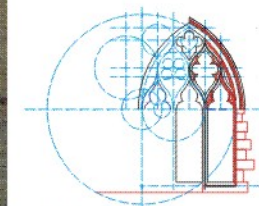


February 2014



Michael
HEATON
heritage consultants

SUMMARY

New electricity supply, Christchurch Priory, Dorset

NGR: 415961/092500

Archaeological watching brief

February 2014

Report date: April 2014

Excavation of a 300mm x 450mm trench along the south side of Priory Cottage to the Priory's shop and thence across the gap between the south transept of the church and Priory House in February 2014, revealed comprehensively disturbed soils to the base of the excavations and a thick layer of demolition rubble derived from early-mid 19th century building works within the Priory church.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sponsor: Christchurch Priory (Property Directorate), Quay Road, Christchurch, Dorset.

Designer: Jennie Schillig, *Columba Cook Chartered Architects*, 106 Bargates, Christchurch, Dorset. BH23 1QP

Author: Michael Heaton MIfA IHBC. Eversfield House, Station Road, Warminster, Wiltshire. BA12 9BP

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Figure 1. The Site and principal observations

**New Electricity Supply
CHRISTCHURCH PRIORY
Christchurch, Dorset
Scheduled Monument 22962**

**Archaeological Watching Brief
February 2014**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Project

1.1.1 This document presents the results of a watching brief maintained during groundworks occasioned by installation of a new electricity supply to Priory House at Christchurch Priory in Dorset during February 2014. The watching brief was commissioned by *Christchurch Priory (Property Directorate)* in accordance with a condition of Scheduled Monument Consent granted by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport as advised by English Heritage.

1.1.2 The watching brief was maintained, and this report prepared, by Michael Heaton MIFA IHBC, in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigations (WSI) submitted in support of the application for SMC. That document (Ref: 3273-12-1) presents a description of the site, its situation and status; a summary of the site's archaeological and historical context; and a detailed specification of the archaeological works, details of which are not repeated here other than in brief summary.

1.1.3 The following texts present a summary description of the site and its archaeological context, the nature of the groundworks and the accompanying archaeological works, a description of the results, and limited conclusions interpreting the results and assessing the methodological efficacy of the work. The texts are augmented by a line drawing and a selection of photographs.

1.2 Method

1.2.1 The work comprised an archaeological watching brief, as defined by the Institute for Archaeologists thus:

"...a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons.....where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and an ordered archive." (IfA, 2008)

1.2.2 The groundworks comprised removal of paving slabs and turf followed by mechanical and manual excavation of a discontinuous linear trench nominally 300mm wide x 450mm deep in the positions indicated on Figure 1, between the 17th and 24th of February 2014. The excavations were attended and observed intermittently, as determined by the progress of the excavations.

1.2.3 All deposits encountered were recorded in notebook form and as digital photographs.

1.2.4 Copies of this report have been submitted to the Client, English Heritage and Dorset County Council. The small archive of site records will be retained by the Priory archives.

1.3 Caveats

1.3.1 This report has been prepared with reasonable skill and care, following the guidances of the professional bodies cited above and based on information publicly available at the time of writing. Archaeological or historical discoveries made in the area after the

date of writing, or changes in research strategies affecting the perceived significance of such discoveries, may affect the currency of the report.

- 1.3.2 No person other than the Client named in paragraph 1.1.1 to whom this report is addressed shall rely on it in any respect and no duty of care will be owed by the author to any such third party.
- 1.3.3 The summary contains an overview of the key results and conclusions. However, no reliance should be placed on any part of the executive summary until the whole of the report has been read: other sections of the report may contain information that affects interpretation of the executive summary.

2 THE SITE

2.1 Situation and extent

- 2.1.1 The District of Christchurch straddles the lower reaches and combined estuary of the rivers Stour and Avon in south-east Dorset. It is an undulating heathland landscape varying between 5mOD and 60mOD on the Tertiary sands and gravels of the Hampshire basin, the southern two kilometres of which is occupied entirely by the residential developments of the Poole-Bournemouth-Christchurch coastal conurbation. Solid geology outcrops c. 15km west and north as the Jurassic limestones of Purbeck and the Cretaceous chalks and greensands of the South Downs, and c. 10km to the south as the softer Tertiary limestones of the Isle of Wight. The eponymous Borough and town is situated on the coast at the junction of the two rivers which, together with the River Mude, form the estuarine expanses of Christchurch Harbour. It comprises two nuclei separated by the River Avon, the smaller and westernmost of which contains the historic and commercial core of the town.
- 2.1.2 The Priory Church is situated at the south-east tip of this nucleus, less than 100m from the main channel of the River Avon. It occupies a level site below 5mOD bounded on its south and east by an artificial leat, and on the west and north by the commercial core of the town. The layout of the church is illustrated on Figure 1. It is of long narrow cruciform plan with short transepts and a northern porch at its western end, oriented WSW-ENE, adjoined on its south side by Priory House and at its west end by a combined shop and public toilets building that are in turn connected to Priory Cottage by a curtain wall. Those buildings are jointly or severally designated Grade 1, Grade II* and Grade II Listed Buildings and they stand within a partially walled enclosure that encompasses the graveyard, the gardens of Priory House and an adjoining public car park in Quay Road that together constitute the Christchurch Priory Scheduled Monument and a large part of the Christchurch Town Centre Conservation Area.
- 2.1.3 The 'Site' for the purposes of this document is the propose route of a new electricity supply to the Priory's main underground switchboard outside the public toilets block, and thence from the Priory church to Priory House. The present supply runs underground along the north edge of the Quay Road car park¹ as far as the southwest corner of Priory Cottage, where it turns sharply north to run along the north side of Priory Cottage and the shop to the southeast corner of the toilets block. The new supply would divert from the existing route at Priory Cottage and run along its south side at a depth of c. 600mm, direct to the existing switchboard southeast corner of the toilet block. From there, the supply would run through an existing conduit along the south side of the South Nave Aisle around the South Transept to an existing services duct, from where it would be carried to the basement of Priory House in a

¹ Also known as the Priory Visitors' Car Park

short (c. 1000mm) trench. The route west of Priory Cottage lies within the paved margin of the public highway; the central c. 30m of the route lies within the paved and planted gardens of Priory Cottage and Priory House; and the rest passes through existing conduits or within ground already disturbed by the basement excavations of Priory House and early 20th century underpinning of the South Nave Aisle².

2.2 Archaeological and historical context

- 2.2.1 The historical origins and archaeological nature of the Priory Church are ambiguous and complex. Initially a quasi-collegiate church of secular canons serving the parish of Twyneham and several other pre-Conquest ministries from a church and nine satellite chapels, it was re-founded as an Augustinian Priory under Henry I in c. 1150 and given the name *Christchurch*. Once re-founded, the Priory was re-endowed and had, by the early 14th century become one of the wealthiest religious houses in southern England, an economic state it continued to enjoy throughout the Middle Ages (VCH, 1903). It was one of the first to be dissolved, 'surrendering' under duress in 1539, when the church building, the cloister, chapter house, frater, farmery and sub-Prior's lodgings were granted to the churchwardens and parishioners of the town. Its historical importance is enhanced by its anomalous state during the 12th century when it was effectively managed – or 'farmed' to use the contemporaneous term - by an officer of the Norman state (Hase, 1988), and by its transfer to the corporation of the borough at the Dissolution rather than to private owners as was usually the case.
- 2.2.2 The material fabric of the church is as archaeologically complex as any of the 'Major' churches, and more so than most. Detailed analyses of the church's archaeological development were published in 1834 (Ferrey) and 1903 (*Victoria County History*) and these have been augmented by the more recent analyses of Polk (1994), Cockain and Tullet (2003) and the author (2010). Substantial repairs were carried out throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, including underpinning, excavation of underground heating services and extensive re-facing. Nonetheless, despite its undoubted archaeological potential and historical significance, it has yet to be the subject of a controlled programme of scientific archaeological investigation and neither the layout nor contents of its monastic precinct are known. However, Priory Cottage is understood to be a relic of one of the buildings of the outer services court and it is assumed that similar buildings extended along the north side of the Quay Road car park and eastwards towards the west end of the church.
- 2.2.3 The 'site' follows the northern side of the outer services court and passes within c. 2.5m of the south wall of Priory Cottage, but it lies outside the likely extent of monastic and post-monastic burials. The ground immediately south of Priory Cottage was observed³ during construction of new drainage in 2011, when it was revealed to be intensively disturbed and archaeologically void. The ground against the south wall of the toilets block is also likely to be intensively disturbed, partly because it was buried by a large mound shown on the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:2500 sheet of 1871⁴ that is assumed to have been building rubble. Similarly, all the ground within a two metre wide band along the South Nave Aisle was removed to a depth of c. two metres in c. 1906 during underpinning operations, whilst the ground between the South Transept and the basement of Priory House will have been excavated and backfilled during construction of the Priory House basements in the late 18th century. The affected ground, therefore, is of negligible archaeological potential. Nonetheless, it is possible that undisturbed deposits might be revealed in the sides or base of the proposed trench, particularly at its eastern end. Such remains would be manifest as

² see the Conservation Management Plan (Heaton, 2010)

³ Heaton, M.J., 2011, 'Priory Cottage....archaeological watching brief April 2011'. (non-publication report ref. 3273-7-2 deposited with English Heritage and Dorset HER)

⁴ Heaton *op cit*

rubble foundations, paved surfaces and culturally enhanced soils containing artefacts and palaeoenvironmental materials.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Stratigraphic data

- 3.1.1 Excavation of the western portion of the trench, between Priory Cottage and the shop, revealed the following consistent stratigraphic sequence:

0 – 400mm Paving slabs and/or a very dark greyish brown sandy loam turfline and topsoil containing moderate quantities of slate, animal bone, hand-made brick and fragments of salt-glazed pipe. The topsoil was comprehensively disturbed by mature tree roots and numerous modern services. In the eastern c. 15m of the trench the ground level rose by c. 1m and the thickness of the topsoil reduced to c. 300mm, but without variation in its character.

400-800mm In the eastern c. 15m of the trench, the topsoil lay on a 500mm thick layer of fine grade limestone and mortar rubble containing small quantities of roofing tile and oyster shell. This was at its thickest immediately south of the shop and thinned to the west, where it appeared to replace the natural subsoil there – i.e. it appeared to be filling a broad and poorly defined 'cut'. The base of this deposit was not encountered in the excavations. In the rest of the trench, running south of Priory Cottage, the topsoil lay over a dark yellowish brown sandy loam 'B' horizon subsoil containing moderate quantities of animal bone and oyster shell. The base of this deposit was not encountered in the excavation.

- 3.1.2 Excavation of the shorter eastern portion of the trench, between the south transept of the Priory church and Priory House, revealed the following stratigraphic sequence:

0-200mm Concrete paving slabs laid on yellow paving grit and a lean-mix concrete substrate.

200-300mm Homogenous greyish brown sandy loam containing large quantities of hand-made and machine-made brick, lumps of portland cement, and fragments of concrete. At the base of this deposit was a wall of hand-made stock bricks 750mm north of the wall and blocked basement window of Priory House and aligned parallel with it.

3.2 Artefactual data

- 3.2.1 Small quantities of modern building materials, clay pipe and post-medieval ceramics were recovered from the topsoils/overburden layers, of which none has been retained.

3.3 Palaeoenvironmental data

- 3.3.1 No floral or faunal remains were recovered and no soil samples were retained.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Archaeological interpretation

- 4.1.1 The general stratigraphic sequence exposed here is the same as that exposed in all other investigations within the vicinity of Christchurch Priory and specifically those of 2011: a very dark humic topsoil lying over a thick sandy subsoil derived from the Tertiary sands and gravels that form the parent material to the soil sequence. Where investigations have penetrated the full depth of the soil sequence, such as in the Vicarage garden⁵ or at the base of the Priory church's foundations⁶, the 'B' horizon subsoil blends gradually into a dark yellow sandy gravel at a depth of c. 1000mm below ground level. However, within the vicinity of the Priory church it is intensely disturbed by post-medieval building groundworks.
- 4.1.2 Two variations from that background sequence were observed. That at the eastern end of the trench, between the church and Priory House, is the anticipated result of repeated construction-related disturbances from the late 18th century onwards, and it is highly unlikely that any significant archaeological remains will survive in this zone within c. 1000mm of ground level.
- 4.1.3 That along the south side of the shop is slightly more interesting. The layer of fine-grained limestone and mortar rubble replaces the upper c. 500mm of the subsoil but it is not clear if it is 'cut' into in the archaeological sense. Nonetheless, it corresponds exactly with the pronounced rise in ground level at the eastern edge of the Priory Cottage garden and the position of the large mound recorded by the 1871 Ordnance Survey map. It consists of demolition rubble and appears to contain no Modern materials such as machine-made brick or Portland cement, although only a relatively small exposure has been investigated, so it is highly likely that it is derived from the Priory church's fabric. Similar deposits have been revealed in the garden of the vicarage, filling deep amorphous quarry pits, where they also contained 18th and early 19th century pottery, fragments of human bone and large pieces of dressed stone of 12th century form⁷. The most likely interpretation is that this material was created during one or more of the many repair campaigns of the 19th century.

4.2 Significance

- 4.2.1 Whilst post-medieval demolition rubble might seem unimportant, in the context of Christchurch Priory it has been demonstrated to contain architectural and structural details of the earlier iterations of the monastic church that no longer survive within the extant fabric⁸. Though such details have not been revealed here, it is possible that archaeologically significant material survives elsewhere within the vicinity of the shop and the Priory House car park.
- 4.2.2 The work was designed and executed in accordance with the published Standards and Guidances of the Institute for Archaeologists (2008) and the Assoc. of Local Govt. Archaeol. Officers. (1993). Data collection and primary report preparation has been undertaken by a skilled archaeological technician experienced in the pedology and archaeology of this area of southern England and of Christchurch Priory in

⁵ Heaton, M.J., 2013, 'New Vicarage, Christchurch: Post-excavation assessment report'. (non-publication planning report Ref. 3273-10-4 deposited with Dorset HER), and forthcoming.

⁶ Heaton, M.J., 2008, 'Christchurch Priory North Quire Aisle buttress underpinning'. (non-publication planning report Ref. 3273-8-2 deposited with Dorset HER); Heaton, M.J., 2009, 'They don't build 'em like they used to: The defective flyers of Christchurch Priory,' *Construction History Society Newsletter* **84**, pp6-8.

⁷ Thurlby, pers comm. Professor Thurlby is currently preparing a short report on the dressed stone.

⁸ *ibid*

particular. The conclusions of the report are based upon a wider consideration of the data by qualified archaeologists.

- 4.2.3 The results relate only to the immediate vicinity of the observed groundworks. Within the constraints operative on the interpretation of all archaeological data, the results and the archaeological conclusions arising from them are considered to be reliable and representative of the archaeological potential of the immediate site.

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1 Western end of the trench, viewed from the west



2 Central part of the trench at eastern boundary of Priory Cottage garden, showing 'made ground' deposit in base of trench



3 Eastern end of trench at shop, viewed from the east, showing 'made ground' deposit at base of trench



4 Connection to Priory House, showing ground conditions



5 Connection to Priory House, showing new supply going through blocked basement window

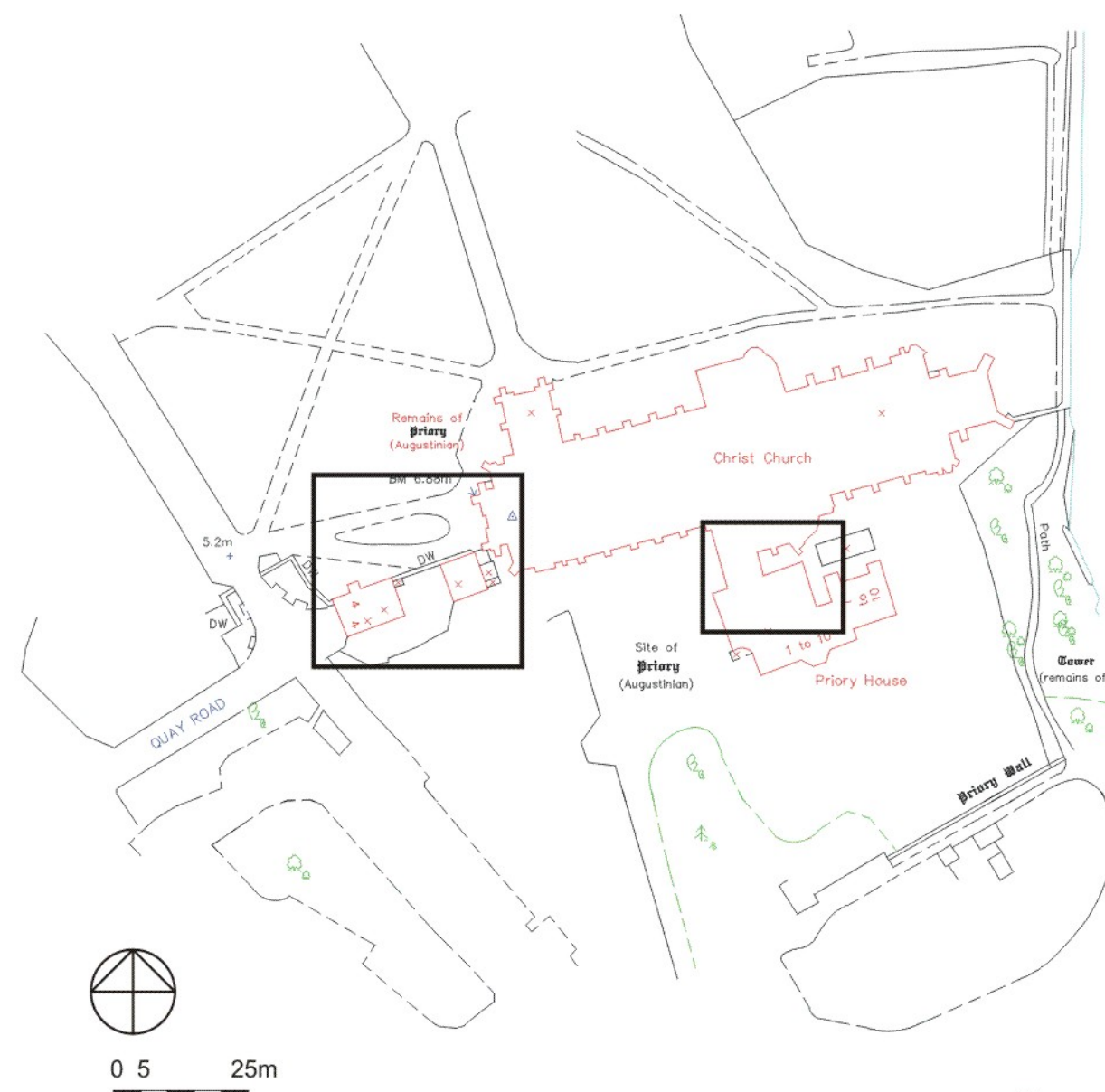
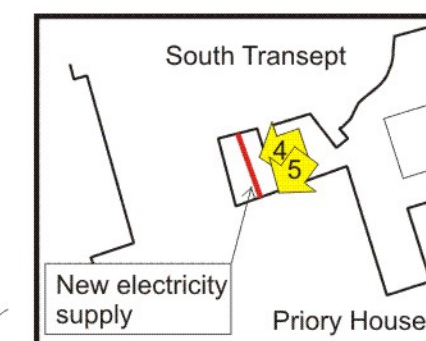
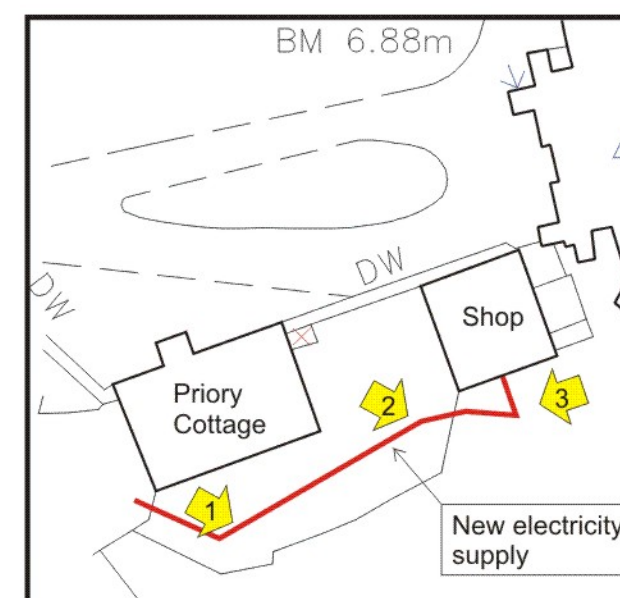


Figure 1



Eversfield House, Station Road, Warminster, Wiltshire. BA12 9BP
01985 847791 : mike@michaelheaton.co.uk : www.michaelheaton.co.uk