scheduled area. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

Methodology and extent of the survey area

The area covered by the analytical earthwork survey encompassed the whole of Priory Gardens but excluded the now disused churchyard area located north of the modern path that runs east-west to the north of the church (Fig. 2). It was felt that ground disturbance through grave digging, potentially over many centuries, had probably removed any pre-graveyard earthworks and that this area was likely to have lain outside the inner, if not the outer, precinct of the priory. The survey also

excluded the area immediately outside the west front of the present-day church which was felt to have been so heavily landscaped as to render earthwork survey unbeneficial. Though the playing fields belonging to Priory Academy, located to the south of the Priory Gardens, were covered by the GPR survey (Linford et al. 2022), levelling in this area also rendered analytical earthwork survey of little benefit.
The analytical earthwork survey was undertaken using a combination of Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) and Total Station Theodolite (TST) equipment at a scale of 1:1000 in order to produce an accurate measured plan of the surface earthworks. A Structure-from-Motion digital elevation model and ortho-mosaic was also created using drone-captured aerial imagery. Further details are given in the Methodology section at the end of this report.

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Priory Gardens are located in the centre of Dunstable, south-east of the central crossroads formed by the modern roads (A505/A5183/B489) that follow the former Roman road of Watling Street (running roughly north-west to south-east) and the ancient Icknield Way (running roughly south-west to north-east) (Fig. 3). The Priory Church of St Peter, situated at the north side of Priory Gardens, comprises the surviving nave of the Augustinian priory.

Dunstable is located on a plateau to the north of the Chiltern escarpment formed of Holywell Nodular Chalk Formation and New Pit Chalk Formation (BGS 2022; Fig. 3). Soils formed over these geologies are described as 'Freely draining lime-rich loamy soils' (Landis 2022). The town lacks a water course as a source of running water with much of the town relying on wells in the pre-Modern period (also *see* Fig. 3).

Figure 3: The topographic situation of Dunstable. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900. 2m DSM © Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2024. All rights reserved.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE SITE

The general history of the priory has been recounted many times (e.g. Evans 1994 and Yates ed. n.d.a, both largely unreferenced; Doubleday and Page 1904), therefore only a summary is provided here, with a particular emphasis on information relevant to the construction and layout of the priory buildings or its wider landscape. Of particular use are the recently published translation of the priory annals, a rich source of information, mainly for the 13th century (Webster 2018), the calendar of the priory charters by Fowler (1926) and a recent reappraisal of the evidence for the founding of the priory based on royal charters (Carpenter 2018).

Despite the earlier existence of a Roman town, Dunstable is not mentioned in the Domesday survey (compiled 1085-6), with the area where Watling Street crossed Icknield Way probably located in the King's manor of Houghton at that time (Page 1912, 355). It has been suggested that Henry I created the new town at Dunstable in around 1107. Farrer (1920, 51-52) records a foundation charter document that grants to Queen Matilda the right to establish canons regular (a monastic community of canons who renounced private wealth and adopted the Rule of St Augustine) at Holy Trinity, Aldgate. He notes that it was issued in Dunstable and gives a date range of May 1108-16. However, the authenticity of this foundation charter for Holy Trinity, in which the name of Dunstable is first mentioned, has been questioned (Carpenter 2018, 4) and must also call into question the inference that if it was signed at Dunstable then the town must have been founded by that time (compare Yates n.d.b). Beresford and Finberg (1973, 66) cite the creation of the town as 1114, based on the assertion in Dugdale's *Monasticon* that the King held the town for seventeen and a half years before the traditionally held date that he gave it to the priory (see discussion below). Dugdale's *Monasticon* is probably also the original source of the reference, mentioned by Joan Curran on the Medieval Dunstable website, to a 'Borough Charter' dated 1112-1117 (Curran n.d.a).

Tradition holds that Henry I created a new town at Dunstable by inviting free burgesses from other towns to rent an 'acre' of land at the crossroads without obligation to provide labour to the King, with the intention of establishing a trade centre (Yates n.d.a, 20; Curran n.d.b, 33). This appears to be based on an early 17th-century source which is referenced in an 18th-century copy of Dugdale's *Monasticon* (Carpenter 2018, 1). Curran (n.d., 34) suggests plots were laid out in the new town along both sides of South Street (now High Street South) and East Street (now Church Street), implying that the burgage plots were laid out before the priory was established (therefore determining the northern and western boundary of the precinct) though there is no evidence for the exact processes and timeframe. Kingsbury Palace was also established around this time but it is not clear exactly when. It has been assumed that Henry must have stayed at Kingsbury Palace when he signed the suspect Aldgate foundation charter mentioned above (Yates n.d.a, 20; Curran n.d.b, 33). The palace was on the northern side of East Street (now Church Street) opposite the priory (Page 1912, 351) and was said to have consisted of 9 acres put aside for a royal residence when the town was created by Henry I (Allen Brown et al. 1963). Excavations on the site have revealed evidence for worked Totternhoe

stone and leaded windows, suggesting a high-status building (Kaye 2007; Jones 2012; Fig. 4).

Figure 4: Location map showing places mentioned in the text. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

Henry went on to establish Dunstable Priory to accommodate a group of Augustinian canons. This must have occurred at some point after Bernard (later first prior of Dunstable) visited Norman France with his brother Norman (later prior of Holy Trinity, Aldgate) to study the Augustinian Rule, thought to be sometime before 1106 (Robinson 1980, 14). Bernard and Norman (who had been a secular canon at St Julian and St Botolph Colchester) were instrumental in introducing the Augustinian order to England. They were sent to France under the recommendation of Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to learn the rule of St Augustine so that they could return and establish an Augustinian monastery (Doubleday and Page 1904, 371), experiencing the grand churches at St Lucien, Beauvais and the abbey of Saint-Pere-en-Vallee, Chartres. Dunstable's foundation must also have occurred after Holy Trinity is thought to have been founded by Queen Matilda (also known as Maud) in 1107 or 1108, as Dunstable was a daughter house of Holy Trinity (Page 1909, 465; Carpenter 2018, 4).

Webster (2018, xi) states that Dunstable Priory's foundation was sometime soon after 1120, based on when other daughter houses of Holy Trinity, Aldgate were founded (these included Launceston, Plympton, St Frideswide in Oxford and St Osyth), and almost certainly by 1125 when it is thought that Bernard, Prior of Dunstable, witnessed a gift to Holy Trinity (Carpenter 2018, 4). The number of new Augustinian foundations rose quickly between the establishment of Holy Trinity and 1120 and then dramatically between 1131 and 1135 as the Augustinian order

had royal favour and was viewed as new and fashionable (Robinson 1980, 25). It is not clear whether the establishment of a school at Dunstable in 1119 by Geoffrey de Gorron, eventually to become abbot of St Albans (Carpenter 2018, 4), suggests that the priory had already been founded by that date.

It is traditionally thought that in 1131 Henry I essentially gave control of the town, the market and, consequently, any rents, taxes or tolls that could be raised, to the priory (e.g. Doubleday and Page 1904, 371; Yates n.d.a 21) but the authenticity of the foundation charter that documents this has also been questioned, as has a later charter that confirmed it (Carpenter 2018, 19). It is likely that this process (whenever it occurred) was received with much opposition from the burgesses, as Yates (n.d., 21) and Curran (n.d., 35-38) suggest, as the prior had effectively been given the position of the lord of manor, in control of everything except the King's palace. Nevertheless, the founding of Dunstable by Henry I led to subsequent royal patronage and the town had many royal visits in the 12th and 13th centuries and became a focus for tournaments (Webster 21018, xii).

In 1203 King John granted the priory the right to hold a fair, on 10 May, which was upheld in 1286 and again in 1330 (Letters 2013). The fair was eventually moved to 1 August (Page 1912, 363) and is presumably the fair that the priory claimed in 1287 on the Saint's Day of Peter in Chains 'from time immemorial' (Letters 2013). In 1204 King John also gave the site of the royal residence and gardens (Kingesbyr) to the priory (Curran n.d.b, 41; Garrod n.d., 169; Webster 2018, 5). The nature of Kingsbury's use by the priory is not clear but Evans (1994, 77) cites a reference to Henry IV staying in 'the old royal palace, Dunstable' in 1405 which suggests the priory maintained guest accommodation on the site.

Richard de Morins (who became prior in 1202) seems to have presided over one of the priory's most affluent periods. In 1207 altars in the church were dedicated to 'Saints Mary, Fremund, Nicholas and James [of Compostella]' (Webster 2018, 6). De Morins also founded a hostel, almonry and leper hospital (Yates n.d.a, 21; Doubleday and Page 1904, 371-2). The leper hospital and the almonry were both founded around 1208 (Fowler 1926, 101:296; Webster 2018, 7). Page (1912, 364) states that the exact site of the leper hospital of St Mary Magdalene has not been attained but Evans (1994, 24) locates it on the east side of South Street on the town boundary (north-west of Half Moon Lane), though the names of Spittle Bottom and Spittle Hill are recorded on the other side of road in the 1840 tithe apportionment (TNA IR30/1/15; Curran n.d.b, 45). The location of the almonry is also not clear from historical sources. Evans (1994, 25) appears to suggest that the almonry, Hospital of St Peter and Hospital of St John the Baptist were all one and the same and located on West Street, based on a number of charter entries (*see* 'Discussion and Conclusions' section on Priory House).

In the early or mid-13th century a building with a stone undercroft with hall over, now incorporated into Priory House, was constructed at the western side of the priory (Hall and Bunbury 2022, 2; Henderson et al. 2022, 37; Bayliss et al. 2024). The various possible interpretations of the building will be considered below. In 1233 a hostel is mentioned in the priory annals and the suggestion is made that this is the

building incorporated into Priory House, but it is not clear on what evidence this link is made (Webster 2018, 88).

The annals record that the priory church was dedicated in 1213 (Webster 2018, 19), some 90 or so years after the probable founding of the priory. This was followed by the dedication of other altars in 1220 (Hall and Bunbury 2022, 2). Webster suggests that the dedication recorded in 1213 was in fact a rededication prompted by the acquisition of relics that would attract pilgrims and therefore generate revenue for the priory (this would also explain the reference to altar dedications in 1207 noted above). It is possible that these late dedications may also reflect the completion of a redesign of the eastern end of the church, perhaps as part of a major expansion at the end of the 12th century. The physical fabric of the church appears to support this interpretation with the earliest surviving fabric of the nave thought to date from around the period 1150-1160, the upper reaches of the gallery towards the end of the 12th century and decorative elements of the west front around 1170 – 1190 (O'Brien and Pevsner 2014, 146-7).

However, only a decade or so later in June 1222, the annals record that 'the roof of the presbytery at Dunstable collapsed', followed in December by the 'the two towers above the front of Dunstable church', of which 'one of them fell on the prior's house and destroyed a large part of it' (Webster 2018, 46). O'Brien and Pevsner (2014, 147) note that the collapse of these towers 'comes as a surprise, for the arcades make no visible provision for towers', putting the surviving fabric slightly at odds with the historical account of the 12th-century church. Also in the 1220s, two chapels may have been built in the canons' churchyard, one in 1227 dedicated to St Martin (Garrod, n.d., 171, though the source of this information is not clear) and, according to the annals, one in 1228, 'the chapel of St Mary in the cemetery of the canons of Dunstable' (Webster 2018, 73). In general, from the start of the 13th century onwards the surviving church fabric suggests piecemeal alteration and 'no consistent plan' (O'Brien and Pevsner 2014, 147).

A number of references in the priory annals indicate how the spaces around the priory may have been enclosed and divided, with a reference in 1228 to a wall enclosing the Prior's Garden (Webster 2018, 70) and another reference to two canons escaping the priory by jumping over the 'monastery wall' in 1233 (Webster 2018, 90) both indicating that the precinct boundary was defined by a stone wall. A reference in the annals from 1250 states 'we began to build the inner gate inside the court at Dunstable, and we completed it within the same year……we put ten loads of lead on the refectory roof' (Webster 2018, 124). By implication this also suggests that there was an outer gate and a distinction between an inner and outer precinct. Walls are also mentioned in entries in the cartulary (Fowler 1926, 46d (2) 410; 69 (2) 801) one of which (ibid 46d (2) 410) records the granting of a barn to the canons in around 1210-40 and which described the location of the barn as on,

> '[?the land] which is situated behind their bakehouse, of which part is in the ditch of their orchard, together with that land on which a barn is situated as far as the corner of the bakehouse, and so much surrounding [or neighbouring] land where the canons could be able

> freely to make a wall outside the foundation [or eaves] of the barn to a depth [or thickness] of two feet'.

Despite references to general decline and increasing debt at the priory (Doubleday and Page 1904, 372), a number of different building projects occurred in the 1250s, including the building of a 'new, private dormitory' in 1251 as the canons were 'afraid the old one might fall down' (Webster 2018, 126). The following year in 1252 the priory 'built a new house for carpenters and wheelwrights in the courtyard at Dunstable' (Webster 2018, 127). In 1254 the Priory 'built a large stable at Dunstable' (Webster 2018, 132) but in 1258 it collapsed and an entry in the annals states 'All the woodwork and bricks were smashed, but we put it back together as quickly as we could' (Webster 2018, 142). To add to these tribulations, in 1259 a Dominican friary was founded by royal request almost opposite the priory at the other side of Watling Street, apparently to the frustration of the priory (Yates n.d.a, 23; Curran n.d.b, 44). In 1273 the priory 'paid for the renovation of the vault of the north aisle in our church at Dunstable, from the altar to the cross and as far as the west door' as well as building 'a large pigeon house next to the tailor's room' and a 'windmill at Schykes-acre' (Webster 2018, 178). An entry from the annals in 1277 states 'We began a large room for the use of the lord king, next to the prior's room' (Webster 2018, 190). By 1291-2, when the Taxatio (an ecclesiastical taxation assessment) was compiled, Dunstable was not a wealthy establishment compared to some of its contemporaries, such as, for example, St Osyth (Denton et al. 2014).

Two further entries from the annals are of some interest. In 1289 it is recorded that 'The parishioners of Dunstable built two pinnacles on the north front of the church. They also repaired the stone roof of the south porch' (Webster 2018, 243) and in 1294 'the hay barn in our yard at Dunstable was burnt down... Also in the same year we enlarged our courtyard by building a new wall outside the old one. This was extremely expensive...because of bad weather that summer, the new wall immediately collapsed the following winter...[other walls collapsed] namely those around the priory's garden and its herbarium and others elsewhere, both inside the precinct and outside it' (Webster 2018, 263). Garrod (n.d., 179) cites an entry in the annals which talks about the rebuilding of the priory's main prison in 1295. It appears that the prison was located on the high street and that the priory also had a prison in Houghton (Page 1912, 358; Doubleday and Page 1904, 373).

Less information is available about the priory in the 14th century and beyond as the annals end in 1297 (Webster 2018, 276). The hundred years starting from around the 1320s has been noted as a period of sporadic alterations to the priory church (Garrod n.d., 180) including the rebuilding of the Lady Chapel in 1324 due to its ruinous state and probable alterations to divide the church into a parish church and a conventual church in 1390 (Hall 2022, 15 citing VCH and Registers of the Bishop of Lincoln). This was followed in 1392 by an agreement in which the town was granted use of the nave as the parish church (Yates n.d.a, 25; Hall 2022, 15). O'Brien and Pevsner (2014, 147-8) note the southern pier on the external elevation of the eastern end as 'related to a big strengthening of the C14 [14th century], when the transept and crossing tower were rebuilt or remodelled' which may be connected to the division of the church. In addition, Rushton (2003, 33) describes The Saracen's

Head (no. 45 High Street South) as 'opened by the priory as an extension of their other sources of accommodation and was possibly as early as 14th century' so its construction could also have been in this period.

Hall (2022, 15) notes architectural evidence for work on the west front of the church and major renovations of the north-west tower in the 15th century. A reference in a will of 1518 notes that Agnes is to inherit a tenement that after her death 'is to go to the new chapel in the Priory, which Sir John Wastell has lately built' (Jackie Hall 2022, pers. comm., 28 Mar) but it is not clear where this chapel was located.

Arguably one of the priory's most important moments came in May 1533 when the court that was to officially annul Henry VIII's marriage to Catharine of Aragon sat in the Lady Chapel. However, less than seven years later the priory was dissolved. Evans (1994, 98) says the priory was surrendered on 31 December 1539 (unreferenced), though Doubleday and Page (1904, 374) states Markham, the last prior, surrendered the house on 20 January 1540-1. Towards the end of its existence in around 1535 the priory had a net income of over £344 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 140). Interestingly Webster (2018, xi) states that Dunstable ranked about 20 out of 180 monasteries when Henry VIII valued the land at dissolution, with most of the wealthier institutions being abbeys, though it should be noted that some of those institutions were wealthier than Dunstable by some margin. St Albans Abbey, for example, had a net income of £2,102 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 56).

The Post-Dissolution Period

It is not clear exactly what happened to the priory buildings in the immediate post-dissolution period. A plan of around 1543-44 entitled 'The Plat of Dunstabyll' drawn up by the master carpenter Lawrence Bradshaw (Colvin 1982, 75-6) is reproduced and described by Evans (1994, 99) and by Thurley (1993, 118) (Fig. 5). It is not clear to what extent the plans were carried out. Colvin (1982, 75-76) notes that James Nedeham, Surveyor of the King's works, rode to Dunstable in 1543-4 to pay workmen there and that Lawrence Bradshaw and Robert Sylvester, the Court's master mason, both rode to Dunstable to view works, suggesting reasonable progress to convert the buildings was made.

Evans (1994, 101) suggests that the plan may have been a scheme to convert the conventual buildings of the priory, linked to Henry VIII's wish to create a bishopric at Dunstable, and suggests that there were six suites for the six prebendaries (canons) that were proposed. The bishopric was to cover Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire with the priory church as its cathedral (Garrod n.d., 182). Evans states that the plan is listed in the catalogue as a hunting lodge and as a ground floor plan, but an interpretation as a first-floor plan appears more likely and explains the lack of dining room or kitchen.

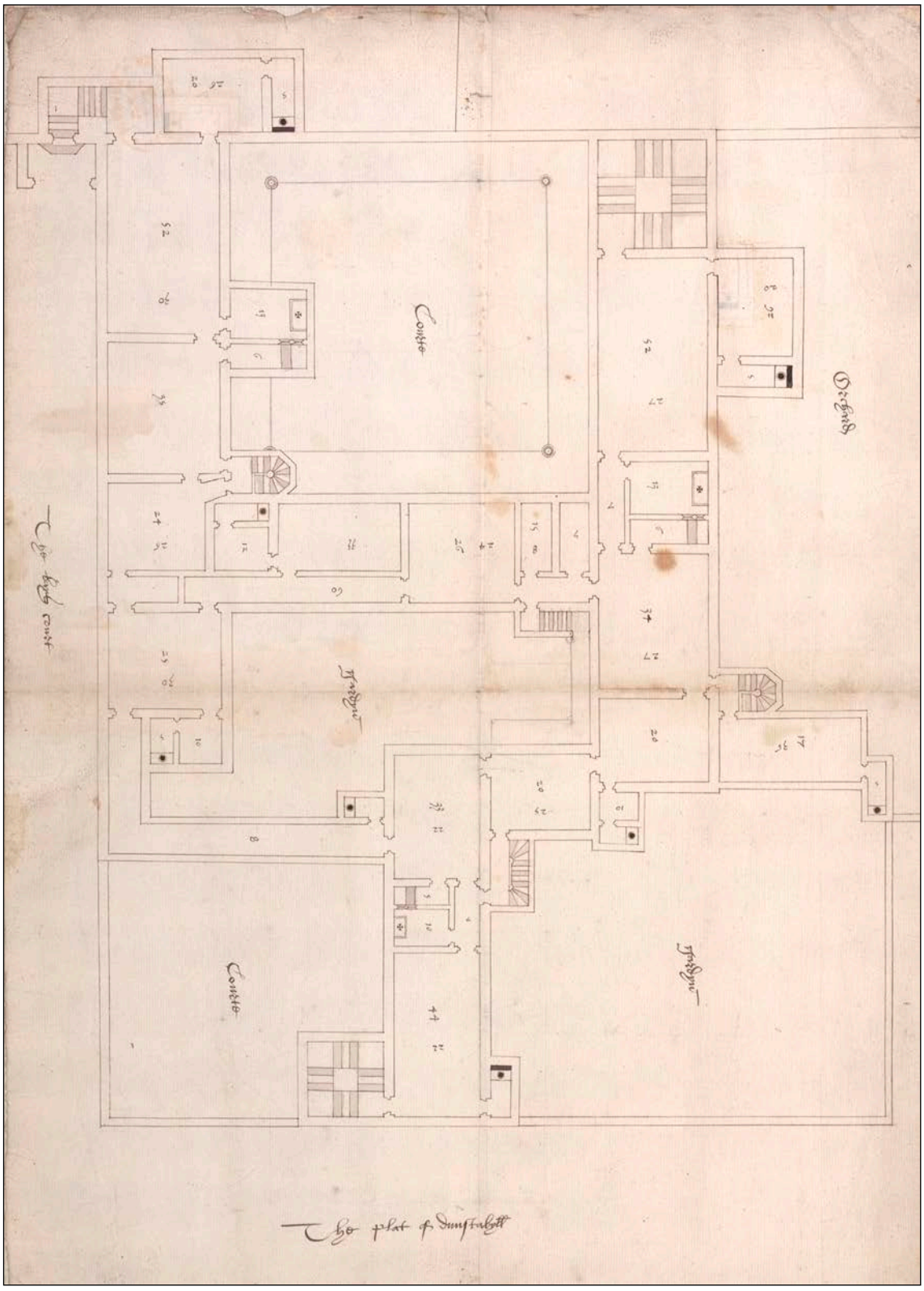

Figure 5: 'The Plat of Dunstabyll' dated 1543-44. Hatfield House Archive (CPM II 22 1540s). Reproduced with permission of the Marquess of Salisbury, Hatfield House.

More likely is the interpretation proposed by Thurley (1991, 259-261) who describes three sets of lodgings shown on the plan, suggesting that these were intended for

the King, Queen and Prince Edward, based on what he identifies as three closet-and-gallery plans, as well as bedchambers for servants and the 'King's bedchamber on the Queen's side' which he notes is seen in other royal residences of this period. The plan appears to extend from the south wall of the priory church and the three apartments appear to fit within the conventual buildings around the cloister. He suggests that the King's chambers were at the 'top' of the plan (to the east or right-hand side of Figure 5) with the Queen's to the 'bottom' (the west or left-hand side of Figure 5) and notes that the closet-and-gallery may have been situated in an existing projection, though this projection into the cloister walk is unlikely to have existed prior to dissolution. Thurley does not appear to have made a direct connection between the plan and the monastic cloister.

Whatever the extent of the conversion, Richard Greenway was made 'keeper of the mansion, chief messuage and gardens in 1545' (Page 1912, 361) suggesting a substantial, and probably occupied, dwelling, at least at this date, two years before Henry died, though Garrod (n.d., 182) suggests this is the point at which the scheme to convert the buildings fell through. Colvin (1982, 74-5) states that no more work was carried out following Henry's death in January 1547 and that the buildings were sold by Queen Mary to Sir Leonard Chamberlain for £300 in 1554. The suggestion that at least some of the work to convert the claustral buildings was undertaken is supported by both the fact that Henry visited twice in the post-dissolution period (Page 1912, 353) (probably due to the cathedral scheme) and the fact that the plan suggests that the changes need to convert the buildings would have been relatively straightforward to implement.

In the same year that he acquired the priory site (1554), Sir Leonard Chamberlain sold the property on to group of people including George Ferrers, Henry Bevell, Richard Denton and others, who then passed it on to Richard and Elizabeth Aves in 1561 (Page 1912, 361; Carpenter 2018, 5; Evans 1994, 103). It is not clear whether the building now known as Priory House (*see* Fig. 4) was part of the property at this date or whether it was separated from the main monastic complex at the time the priory was dissolved. Despite the later association of Priory House with the manor of Dame Sayres (or Sayers) (e.g. Henderson et al. 2022, 5), there is no firm evidence that the manor of Dames Sayres had any association with the priory or Priory House at this date. It was in fact a manor in Kensworth that had been held by the Zouches and that was sold in 1544 by Reynold Conygrave to a Dunstable man, Robert Ameryke (Page 1908, 231-234; Nichols 1984, 120 (400-401)) as described in an indenture of sale at a time when the main priory complex was still held by the Crown (Henderson et al. 2022, 5 – no reference given but assumed to be the Feet of Fines documents referenced in Page 1908, 231-234). It is however possible that Robert Ameryke also came into possession of Priory House then or at some later point.

From the mid-16th century to the mid-17th century there is no information about the ownership of the priory grounds, or the building later known as Priory House. In 1630 Zachary Symmes (Rector of Dunstable) leased a building from one Thomas Sheafe (Doctor of Divinity) for 18 years. Curran (2008, 6) quotes the lease which describes the building as 'the Manor House, formerly called the Angell, now the Stone House' and the associated 'manor of Dame Sayers' (also *see* Henderson et al.

2022, 5-6 quoting Bedfordshire Archives Services (BAS) AD907). Curran (2008) and Henderson et al. (2022) associate this building with what is now Priory House, which is very plausible given the later association, but the Court of Augmentations records from, presumably, 1540 when Dunstable Priory surrendered, note two buildings 'built of stone' in South Street and also described 'lord le Souche' as holding one tenement in South Street situated *next* to the tenement called the Angell (Nichols 1984, 115-6). This might suggest the source of the later association of Priory House with the manor of Dame Sayres.

There is some confusion around the ownership of the priory grounds and Priory House in the middle of the 17th century, when it is traditionally held that Priory House came into the possession of Sir John Napier of Luton Hoo (Curran 2008, 7). The county history for Hertfordshire suggests that the manor of Dame Sayers passed from Mary Sheafe (wife of the aforementioned Thomas) to William Burrell or Burwell who sold it to Sir Robert Napier of Luton Hoo in 1642 (Page 1908, 231-4) whilst Henderson et al. (2022, 6) quote a reference from the Bedfordshire Archives Service (AD768 – not examined) which suggests that Priory House was owned by a Hester Pocoke in 1642 when it was sold to Sir Robert.

The first direct reference to the ownership of what appears to be the priory grounds after the mid-16th century comes from details of the sale of the property in 1753. At this date it comprised three 'items', the Manor of Dame Sayres, the capital messuage or manor house with appurtenances situated in the South Street of Dunstable and the pasture adjoining known as 'the Pryory' which, according to Henderson et al. (2022, 7), describes the sale of '2 closes of pasture adjoining to [Priory House] and called 'the Pryory' by Sir John Napier to Robert Crawley in 1673. This seems to suggest that the priory grounds and Priory House were both acquired by the Crawley family but possibly at separate dates as Sir John Napier's heirs are thought to have sold the manor of Dame Sayers (traditionally assumed to include Priory House at this time) to Richard Crawley by 1670 (Curran 2008, 7). Adding to the confusion, references quoted in *A History of the County of Hertford* seem to suggest that the Napiers still held the manor in 1669 and 1677 (Page 1908, 231-4). The property remained with the Crawley family for the next 80 years and was used as a home and a private asylum (Phillips and Cooper-Reade 2005, 11-12 quoting Evans (n.d.); Curran 2008, 9).

Robert Crawley's 1694 will left the manor of Dame Sayres (traditionally assumed to include Priory House) as well as 'a piece of ground (c. 5acs) called the 'Pryory" (Henderson at al. 2022, 6 citing BAS BorDV13/1). This seems to support what we understand to be Priory House (within the manor known as Dame Sayres) and the remains of the priory being in the same ownership by this date, as understood from the later 1753 sale details, but there is still no definitive evidence that the manor house that is being referred to in 1694 is Priory House.

On the death of Dr Crawley in 1752 the property passed to his cousin the Rev John Lord who almost immediately sold it to Thomas Vaux (1753-78). This sale describes the property as the three separate elements noted above (Dame Sayres manor, manor house (Priory House) and 'Pryory' grounds), describing the 'Manor

of Dame Sayres otherwise Kensworth' (Henderson et al. 2022, 6) and highlighting the relationship (and possible confusion) between the descent of that manor and the ownership of Priory House and the priory grounds.

Thomas Vaux then sold the property to Thomas Cooke in 1778, before it became the property of one George Maddison in 1796, the name 'Dunstable Priory' or 'house called the priory' being first recorded when the house was advertised to let by his son, Lieutenant Colonel George Maddison (Henderson et al. 2022, 8 quoting BAS BORD 13/10). A perspective view of Dunstable included in the 1762 survey of Houghton Regis by T Bateman, held in the Bedfordshire Archives, adds little to our understanding of Priory Gardens or Priory House in the 18th century (BAS B553). Priory House and grounds had another three owners between 1809 and 1832: one William Gresham, who sold it to William Frederick Brown, and who apparently then sold it back to William Gresham (possibly a relative of the original William Gresham), who then sold it to Robert Thorp (Henderson et al. 2022, 10-14). In 1826 the property was advertised to let in the *Northampton Mercury* and described as having, 'lawn, pleasure ground, meadow land, pleasantly situated and surrounded with shrubbery walks, comprising almost four acres', which suggests that the area that is now Priory Gardens remained part of the property at that time (Henderson et al. 2022, 113). The original manor of Dame Sayres in Kensworth appears to have followed a different descent from the Dunstable holdings from the time of its ownership by the first George Maddison in the late 18th century and then is subsequently lost (Page 1908, 231-4).

The tithe map for Dunstable, surveyed by John Durham in 1822 and revised by Joseph Mead in 1840, shows a pattern of land boundaries in and around the priory that is clearly recognisable in the modern landscape (Fig. 6). It is notable that the fields to the south and east of the priory, stretching as far east and south as the Houghton Regis and Caddington parish boundaries respectively, appear to be without a tithe apportionment number, suggesting they were not tithed, reflecting their history as part of the holdings of the medieval priory (the block of land which relates to the location of the Friary is similarly lacking a number). This seems to fit with Evans's (1994, 38) assertion - based on her studies of the priory charters - that 'property belonging to the Priory filled most of this quarter' of the town. Also of note on the tithe map is the water-filled channel which runs around two (possibly three) sides of a plot to the north side of Church Street on the site of the King's manor (Kingsbury), possibly indicating a lost moat. Interestingly (and possibly coincidentally) Worthington Smith's conjectural plan of Dunstable shows Kingsbury surrounded by a moat (Smith 1904); prior to residential development around the site local anecdotes suggest that this wet 'moat' reappeared in times of flood or high water table.

A key moment in the history of Priory House and its grounds occurred in 1832 when the property was leased by Messrs. Munt and Brown, straw hat manufacturers (Henderson et al. 2022, 14 quoting W.G. Smith 1904). Priory House became the manager's residence (Curran 2008, 15) and Munt and Brown went on to purchase the property in 1839 (Henderson et al. 2002, 14 quoting Bedfordshire Archive BorDV13/23 1-2).

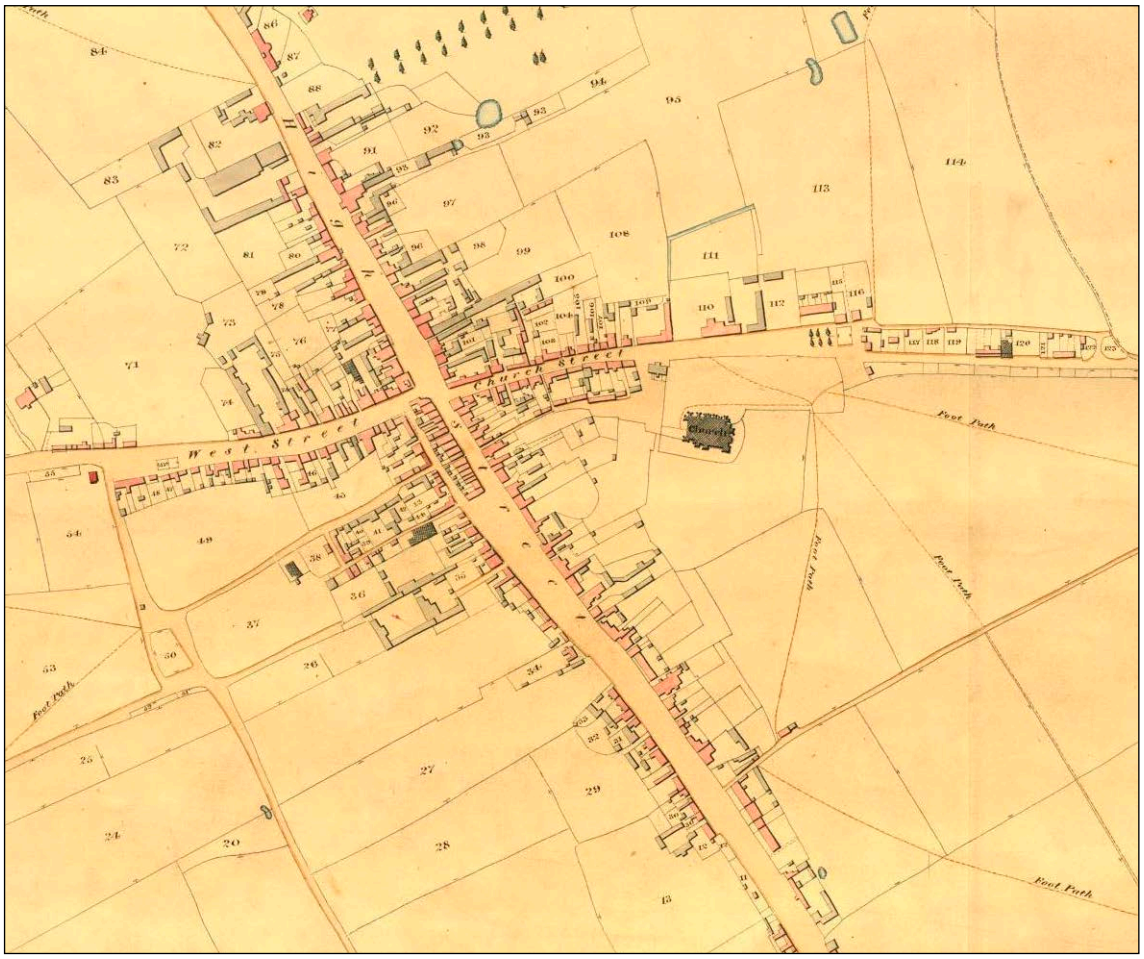

Figure 6: Detail from Dunstable Tithe Map (TNA IR30/1/15) dated 1822, revised 1840. The National Archives.

The hat manufacturers made various extensions and alterations over the years (Fig. 7) and Priory House became the family home of four successive managers (Curran 2008, 16). The factory closed in 1908 when Munt and Brown went bankrupt and the factory building was demolished in 1909. Priory House became the home of Arthur Munt, who died in 1927, and ceased to be a domestic residence around the time of the Second World War when his wife died (ibid., 22). Curran (2008, 22) describes Arthur as a 'keen gardener' and the formal garden and kitchen gardens shown on the Aerofilms photographs from 1928 may have been his creations (*see* Figs 26 and 29 in 'The Formal Gardens' section). Finally, Phillips and Cooper-Reade (2005, 29) state 'in 1946, the building and gardens were acquired by the local authority, through compulsory purchase, for use as public open space'.

The various historic Ordnance Survey (OS) map editions spanning the late 19th- and early 20th century show relatively little change in the area of Priory Gardens, apart from the demolition of the factory buildings. A fountain, situated in the northern part of Priory Gardens, to the west of the church, had been built by the time the 1924 map was surveyed and can be seen on aerial photographs dating from 1928 (HEA Aerofilms EPW023863 01-SEP-28). Aerial photographs from 1949 show the changes that occurred once the house and grounds were in municipal ownership, including

the removal of the kitchen garden and orchard in preparation for the construction of the war memorial, by summer 1952 (HEA RAF/SFFO/540/173/0036 26-MAR-1949; HEA TL0221/1 CAP9057/42 07-JUN-1952).

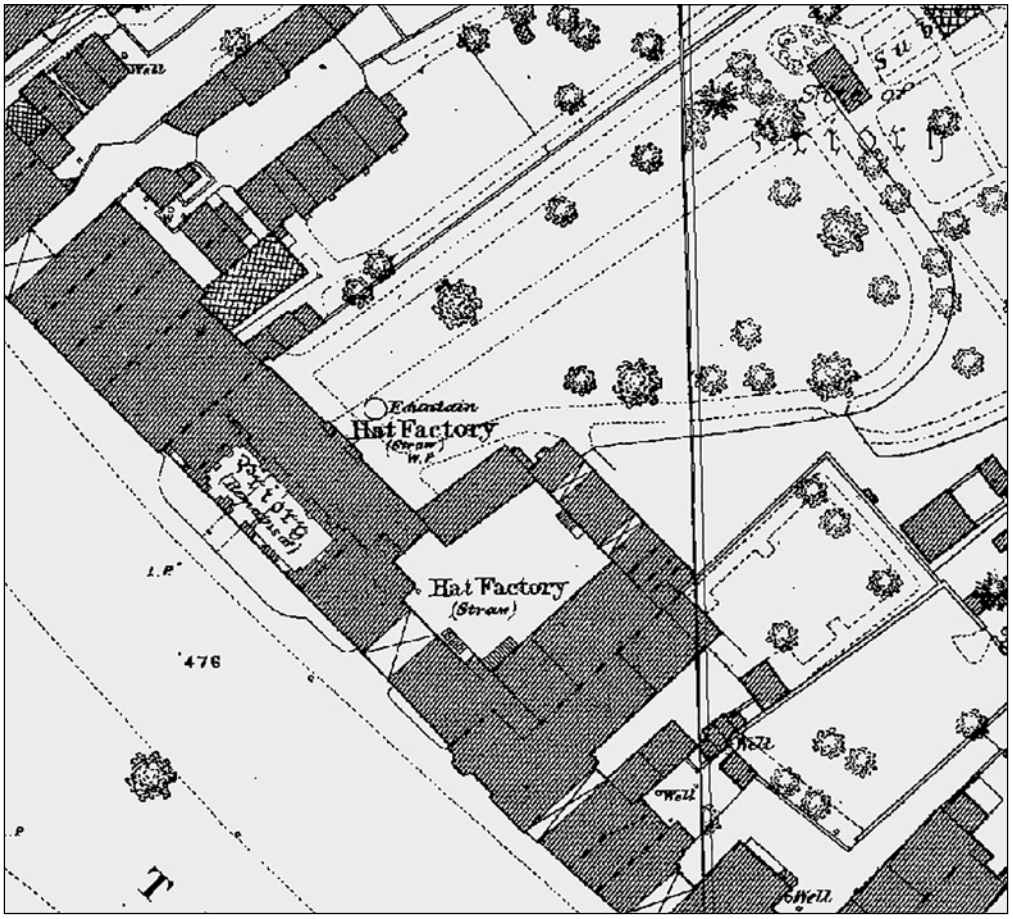

Figure 7: Ordnance Survey 1:500 Town Plan published 1880 showing Munt and Brown's straw hat factory behind and south-east of Priory House. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2023). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024). Not to scale.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

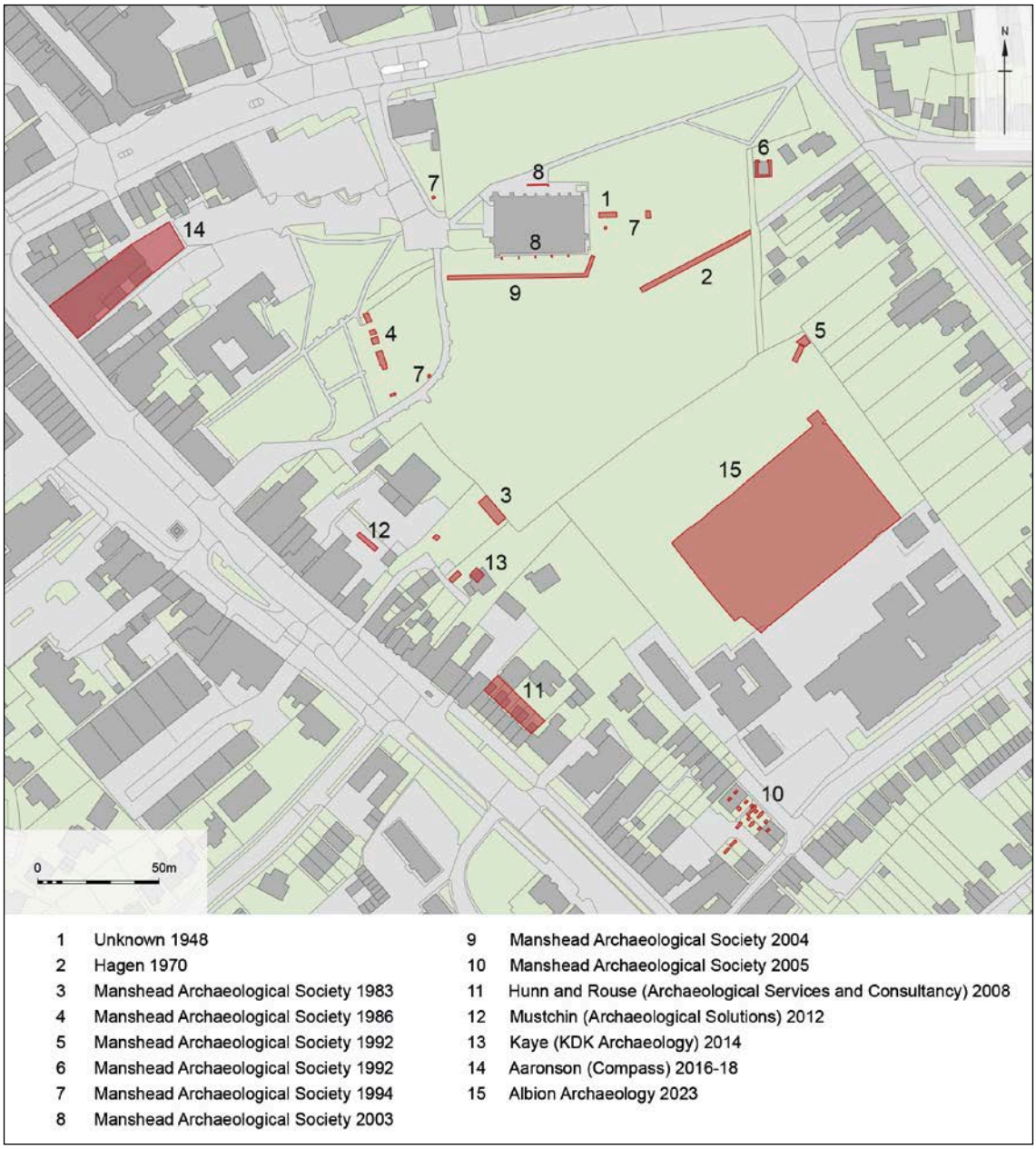

Figure 8: Previous 20th- and 21st-century archaeological interventions in and around Priory Gardens mentioned in the text (where location information is available). © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

Priory Gardens and the wider vicinity has seen a significant amount of archaeological research through the 20th and into the 21st century which is summarised below (Fig. 8). Earlier interventions are poorly recorded but appear to have included digging around the buried eastern end of the monastic church and the discovery of stone coffins (Lamborn 1859, 135-6). Some of these diggings

appear to have revealed the column bases for the eastern side of the church's central crossing and also a stone coffin with skeletal remains, which was discovered around 1783 when the roots of a beech tree were removed. The tree was part of a beech avenue which was subsequently felled in 1811, the removal of the roots revealing two parallel wall foundations in line with what is described as the 'middle aisle of the present church'. The location of the previously mentioned stone coffin was between the two, suggesting it was within the church rather than in the cemetery (Dunno 2001, 13-14).

In 1948 two trenches were excavated immediately to the east of the church which revealed one of the columns from the original crossing and another wall to the east (Hitchcock 1993, 13; 1993a, 2-3). Low level aerial photographs taken in 1949 (Fig. 9) appear to show ground disturbance and spoil heaps relating to this activity, though the spoil and disturbance, especially to the east, appears to be much more extensive than the diagram published by the Manshead Archaeological Society 45 years later (Hitchcock 1993, 13).

Figure 9: A detail of an aerial photograph taken in 1949 which appears to show the archaeological excavation trenches opened the previous year. HEA RAF/PFFO/540/173/0016 26-MAR-1949 (Historic England Archive: RAF Photography)

In March 1970 a linear trench was dug across part of Priory Gardens to the east-south-east of the church in order to 're-lay part of a main electricity supply cable' (Hagen 1972, 35), possibly the one seen being laid in aerial photographs from 1938 and discussed later in this report (Figs 19 and 20 in the description of the earthwork evidence 'East of the Church'). The excavation revealed a substantial Roman ditch with other shallow, probably pre-medieval, trenches parallel. The partial remains of at least 18 'middle-aged-elderly male skeletons' were discovered, which would be typical of the canons' cemetery that might be expected in this location, as well as sections of the foundations of substantial monastic buildings, almost certainly related to the chapter house.

In 1983 the Manshead Archaeological Society (MAS) excavated a large, medieval building located within the garden of the Saracen's Head hotel, High Street South, aligned on the rear property boundary and at least 12m in length (Matthews 1984, 2-26).

The building contained a series of cellars with ovens which were apparently converted into a lime kiln in the post-dissolution period (based on bricks in the kiln which suggest a date 100 years after dissolution). The building was interpreted as a bakehouse or brewhouse with guest accommodation above, based on the width of the walls, and was built up against a wall which may have marked the precinct boundary. It is possible that the later lime kiln may have been used for burning stone from the priory to produce lime for mortar or soil improvement, as suggested by documentary and archaeological evidence from Lincoln (*see* Stocker 1990, 27).

This area was also subject to GPR survey in 2012 which identified a number of potential archaeological anomalies over two areas (Biggs 2012). In the immediate vicinity of the 1983 excavation possible infilled and robbed-out structural remains were identified, perhaps relating to unexcavated areas of the building identified at the time of the excavations. The archaeological evaluation that followed identified a 19th-century wall, immediately to the rear of the hotel, containing reused medieval stonework that appeared to be scorched, suggesting it may have come from the bake/brewhouse or later lime kilns (Mustchin et al. 2012).

In 1986 the Manshead Archaeological Society undertook a small excavation to remove hedge roots on the boundary between the formal gardens of Priory House and the meadow south of the priory, revealing amongst other features an 'exceptionally' large, probably medieval, well over 2m in diameter (Warren 1987a, 12-14; Warren 1987b, 1-11) but no coherent building remains.

In 1992 MAS undertook an excavation in the northern corner of the Priory Middle School (now Priory Academy) playing fields, just outside the priory's scheduled area. The excavations revealed a possibly later medieval rutted trackway running into the priory grounds and a possible earlier medieval building marked by a line of Totternhoe stone lumps. It was noted that the precinct boundary wall on the western side had been previously found to be of solid Totternhoe construction. The features raised questions about their relationship with the location of the priory boundary and whether the track was earlier than or contemporary with the priory. Also of note was the observation that the playing fields were lower than Priory Gardens yet there was evidence of soil introduction and 'wholescale landscaping' both here and in other excavations to the south of the priory (Warren and Hudspith 1993a, 15-19). The work also included some geophysical survey which proved unproductive.

In the same year the society excavated evidence for at least 20 burials prior to the construction of a garage at 2 Priory Road. The burials were thought to be related to the construction phase of the priory due to the injuries evident and the presence of 'ear-muff' burials (where stones intended to prop the head are found either side of the skull), which the excavators took to indicate an early date in the history of the priory. The burials were suggested to be outside the precinct and possibly bounded by a palisade trench and ditch, though the evidence for this feature was fragmentary (Warren 1993a, 19-26; 1993b, 12-21).

Another excavation by MAS at Priory Middle School (now Priory Academy) in 1993 is mentioned in passing in *South Midlands Archaeology*. A post-medieval lane was

discovered running along the back of the properties to the east of High Street South and a considerable build-up of material was also noted in this excavation (Anon. 1995a, 18). Excavations prior to the installation of interpretation boards in Priory Gardens the following year only revealed demolition rubble and again evidence of the land being built-up (Anon. 1995b, 18). No features were recorded in the three 1m by 1m by 1m holes but in one case the post-medieval ground-level build up was possibly infilling an earlier feature (Warren 1994, 7-10).

In 2003 MAS excavated five small inspection holes immediately south of the nave of the church and one 9m trench to the north of the church, ahead of a scheme to install new lighting. The holes revealed evidence for a stone wall core running parallel to the existing church wall (Warren 2004, 10-13), perhaps indicating the northern side of the cloister walk.

In June 2004 the society was also involved in the observation and recording of trenches created by the removal of an ornamental hedge to the south of the priory (Hudspith 2004, 18-19). The excavations revealed evidence for comprehensive demolition of the priory at dissolution and evidence for former floor surfaces and robbed out walls, also presumably associated with the cloister walk or cellarer's range (NB excavation plan not seen).

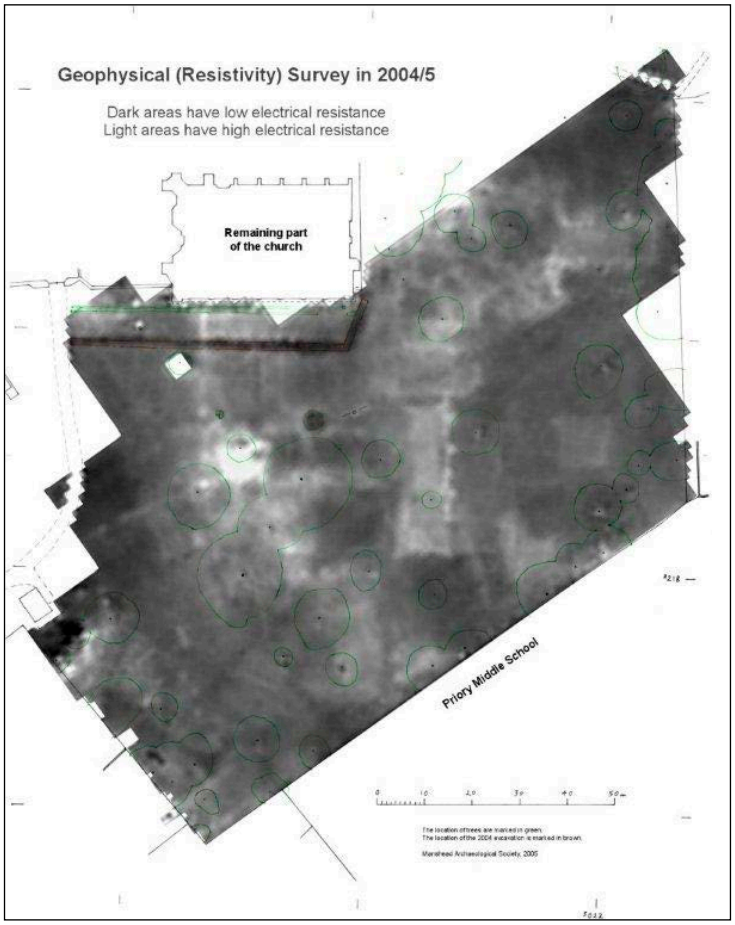

Figure 10: Earth resistance survey undertaken by the Manshead Archaeological Society in 2004/5 (Source: Medieval Dunstable website)

In 2004 (and possibly 2005) the Manshead Archaeological Society carried out the first of two earth resistance surveys. Both surveys revealed details of the monastic church, cloister and other associated buildings, including a possible, smaller, second court. The first survey was 'in very dry conditions before the resistivity meter was upgraded' (Ren Hudspith, pers. comm.). This is the survey marked as 2004/5 on the Medieval Dunstable website (Anon. n.d.; Fig. 10). It has been noted that 'the second was done in the winter after the excavation, now displayed on notice boards near the Priory & used for marking out the Site' (Ren Hudspith, pers. comm.). This is presumably a reference to the survey mentioned on the Medieval Dunstable website as 'begun in late 2011' (Yates n.d.c) and described as being carried out in 2012 on a conjectural plan of the priory by Tony Woodhouse (Woodhouse 2012).

It was during this second resistivity survey that features interpreted as the 'foundations of a large tithe barn' were discovered 'adjacent to Priory House' (Yates ed. n.d., 13). A high resolution copy of the resistivity results was not available for this area of the Priory Gardens during the research for this report but Jean Yates (2022, pers. comm., 1 Dec) has said that it was 'adjacent, but running east west, to Priory House and they said very early – before the back part of PH [Priory House] was built as it was too close, and possibly the first tithe barn'. Soil testing undertaken at the time also suggested it was not a stable (Yates 2022, pers. comm., 1 Dec). The recent GPR survey (see below) did not suggest the remains of a substantial building in this area so it is possible that the feature identified was related to the 'subterranean passage' (more likely a conduit or drain) marked on the OS 1:500 Town Plan published in 1880 (*see* Fig. 7).

Various other investigations in the local area have revealed evidence that may be related to the priory but none of it has been definitive. Excavations undertaken in 2005 in the garden of 77b High Street South, and to the rear of the White Swan public house, close to Priory Middle School (now Priory Academy), revealed sections of a medieval ditch, possibly a former property boundary (Anon. 2005a, 9-10; Anon. 2005b 11-17). A watching brief undertaken at Cart's Almshouses (65-75 High Street South) in the same year revealed some pieces of Totternhoe clunch, one shaped and possibly of medieval date, but it was not clear to what they related (Rouse 2005, 10). A watching brief to the rear of 65-75 High Street South revealed some worked Totternhoe stone suggesting it could have come from the priory or another high-status building (Hunn and Rouse 2008).

In 2011 the Heritage Lottery Fund funded the 'Medieval Dunstable Project' which aimed for Dunstable's importance as a medieval town to be recognised (Yates n.d.a, 9). The Medieval Dunstable Project included the geophysical survey described above and the installation of 'granite plaques marking each building or room' across Priory Gardens, based on the project's interpretation of the priory's layout (Yates n.d.a, 12-13). Further information is available on the Medieval Dunstable website.

Kaye (2013, 4) describes the discovery in 2013, to the rear of 59 High Street South, of 'some worked stone blocks...noted by the contractors when some ground clearance work was undertaken at the north east end of the site'. Further excavations on the site in advance of construction revealed the footings of a clunch wall, apparently on

a north-west to south-east orientation. The report tentatively suggested that 'there is the possibility that the extent of the precinct has been underestimated, and that the footing exposed in Trench 2 is the remnant of the Priory's perimeter wall' (Kaye 2014, 16).

In 2016 an evaluation undertaken by Compass Archaeology at 11-15 High Street South, just to the south of Church Walk, revealed a Totternhoe clunch-faced wall with rubble infill in the carpark to the rear (east) of the property. The wall was initially interpreted as medieval in date due to 'the size and nature of construction of the footing' and the excavators felt it 'safe to consider it forms a part of the wider precinct/complex of Dunstable Priory, and as such is of great significance as to our understanding of the extent and nature of the priory site'. They went on to describe how, 'the material dumped against the footing must derive either from its associated above-ground structure or from a nearby source such as another nearby precinct building or maybe even the Priory itself' (Aaronson 2016, 34).

However more extensive exploration of the site in 2017 revealed the remains to be part of an elaborate tank and well structure rather than a wall (Aaronson 2018, 27). The structure consisted of two cells, one accessed via steps and the other with sloping walls, divided by a wall with a gap in it and stone flagging at its base. A 12th-century date has been suggested for the structure on the basis of tool marks on the well lining. Multiple possible functions for the structure were proposed by the excavators, who speculated whether one or both cells were filled with water and why access into a water-filled tank would be needed. The possible interpretation of a Jewish ritual bath ('mikveh') was proposed (Aaronson 2018, 28-30). Other evidence of medieval activity uncovered during the excavation included domestic-scale ovens constructed from tiles (Aaronson 2018, 23).

In summer 2023 an evaluation was undertaken by Albion Archaeology on the Priory Academy playing fields. The full results were not available to the authors whilst writing this report but initial findings suggest the existance of pits of medieval date, possibly related to tree planting, and no evidence of stone-built structures (Wesley Kier, pers. comm., 2023). Similarly, at the time of writing, investigations and renovations are ongoing at Priory House. The draft report by Henderson et al. (2022) has been drawn on for this research and new discoveries, such as possible 15th- or 16th-century fireplaces have been revealed as well as decorative schemes from a similar period. Packing material from the vault cones also produced a calibrated radiocarbon date of between 1217 and 1269 at a 95% probablity (Bayliss et al. 2024).

Historic England Ground Penetrating Radar Survey

The ground penetrating radar survey undertaken in Priory Gardens in May 2021 as part of the Dunstable High Street Heritage Action Zone project (Linford et al. 2022; see Figs A1 and A2 at the rear of this report) is a significant source of information for the interpretation of the priory remains. Its findings will be briefly summarised here and drawn on more extensively in the interpretation of the analytical earthwork survey (below).

In many aspects the GPR survey confirmed much of the layout of the priory as revealed by the earlier earth resistance surveys. The greatest extent of extra information was revealed around the eastern end of the church, where the presbytery was shown to have had a rounded or apsidal end and where hints of possible grave or memorial stones were revealed within the Lady Chapel (Fig. 11).

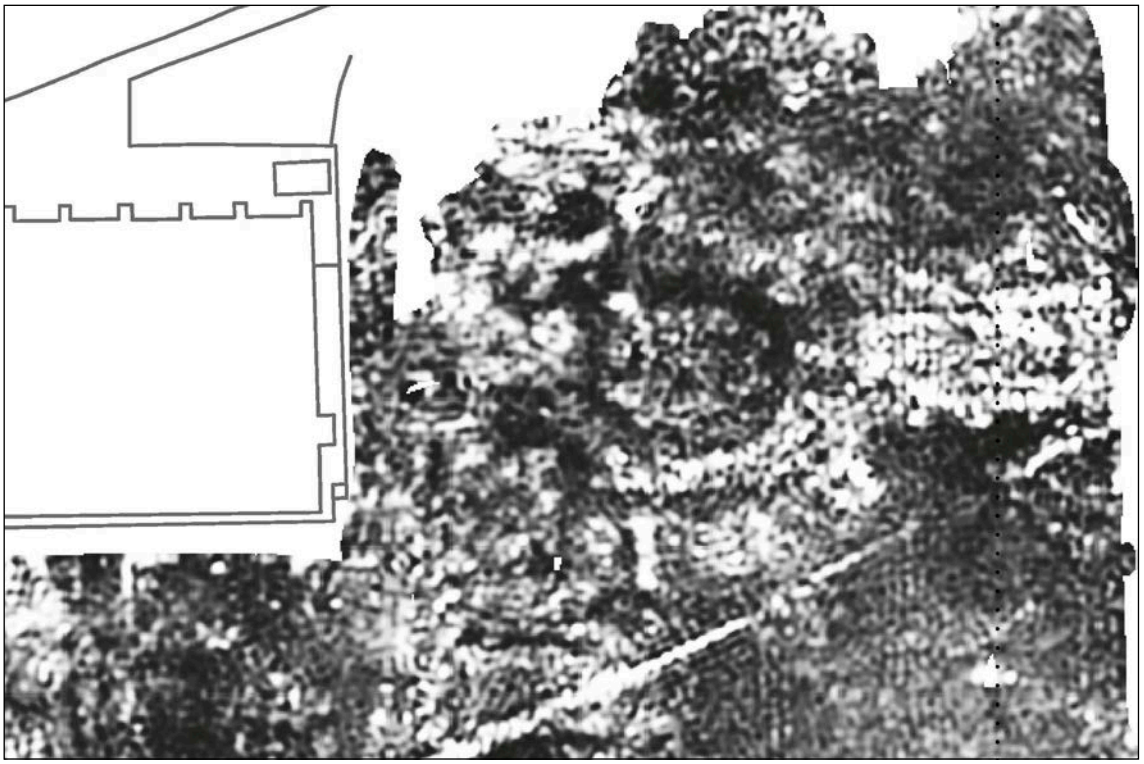

Figure 11: Extract from the GPR data showing the ditches (black) and walls (white) at a depth of between 0.9 and 1.03m from the surface. The buried remains of the rounded presbytery can be seen located between the surviving church (to the left) and the buried remains of the Lady Chapel (to the right).

Finer details of building layouts were revealed across the site, as well as a possible building or projection at the south-west corner of the cloister ranges and a square building or structure to its south. The survey particularly highlighted the change of orientation seen in the priory buildings towards the south side of Priory Gardens. Anomalies revealed to the west of the main priory buildings, in the formal gardens towards Priory House, are thought to relate to later, post-dissolution, periods of activity (*see* Figs A1 and A2).

The GPR survey of Priory Academy (formerly Priory Middle School) playing fields did not reveal evidence of further priory buildings extending to the south beyond the boundary of Priory Gardens. The track which ran down the eastern side of Priory Gardens and across the field in the 19th century - which may have medieval origins (see below) - is clearly visible.

DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE REMAINS

NB Feature numbers given in square-brackets throughout the description text and on extracts from the survey drawing (Figs 13, 17 and 22) are to aid reader orientation. A full, numbered, 1:1000 scale, A3 version of the analytical earthwork survey plan can be found at the back of this report (Fig. A3) alongside an unnumbered version (Fig. A4).

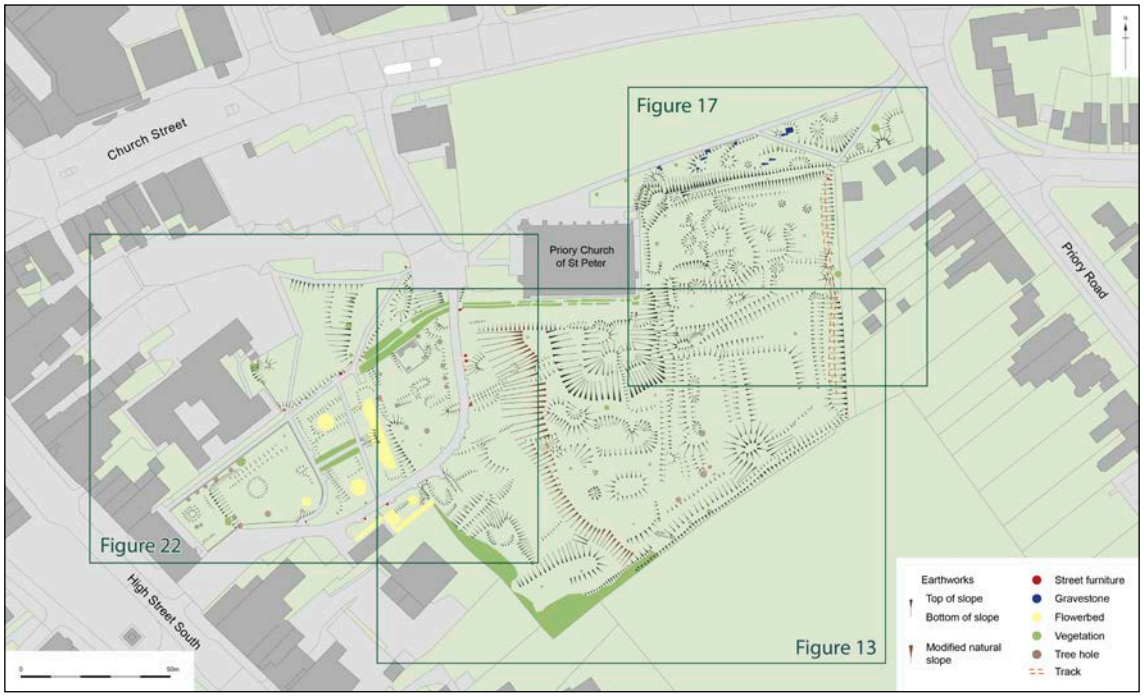

Figure 12: Key to analytical earthwork survey extracts. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

The Cloisters

Immediately to the west of the cloister area, a very substantial scarp [1] runs roughly north-north-west to south-south-east for around 90m, from the western end of the church to the boundary with Priory Academy, reducing in height from 1.5m at its northern end to roughly 0.4m towards the south (Fig. 14). Excavation (probably in 2004, *see* Fig. 8) has suggested that this is a natural feature (Ren Hudspith 2022, pers. comm.) but both the GPR and analytical earthwork surveys suggest that it served as a substantial boundary at some point and could have influenced (or reflect) the layout of the monastic buildings. The scarp does appear to be on the line of a boundary shown on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880, though this is not shown on the earlier tithe map of 1822 (revised 1840) (Fig. 6). Geophysical anomaly [gpr28] (Fig. A2) could indicate some form of revetting along this boundary though its position in relation to the overlying scarp does vary.

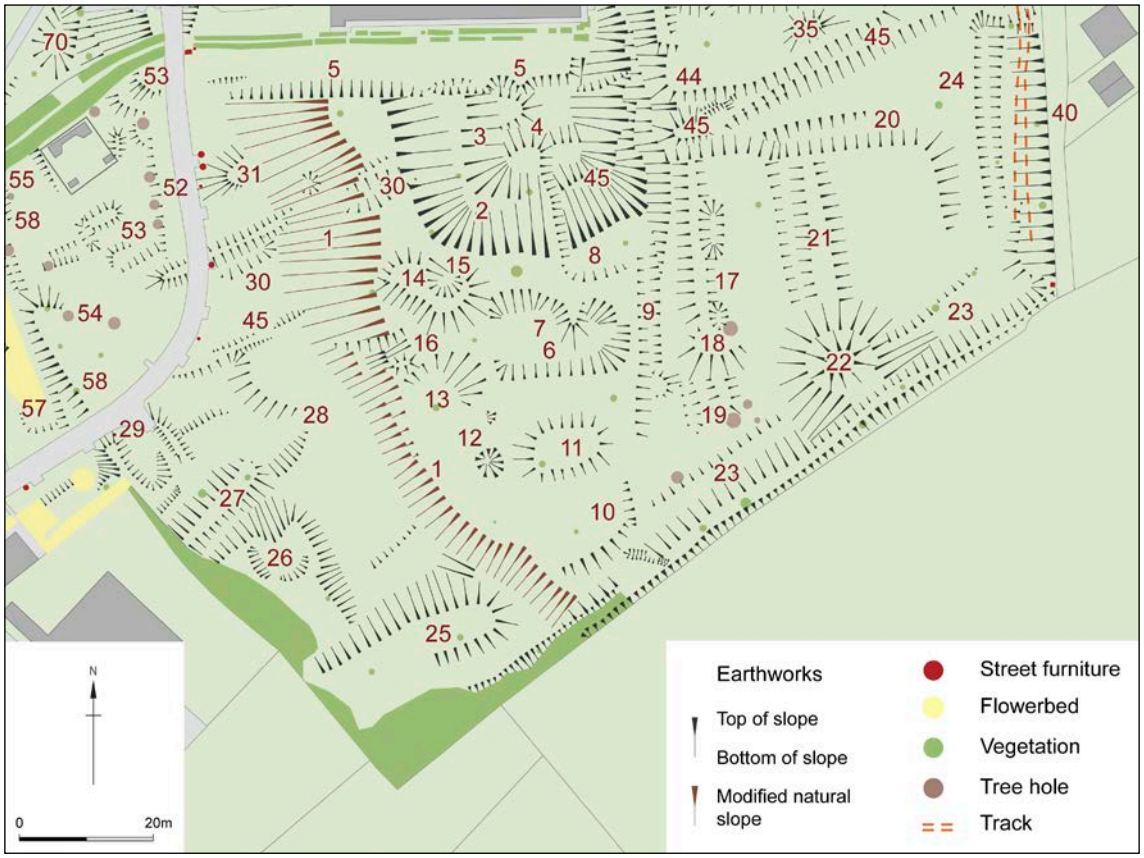

Figure 13: An extract from Figure A3 showing the earthworks around 'The Cloisters', ‘South of the cloister’, in ‘The South-East Corner’ and in ‘The Western Area’. The labels refer to the numbers in square brackets mentioned in the text. Please refer to Figure 12 for the location of the extract. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

Figure 14: The substantial scarp [1] running roughly north-north-west to south-south-east across the site, view looking south towards Priory Academy. 12-SEP-2022. © Historic England

Figure 15: The sub-square hollow [2] indicating the former location of the cloister to the south of the church, view looking west. 12-SEP-2022. © Historic England

The most prominent earthwork on the site is the large sub-square hollow [2], 36m east-west by 25m north-south, which is located to the south of the church and represents the cloister garth (the open space in the middle of the cloister) (Fig. 15). The base of the hollow is 0.8m deeper than the surrounding ground surface but probably not much deeper than the base of the church (based on the level of the blocked doorways in its eastern elevation), suggesting that what appears to be a hole has in fact been created by the large amount of buried demolition rubble reflecting the plan of the surrounding cloister ranges. The results from the GPR survey appear to reinforce this interpretation with anomalies relating to the cloister buildings starting to appear at around 0.77-0.9m below the current ground surface, at a similar level to the base of the hollow, and being strongest at around 1.5m below (*see* Figs 4 and 5 in Linford et al. 2022). Clearly there has been much disturbance, and demolition rubble masks the pattern of the priory earthworks to some extent, but broadly speaking the upper edge of the hole appears to correspond with the internal face of the outer wall of the building ranges that surrounded the cloister when compared to the earth resistance (Fig. 10) and the ground penetrating radar surveys (Fig. A3 [gpr24; gpr25]), whereas the inner, lower scarp [3] appears to align with the likely position of the walkway surrounding the cloister garth (Fig. A1 and Fig. A2 [?gpr26]).

The mounds that have created the uneven surface in the bottom of the cloister hollow are assumed to be piles of demolition rubble or collapsed masonry [4]. A series of scarps that run roughly west to east on the northern side of the hollow [5] appear to relate to the former position of a hedge which separated the church from the wider

meadow. A 1.5m wide excavation trench, dug when the hedge was removed by machine, revealed evidence for comprehensive demolition of the priory buildings (Hudspith 2004, 18-19). The location of the hedge/excavation is visible as a north-facing scarp where it cuts the higher ground to the west and as a south-facing scarp further to the east. This boundary is shown on the tithe map of 1822 (revised 1840) (Fig. 6) and correlates with geophysical anomaly [gpr7] (Fig. A2).

South of the cloister

On the higher ground to the south of the hollow marking the centre of the cloister are a series of hollows and mounds that represent a mixture of buried priory remains and probable demolition rubble. About 14m south of the cloister hollow is a north-facing scarp [6] which runs west-east for 20m before turning north to form a well-defined hollow area suggesting the location of a building. This aligns with low amplitude GPR anomaly [gpr29] (Fig. A2), bounded by walls to the south and east, which could be a small garden or court or a building. The area the anomaly defines is also visible on the earth resistance survey (Fig. 10). The more undulating south-facing scarp which defines the northern edge of the feature [7] does not align with the geophysical anomalies and is more likely to be related to the demolition of the monastic buildings. A very slight north-facing scarp [8] running east-west just south of the cloister hollow may mark the location of the southern wall of the south cloister range, aligning with a clear anomaly on the GPR survey (Fig. A2 [gpr25]) identified as the south side of the refectory. At its western end it appears to turn north, slightly cutting into the cloister hollow, which suggests that this north-south element is probably part of a different, later feature.

To the immediate east of the hollow and slight scarp are a pair of parallel facing scarps [9] which form a gulley running north-south for a combined total of 30m from the south-east corner of the cloister hollow. Examination of the GPR and earth resistance results (Figs 10, A1 and A2 [gpr19]) show that this gulley defines the western side of a range of buildings which ran north-south in this location (presumably the warming room and dormitory, based on typical Augustinian priory layouts). One scarp continues, however, beyond the southern extent of the geophysical anomalies and perhaps represents a garden boundary that extended the line of the buildings. To the south of the parallel scarps, a short west-facing scarp [10] appears to align with the eastern side of a building or building range on a different alignment, shown on the GPR survey (Fig. A2 [gpr31]). The east-west scarp that runs westwards from its southern end may be part of a different feature. An oval mound [11], roughly 15m by 9.8m, located at the northern end of the building or building range identified on the GPR, does not appear to relate to the buried wall lines and may be demolition rubble. To the west of the oval mound there is a small circular hole, on average 4m in diameter [12]. This aligns with a small, high amplitude anomaly shown on the GPR (Fig. A2 [gpr30]), possibly buried masonry or rubble. It sits within a small, square enclosed area (perhaps a garden or building) and may have been the location of a structure such as a fountain or the top of a well. The GPR response for the central anomaly disappears fairly rapidly as the depth beneath the surface increases however, casting doubt on the possibility of a well shaft

beneath, though the high amplitude anomaly near the surface may have impeded the detection of deeper features.

A number of other features in this part of Priory Gardens are more difficult to interpret. The origin of the scarp forming a hollow or scoop [13] to the west of the scarp that defines the building or small court area [6] is unclear and it is neither aligned on a buried geophysical anomaly or orientated in a way which suggests it relates to the buried monastic remains. Similarly the scarps [14] and hollow [15] to the north are located above a newly identified building visible on the GPR survey, orientated east-west (Fig. A2 [gpr27]), but do not appear to be directly related to it and may reflect demolition rubble. The nearby scarps and small mound [16] at the top of the long north-south scarp are probably the result of fairly modern activity, though the close proximity of the newly identified buried building should be acknowledged.

The South-East Corner

Parallel and to the east of the north-south gulley that marks the western side of the eastern cloister range [9] are another two scarps which form a low bank running north-south for around 25m [17]. At the southern end of the bank is a low scarp, which almost forms a mound [18]. The bank's eastern scarp is interrupted by two shallow oval hollows whose origins are unclear. Comparison with both the GPR and earth resistance surveys (Figs 10, A1 and A3) shows that this low bank is not aligned exactly with the eastern side of the building range but is positioned slightly to the west so that it sits within the building range itself, though the mound [18] is broadly speaking located at the southern end of the building. A north-south hollow and parallel bank [19], that run south from the position of the mound, may or may not be related but they give the impression that the low bank is running on a slightly different alignment from geophysical anomalies. It is possible that the low bank [17] could be a run of upcast related to the extraction of building foundations on its western side, hence the apparent misalignment with the eastern side of the building range, though in that case it is surprisingly low and well-formed.

Approximately 15m to east of the building range described above, a very low bank with a parallel gulley to its west [21], runs on a roughly north-south alignment from the large mound on the southern boundary of the survey area [22] to a scarp running east-west [20]. These features are on a slightly different alignment to the buried walls so clearly visible on the GPR results, (Fig. A2 [gpr20]), which may suggest that they belong to a later, possibly post-dissolution, phase of activity. The north-facing scarp [20], which runs east-west at the north end of the gulley and bank [21], begins in the area between the eastern cloister range and the chapter house and dog-legs slightly southwards just before it meets the north-south bank and gulley [21], before continuing eastwards for around 25m. It then turns south for another 12m, neatly enclosing the area on its southern and western sides. Again the alignment of this scarp appears similar to the gulley and bank and slightly off the alignment of the monastic buildings recorded by the geophysical surveys, including the square anomaly that sits within the area that the scarp encloses (Fig. A2 [gpr21]; Fig. 10 and *see* 'Discussions and Conclusions' below).

The mound itself [22] is around 19m in diameter and is a very low, sub-circular, spread earthwork with a slightly smaller, but more pronounced, mound on top. The southern end of the spread mound appears to be truncated by the modern field boundary. The feature is located in the proximity of GPR evidence for another possible building or building range, (Fig. A2 [gpr32]), but unfortunately the GPR survey of the school playing fields did not reveal any evidence of the feature continuing to the south (Fig. A1).

Along the southern boundary of the site (which runs south-west to north-east) a sharp fall to the south-east, towards the playing fields, is visible, which may be partly related to the insertion of the modern metal fence but may also reflect the amount of demolition material in Priory Gardens compared to the playing fields, as well as some modern levelling. Running parallel to and about 3.5m from the modern boundary is another, north-west facing, scarp [23] that suggests that the boundary (which is visible in the same position on the 1822 (revised 1840) tithe map (Fig. 6)) was at one point defined by a bank. A very slight scarp running parallel to its north-west may suggest that a track followed the boundary at some point. The origin of a gulley, 3.7m wide, that runs parallel to the eastern boundary of Priory Garden for around 30m is not clear [24] .

The Western area

In the very southern corner of the site, to the west of the large scarp that runs roughly north-north-west to south-south-east [1], is a possible elongated building platform, which may be up to 26.5m long and just over 5m wide [25]. The platform is aligned with the modern south-eastern field boundary and its origin is unclear. It does not coincide with any geophysical anomalies recorded on the GPR nor the earlier earth resistance surveys and it is not clear how it relates to the small rectangular enclosure shown on the south-eastern boundary on the third edition 25 inch OS map published in 1924. It may have been the site of a monastic building lacking solid foundations or it could be much later in date. Immediately north, a slightly irregular platform [26], roughly 19m by 12m and aligned with the modern field boundary, is defined by a scarp along its northern and eastern edges. Its origins are not clear but geophysical anomalies recorded in the same location do not appear to directly relate to the earthwork platform (Fig. A1).

To the north of the platforms described above are a number of earthworks that are probably related to the construction and demolition of two small buildings that are shown on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880 (Fig. 16) but are not shown on the tithe map of 1822/1840 (Fig. 6). The larger of the two buildings, located to the south-west, was still standing in 1937 (OS 1:2500) but had gone by 1963 (OS Post War 1:1250), whereas the small building to the north-east was still standing in 1974 (OS Post War 1:1250). These buildings are likely to be those described as 'two outbuildings, one largely built of stones from the priory ruins' located in the 'paddock' in the District Valuer's Report for the Purchase of Priory House from 1946 (Henderson et al. 2022, 18), the larger building (to the south-east) being visible on an aerial photograph dating to 1928, though it is not clear if it is stone-built (*see* Fig. 20 below).

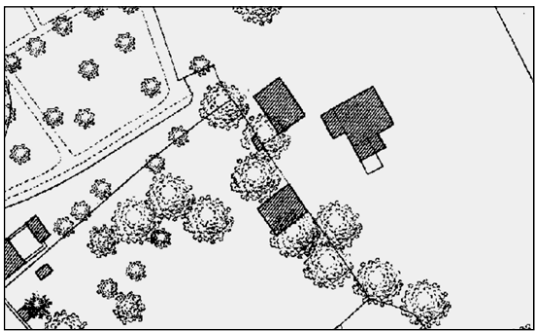

Figure 16: Extract of 1:500 Ordnance Survey Town Plan published in 1880 showing two small buildings, now demolished, located to the south-west of the cloister area. (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2023). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024). Not to scale.

A low bank [27] around 16m long and on average 2.3m wide, that runs at ninety degrees to the field boundary, may be related to the construction or demolition of the larger building, as may the roughly north and west-facing scarps to its north-east [28]. A series of scarps to the north-west [29] define the position of the smaller building which was located close to the modern path. Aerial photographs from 1938 also appear to show a great deal of ground disturbance around the two buildings which seems to be related to the insertion of the service pipe across Priory Gardens (*see* Figs 19 and 20 below).

To the north of the earthworks relating to the two buildings is a very slight bank [30] only 0.7m wide which, although cut by the modern path, runs for 22m on a south-west to north-east alignment to the base of the large north-south scarp [1] and then continues on the same alignment for another 6m or so from the top of the scarp. It is accompanied by a shallow gulley in places on its southern side. Its origin is unclear but it looks very much like a shallow trench dug for a modern purpose, such as to insert a service, but, if so, it appears to be undocumented. To the north, the origin of the fan of soil [31] is unclear.

East of the Church

A complex combination of earthworks is located in the area between the east end of the existing church and the eastern boundary of Priory Gardens, many of which reflect the extent of demolition debris which still lies buried. However, within these earthworks some clear features which indicate the layout of the eastern end of the monastic church can be identified, including a low, curving bank [32] (Fig. 18), which is broadly aligned with the remains of the apsidal end of the church identified by the GPR (Fig. A2 [gpr 13 & 17]), though at its northern end it appears to merge with another feature (an east-facing scarp). To the east of the curving feature, three short scarps [33], running east-west, align broadly with the buried remains of the Lady Chapel identified from the earth resistance survey (Fig. 10) and confirmed by the GPR (Fig. A2 [gpr8]), and appear to be surface indications of collapsed walls. Another curving scarp to the south [34] may also reflect the rounded apse of the monastic church, though it merges into a modern service trench as it straightens and heads west.

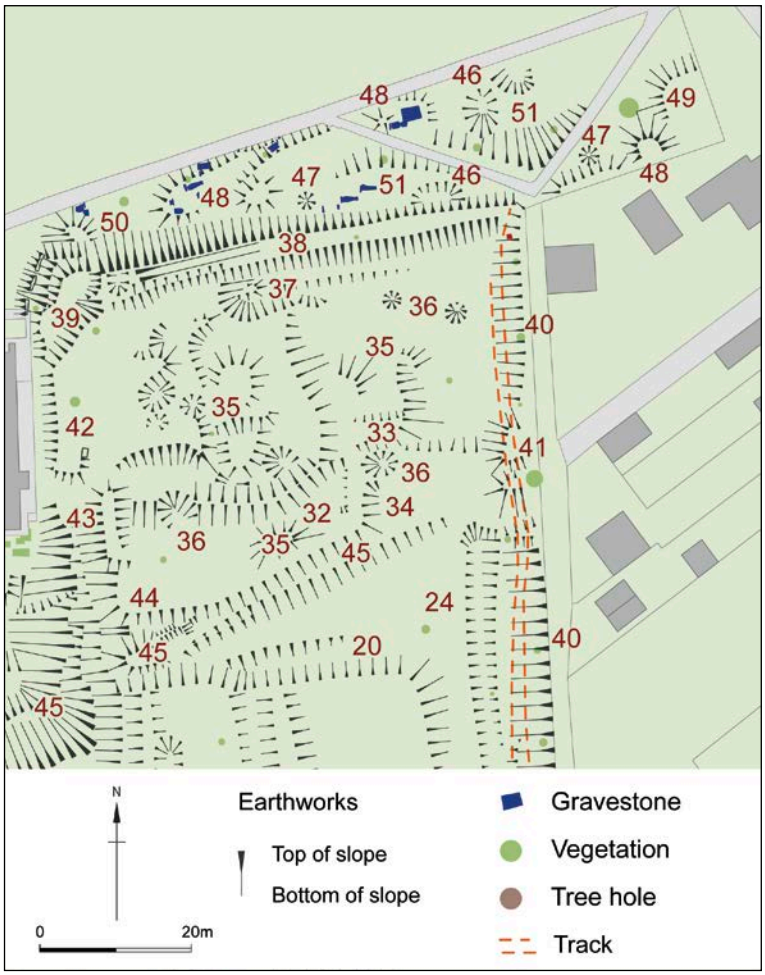

Figure 17: An extract from Figure A3 showing the earthworks 'East of the church'. The labels refer to the numbers mentioned in square brackets in the text. Please refer to Figure 12 for the location of the extract. © Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900.

The area is covered with an array of amorphous mounds and hollows [35]. Whilst it is possible that they reflect the position of further elements of the monastic church plan in this area, it is more likely that they represent the various processes of demolition and disturbance that have occurred in this part of Priory Gardens from the dissolution of the priory onwards. Some of the hollows [36] may represent the former locations of trees or ad-hoc digging into the buried remains (*see* 'Previous Research'). It is not clear whether a scooped out area [37], 3m by 11m, located to the north of the apse, is the location of a former structure positioned against the east-west boundary [38].

The area east of the present church is bounded to the north by a substantial bank [38], around 60m in length, which reaches a maximum height of 0.9m at its western end, and which runs east-west from the modern eastern boundary of Priory Gardens before it turns south to meet the church (*see* Fig. 21 below). At this point it becomes an upper and lower scarp [39], the upper reflecting the line of the boundary shown on the tithe map of 1822 (resurveyed 1840; Fig. 6), though the stone slabs revetting this end of the bank suggest significant modification in this area. This boundary separates Priory Gardens from the cemetery to the north of the present church but it is likely that this was also the precinct boundary in the medieval period, separating the private space of the cloister from the public-facing west and north faces of the

church and what may have been the lay cemetery and/or the forbury or fair site (*see* Discussion and Conclusions).

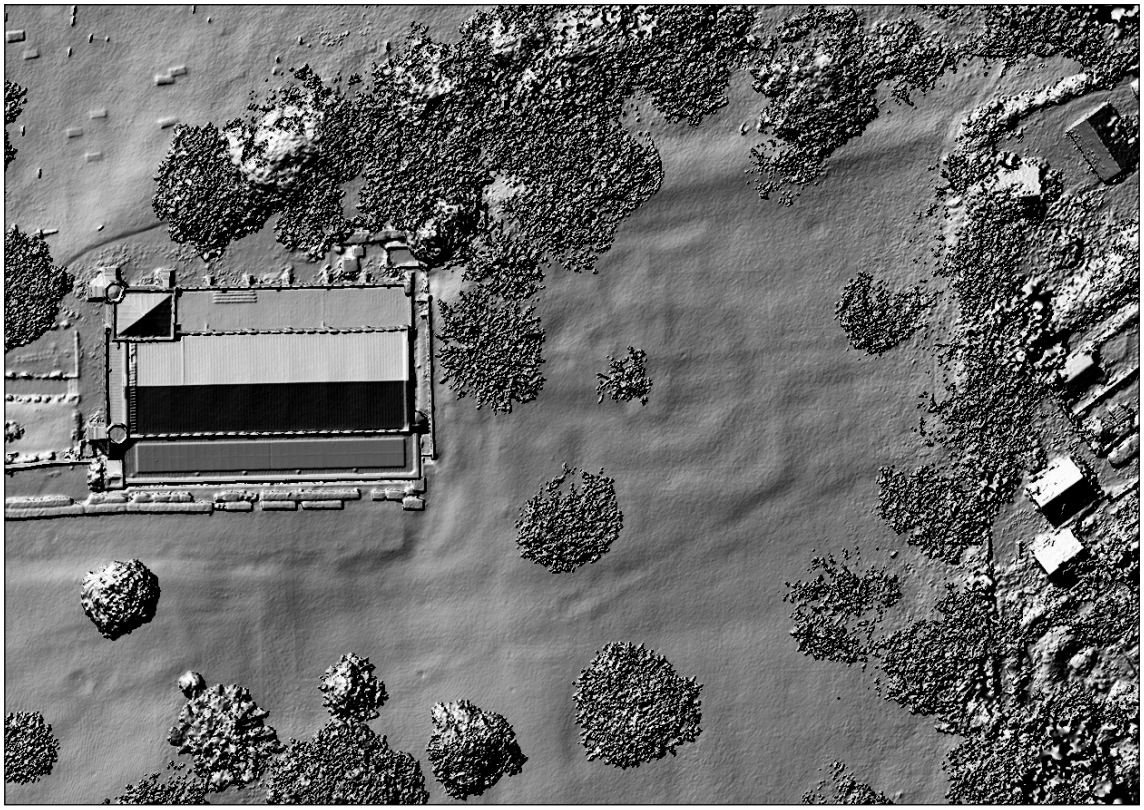

Figure 18: Detail of 3D drone-derived ground model showing the curving earthwork of the apsidal end of the church [32], and other substantial earthworks such as the sub-square hollow [2] of the cloister south of the church. (Digital Elevation Model showing hillshade at ground sampling distance of 11cm) © Historic England. 21-APR-2022

A substantial west-facing scarp runs north-south along the eastern side of Priory Gardens creating a fall into the gardens from the land to the east [40]. This is probably a relatively modern creation and appears to overlie the main east-west boundary [38] at its northern end. Disturbance in this scarp some 30m south of its northern end appears to be related to tree roots and to the insertion of the large service pipe in the 1930s [41].

A west-facing scarp that runs parallel to the eastern end of the present-day church probably relates to relatively modern activity at this end of the church, which has undergone substantial change since the Dissolution [42], whilst the series of parallel scarps that run north-south to the south probably mark the position of the south transept or the start of the eastern cloister range [43]. A clear corner [44] is visible at the point that this range of buildings meets an east-west scarp that seems to coincide with the northern side of what has been identified as the chapter house (shown clearly on both the earth resistance and GPR– gpr18 (Figs 10, A1 and A2)). Another east-west scarp 10m to the south may mark the southern side of the building but

the earthwork evidence has been substantially impacted by the service trench which runs directly through it from north-east to south-west.

The position of a modern service trench is marked by a pair of parallel scarps running for around 40m from south of the Lady Chapel to the chapter house, substantially disturbing the earthwork evidence [45] (Fig. A2 [gpr6]). Its continued path is marked by a manhole cover on the southern side of the hollow marking the centre of the cloister and some very slight scarps visible on the western edge of the main garden area, though the GPR results clearly show that it is a continuous feature (Fig. A1). Aerial photographs from 1938 appear to have been taken around the time of the insertion of the service pipe, whose large diameter sections suggest that it was for sewage (Figs 19 and 20). The photographs show patches of disturbed ground and the line of the trench running across the gardens. They also show a vehicle track running west-east between the service trench and the south side of the church, possibly the origin of the GPR anomaly - gpr1. It is not clear how the works in the 1930s and the electricity cable trench 'relaid' in 1970 relate to each other but they appear to have followed the same line (Hitchcock 1993, 3).

Figure 19: Extract from a 1938 aerial photograph showing the insertion of a service pipe across Priory Gardens, looking east. EPW056929 26-APR-1938 (Historic England Archive: Aerofilms Collection)

Figure 20: Extract from a 1938 aerial photograph, looking north-west, showing the service pipe sections and ground disturbance from the associated works. EPW056927 26-APR-1938 (Historic England Archive: Aerofilms Collection)

Beyond the northern boundary

The area to the north of the substantial bank that divides the area to the east of the church from the disused graveyard contains no earthwork features that can be easily recognised as relating to the medieval priory (Fig. 21). The area contains a number of hollows [46], between 6-7m in diameter, a few tree holes [47], and a number of

amorphous mounds, some of which appear to be related to gravestones [48]. The origins of a slightly more substantial mound [49] at least 6m by 6m, located in the far eastern corner of the area, are unclear as it truncated by modern fence boundaries. One mound [50] at the foot of the boundary bank's western end appears to be material that has been pushed out of the bank at some point, whilst other scarps appear to relate to modern footpaths [51]. The use of this area as a graveyard has resulted in significant ground disturbance, potentially over 100s of years.

Figure 21: View looking west along the northern boundary bank towards the church with the churchyard to the north (right). 12-SEP-2022. © Historic England

The Formal Gardens

To the west of the main area of priory earthworks is an area of more formal gardens which neatly divides into three sections, moving from east to west: the area around the war memorial (formerly orchard); the current ornamental garden (formerly the kitchen garden); and the croquet lawn immediately north-east of Priory House (formerly ornamental gardens) (*see* Figs 23 and 24). These gardens were previously associated with Priory House (*see* 'Documentary Evidence...' section of the report).

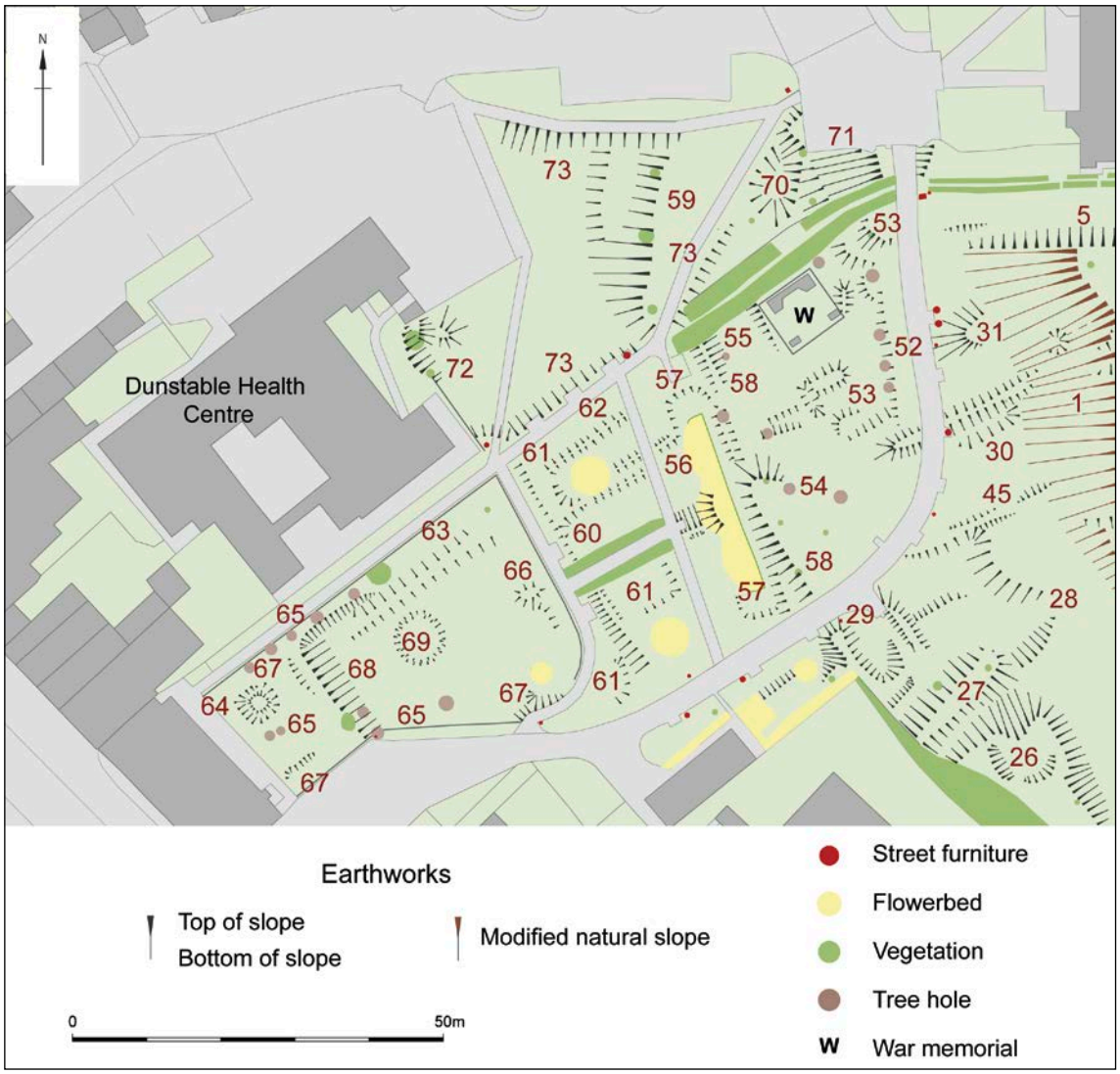

Figure 22: An extract from Figure A3 showing the earthworks of 'The Formal Gardens' and 'North of the Formal Gardens'. The labels refer to the numbers mentioned in square brackets in the text. Please refer to Figure 12 for the location of the extract (© Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900)

Former Orchard and Kitchen Garden

A possible former orchard, characterised by trees planted in well-spaced rows, is visible on numerous aerial photographs from 1928 through to 1949 (e.g. Figs 24 – 25), by which date the trees had been cleared, possibly to create an appropriate setting for the war memorial which was installed around 1952 (Fig. 23). Though trees are shown on earlier maps the area is not enclosed and depicted as orchard until the 25-inch 2nd edition OS map of 1909. An orchard is mentioned on the site in a probate will at the end of the 17th century and pleasure and kitchen gardens are mentioned from 1780 onwards (Henderson et al. 2022, 6-7).

A linear scarp, 18m in length, running north to south at the eastern side of this area may mark the position of the hedge boundary around the former orchard [52]. This

appears to align with anomaly [gpr56] (Fig. A2) and is very clear on the digital elevation model (*see* Fig. 28 below). The origins of many of the other slight scarps, mounds and hollows in this area are unknown but most probably relate to the removal of the trees and subsequent landscaping [53], though earlier origins cannot be ruled out. A number of shallow holes identified may have been created by the removal of trees [54]. A scarp next to the west side of the war memorial probably relates to the levelling of the area to enable its installation [55].

Figure 23: Extract from an aerial photograph taken in 1949 showing the orchard area cleared of trees prior to the installation of the war memorial. Looking north, with High Street South to the left and Priory Church just out of shot to the right. RAF/SFFO/540/173/0036 26-MAR-1949. (Historic England Archive: RAF Photography)

One small section of ridge 3m in length [56], aligns with part of geophysical anomaly [gpr47] (Fig. A2) which, as discussed below, may be a path or the edge of a bed as this area was originally part of the kitchen garden. This can be seen continuing to the west of the modern path for another 3.9m on the digital elevation model (Fig. 28 below). Low curving scarps to the north and south of the existing raised flower bed [57] appear to relate to the redesign of the kitchen garden visible on aerial photographs from 1969 (OS/69/110/039 14-APR-1969).

A series of scarps [58] that run north-south just to the east of the existing raised flower bed probably mark either the position of the hedge that divided the kitchen garden from the orchard or the excavation trenches that were dug by the Manshead Archaeological Society when the stumps of the hedge were removed in 1986 (Warren 1987b). To the south the scarp is fairly substantial (0.3m in height) suggesting that the hedge could have marked some earlier, more significant, boundary, though perhaps not one of medieval date as it appears to run straight into the position of a medieval well found in the hedge stump excavation. It may also be a continuation of the boundary marked on historic OS maps in the area north of the formal gardens [59].

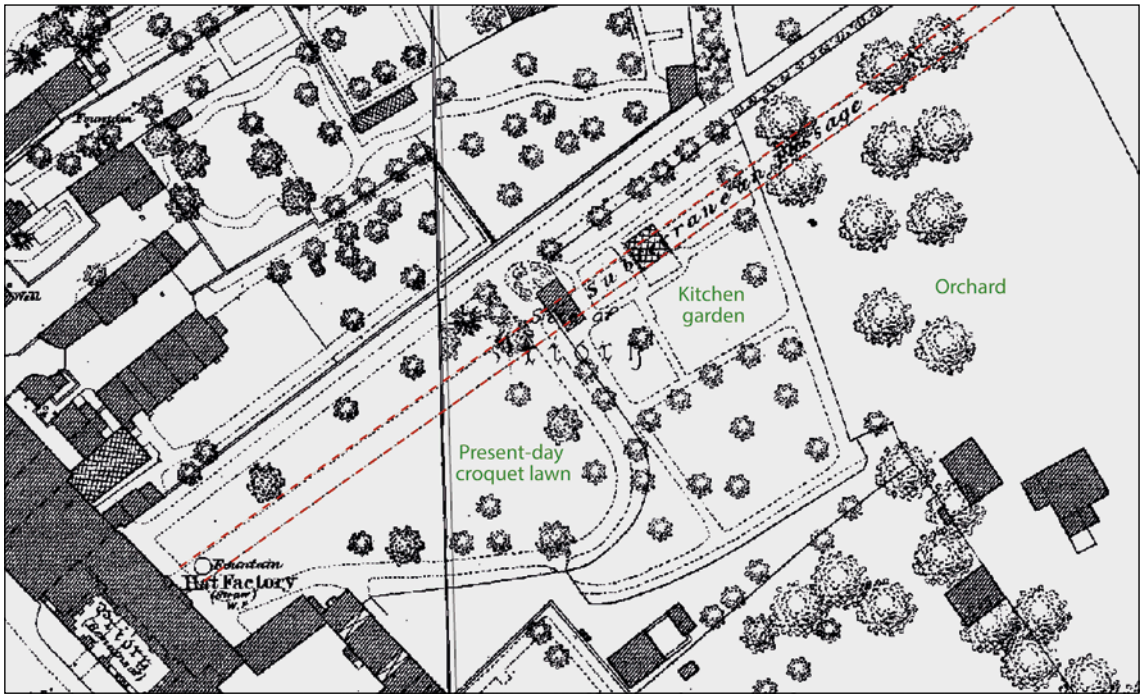

Figure 24: An extract from the Ordnance Survey 1:500 Town Plan published in 1880 showing the kitchen garden, orchard area and the present-day location of the croquet lawn. The fountain can be seen at the end of the so-called 'subterranean passage' (marked with parallel dashed lines) © Historic England. Background mapping © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2023). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024. Not to scale.

The section of gardens between the croquet lawn and what was the orchard area was formerly a kitchen garden. It is shown on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880 and is very little changed in the Aerofilms aerial photograph taken in 1928 (Fig. 25). It was probably the creation of Arthur Munt who lived at Priory House from 1909 until 1927 and who has been described as a 'keen gardener' (Curran 2008, 22). Though it appears that the area was no longer in use as a kitchen garden by 1952 (TL0221/1 CAP9057/42 07-JUN-1952), the main elements of the late 19th-century layout survived into the 1960s but had subsequently been removed by 1969 (OS/69/110/039 14-APR-1969). It is worth noting that when the layout was changed, before or in 1969, the path to the east of the kitchen garden was relaid to the west of its former position, making the surviving area smaller than it was in the 19th century. A pair of very slight curving scarps in the northern section of the garden appear to mark the curved corners of former vegetable beds [60] and a number of other surviving scarps [61] may also mark the edges of beds. These are clearly identifiable on the drone-derived digital elevation model (*see* Fig. 28). A very slight ridge, just under 13m in length, seen partly as an earthwork and on the digital elevation model, may also represent the edge of these formal beds [62], though this is also in line with anomaly [gpr48] (Fig. A2) and may mark the position of an extension of the feature traditionally known as the 'subterranean tunnel' evident on the croquet lawn to the west [63].

Figure 25: Detail from a 1928 aerial photograph of the kitchen garden area and orchard beyond, looking north-east. EPW023862 01-SEP-1928 (Historic England Archive: Aerofilms Collection)

The Croquet Lawn

Figure 26: The croquet lawn with Priory House beyond, looking south-west. 21-APR-2022. (Photo: Matt Bristow) © Historic England

The lawn immediately east of Priory House, now known as the croquet lawn, has changed little through the 20th and into the 21st century (Fig. 26). The oldest feature recorded here may be the very low ridge, 23m long and just over 3m wide, which runs parallel to the path on the north-western side of the lawn [63]. This coincides with linear anomaly [gpr46] (Fig. A2) which is thought to represent a drain or a culvert. This feature appears to line up with the 'subterranean passage'

marked on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880 and may be related to whatever this passage is in reality, whether it be some form of monastic culvert or drain, or something related to the later activities of the hat factory at Priory House (*see* Fig. 24).

On the line of the linear bank mentioned above, and closer to Priory House, is a small platform around 2m square, defined by a very shallow ditch on average 1.7m in width [64]. This is probably the site of the fountain or possibly bird bath shown on the Aerofilms photographs from 1928 (Fig. 27), perhaps the same one marked on the 1:500 1880 OS Town Plan. However, the earthwork does appear to be further away from the front of Priory House than the fountain and may relate to the cross feature shown on the aerial photograph to the east. A number of vegetation hollows recorded along the north-western and, what would have been, the southern edge of the croquet lawn mark the position of ornamental shrubs as seen on the 1928 aerial photograph [65]. A slight irregular shaped mound at the eastern end of the croquet lawn [66] marks the former position of a tree shown on the 1928 photograph (Fig. 27).

Figure 27: Detail from a 1928 aerial photograph showing the area now known as the croquet lawn behind Priory House laid out as formal gardens, looking north-west. EPW023860 01-SEP-1928 (Historic England Archive: Aerofilms Collection)

A number of slight scarps in this area [67] probably relate to minor changes to the shape of the garden throughout the 20th century and the substantial scarp that crosses the croquet lawn from north-west to south-east [68] (and the adjacent scarp that runs parallel to the north-western path) is clearly related to the levelling of the area to its east in order to create a suitable, flat, surface, presumably for croquet. It is not clear from the aerial photographs when this levelling was undertaken but a slight circular feature, 6.8m in diameter, visible as an earthwork and on the digital elevation model, must pre-date the creation of the croquet lawn and is perhaps a former flower-bed [69]. The digital elevation model suggests that the feature consists of a circular ditch enclosing an area roughly 5.25m in diameter (*see* Fig. 28). It can also be seen as a mark in the grass on Figure 26.

North of the Formal Gardens

There are a number of scarps in the area to the north of the formal gardens, between the church and the health centre. The most significant of these is probably the west-facing scarp that curves north to south for 27m [59]. This appears to follow the line of a boundary and belt of trees shown in this position on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880 and appears to continue the line of the hedge boundary between the former kitchen garden and orchard. The scarp is reasonably substantial and it is possible that it marks the position of a boundary that had been established for many years though it does not appear to correspond with a parallel boundary shown on the 1822/1840 tithe map (*see* Fig. 6).

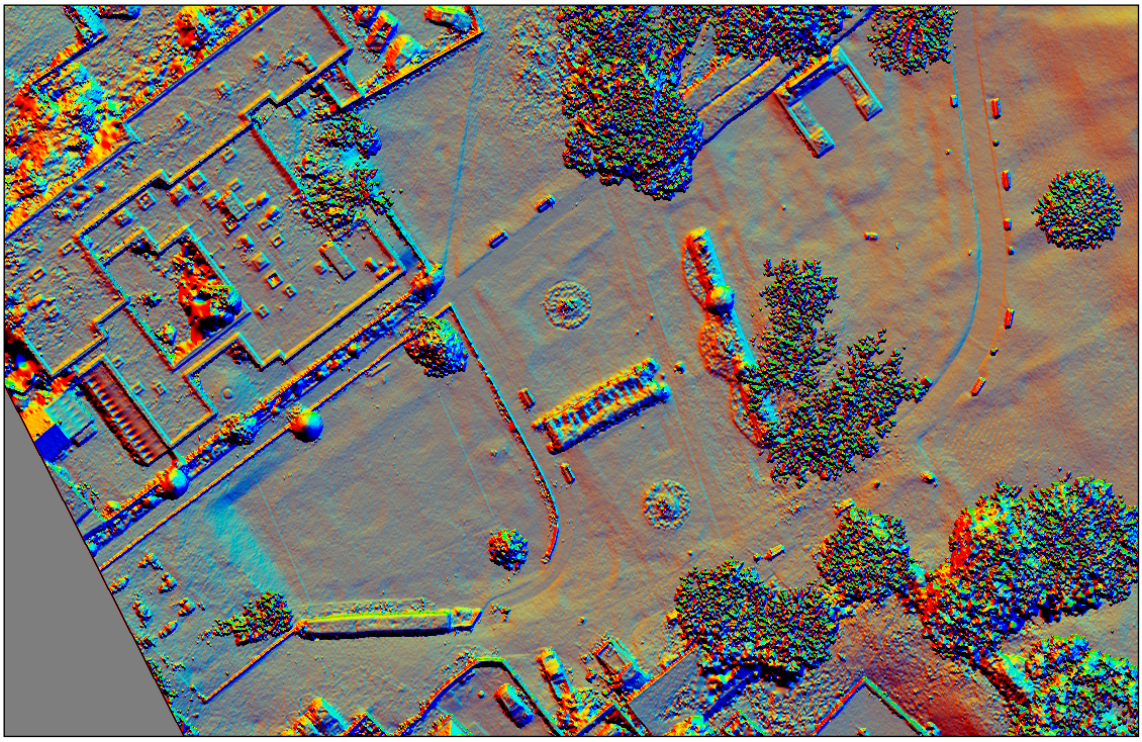

Figure 28: Detail of the drone-derived digital elevation model showing the kitchen garden and croquet lawn areas. (Digital Elevation Model, Multi-directional hillshade at ground sampling distance of 11cm) © Historic England. 21-APR-2022

The origins of a shallow hollow [70], 8m by 6.5m, to the eastern side of this area are unclear, but it appears to be too far to the east to mark the location of the infilled fountain and pond show on aerial photographs (e.g. RAF/SFFO/540/173/0036 26-MAR-1949) and built sometime before 1922 (when the 1924 OS 25-inch map was surveyed). It was removed in the redesign of the garden in the late 1960s. It is not clear whether the west-facing scarp to its east [71] is part of the possible semi-natural slope that runs north-west to south-east across the cloister area [1]. A number of other scarps are the result of the creation of modern paths and an area of earthworks in the north-western corner, near the health centre [72], is probably the result of demolition of walls and a small garden building in that area. Evidence for the

formal paths laid out as part of a private garden in this area (shown on the 1:500 OS Town Plan published in 1880) were not identified as earthworks but are evident as geophysical anomalies (Fig. A2 [gpr4]). Scarps also define a number of the modern paths (e.g. [73]).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Priory Church

The Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey and, to a certain extent the analytical earthwork survey, have revealed new information about the layout of the priory church's east end, in the form of a buried curving ditch and parallel section of wall. These appear to indicate an apsidal or rounded presbytery with an arcaded ambulatory (passageway), similar to that of the 12th-century Augustinian presbytery which survives in the church of St Bartholomew the Great, Farringdon, London (Fig. 29), or as suggested by excavations and GPR survey undertaken at the Priory Church of Saints Peter and Paul at Leominster (Fig. 30), or St Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury (Freeman 1853, 111; Barker and Rarity 2003; Coppack 1990, 40). Aside from the clear evidence of the Lady Chapel, located immediately to the east of the presbytery, there are hints in the GPR of separate chapels that could be accessed from the ambulatory and transepts, but the evidence is far from conclusive.

Figure 29: The eastern end of St Bartholomew the Great, Farringdon, London, with rounded apsidal end and arcaded ambulatory. Image: Chris Redgrave DP462404 © Historic England Archive.

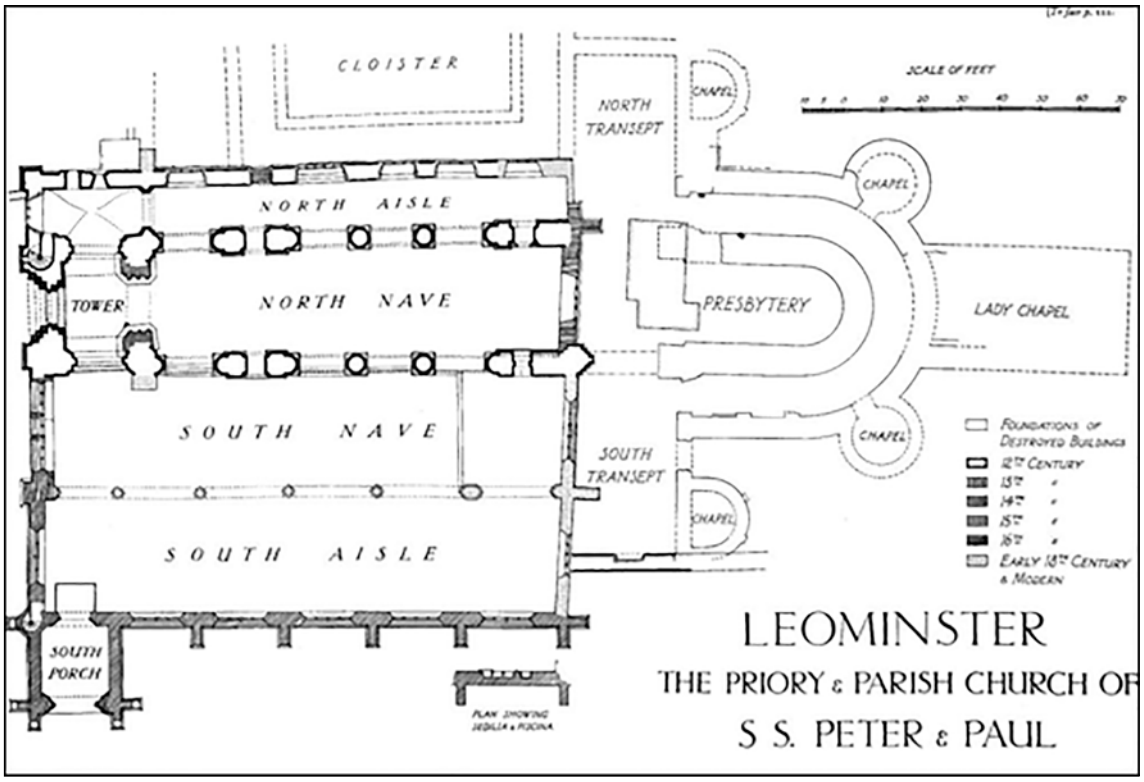

Figure 30: The apsidal presbytery and attached chapels at Leominster Priory (RCHME 1934, insert facing 111).

Although the GPR evidence suggests that this rounded presbytery was the final form of the priory church, it is not clear whether it represents the initial design or whether the east end of the church was reworked at some point, perhaps in 1222 when the presbytery roof collapsed (Webster 2018, 46). However, this collapse seems unlikely to have necessitated a phase of complete rebuilding and it is surprising that any work needed after the roof collapse is not recorded in the annals, particularly when so much other construction work is noted. The surviving fabric suggests that the church saw a flurry of developments in the late 12th century which culminated in the rededication of the church in 1213, during Richard de Morins' time as prior, probably prompted by the priory's acquisition of relics (Webster 2018, 19). This may have necessitated the addition of an ambulatory in order to enable pilgrims to access the relics in the apsidal chapels via the nave aisles without disturbing the canons in the main body of the church.

The construction of an ambulatory with radiating chapels (known as a 'chevet' – French for crown) 'flourished at the turn of the eleventh century' in northern France and other parts of Europe (Armi 2006, 496). The GPR evidence appears to suggest that any chapels that may have surrounded the presbytery were few and separate, indicating an earlier, Romanesque, style (1066 until roughly the end of the 12th century), rather than a later arrangement of conjoined chapels, integral to the apse, which appeared in England (outside Canterbury) from the 13th century onwards with the adoption of Gothic styles of architecture (Hall 2007, 102-3).

It is also worth noting that, although we know the first Lady Chapel was founded in 1228, when it was described in the annals as 'the chapel of St Mary in the cemetery of the canons of Dunstable' (Webster 2018, 73), we also know that it was rebuilt in 1324 'on account of its ruinous condition' (Hall and Bunbury 2022, 14). It is not clear to which phase of its construction the foundations shown on the earth resistance and GPR surveys relate, though it would be reasonable to assume the latter. The annals also contain a reference to the repair of the 'stone roof of the south porch' in 1289 (Webster 2018, 243), the wording of the entry implying that this was the responsibility of the parishioners not the priory, so it may be referring to a southern entrance into the nave of the church. There is a hint of a structure at the northern end of the cellarer's range on the GPR results, but further investigation would be needed to confirm this as a porch.

Priory Layout

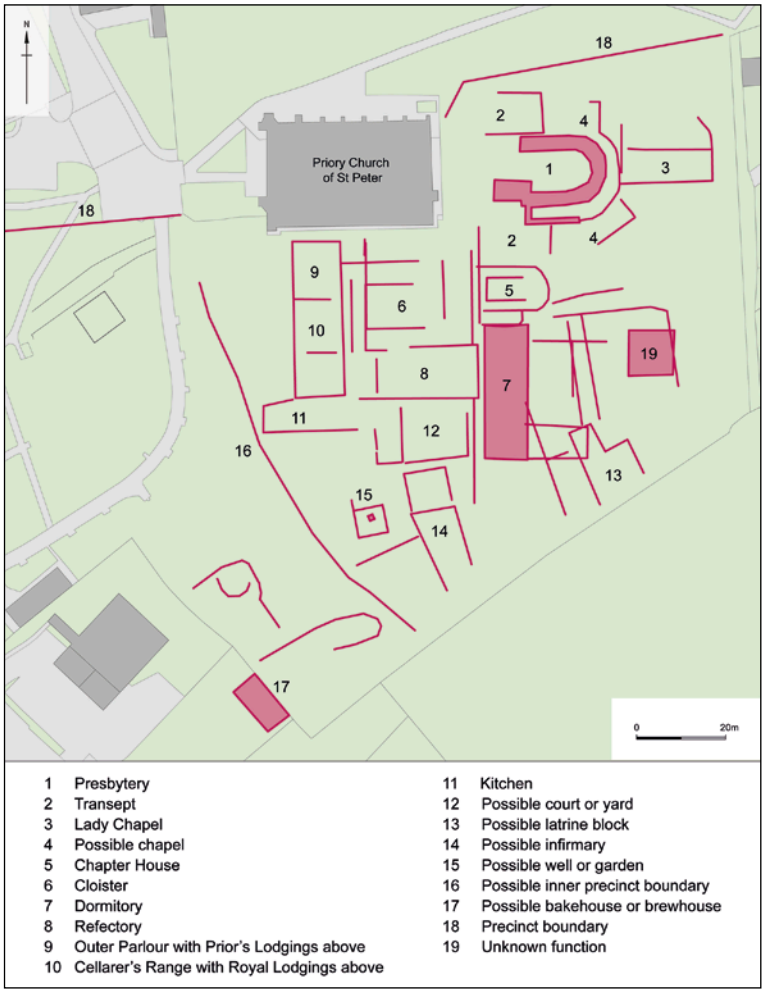

Figure 31: New conjectural layout of the priory based on an appraisal of the Historic England investigation (GPR and earthwork survey) and previous research such as the resistivity surveys undertaken by the Manshead Archaeological Society. (© Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900)

The research undertaken to produce this report has made it possible to add to earlier understandings of the plan of the priory beyond the church itself (e.g. Evans 1994, 109; Pain & Horne 1998 referenced in Rushton 2003, 27; Yates n.d.a, 143 and 152). It is important to note that the plan that we can at least partially reconstruct

from the archaeological evidence only reflects the priory in its final phase and most monastic sites would have been added to and altered throughout their periods of occupation (Fig. 31).

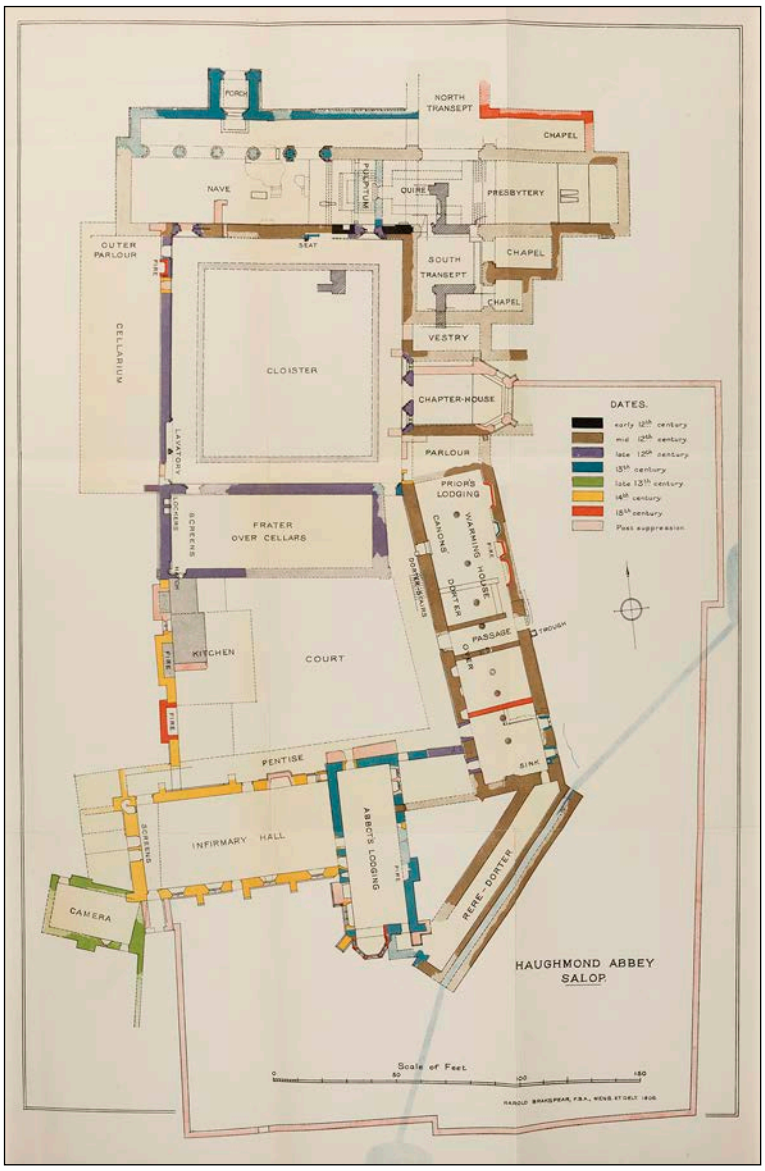

Figure 32: Plan of Haughmond Abbey, Shropshire, showing the change of building alignments across the site. (Source: Brakspear, H. (1906) Haughmond Abbey Salop. [plan]. St John Hope, W.H. and Brakspear, H. 1910 'Haughmond Abbey' in Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. 3rd series, vol.33. [unnumbered page between p. 200-201]). Historic England Library

One of the most striking aspects highlighted by the GPR survey is the change in alignment of the buildings as one moves south away from the cloister and the more sacred or controlled spaces. The buildings to the south, particularly those that have been interpreted as the infirmary and latrines, clearly follow a NNW to SSE alignment as opposed to the constrained and rigid north-south and east-west alignments of the buildings forming the cloister ranges, whose alignments are dictated by the church. The reason for this change in alignment is not immediately clear but it could have been to accommodate the modified natural slope that forms the western boundary of the inner court [1], which constricts the available building space as one moves south across the site, or it may have been to accommodate access to a drain which served the latrines, though exactly how they were flushed is not

clear, nor is the position of the very necessary drain (*see* 'Water supply' discussion below). A comparison can be made to the layout of the buildings at Haughmond Abbey, Shropshire, where the arrangement was clearly adjusted to fit in with the existing watercourse (Fig. 32).

The Manshead Archaeological Society also note the impact of the north-south boundary to the west of the cloisters [1], describing it as a 'broad natural gulley that acted as a drain on occasion' (Warren 1987a, 10) and suggesting that it divided the inner court from the outer court as seen on Fowler's plan of 1959 (Evans 1994, 109).

Well to west of infirmary?

To the west of the possible infirmary building, and located on a similar alignment, are the square foundations of either a narrow range of buildings surrounding a small courtyard, or a small square building surrounded by a walkway ([gpr30] on Fig. A2; [12] on Fig. 13; 15 on Fig. 31). A central circular hollow recorded by the earthwork survey may suggest the location of a blocked well, perhaps serving the infirmary in the absence of a fresh water supply, similar to the well in the infirmary cloister at Christchurch, Canterbury (Bond 1993, 43). Though it is a little detached from the refectory and cellarer's range, the similarity to the layout of the square monk's and abbot's kitchens at Glastonbury Abbey is also worthy of note (Gardner n.d.). Given its proximity to the infirmary another possible interpretation is as a chapel, though its square shape would be unusual. To the north, the function of the small western projection visible on the GPR survey at the southern end of the cellarer's range is unclear ([gpr27] on Fig. A2), but given its location between the refectory and cellarer's range it is quite possibly part of the kitchen. The research did not find any archaeological or documentary evidence for a detached, octagonal kitchen as shown in a similar position on a number of reconstructions and plans (e.g. Yates n.d.a, 143).

East of the dormitory range

Both the earthwork and GPR surveys have revealed further information about the area of the priory to the east of the dormitory. A T-shaped arrangement of probable wall foundations, extending from the eastern side of the dormitory range, appears to be heading for what has been reinterpreted as the latrines (Fig. A2 [gpr20]). The wall is difficult to fit into a typical Augustinian priory plan in this location and may represent a boundary wall rather than a building, perhaps between the canon's garden (which is known to have existed from the cartulary (Fowler 1926, 69 (2) 801)) and the cemetery. The very slight bank and gulley running on a slightly different alignment, north-north-west to south-south-east, across this buried wall foundation is suggestive of a later garden boundary and may indicate that the boundary walls to the east of the dormitory collapsed or were demolished at some point [21].

On a similar alignment and to the east of the boundary wall described above, an earthwork scarp running east-west and then turning to the south again suggests some sort of small enclosed garden [20]. It does not show on the geophysical surveys, suggesting a hedged or fenced boundary rather than a stone wall. The feature on the earth resistance survey traditionally identified as St Martin's Chapel

(though the origin of this interpretation is unclear) sits on the eastern edge of this enclosed area (*see* Fig. 10 and Fig. 31 feature 19). This feature only shows at around 1.3m below the ground surface on the GPR (Fig. A2 [gpr21]) and is a lower amplitude anomaly than the other nearby structural responses from buried walls, suggesting that it was not a stone-built structure such as a chapel, unless it was systematically robbed out in a way not seen on the rest of the site. It seems more likely that it is a compacted surface of some kind, perhaps part of a garden design. It also not clear that the cemetery would have extended southwards into the area east of the dormitory, throwing doubt on to the likelihood of a detached chapel in this position.

Location of Prior's lodge?

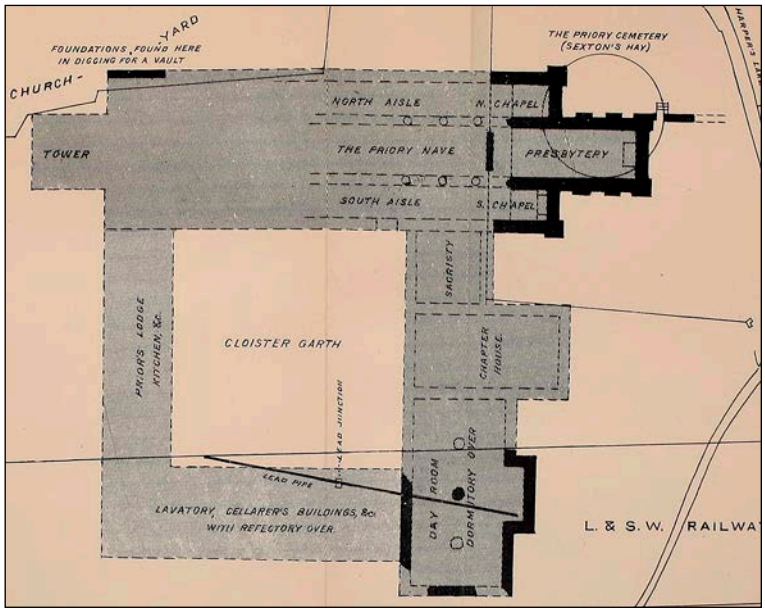

Figure 33: Plan of Launceston Priory based on excavations by Otho Peter in the late 19th century (reproduced from Peter 1892). The Prior's Lodge is interpreted as being in the western range as suggested by the evidence from Dunstable, though in this interpretation the cellarer's range has been located to the south of the cloister, at odds with accepted convention.

The possible building range that has been reinterpreted as the latrines in this report (*see* Fig. 31 feature 13) has been previously identified as the 'Prior's Hall' (e.g. Yates n.d.a, 117; 143). However the prior's lodgings were probably located closer to the church. They seem likely to have been located above or close to the cellarer's range on the west side of the cloister, as seen at Norton (Greene 1989, xi), Castle Acre (English Heritage 2016) and Launceston (Fig. 33), which, like Dunstable, was essentially a daughter house of Holy Trinity, Aldgate. This proposed location is reinforced by the annals which state that in 1222 'in the month of December the two towers above the front of Dunstable church collapsed. One of them fell on the prior's house and destroyed a large part of it' (Webster 2018, 46). It is possible that the Prior's lodgings were rebuilt somewhere else (the abbot's lodgings at Haughmond have been identified as being away from the cellarer's range to the south (*see* Fig. 32)) but the evidence for its association with a location south-east of the main claustral buildings is not clear. It is also worth noting the entry in the annals from 1277 that states 'We began a large room for the use of the King, next to the prior's room' (Webster 2018, 190). This has implications for the position of the king's apartments, which in this interpretation must also have been on the first floor of the cellarer's

range, perhaps towards the southern end, if we accept that the Prior's house was not located where local tradition would have it.

Bakehouse

Beyond the restricted space of the inner court, two earthwork platforms noted in the far southern corner of Priory Gardens ([25],[26]) are of potential interest given their proximity to the stone building, excavated in 1983, with a fireplace and ovens at cellar level and interpreted as a possible bakehouse (Fig. 31 feature 17). The east wall of the excavated building was under and aligned with the boundary fence between Priory Gardens and the Saracen's Head (Matthews 1984, 2-3) and it possible that the earthwork platforms immediately to the east were the location of other monastic activities or related to the post-dissolution lime kiln which was later constructed on the site. It is worth noting that the excavators identified what they thought was the precinct boundary wall forming the west side of the putative bakehouse.

Other elements of the priory layout

If the structure excavated to the rear of the Saracen's Head was correctly identified as a bakehouse then it may suggest that the earthwork platforms are related to a barn mentioned in the Cartulary (Fowler 1926, 46d (2) 410) described as on:

> [?the land] which is situated behind their bakehouse, of which part is in the ditch of their orchard, together with that land on which a barn is situated as far as the corner of the bakehouse, and so much surrounding [or neighbouring] land where the canons could be able freely to make a wall outside the foundation [or eaves] of the barn to a depth [or thickness] of two feet.

It is not clear whether this is the same barn described in 1294 in the annals as being in 'our yard' and as burning down (Webster 2018, 263).

The priory annals record a number of buildings and structures that are impossible to locate but most must have been sited within the outer court or precinct of the priory. These include a 'new house for carpenters and wheelwrights in the courtyard at Dunstable', a large stable built in 1254 and 'a large pigeon house next to the tailor's room' built in 1273 (Webster 2018, 127; 132; 178). A reference in the annals to a series of walls collapsing in 1294 also mentions the priory's garden and its herbarium and another entry references the prior's garden (Webster 2018, 70; 263). Yates (n.d., 15) also states that the priory owned a vineyard in Dunstable but the comment is not referenced.

Dissolution and Conversion?

It is interesting to consider to what extent the analytical earthwork, GPR and earlier resistivity surveys reveal information about the immediate post-dissolution plans to convert the cloister ranges into a residence for Henry VIII. A comparison of the conjectural plan developed as part of this research and the 1540s plan for conversion of the buildings (Fig. 34, and *see* Fig. 5) suggests that the majority of the monastic

layout was to be retained, a situation which was far from unusual with, as Howard (2007, 25) notes, 'the deliberate and thoroughgoing destruction that came to be associated with the dissolution' happening 'only at selective sites'. In fact Howard also notes (2007, 16) that 'the very speed of conversion encouraged conformity with the prevailing norms'. The rapid conversion of the priory at Dunstable would certainly have seemed appealing to Henry whilst the plan to create a bishopric was still in favour.

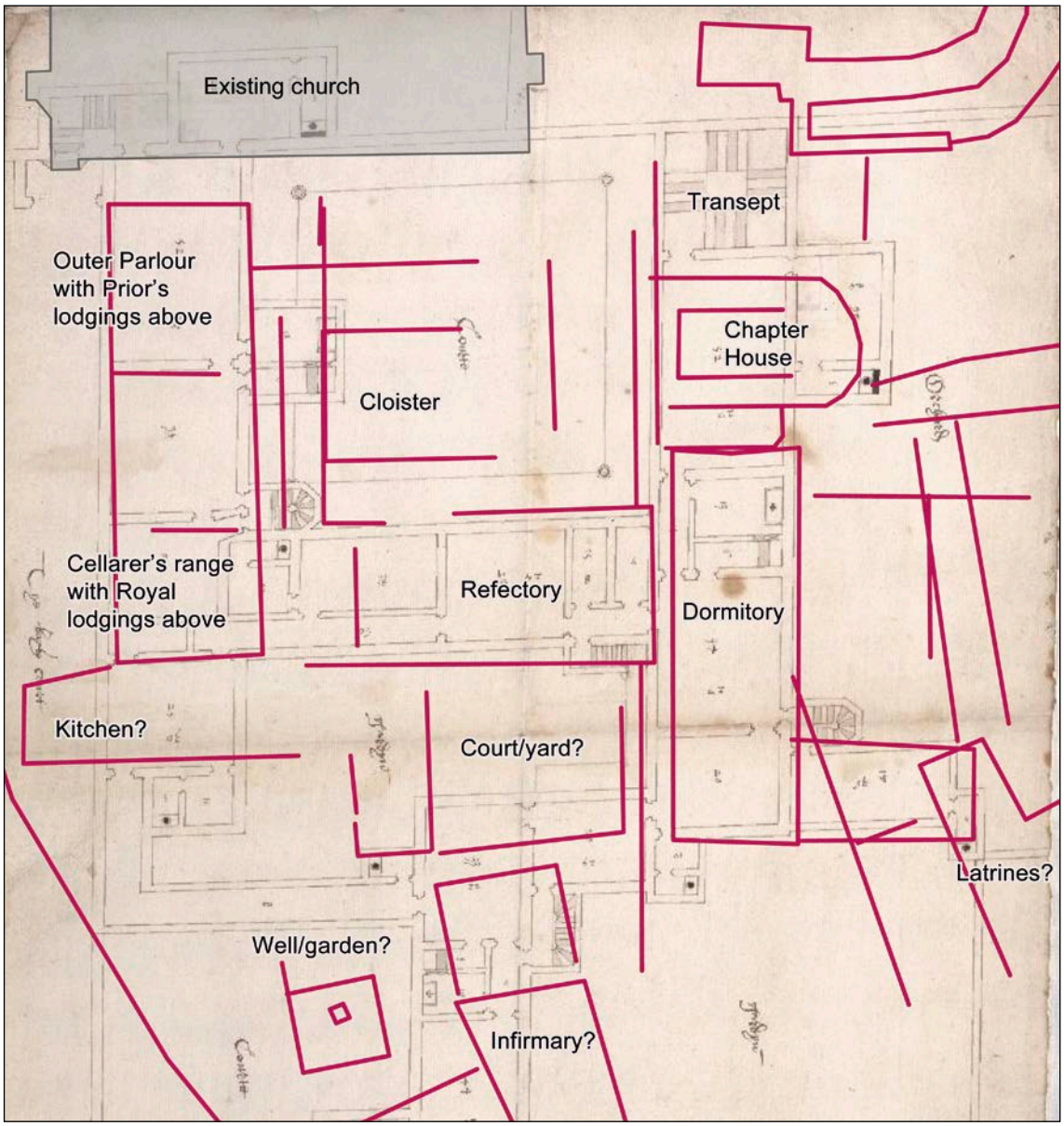

Figure 34: The conjectural monastic plan overlying the 1540s conversion proposal. The 1540s plan does not reflect the change of orientation of the buildings to the south revealed by the archaeological research but overall the areas appear to correspond. ('The Plat of Dunstabyll' dated 1543-44. CPM II 22 1540s. Reproduced with permission of the Marquess of Salisbury, Hatfield House.)

As has been discussed above, the plan appears to be of the first-floor, the customary location of royal state apartments. These areas of the conventual buildings presumably would have needed most work to make them suitable for royal visitors, though perhaps not so much in the western range where the monastic royal lodgings are thought to have been located. Though we know from documentary sources that Henry undertook some work (Colvin 1982, 75-6), it is possible that very little of these plans were carried out or that very little of what was altered is likely to be evident from the earthwork or geophysical surveys. On the western side of the cloister for instance, there is no evidence for the construction of the square inward-projecting tower which would have been a post-dissolution addition to the monastic plan, whilst the stair turret in the south-west corner would have been an original feature to allow the canons access to a first-floor refectory in the southern range (Bristow 2017, 110). Similarly there is also no evidence for the squaring off of the eastern end of the chapter house, with both the earth resistance and GPR showing clear evidence for surviving apsidal foundations (Fig. 11 and Fig. A1).

Interestingly the grand square staircase shown to the north-east on the 1540s plan (*see* Figs 5 and 34) sits in the location of the south transept of the church (the original location of the night stair leading to the dormitory), perhaps causing no issues as the eastern, monastic, end of the church would have been decommissioned and presumably demolished; a line marking the approximate point of the eastern end of the church as it survives today is shown on the plan. More problematic would have been the creation of the room and staircase at the northern end of the western range which would, if constructed, have sat squarely within the south side of the nave of the parish church. It has to be assumed that this was never carried out. The privy at the southern end of the east (formerly dormitory) range occupies a similar location to that of the proposed monastic latrines, perhaps making use of an existing (as yet unidentified) drain.

Priory House

Hall (2021, 2) describes the medieval core of Priory House as 'a rare near-complete survival of a small early 13th-century stone undercroft, with hall over' (Fig. 35). This interpretation aligns with that of Henderson et al. (2022, 21; 37) whose investigations also suggest that it was a two-storey building (with a presumed external stair) constructed in the first half of the 13th century. Recent radiocarbon dating has confirmed that the vault was likely to have been constructed between 1217-1269 (Bayliss et al. 2024). There have been many different interpretations of the original function of the medieval building and its relationship with the priory. The most common interpretation is that it was the guest house (or hospitium) for the priory (e.g. Rushton 2003, 27), though Curran (n.d., 37) has suggested that it may have been a private merchant's house and notes other interpretations through the years including as a canons refectory, school house or market hall. It has also been referred to as a 'hostelry' that lay outside the priory precinct (O'Brien and Pevsner 2014, 152). Henderson et al. (2022, 42) suggest that the lack of evidence for internal division, opposing entrances and fireplaces that definitely belong to the first phase of construction make it hard at present to interpret the building as 'purely domestic'. It should be noted that at the time of writing Priory House is undergoing further

investigations and extensive renovation works which may reveal further information about its layout and use.

Figure 35: Priory House, looking north-east from High Street South, with Priory Church and Priory Gardens visible in the distance beyond the building. Photograph: Patricia Payne 18-JUL-2018 DP232302 © Historic England Archive

As Hall (2021, 2) and Henderson et al. (2022, 38) rightly highlight, the location of the building in relation to the priory precinct is a significant factor in its interpretation; guesthouses were typically located much more centrally within precincts whereas Priory House was either on or outside the precinct boundary. The lack of tithe fee recorded for Priory House in the 19th century suggests that it was situated on land held by the priory if not within the precinct (Henderson et al. 2022, 38), though there is a limit to what can be interpreted from this as the whole south-east quadrant of the town was tithe-free, presumably as a result of being part of the monastic estate. Hall (2021, 2) suggests that a location on a precinct boundary or close to a gatehouse prompts an interpretation as an almshouse (or almonry), manor court or hospital. Henderson et al. (2022, 42) describe the almonry interpretation as 'perhaps to be favoured' though their report was written prior to the availability of the radiocarbon date, which suggests that the building was constructed at least a decade after the annals say the almonry was built (Webster 2018, 7; Bayliss et al. 2024).

Though the radiocarbon date makes an almonry function less likely, the building does compare favourably to the surviving almonry at Ely, which dates from the late 12th century and which has a similar ground-floor vault and a comparable location at the edge of the precinct fronting onto the High Street. Whilst the Ely example is located to the north-east of the church, Henderson at al. (2022, 40) also cite other examples of almonries located at the western gate including Glastonbury - within the gates - and Thornholme (Lincolnshire), Westminster and Canterbury (both Cathedral Priory and St Augustine's) - without the gates. Henderson et al. (2022, 34;

40) note that the simplicity of the building's construction could reflect its function as a possible almonry but also suggest, alternatively, that the building may have functioned as the 'house of the lay steward' comparing it to an excavated example at Thornholme Priory which was 'on the boundary for dual access'.

The location of the almonry mentioned in 1208 in the annals remains ambiguous. Two entries in the published summary of the Cartulary of Dunstable Priory suggest that the almonry and the Hospital of St Peter were one and the same (Fowler 1926, 59 (1) 595; 599). Around 1225 Ysabella and Lucia Thurkill granted the Hospital of St Peter a place 'at the end of their curtilage, namely, six score and forty eight feet in length, and of the full breadth which they held' (Fowler 1926, 59 (1) 594). This equates to a piece of land about 50m in length but it is difficult to understand exactly where the holding may have been located in relation to the priory precinct. Fifty metres is about the same length as area behind Priory House where the croquet lawn is located. It is tempting to speculate that someone granted their high street frontage to the priory to enable the almonry to be built and then granted the areas behind, implying that the precinct boundary ran to the east of these plots, but there is currently no proof of this interpretation.

Another Cartulary entry from around 1225 is very similar and states that Isabella and Lucia Turchilli granted the Hospital of St John Baptist near the court of the canons a place at the end of their curtilage, '40 feet in length from the Hospital towards the west, and the full breadth of what they have' (Fowler 1926, 46 (2) 402). Presumably on the basis of this and other charters, Evans (1994, 25) suggests that the almonry was on the western side of the marketplace, implying that it was on the same site on West Street as a fraternity formed in the 15th century, also dedicated to St John the Baptist. However it is difficult to reconcile the two 1225 charter entries, which refer to hospitals with different dedications and different grants of land, and it should not be assumed that the two hospitals and the almonry are all one and the same.

Precinct Boundaries

As with other Augustinian priories and monastic foundations, there would have been an inner, tightly controlled, space or precinct and an outer court where access was controlled but more relaxed. The annals state that Dunstable Priory began to build an 'inner gate inside the court' in 1250 (Webster 2018, 124) highlighting the existence of these two levels of monastic control and, by implication, the existence of an outer gate. This is reinforced by a reference in 1279 to the 'chief gate' (Webster 2018, 193). There are references to walls in and around the priory in the annals and the cartulary, at least some of which may have divided the inner, sacred, space from the outer court or precinct and others which may have divided the outer precinct or court, that the priory directly occupied, from the world beyond. It is worth noting that there is a reference from 1294 to how the canons enlarged their courtyard 'by building a new wall outside the old one' reminding us that these boundaries may have been altered numerous times during the 400 years that the priory occupied the site (Webster 2018, 263). Similarly, though no original source is cited, Garrod (n.d., 178) notes that in 1281 'it was agreed by the townspeople that the prior could enclose

a certain piece of land in Dunstable, including a lane. The prior had a wall built but some men from South St[reet] knocked it down as he had blocked an access to their property. They eventually made their peace and the prior built them another road'. This again underlines the potential for alterations to the precinct layout over time.

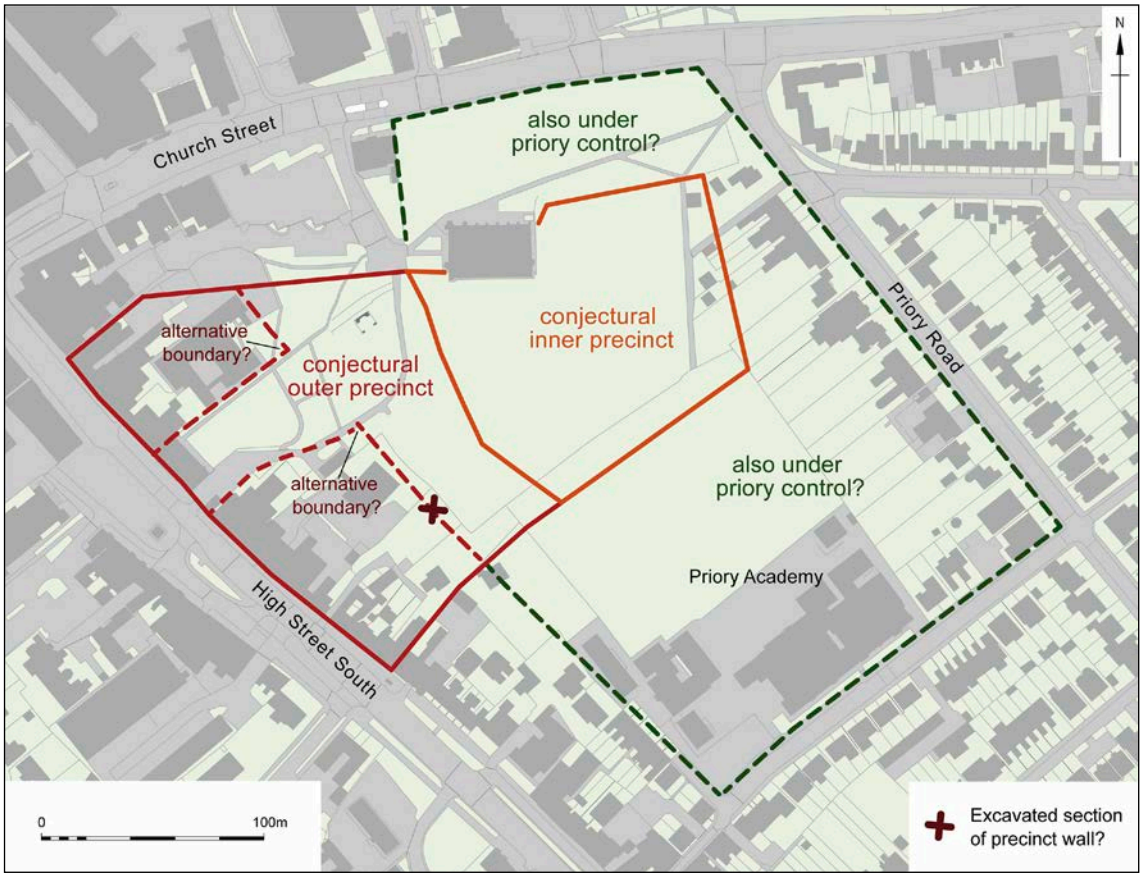

Figure 36: Conjectural boundaries for the inner precinct (orange) and outer precinct (red) based on the Historic England project and existing research. Also shown are alternative possible locations for the outer precinct boundary and other areas which may have been under priory control. (© Historic England. Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900).

The inner precinct or court

North

The location of the northern boundary of the inner precinct is not entirely clear. To the east of the present church it is probably represented by the substantial earthen bank that runs from the north-eastern corner of the church to the northern corner of Priory Gardens (Fig. 36). This boundary is essentially the same as that shown on the 1822/1840 tithe map (*see* Fig. 6) and the 1880 OS 1:500 town plan (Fig. 37) but it is likely that it originally extended further to the east.

East

The research suggests that there is no solid evidence for an outer court area to the east of the monastic church. Interpretation of the precinct boundary on the east side of the priory largely rests on the evidence of the cemetery excavated to the rear of 2 Priory Road and whether the burials are interpreted as being inside or outside the precinct boundary. Excavations by the Manshead Archaeological Society in 1992 (Warren 1993, 19-26) demonstrated that, at least in the early history of the priory, the cemetery extended beyond the current eastern boundary of Priory Gardens (*see* Fig. 36).

Warren (1993, 24; 1993a, 12) suggests that all the burials are relatively early and that this area may have fallen out of use relatively quickly (he suggests the mid-13th century) with the boundary being subsequently redefined to the west. This is based on the presence of two 'ear-muff' burials and a high proportion of injuries – albeit from a very small sample – that may suggest the individuals were involved in the construction of the priory. Stylistically the anthropomorphic grave cuts support this interpretation as they were used until the mid-14th century but there are known examples of 'ear-muff' burials from the 12th to the 16th century (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 132; 138). Gilchrist and Sloane (2005, 138) conclude that the 'general rarity' of 'ear-muff' burials 'support the observations that this burial practice is more common in the 11th and early 12th centuries', though the citing of the Dunstable examples as supporting this date creates a circular argument.

The excavation report does not detail any direct evidence for the skeletons belonging to the canons' cemetery, but Gilchrist and Sloane (2005, 132) conclude that anthropomorphic grave cuts (as seen in Dunstable) did in 'most instances derive from monastic cemeteries'. The presence of juvenile and female burials is also not unusual, even in the monastic cemetery, with more being buried over time and 'In an urban context, a monastery may have been more closely integrated with the local population, in life and in death' (Gilchrist and Sloane 2005, 65).

Interestingly Gilchrist and Sloane (2005, 47) put forward the possibility, based on the dates of the burials excavated at Dunstable, that this was an Interdict cemetery. The Interdict was the period from 1208-1214 when Pope Innocent III banned everyone in England from burial in consecrated ground (amongst other sacraments) because King John did not accept his nomination for Archbishop of Canterbury. An entry in the annals for 1208 does state that 'During the interdict the bodies of the dead were buried outside the cemetery and with no priest present' (Webster 1208, 7) though, as Gilchrist and Sloane note, if this is what the Priory Road skeletons represent then there was a high frequency of burial in this period. If this theory was to be proved correct then it clearly has a bearing on the interpretation of the position of the precinct boundary.

The current eastern boundary of Priory Gardens was certainly in place by the time the tithe map was revised in 1840 (*see* Fig. 6) but the footpath that later runs north-south down the eastern side of Priory Gardens and across the playing fields appears to have run slightly further to the east when the tithe map was surveyed, perhaps

suggesting that it was skirting around what had originally been controlled space within the precinct (*see* Fig. 37). Evans (1994, 38) equates the footpath with the lane mentioned in the priory charters in around 1202-20 which 'leads from the house of Angerus to the Church' (Fowler 1924, 35 (2) 282) but there is no firm evidence to support this assertion.

The current boundary does lie extremely close to the east end of the Lady Chapel which also suggests that the line of the precinct may have sat, at least at some point, slightly further to the east. The tithe map certainly suggests that there was no particular reason that the precinct layout was constrained to the east, unlike some priories on other urban sites. Finally it is worth noting that evidence for a medieval ditch and a possible Totternhoe stone building in the far northern corner of the Priory Academy playing fields, east of the modern eastern boundary, may also support the assertion that the eastern precinct boundary was further east, as may the later (but possibly still medieval) rammed flint surface which suggests a track running north-south at this point (Warren and Hudspith 1993b).

South-East

The ground penetrating radar survey of Priory Academy playing fields suggests that the main core of the priory did not extend much further south than the modern south-eastern boundary of Priory Gardens (*see* Fig. 36). Initial findings from 2023 excavations carried out by Albion Archaeology appear to support this conclusion (Wesley Keir 2023, pers. comm., 11 Sep), as does the conjectured plan of the priory proposed above (*see* Fig. 31). The conjectural plan suggests that there are no significant stone buildings to be accounted for that could be expected to be located further south, though, as previously mentioned, evidence for a possible medieval Totternhoe stone building was excavated in the very northern corner of the school playing fields in 1993 (Warren and Hudspith 1993b, 8) and other less substantial structures may have existed to the south. The 1993 excavations also revealed a stretch of ditch and bank running parallel and to the south of the current south-east boundary to the site (Warren and Hudspith 1993b, 4). Although the excavators concluded that there was no evidence the ditch had ever been water-filled, it is tempting to speculate that this may have been the main drain that must have existed for flushing the latrine block that appears to have been truncated at its southern end by the modern field boundary. At the very least it may indicate that the southern boundary of the site was some 6-8m south of the current boundary.

The depth, relative to the surface of the field, of the possible medieval track which ran down the eastern side of Priory Gardens and across the field in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries suggests that more earth has been introduced at the southern end of the site in order to level the playing fields and would therefore be unlikely to impact on the GPR results closer to the boundary with Priory Gardens. This suggestion appears to be supported by Albion Archaeology's excavation on the Priory Academy playing fields in 2023 which suggested that 20th-century landscaping has obscured or removed the path towards the south. Warren and Hudspith (1993b, 9) estimated the presence of around half a metre of introduced topsoil at the northern end of the playing fields. The footpath appears to have been closed sometime after 1938 when

aerial photographs appear to show the playing fields being created (EPW056924 26-APR-1938). It should be noted that the fields to the south of Priory Gardens, up to Britain Street, were known as Great and Little Englands - from 'inlands' (Evans 1994, 104) - and were part of the Priory's possessions but they may not have been held directly and probably did not fall within the precinct (Page 1912, 350).

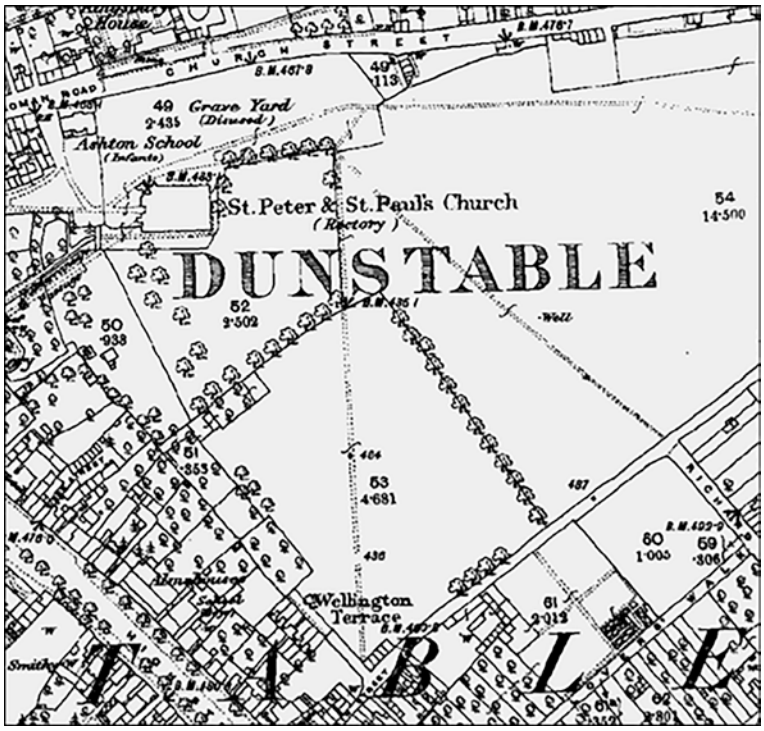

Figure 37: The lane from Britain Street to the disused graveyard, running north-south through the centre of the image and along the east side of what is now Priory Gardens. Ordnance Survey 25-inch 1st edition map published 1880 (© and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2023). Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024). Not to scale.

West

The research and survey work suggest that on the western side the inner court was probably separated from the outer court to the immediate west of the cellarer's range, either by the buildings themselves or possibly by a wall following the line of the scarp running roughly NNW-SSE across Priory Gardens recorded during the analytical earthwork survey [1]. This is suggested by the limit of the buildings identified on the earth resistance and GPR surveys but also by the location of what was probably an outer gatehouse immediately west of the church, giving access to the outer court, west of the suggested inner boundary. Access through into the cloister may have been via an inner gate or porch structure (known as an Outer Parlour) on the west side of the cellarer's range such as seen at Castle Acre (English Heritage 2016) and Kirkham Priory (English Heritage 2020).

The outer precinct or court

The outer precinct layout was probably not dissimilar to the one proposed by Worthington Smith (Smith 1904) with at least two gates, one just to the west of the church, where there are surviving remains, and one probably located near Priory House, though no direct evidence of this gate exists. Evans (1994, 101;

112) reiterates this idea stating that there must have been gates on 'both East and South Street'. It seems that one of these gates was known as the 'great gate' and had a porter (Doubleday and Page 1904, 374). This was probably the gate on the northern side whose remains still survive, which is located in a very similar position to the main gate at St Albans (St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society n.d.). It is also worth reiterating that the boundaries of the outer court may have changed over time as we know that the canons enlarged their courtyard in 1294 by building a new wall outside the old one (Webster 2018, 263).

North

To the west of the church the northern boundary of the outer court presumably extended from the line of the gatehouse towards High Street South, perhaps curving along the south side of Church Walk, and presenting the west front of the church as the public face of the priory facing on to the crossroads (*see* Fig. 36). This may explain the existence of the access along Church Walk in the modern townscape. It should be noted that the Houghton Regis map of 1762 does appear to show a step in the line of this boundary as it heads west from the gatehouse but given the scale and perspective view this is probably of little consequence (Bedfordshire Archives Service B553). If the northern precinct boundary was in the position proposed, it suggests that any activity associated with the medieval ovens and tank/well structure excavated to the rear of 11-15 High Street South was not directly monastic in nature (Aaronson 2018).

The disused graveyard area to the immediate north of the church was probably always outside the precinct but probably remained within the priory's ultimate control. Unfortunately it is not possible to be sure whether the area was always the lay cemetery for the priory or whether burials in this area commenced when the nave formally became the parish church around 1390, or even at dissolution. Whichever way, it is possible that the area originally functioned as a 'forbury' or 'foreberry' and was the site of the annual fair (granted in 1203), as seen at Reading Abbey, Leominster and St Osyth, where the priory's control of the space may have enabled them to collect tolls. Its roughly triangular shape – evident on Figure 37 but truncated to the east by Priory Road on modern maps - is reminiscent of the forbury identified at Latton Priory, Essex (Bristow 2017, 133-4). Gilchrist and Sloane (2055, 44) also note the use of Norwich and Ely cathedral cemeteries for fairs. Evans (1994, 41) notes that there are few references to properties on East Street (now Church Street) in the priory charters as the area was mainly taken up with the priory and Kingsbury.

West

As discussed above, it is possible that there were a number of years between the establishment of the town and the founding of the priory and it is therefore assumed that at least some burgage plots were laid out before the priory lands were fully established, though it is not clear how many or to what extent. Even if burgage plots did not exist along the eastern side of High Street South when the priory was established, Thomas (2010) describes how the monastery at Abingdon set its precinct

boundary back from the road so that properties could be established in between from which the abbey could raise rent. He also mentions similar 'planned secular fringes' to precincts in Gloucester and Leominster.

It is not entirely clear whether there were originally burgage plots between the western boundary of the priory and the road and, because Henry essentially gave all the town to the priory in - traditionally at least - 1131, it is hard to make interpretations based on property ownership and also hard to know if the type of town planning described at Abingdon was necessary. Study of the priory charters dating from the 13th century led Evans (1994, 40) to conclude that there were 12 houses belonging to the priory on the eastern side of High Street South at that time 'possibly from the gates of the great courtyard, south towards Britain Street'. She also suggested that there were some 'business houses between Church Walk and the crossroads' seemingly implying that there were no properties between Priory House and Church Walk which perhaps suggested that the precinct boundary ran along the eastern side of High Street between those points at least.

If Priory House did originate as an almonry or lay steward's house, as discussed above, then it is most likely to have been located at the boundary of the priory's outer court or precinct, which suggests that the boundary ran along the eastern side of High Street South and any plots now located there are later encroachment, perhaps encouraged by the priory in periods of financial difficulty. Howard (2007, 30) notes that in London, at St Mary Clerkenwell and St Mary Spital, tenements built in monastic times suggest foundations expanded on their outer edges either to accommodate abbey servants or to allow lets. Examination of the 1822/1840 tithe map (*see* Fig. 6) does not immediately give the impression of regularly sized plots in the area south of Church Walk, which might suggest later organic infill rather than the systematic laying out of plots either by Henry I or the priory. Henderson et al. (2022, 19) suggest that the northern bay of the medieval core of Priory House may be narrower than the other bays as it was constrained in some way when built, though whether this constraint would have been other monastic buildings within the precinct or existing burgage plots on this side of priory precinct is unclear.

Some of the archaeological evidence does not fit with the theory that the outer court or precinct boundary ran down the eastern side of High Street South. Matthews (1984, 2) describes a 1.5m wide 'outer wall of monastic site' forming the west wall of the bakehouse to the rear of the Saracen's Head, but this sits some 70m to the north-east of the High Street. It is possible that this wall has been misinterpreted or that it marks the inner precinct boundary, though this would not allow much space within the outer court area. Another option is that the western precinct boundary meandered in order to avoid pre-existing holdings. Evans (1994, 38) states that 'there are charters where the canons let out land behind the houses' but it is not really clear what is meant by this statement.

Water Supply

Despite the multiple surveys undertaken of the site (analytical earthwork, GPR and the earlier earth resistance surveys), no clear evidence of how the priory was

supplied with water (beyond the sinking of wells) or how water was managed and distributed across the precinct has been identified. Access to a water supply was often a key factor in the siting and layout of monastic foundations (Bond 1993, 43), but in Dunstable's case Henry's desire to establish a monastery in his new town at Dunstable's important cross-road location appears to have over-ridden this more practical consideration.

Although many monastic foundations in urban contexts may have initially relied on wells, many installed piped water systems from the mid-12th century onwards, some bringing clean water for drinking and washing across considerable distances (e.g. Warter (East Yorkshire) Bond 1989, 86; Bond 1993, 44). The apparent heyday of the priory under the auspices of the prior Richard de Morins may have provided a suitable context for the development of such a system at Dunstable Priory. However, if this was the case it is surprising that there are no references to the installation and maintenance of a piped water supply in the annals or other historical records; however it should be noted the surviving historical records are not comprehensive and other significant developments on the site are not recorded. Another question is where such a water supply might have been brought from. One possibility is that the water was diverted from a spring or reservoir near Zouches Farm on Blows Down, Houghton Regis, just under 2km to the east (Fig. 38). The name 'Grove Spring' on the 1st edition 25-inch OS map of 1880 and the presence of a deserted settlement on the hill suggest the location of a possible water source but this is hard to reconcile with the known geology which does not suggest that a spring would be possible in this location.

Figure 38: The view north-west towards Dunstable Priory Church from Blow's Down. The arrow indicates the location of the priory church. 12 September 2022. © Historic England

It is possible that, like the rest of the town, the priory was always fed by wells (and presumably cisterns), though it must have taken a reasonable amount of effort to draw enough water for drinking, washing and for flushing the latrines that presumably existed. It should be noted however that not every monastery appears to have had flushing facilities e.g. Higham nunnery, Kent (Bond 1989, 91). Rushton (2003, 26; 30) has suggested that excavated wells around the town suggest the medieval water table was much lower, sometimes drawing water from a depth of 28m. Certainly any mills or fish ponds must have been sited elsewhere. If we accept the premise that there was no running water source diverted through the site then it seems all the more surprising that Henry VIII was keen to convert the priory into a royal residence.

As the location of the latrines (reredorter) on a monastic site was dictated by the direction of running water or the course of the main drain (Bond 1989, 93) the interpretation of the structure to the south-west of the dormitory as the latrines implies that there was some sort of drain on or close to the line of the current boundary between Priory Gardens and the Priory Academy playing fields. As suggested above it is tempting to speculate that this was the function of the ditch excavated in 1993 to the south of the current boundary (Warren and Hudspith 1993b, 4) but it does not look particularly substantial in profile. It must of course be considered that the latrines could have been accommodated at the southern end of the dormitory itself – although this may have been less desirable than a separate block when there was a limited water supply. At Norton Priory in Cheshire the latrines were periodically flushed using a system of sluices (Greene 1989, 36) but even this would have required a volume of water that seems unlikely to have been easily available in a well- or rain-fed system.

Page (1912, 349) records that Defoe wrote about Dunstable in 1778 stating that it had no running water. Apparently there were deep wells at this time and four ponds to store water but it is not clear if any of these had monastic origins. Worthington Smith (1904) also describes dry ditches draining the priory site to the south and east before running through the Kingsbury site, though the evidence for this is not entirely clear.

SUMMARY

Summary of the history of Dunstable Priory

The research has shown that the traditional dates for the foundation of the town and the priory at Dunstable are potentially unreliable. At best we can say that Henry I founded the town sometime around 1114 and that the priory was almost certainly in existence by 1125 when the first prior, Bernard, witnessed a gift to Dunstable's mother house, Holy Trinity, Aldgate. The date of 1131 as the point at which Henry gifted the town and all its rents to the priory is also potentially unreliable, though this must have happened soon after the priory's foundation in order for it to sustain itself. By the middle of the 12th century the construction of the priory church was well underway, with the main body of the nave thought to date to around 1150-60 but with other fabric in the gallery and on the west front suggesting further developments at the end of the 12th century.

The start of the 13th century, under the auspices of Richard de Morins (prior 1202 - 1242), appears to have been a vibrant period in the priory's history. The probable rededication of the church in 1213 may have been prompted by the acquisition of relics which had the potential to be an important source of income for the church. This may have been the context for the flurry of developments in the church at the end of the 12th century and even for the ambulatory and possible radiating chapels constructed around the presbytery's apsidal eastern end. These would have provided somewhere to display relics and a means of access for pilgrims without disturbing the canons in the main body of the church. There were a number of other developments at the priory in the early 13th century, many of which are known from the annals. These include the granting of a fair by King John in 1203, the construction of a leper hospital, the construction of an almonry in 1208 and the construction of the Lady Chapel in 1228. Assessment of the historic fabric and radiocarbon dates from the surviving stone undercroft at Priory House suggest an early to mid-13th century but its interpretation remains a matter of debate.

However, not all was straightforward and in 1222 both the roof of the presbytery and two towers on the west front of the church collapsed, one on to the prior's lodgings which, along with the royal lodgings, was probably located above the cellarer's rooms in the western range of the cloister. Various references to walls and inner gates throughout the annals show that there were defined boundaries to the priory at this date and probably an inner and outer precinct. Despite references to general decline and increasing debt at the priory, a number of different building projects occurred in the 1250s, including the building of a new dormitory, a new house for carpenters and wheelwrights in the courtyard and a large stable. In 1259 a Dominican friary was founded by royal request almost opposite the priory at the other side of Watling Street, apparently to the priory's frustration. In the 1270s the priory renovated the north aisle of the church and started work on a room for the king, but records show that by 1291-2, Dunstable was not a wealthy establishment when compared to some of its contemporaries.

Less information is available about the priory in the 14th century and beyond as the annals end in 1297 (Webster 2018, 276). There were sporadic alterations to the church including the rebuilding of the Lady Chapel in 1324 and probable alterations to divide the church into a parish church and a conventual church in 1390, which may be evident in its surviving fabric. This was followed in 1392 by a formal agreement in which the town was granted use of the nave as the parish church. In the 15th century work was undertaken on the west front and there were major renovations of the north-west tower. Arguably one of the priory's most important moments came in May 1533 when the court that was to officially annul Henry VIII's marriage to Catharine of Aragon sat in the Lady Chapel. However seven years later the priory was dissolved. The priory had a net income of over £344 around 1535.

The priory's connection with Henry VIII did not end at the point the monastery was dissolved. As Henry toyed with the idea of creating a bishopric at Dunstable, plans were drawn up to convert the claustral buildings into what appear to have been royal apartments. It is not clear how far the work progressed but it seems to have been abandoned on the death of Henry in 1547. The land was sold in 1554 and then seems to have been variously owned and rented by numerous individuals, latterly (though possibly not always) along with property that eventually became known as Priory House. After periods of time as a home and as a private asylum, Priory House became the manager's residence for the Munt and Brown straw hat factory in 1832. It appears to have been acquired by the local authority in 1946, along with the land containing the remains of the priory in order to create public green space.

The conclusions from this research

One of the key conclusions from the research (particularly from the GPR survey by the Historic England Geophysics team) is that the monastic church at Dunstable, with its apsidal end, was more elaborate than previously understood. The earthwork survey demonstrated that the surface evidence in Priory Gardens represents more than just demolition rubble and reflects more of the monastic layout than previously assumed, including the surface expression of the apsidal end of the church mentioned above. The earthwork survey also identified some possible evidence for a different, possibly post-medieval, phase of use on the site. The combined evidence from the Manshead Archaeological Society's earth resistance survey, the GPR survey and the earthwork survey has highlighted the clear change in alignment of the monastic buildings moving south away from the church and cloister.

The background research undertaken as part of this project has highlighted that the foundation dates for the town and the priory are not as reliable as traditionally assumed. The background research also suggested that the precinct boundary was probably further to the east than the current eastern boundary of Priory Gardens. It has also highlighted the importance of the 1540s plan, drawn up to convert the claustral buildings, in recording what essentially was the final phase of the monastic layout.

Future Research

There are a few areas of research that would benefit from further work. The lack of evidence of how (beyond wells) the priory was supplied with running water for flushing the latrines, as well as clean water for drinking and religious practices, has been discussed above. This is clearly an area that would benefit from further research, perhaps through a re-examination of the Cartulary to specifically identify relevant references to water management at the site.

Further work to identify the precinct boundary walls, of which we know there were several, would be highly beneficial though these would be most easily identified through excavation, opportunities for which will inevitably be limited within the scheduled area. However, the locations of all boundaries of the precinct could be explored through targeted excavation if opportunities arise in the future, for example the southern extent of the precinct boundary, perhaps through excavations on the Priory Academy playing fields, targeted where buildings may have been truncated by the south-eastern boundary of Priory Gardens. It should be noted that excavations by Albion Archaeology in 2023 (Wesley Kier, pers. comm.) were further to the south of this key area.

The period from the dissolution of the priory until around 1700 is poorly understood and would benefit from further investigation as it is very unclear at what point the claustral buildings were vacated once there was no longer royal interest in their conversion. The process of demolition is also poorly understood. Potential sources of information include the Minister's Accounts held in Bedfordshire Archives and the 'LR' (Land Revenue) series of documents held in The National Archives, which may contain indications of the extent of royal rebuilding.

The priory clearly had a huge administrative and financial impact on the development of the town of Dunstable but also an impact on the town's layout and the development of the High Street. The relationship between the priory precinct and High Street South and Church Street could still be better understood and it might be beneficial to revisit the Cartulary and other historical accounts in order to try and elucidate these issues alongside any opportunities to examine the priory boundaries through archaeological interventions.

METHODOLOGY

For method details relating to the Historic England GPR survey discussed in this report, please refer to the dedicated geophysical survey research report (Linford et al. 2022).

Analytical earthwork survey

Fieldwork

GNSS with base fixed by VRS

In areas of Priory Gardens with open skies detail was surveyed using a Trimble R8 survey grade GNSS receiver working in Real Time Kinematic mode (RTK) with points related to an R8 receiver configured as an on-site base station. The position of the base station had previously been adjusted to the National Grid Transformation OSTN15 via the Trimble VRS Now Network RTK delivery service. This uses the Ordnance Survey's GNSS correction network (OSNet) and gives a stated accuracy of 0.01-0.015m per point with vertical accuracy being half as precise.

Total Station

In all other areas of Priory Gardens detail was surveyed using a Trimble 5600 Total Station theodolite by taking radiating readings from each station on a network of five stations. The stations were surveyed in sequence to form a closed traverse. As the traverse was based upon GNSS control, survey was directly to Ordnance Survey National Grid and later adjusted for errors using proprietary Trimble Business Centre software. Overall accuracy is comparable to GNSS though, unlike GNSS, decreases with length of traverse and distance between surveyor and station.

Drone Survey

Aerial photography was acquired using a DJI Phantom 4 RTK quadcopter drone owned by Historic England and operated under the Civil Aviation Authority operator ID GBR OP-8NJJ9W4XXCV7. A pre-programmed mapping flight covering an area of 6 acres was carried out using the Drone Deploy operating system. The flight captured 388 overlapping 20-megapixel JPEG images each from an altitude of about 50m above ground level, resulting in a ground resolution of 1.72cm per pixel. These images were processed in Agisoft Metashape to create a high-quality ortho-mosaic photograph and a Digital Surface Model (DSM) of the survey. Positional accuracy of the model was improved by referencing 4 ground targets, established with the GNSS equipment. The DSM GeoTIFF was visualised in Agisoft Metsahape by classifying the dense point cloud and building the DSM and slope models were produced using the Relief Visualisation Toolkit. The drone was also used to take a number of oblique still photographs of the former priory church and Priory Gardens. The flights were undertaken in accordance with the procedures in Historic England's, 'Small Unmanned Aircraft Operations Manual v2.3' (2021) that underpins the organisation's Permission for Commercial Operations accreditation with the Civil

Aviation Authority. Processing and visualisation were carried out in accordance with our published guidelines (Historic England 2017).

Publication

The survey data was downloaded into Trimble Business Centre software to process the traverse and field codes and the data transferred into AutoCAD for editing. The survey plans were completed at 1:1000 scale using digital drawing techniques. The drawings were cleaned and slopes were hachured to indicate relative strengths. Small areas of extra detail were added from the drone-derived elevation model (*see* Fig. A4). The drawings were then plotted for checking in the field. Additional report illustrations were prepared using Adobe Illustrator software and ArcPro.

The report was prepared for publication using Adobe InDesign software.

Archive

The research data has been archived in compliance with Historic England guidelines and deposited at the Historic England Archive.

Limiting factors

The survey was occasionally impacted by poor light conditions.

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Dunstable, Bedfordshire [Lawrence Bradshaw 1543–4]. Ground plan of a house, inscribed The plat of Dunstabyll and endorsed Dunstable. Paper, 15½ X 22½. Ink with grey wash on alternate steps.

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Dunstable Tithe Map by John Durham dated 1822, revised by Joseph Mead in 1840.

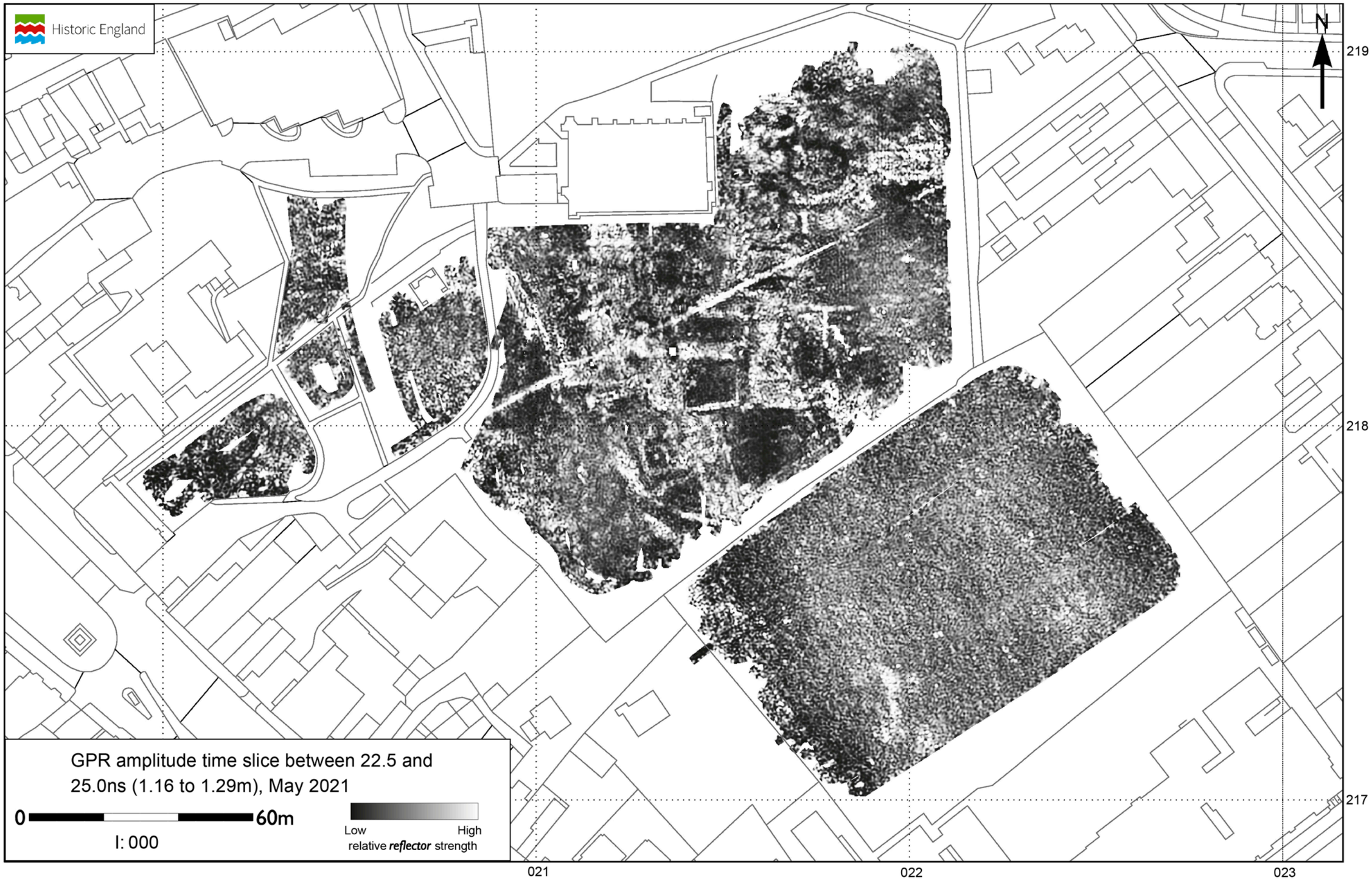


Figure A1: GPR results for 1.16-1.29m below the surface as recorded by the Historic England Geophysics team in May 2021 (see Linford et al. 2022).© Historic England. (Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2021. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100019088.)

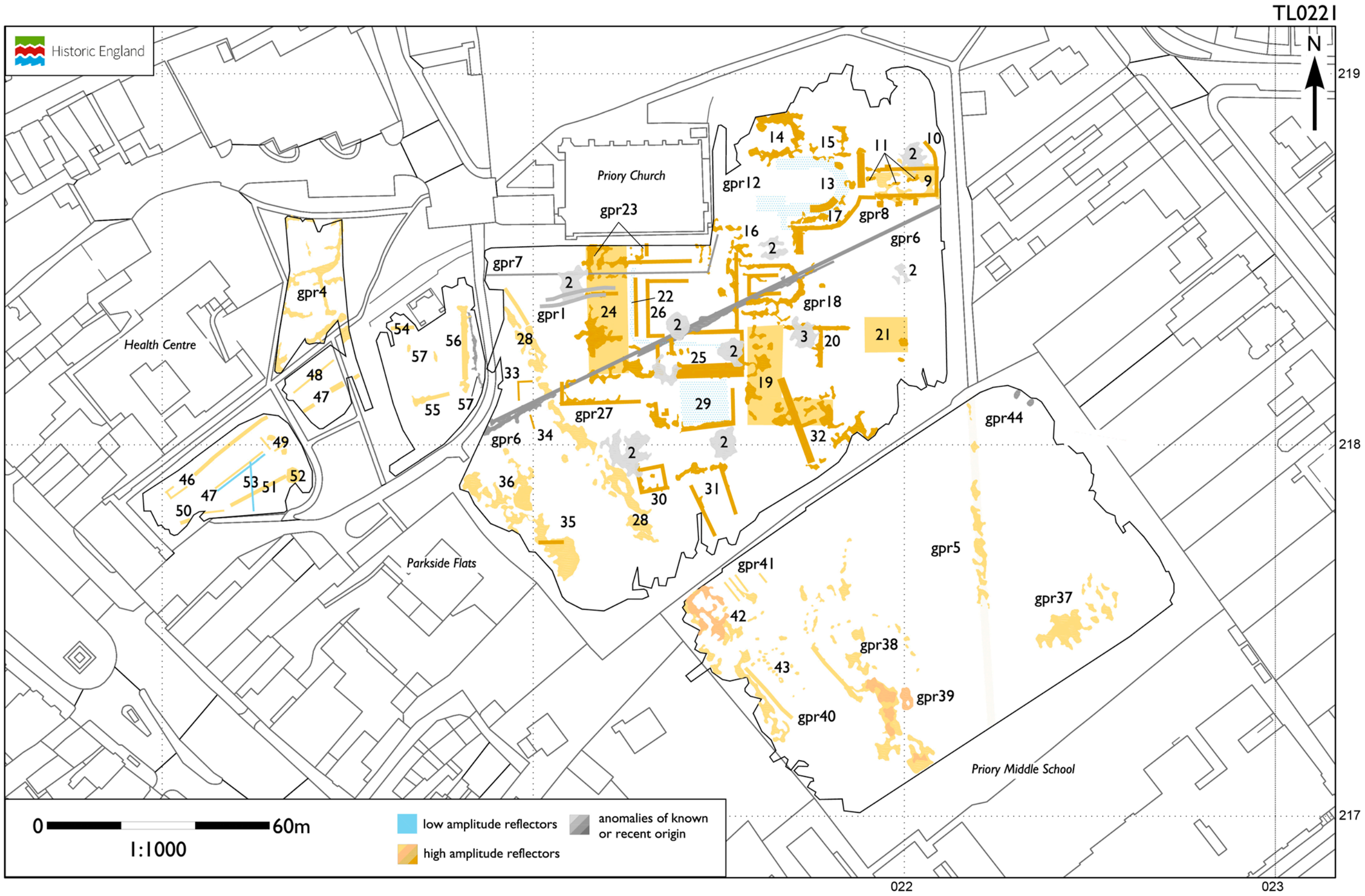


Figure A2: Summary of the GPR anomalies based on the 2021 survey by the Historic England Geophysics team (see Linford et al. 2022). © Historic England. (Background mapping (© Crown Copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900)

Figure A3: The analytical earthwork survey of Priory Gardens, Dunstable (1:1000 scale) with labels referring to the numbers in square brackets used in the text. © Historic England. (Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900)

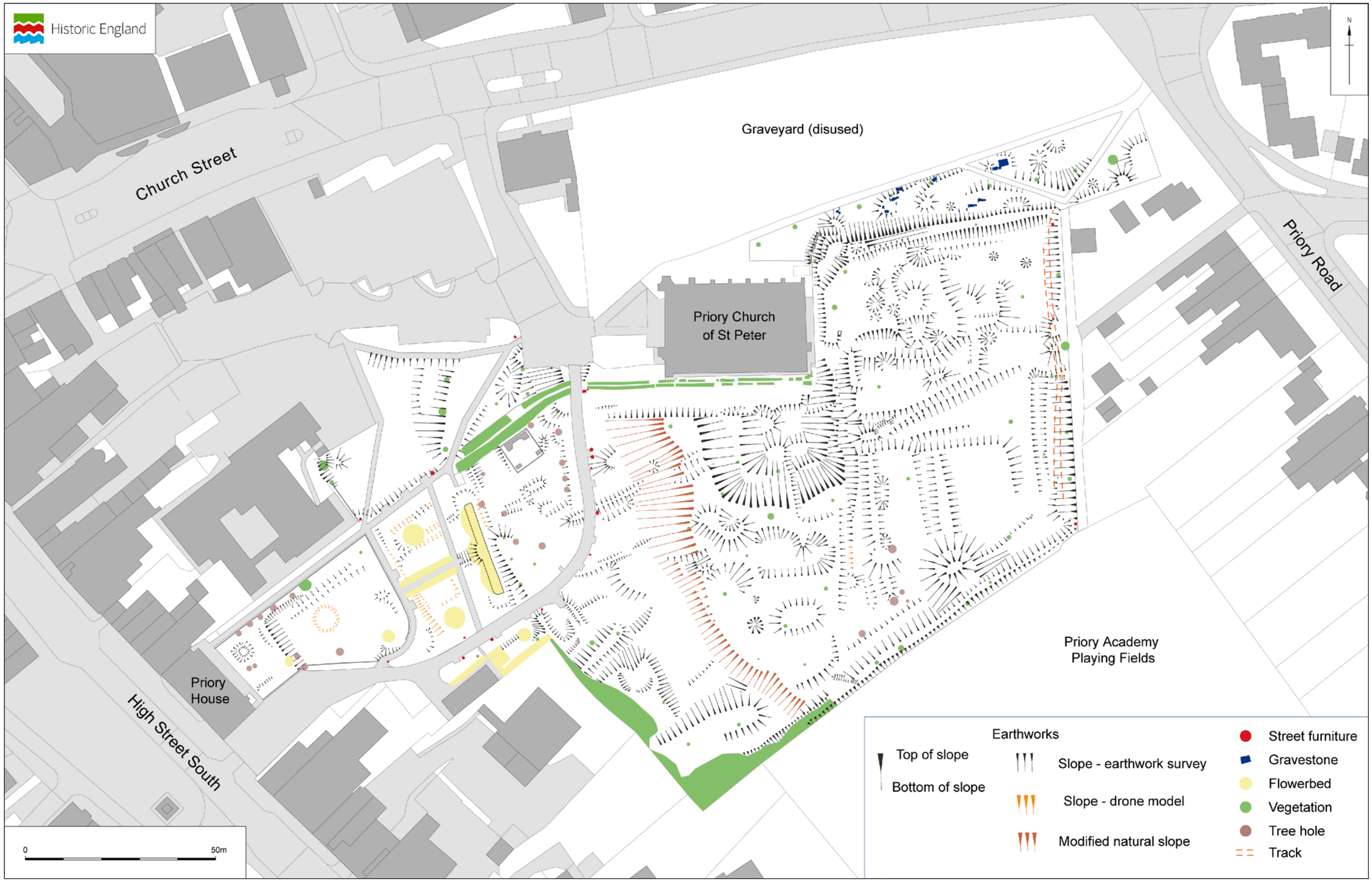
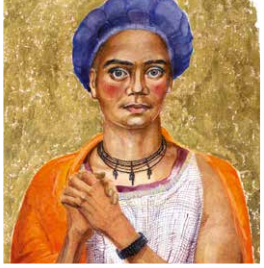


Figure A4: The analytical earthwork survey of Priory Gardens, Dunstable (1:1000 scale) © Historic England. (Background mapping © Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100024900)



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