



Paradise Walk, Priory Gardens, Christchurch, Dorset Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New Fencing



Report No. 53545/3/1

January 2023

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Paradise Walk, Priory Gardens, Christchurch, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New Fencing, October 2022

Report No. 53545/3/1

January 2023

Client: BCP Council

Agent:

Scheduled Monument: 1018277 Pre-Conquest monastery, early Christian cemetery, Augustinian priory and a motte and bailey castle at Christchurch

SMC Case No: S00242795

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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terraina1-512380		
Project Title	New Fencing, Paradise Walk, Priory Quarter, Christchurch, Dorset		
Short Description of Project	Terrain Archaeology carried out archaeological observations and recording during the erection of new fencing along Paradise Walk to the south east of Christchurch Priory. This fence exposed disturbed soils of probably nineteenth and twentieth century date, with very few finds noted. The only feature of note was a flat dressed limestone slab covering a void that was encountered just south of the Lady Chapel and may be part of a grave or vault, but this is uncertain.		
Project Dates	Start: 11-10-2022	End: 13-10-2022	
Previous/Future Work	No/No		
Project Code	53545		
Monument Type and Period	Grave? (medieval?)		
Significant Finds	None		
Project Location			
County/District/Parish	Dorset/ Christchurch/ Christchurch		
Site Address	Paradise Walk, Priory Gardens, Christchurch BH23 1BU		
Site Coordinates	SZ16078250 – SZ1608492537		
Site Area	c. 1.75 m ²		
Height OD			
Project Creators			
Organisation	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Brief Originator	Historic England		
Project Design Originator	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Supervisor	Peter Bellamy		
Project Manager	Peter Bellamy		
Sponsor or Funding Body	BCP Council		
Project Archive			
Archive Type	Physical	Digital	Paper
Location/Accession No	No physical archive	No digital archive	No paper archive
Contents			

Paradise Walk, Priory Gardens, Christchurch, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New Fencing, October 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by BCP Council to carry out archaeological observations and recording during new fencing works along Paradise Walk between Christchurch Priory and the Priory Wall to the south. The new fencing lies within Scheduled Monument *Pre-Conquest monastery, early Christian cemetery, Augustinian priory and a motte and bailey castle at Christchurch* (National Heritage List Entry No: 1018277) and the archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the works to comply with the statutory requirements of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (as amended) regarding the Scheduled Monument. The works were carried out under Scheduled Monument Consent Case Number S00242795.

The fieldwork was carried out between the 11th and 13th October 2022 by Peter Bellamy.

1.2 Brief

No written brief was issued on behalf of BCP Council for the works, but the requirements of the archaeological mitigation were determined in consultation with Historic England.

1.3 Site Location

The site is located on the southern edge of the historic core of Christchurch, Dorset. It runs within the southeastern side of the Priory precinct (Paradise Walk), in Priory Gardens (between SZ160782500 and SZ1608492537) (Figures 1 and 2).

1.4 Geology

The solid geology is mapped as sand of the Branksome Sand Formation. This is covered by Superficial Deposits River Terrace Deposits, 4 sands and gravels (<https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk>).

1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

There appears to have been a settlement in the southern part of the low gravel ridge formed by the confluence of the rivers Stour and Avon in the middle Saxon period, suggested by the discovery of a mid sixth/seventh century cemetery at Bargates (Jarvis 1983). There may have been an early Minster church administering to a large *parochia*, established in the area of the later Priory by the mid-8th century AD (Hase 1988). The first documented mention of a settlement at Christchurch comes in AD900 when a residence at *Tweoxneam* (Christchurch) was seized by the aetheling Aethelwold (Jarvis 1983, 9).

Twinham is listed in the Burghal Hidage, an early 10th century document allocating resources to defended towns or burhs for the maintenance of their defences. The town appears to have comprised a royal residence and Minster church located at the southern tip of the gravel ridge. Any lay settlement appears to have been concentrated immediately to the north of the Minster (Bellamy and Davey 2011). The burh was provided with defences in the form of an earthen bank with one or more defensive ditches, probably built in AD878–9 (Haslam 2009). A stone wall was added to the front of the bank and the ditches were recut in the 890s (Haslam 2009). The stone wall appears to have been deliberately demolished and the stones spread, perhaps in the early 11th century (Haslam 2009).

The Domesday survey records only 39 messuages, by far the poorest of the Dorset burhs (Penn, 1980, 38). William Rufus gave the Church and town to Ranulf Flambard, before 1095. However, Flambard was exiled after the murder of William Rufus, and the manor, town and church passed to Richard de Redvers. Baldwin De Redvers began the construction of the castle c. 1100 and it became the seat of the manor (Penn, 1980, 39). He granted the town a charter in 1149. It appears to have developed only slowly as a medieval market town. The medieval town comprised one major street, the High Street, running from the Bargate in the north south to the Priory with a series of burgage plots along both sides along its length. Castle Street ran eastwards across East Bridge and Wick Lane ran westwards. There were also several other small side and back lanes. The site probably lay on the edge of the medieval town, perhaps at the end of the burgage plots running back from the High Street.

Christchurch was a relatively poor town during the medieval period and remained so during the post-medieval period. The Priory was dissolved in 1539 and the Castle was slighted in the 1650s after the Civil War. The population of the town began to rise rapidly during the nineteenth century. The railway arrived in 1862 and a series of suburbs developed during the later nineteenth and twentieth century to the north and east of the historic town centre (Bellamy and Davey 2011).

1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

There have been no archaeological investigations along the line of the new fencing, but there have been several previous investigations close by. Christchurch Priory and Priory House have been the subject of a number of investigations and building recording from the eighteenth century onwards, but these will not be discussed further here as they relate mainly to the building itself.

Evaluation excavation on the south side of the Priory by Wessex Archaeology in 2017-8 has revealed a deep complex stratigraphy within the priory precinct to the south of the church (Wessex Archaeology 2020). This included a buried soil at a depth of between about 1.05–1.50 m below ground level, containing residual prehistoric and Roman finds, with a series of possible early surfaces above. A complex series of intercutting graves dating from the Early Medieval period onwards were found from a depth of about 0.35 m below ground level. A substantial ditch of seventeenth century date cut through several graves and the upper part of the sequence was disturbed by eighteenth and nineteenth century activity associated with Priory House and modern services.

The area of Paradise Walk (Site X3) was investigated in 1969-70 by a series of small trenches (Figure 2), which revealed traces of the medieval priory precinct wall, a stone-lined garderobe pit and traces of other walls from possible medieval priory building (Jarvis 1983, 27-31). The finds included a small number of residual Roman finds.

1.7 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Archaeological Observations and Recording was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

Its objectives were:

- To observe and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.
- To record recovered artefacts and other materials to an appropriate standard.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

1.8 Groundworks

The groundworks consisted of the hand excavation of 28 postholes for the new fencing, excavated in the positions shown on Figure 2. These holes were all about 0.25m across and 0.50m deep with the gate post (114) dug to 0.70m depth.

1.9 Methods

The methodology, scope, aims and objectives of the works was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by Terrain Archaeology in April 2022 (Terrain Archaeology document no. 3545/0/1).

The observation and recording of the groundworks was undertaken to the standards of the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists (CIfA 2014), with an archaeologist in attendance during all groundworks that possibly may have exposed pre-modern deposits.

All deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The photographic record of the work was maintained in digital format, and included aspects of its setting, conduct and technical detail.

1.10 Archive and Dissemination

1.10.1 Paper Archive

No paper archive will be retained beyond the end of the project. The archive will consist of this report only.

1.10.2 Artefacts

No artefacts or other materials were retained from the site.

1.10.3 Report

A copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the archive will be placed with the OASIS project (www.oasis.ac.uk) under the reference code *terrains1-512380*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

2. Results

2.1 Introduction

A total of 21 of the 28 holes excavated were observed and recorded (Figure 2; Plates 1–4). The seven holes not observed (100–106) still had their spoil surviving adjacent to the new fenceposts, which together with the description by the fencing contractors, enabled the stratigraphy to be reconstructed. The deposits revealed in each hole are described in Appendix 1.

2.2 Natural Deposits

Natural deposits were not encountered during the groundworks.

2.3 Archaeological Features

A single archaeological feature was observed. In Hole 124 at a depth of 0.25m was a finely worked flat limestone slab 25mm thick (Figure 2; Plate 8). A small hole was knocked through this stone, but further damage was halted, and new fence post was concreted over the top of the slab with a membrane protecting the slab. The hole knocked through the stone revealed a void about 1.6 m deep below. An attempt to probe to find the extent of the slab was unsuccessful on account of the amount of rubble and roots in the soil.

2.4 Modern Deposits

2.4.1 Modern Soils and Deposits

Along the whole length of the new fence line, there was a mid greyish-brown sand layer with flint gravel, over 0.3 m thick, directly beneath the modern topsoil. In holes 107–110 and 118 quantities of small stone rubble were found within this soil and some tile and slate rubble in hole 108 (Plates 5–6). Quantities of small chalk rubble was found in Holes 116, 119, and 120.

In Holes 114 and 115, an orange-brown sand and gravel was exposed at a depth of 0.5–0.6m below ground level, below the made ground deposit described above (Plate 7). This is likely to be a localised layer of redeposited sand and gravel.

2.4.2 Topsoil

Topsoil was present along the whole length of the new fence. It was a dark brown sandy loam between 0.2 – 0.3 m thick.

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

No finds were retained from the observations. A small quantity of clay roof tile and slate roof tile was noted in Hole 108 and a small fragment of dressed limestone in Hole 118, but these were not collected or quantified.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

The new fence was erected along the east side of Priory House gardens to the south east of the Priory. The excavation of the new fence post holes did not reveal any significant deposits and no secure dating material, but the soils are likely to be post-medieval or modern in origin, probably related to landscaping associated with the garden of Priory House, probably in the later nineteenth century.

The single archaeological feature discovered immediately south of the east end of the Lady Chapel (in Hole 124) is poorly understood, as its full extent and character was not determined. The presence of a substantial void below the stone slab could suggest that it was the remains of a stone coffin or vault. Not enough of the stone slab was exposed to determine whether it was plain or was decorated or inscribed. The slab was found at a very shallow depth, much shallower than the stone-lined graves found by Wessex Archaeology to the west behind Priory House (Wessex Archaeology 2020). Stone-lined graves were found in 1939 to the south of the Lady Chapel (immediately north of the new fence line) at a depth of about 1.0 m below ground level, but this is likely to be the depth at which the burial was encountered rather than the top of the grave. Nevertheless, the discrepancy in depth between the earlier graves and the stone slab do not allow it to be readily interpreted as part of a grave and its precise interpretation remains in doubt.

4.2 Conclusions

The archaeological observations and recording during the new fencing works did not disturb any significant archaeological deposits, mainly nineteenth or twentieth century soils containing some rubble, probably from activity associated with the construction of the park and landscaping around Priory House. A stone slab found south of the Lady Chapel is of significance, but its interpretation is uncertain but may be related to a grave or vault.

5. References

- Bellamy, P. and Davey, J., 2011 *Christchurch Historic Urban Characterisation*. Dorset Historic Towns Project, Dorset County Council.
- ClfA, 2014 *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. December 2014. Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.
- Hase, P. H., 1988 'Mother Churches in Hampshire' in Blair, J. (ed.) *Minsters and parish churches: The local church in transformation 960 – 1200*. Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 17, 45-66.
- Haslam, J., 2009 'The Development of Late-Saxon Christchurch, Dorset, and the Burghal Hidage', *Medieval Archaeology* **53**, 95–117.
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- Penn, K. J., 1980 *Historic Towns in Dorset*, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph 1.
- Terrain Archaeology, 2022 *Priory Quarter, Christchurch, Dorset: Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Observations and Recording during New Fencing*. Terrain Archaeology Document No. 3545/0/1, April 2022.
- Wessex Archaeology, 2020 *Proposed Visitor Centre, Christchurch Prior, Christchurch, Dorset: Evaluation Report*. Wessex Archaeology Document Ref. 119070.2, March 2020.

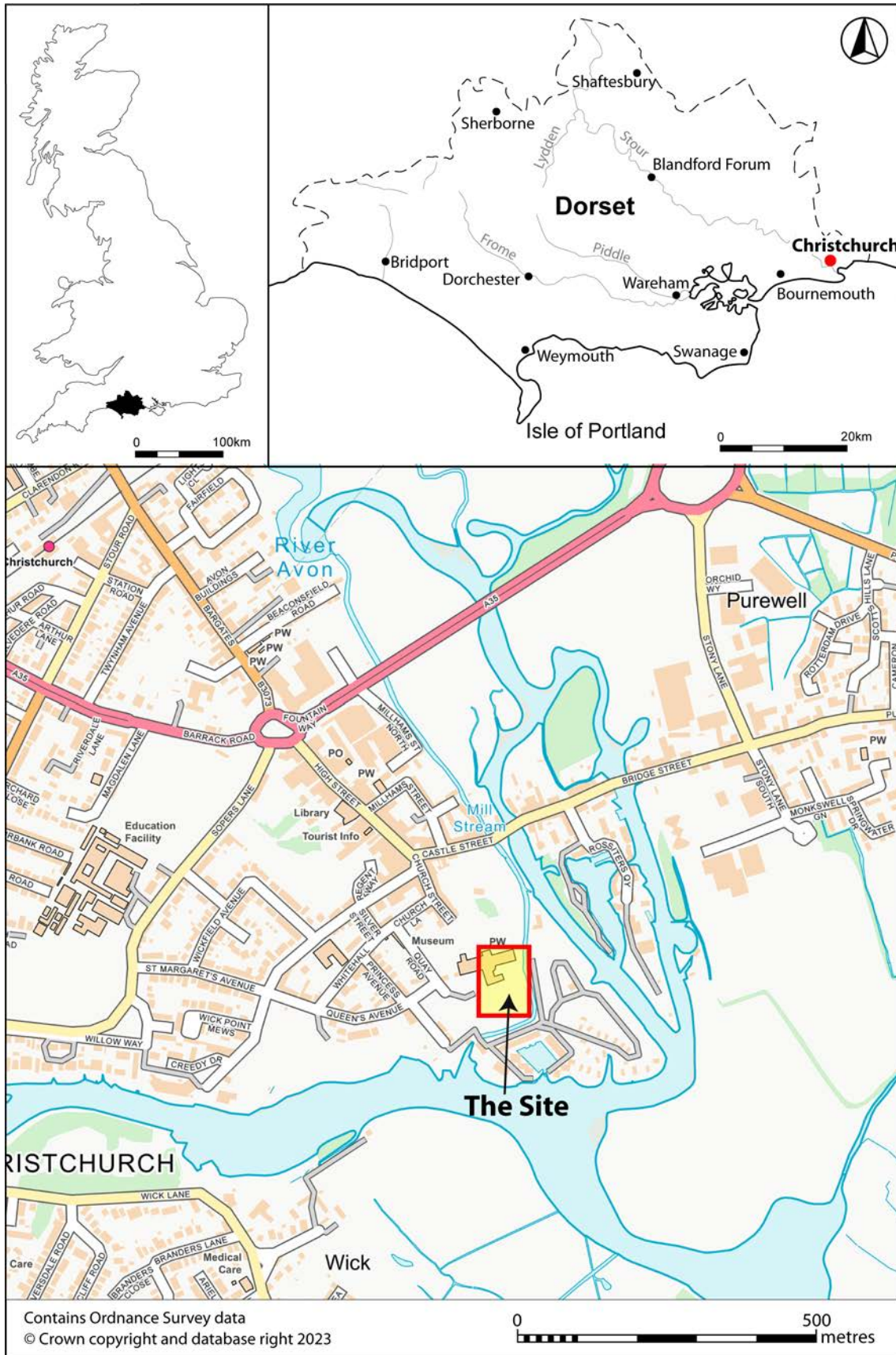


Figure 1: Site Location.

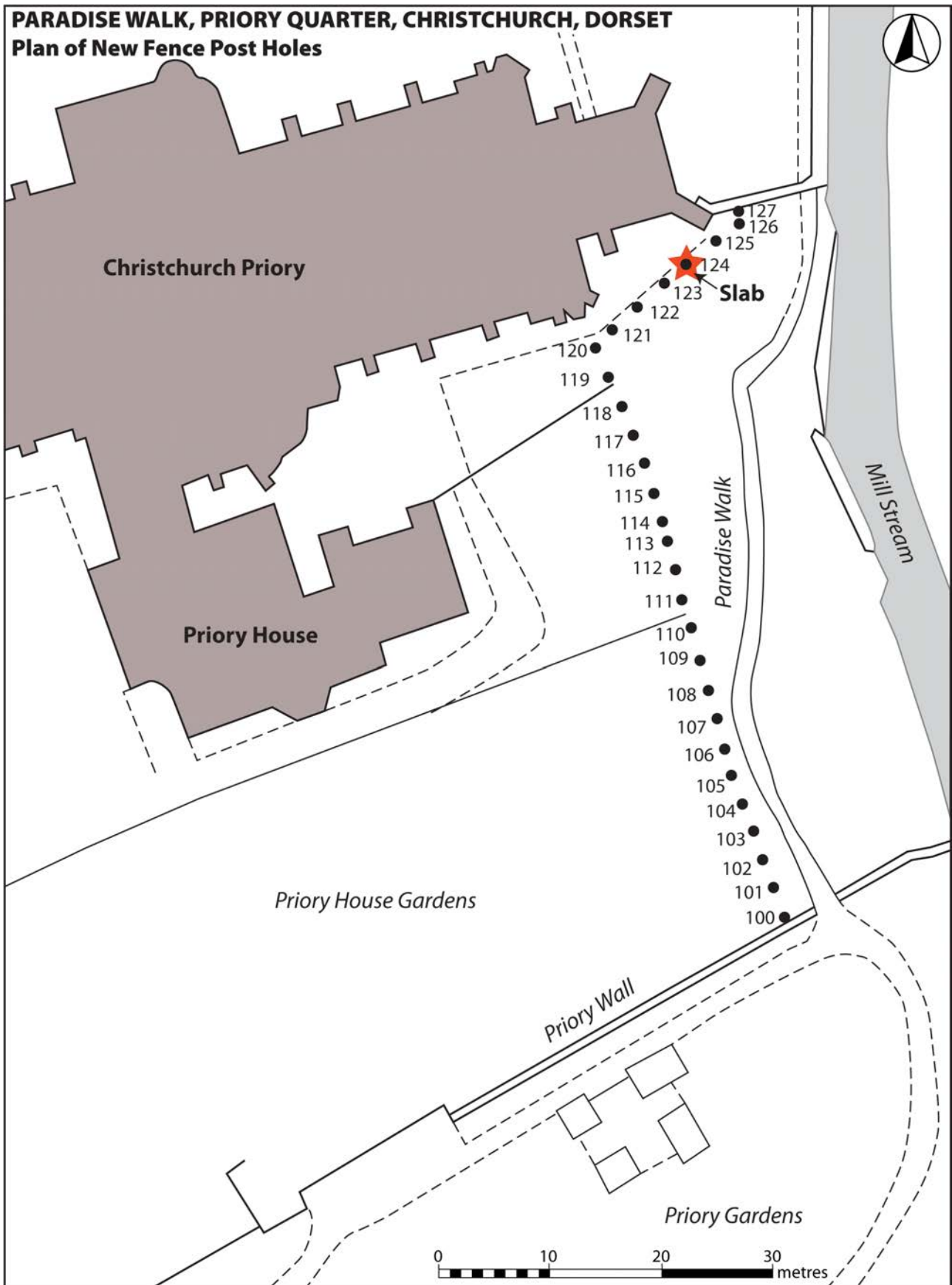


Figure 2: Plan of new fence postholes.



Plate 1: General view of new fence, looking north towards the Priory.



Plate 2: View of southern end of new fence along edge of Paradise Walk.



Plate 3: View of northern part of new fence along edge of Paradise Walk.



Plate 4: View of north end of new fence adjacent to the Priory, looking east.



Plate 5: Detail of Hole 107, showing stone rubble.



Plate 6: Detail of Hole 108, showing stone rubble.



Plate 7: Detail of Hole 115, showing sand and gravel from base of hole.



Plate 8: Detail of Hole 124, showing stone slab at base with hole pierced through it by fencing contractors.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Posthole	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
101	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
102	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
103	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
104	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
105	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
106	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam (not observed).	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel (not observed).	0.25 – 0.50m+
107	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant stone rubble 50–250mm across.	0.25 – 0.50m+
108	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant small stone 50–150mm across, clay tile and slate.	0.25 – 0.50m+
109	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with common small stone rubble 50–70mm across.	0.30 – 0.50m+
110	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant small stone 20–40mm across, common larger stone rubble 50–100mm across, and sparse flint gravel.	0.30 – 0.50m+
111	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel.	0.30 – 0.50m+
112	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots. Beside existing fence post.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel and many tree roots.	0.30 – 0.50m+
113	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots. Disturbed by existing concrete fence post.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel. Disturbed by existing concrete fence post.	0.30 – 0.50m+
114	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel.	0.30 – 0.60m
	Made Ground: Yellow-brown sand and gravel.	0.60 – 0.70m+
115	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant small chalk and stone fragments.	0.25 – 0.50m
	Made Ground: Yellow-brown sand and gravel.	0.50m+
116	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam with abundant roots.	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Mid greyish-brown sandy loam with abundant small chalk and stone fragments.	0.25 – 0.50m
117	Fence Post: Concrete.	0.00 – 0.50m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with abundant flint gravel.	0.50m+
118	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam, disturbed by concrete fence post.	0.00 – 0.25m
	Made Ground: Loose mid greyish-brown sandy loam with sparse to common small stone, including one dressed stone fragment.	0.25– 0.50m+
119	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam.	0.00 – 0.20m
	Made Ground: Mid/dark brown sandy loam with common flint gravel and sparse small chalk lumps.	0.20 – 0.50m+
120	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam.	0.00 – 0.20m
	Made Ground: Mid/dark brown sandy loam with common flint gravel and sparse small chalk lumps.	0.20 – 0.50m+
121	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam. Disturbed by old fence post.	0.00 – 0.20m
	Made Ground: Mid/dark brown sandy loam with common flint gravel and sparse small chalk lumps. Disturbed by old fence post.	0.20 – 0.50m+

Posthole	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
122	Disturbed: Post inserted into existing rotten fence post hole. Stratigraphy not visible.	0.00 – 0.50m
123	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam. Disturbed by old fence post.	0.00 – 0.20m
	Made Ground: Mid/dark brown sandy loam with common flint gravel and sparse small chalk lumps. Disturbed by old fence post.	0.20 – 0.50m+
124	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam.	0.00 – 0.30m
	Stone Slab: Smooth flat dressed limestone slab 25mm thick.	0.30 – 0.325m
	Void: Void beneath stone slab 1.6m deep.	0.325 – 1.925m
125	Topsoil: Dark brown sandy loam. Disturbed by old fence post.	0.00 – 0.20m
	Made Ground: Mid brown sandy loam with common flint gravel.	0.20 – 0.50m+
126	Disturbed: Post inserted into existing rotten fence post hole. Stratigraphy not visible.	0.00 – 0.50m
127	Disturbed: Post inserted into existing rotten fence post hole. Stratigraphy not visible.	0.00 – 0.50m