

Launceston Priory, Launceston, Cornwall

Clearance and archaeological recording in advance of consolidation



Historic Environment Projects



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The Project Manager was Nigel Thomas.

The views and recommendations expressed in this report are those of Historic Environment Projects and are presented in good faith on the basis of professional judgement and on information currently available.

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Cover illustration: Before and after – the priory ruins viewed from the spoil mound, facing south

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Abbreviations

CRO	Cornwall County Record Office
EH	English Heritage
HER	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Historic Environment Record
HE	Historic Environment, Cornwall Council
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRN	Primary Record Number in Cornwall HER
RIC	Royal Institution of Cornwall

1 Summary

Historic Environment, Cornwall Council were commissioned by Launceston Town Council to undertake clearance and archaeological recording work on the ruins of Launceston Priory. The work was carried out by HE and a team of mainly local volunteers during June 2008 and was successful in clearing the site of extensive vegetation, sorting loose architectural fragments and limited excavation carried out in order to reveal or better define walls hidden by turf and topsoil. Detailed analysis of stonework was undertaken by John Allan of Exeter Archaeology and the results used to update interpretation of the priory, its origins and development. This work suggests that the surviving remains constitute rebuilding of the Norman priory during the late 13th and early 14th centuries resulting in what was probably the grandest Decorated work in Cornwall. Artistic links can be found in Exeter Cathedral (the choir windows, high altar screen, and the earliest floor-tiles).

Following clearance, limited excavation and interpretative analysis the structural remains underwent a programme of consolidation works by Darrock and Brown, improving access and enhancing the site for wider public use.

2 Background

2.1 Project background

HE was commissioned by Launceston Town Council to undertake archaeological recording during the priory restoration project. The work was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund with match-funding from Launceston Town Council, North Cornwall District Council and SITA UK.

Parkes Lees Architects of Launceston were appointed to set the specifications, manage the tendering process and undertake the supervision of the professional building contractors. Darrock and Brown of Bodmin, a building company specialising in conservation projects, were appointed to carry out the building consolidation.

The priory is a Scheduled Monument, number 268.

2.2 Location and setting

Launceston Priory is situated in St Thomas' Parish, Newport, Launceston, Cornwall (at NGR SX 3280 8500, see Fig 1). To the north of the site beyond St Thomas' Church flows the River Kensey, whilst to the south and east the land rises sharply to be dominated by the Norman shell keep of Launceston Castle. The priory ruins themselves stand within a small sunken enclosure to the south-east of the churchyard bounded by stone walls on the north, south and west sides and by a modern concrete block wall on the east side. To the south of the site is the yard, buildings and line of the Launceston Steam Railway (originally part of the London and South Western Railway) and to the east lies the largely empty land once occupied by Launceston Gasworks (currently owned by Transco). In the north-eastern corner of the site is a large mound assumed to be a spoil heap resulting from the excavations of the priory carried out by OB Peter in the late 19th century. Prior to the consolidation works this was covered with mature scrub and trees, but these have now been cleared and the mound re-profiled to allow easier maintenance.

2.3 Geology and soils

Superficial geology comprises alluvial clays and silts above Crackington Formation basaltic tuff and basaltic lava (Sheet 337; British Geological Survey 1994). Local

soils become seasonally waterlogged as a result of the proximity of the River Kensey.

3 Historical background

3.1 The origins and demise of the priory

The priory was founded in 1126 by the Bishop of Exeter as a house of Augustinian canons, and by the time of its dissolution (1539) was the wealthiest religious house in Cornwall with a net income of £354 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 141). This superseded an earlier monastic institution at St Stephens to the north, and became one of the larger houses of the Augustinian order, but the consequences of the Black Death were such that by 1381 there were only 13 canons remaining. The priory was surrendered in 1539 with only 9 canons (*ibid*, 163). Following the dissolution the land occupied by the priory buildings was acquired by Garen Carew who used the buildings as stables, bakehouses and piggeries, but by the end of the 16th century the buildings were ruinous and subsequently levelled. It is likely that whilst standing the priory ruins were extensively robbed for their masonry, and there is much anecdotal evidence for the re-use of priory stone elsewhere in Launceston. Examples include the Norman doorway incorporated into the White Hart Hotel and the Norman font and tympanum at St Thomas' Church. Stones from the priory walls are said to have been used to build a wall around the gas-holder over the eastern end of the building and a section of window tracery perhaps having its origins at the priory can today be seen forming part of a bench outside a house close to Newport Bridge.

A fuller modern summary can be found in Orme 2010, 201-211.

3.2 Rediscovery of the priory

The site was rediscovered by Launceston solicitor and historian OB Peter during the construction of the London and South Western Railway to the south, and gasholders to the east of the priory site. In a series of excavations taking place between 1886 and 1892 Peter revealed walls, floors and moulded stones of a large structure stretching over 200 feet long east to west and including (in Peter's interpretation) Nave, Choir, Tower, Lady Chapel, Aisles, Cloisters, Cellarer's Buildings and other features (Fig 2). Enough of the priory was revealed to show that its plan was typical of other large monastic sites of the period, but the remains visible today represent only the small proportion of the priory that could be saved as a monument.

3.3 Preservation and neglect

The visible remains as left standing by Peter comprise the choir and choir aisles, altar, altar steps, and north tower (or side building with two storeys). Four tombs are also apparent, two of which are upstanding in the choir crossing. Photographs of the priory ruins from the beginning of the 20th century show walls still in reasonable condition and the site generally well-kept, but in the intervening years the site became rather overgrown and neglected and has suffered from casual vandalism. Recent vegetation clearance and a programme of weed-killing had left the site as it was prior to the summer of 2008; most of the walls deteriorating badly and some have suffered recent collapse. There were a large number of stone fragments, mostly moulded or otherwise dressed that have been grouped together in piles, the most notable of which was within the tower area.

It must be remembered that the extant walls of the priory represent only the above-ground component of the site, and that floors, burials or earlier wall lines remain buried and preserved both within and around the walls. Despite change

that has taken place since the construction of the railway it is likely that substantial below-ground remains of the priory complex survive beyond those that are visible today (discussed below). The origin of the large mound to the north of the priory ruins is uncertain, but it is assumed to be a spoil heap resulting from Peter's excavations. This spoil is likely to contain or cover finds or features of archaeological interest thought irrelevant or unnoticed by the Victorian archaeologists.

3.4 Recent years

Recently there has been renewed interest in the priory site. The owners of the scheduled monument, Launceston Town Council, entered discussions with English Heritage over the requirement for consolidation works at the priory, a process that led to the initiation of the 2001 survey (Fig 3). Members of the Launceston Priory Partnership, formed to seek a solution to the problem of the degradation of the monument and latterly Friends of Launceston Priory reached a general consensus in that neglect of the priory could not be allowed to continue. This encouraged the development of the current project and the successful application for funding.

4 Aims and objectives

The principal aim of the work was to ensure the long term survival of the priory remains as a monument for future generations to enjoy. The objective throughout has been to gain a better understanding of the priory and to ensure that a sensitive consolidation programme is carried out.

The work has been carried out over seven stages:

4.1.1 Stage 1: Advice

Initial liaison with architect, modifications to the specification, whereby HE provided guidance to the architect for Scheduled Monument Consent application. A Written Scheme of Investigation was prepared by HE at this stage (Thomas 2008).

4.1.2 Stage 2: Site preparation and recording

HE carried out works in advance of main consolidation stage. This was undertaken by one HE archaeologist assisted by local volunteers, including members of the Friends of Launceston Priory and members of the Cornwall Archaeological Society (Figs 4 and 5).

Clearance/excavation

The principal tasks were to:

- Sort loose dressed stones so that they could be repositioned to beside the south and west boundary walls.
- Clear wall tops of loose stone and vegetation.
- Carry out minor excavations to reveal bases of walls where necessary.
- Clear debris from the two exposed tombs.
- Strip the existing turf from the choir stalls in order to define the extent of these.
- Turf was stripped along the edges of the altar steps in order to define these and to assess their preservation. Turf was not removed from the altar steps themselves as medieval tiles survive *in situ* beneath the turf.

Recording

- John Allan (Exeter Archaeology) advised on the sorting and cataloguing of dressed masonry and carried out recording work to assist interpretation of the priory site.
- A selected number of dressed stones (mainly window tracery fragments) were catalogued by the volunteer team, on a pro-forma recording sheet. These are held in the site archive.

4.1.3 Stage 3: Consolidation works

The conservation building team from Darrock and Brown were supervised by Parkes Lees Architects under the terms of their specification (2008), with guidance as required from HE. This included advice given to the architect and Darrock and Brown on the re-incorporation of fallen stones into walls and the removal of stones where it was clear that they were not *in situ*.

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during small-scale excavations for a new path through the churchyard, the support base of the 'cresset stone', the foundations for a bench, the foundations of new gateposts and the foundations for an information display panel.

The building team undertook the re-pointing and repair of wall faces using a lime mortar the mix of which was agreed by Ann Preston-Jones (EH) and HE.

Wall-capping with turf was also carried out by Darrock and Brown using turf removed from the line of a new path through the churchyard. The capping works followed the specification drawn up by Parkes Lees Architects following a method supplied by Alan Cathersides, English Heritage's landscape architect in liaison with Ann Preston-Jones.

The building team removed unwanted modern debris from the site.

As part of the finished works the exposed tombs of Roger de Horton and Stephen Tredydan have been backfilled with gravel to c 50mm of the surrounding ground surface. Fragments of a stone grave cover found near the tomb of Roger de Horton were placed over the backfilled tomb.

4.1.4 Stage 4: Post-consolidation and presentation works

A press release was prepared on completion of the works. An open day was held by Launceston Town Council on February 2nd 2009 (Candlemas). The priory ruins were included as part of a guided walk for Cornwall Archaeological Society by local historian Arthur Wills.

4.1.5 Stage 5: Archive

The archaeological archive was prepared at HE offices and involved a small number of volunteers to assist with the cataloguing process and finds processing. Finds have been deposited at Lawrence House Museum, Launceston.

4.1.6 Stage 6: Archive report

The preparation of this document.

4.1.7 Stage 7: Publication

Wider publication of results was achieved by the creation of an interpretation panel, and the same information and graphics used for web-pages and an A4 foldout leaflet.

5 Recording Methods

All recording work was undertaken according to the Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording*. Staff followed the IfA *Code of Conduct* and *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Archaeology*. The Institute for Archaeologists is the professional body for archaeologists working in the UK.

5.1 Previous work – 2001 Survey

A full record of the surface of the site was undertaken by HE in 2001 (Gossip 2002), which included:

- A detailed and metrically accurate plan of the whole site created using a total station EDM (electronic distance measurer) with the survey data stored in AutoCAD (Fig 3).
- Elevations were drawn recording the rubble masonry in outline, any changes in structure and any architectural features/dressed masonry, including mouldings in elevation. The elevations were drawn in outline on the total station survey but details of key features within masonry required additional manual survey. Twenty three elevations were drawn, some walls surviving to over 1.0m in height. Others survived just above the ground, and some wall faces were obscured by collapsed or piled-up masonry.
- Black and white photographs of each elevation were taken with a camera mounted on a tripod at a fixed distance from the walls. This allowed photo-montages to be compiled of most elevations, but in places where the camera position was inhibited by obstruction or topography oblique photography had to be used. These montages could then be used to back up the drawn record and provided a means by which to illustrate the many fragments of *in situ* dressed masonry. More elaborate pieces (such as those having combinations of rebates with concave, convex or ovulo mouldings) also benefited from oblique close-up photography.
- General oblique black and white photography was used to document the profuse amount of detached masonry at the site. An attempt was made to identify pieces with particular structures and these fragments were subject to individual close-up photos.
- Loose pieces of dressed masonry lying on the wall tops confused interpretation of the site. An important part of the survey was the identification of these items where possible.
- A few pieces of detached dressed masonry possibly belonging to structures on the site were identified as it was realised that opportunities could exist for rebuilding them into walls during any future conservation work.

5.2 The 2008 recording

Recording carried out during the present project concentrated on details exposed during preparation for consolidation works and whilst consolidation works were ongoing.

5.2.1 Recording methodology - general

- Site drawings (plans, sections, locations of finds) were made on drafting film; plans have been linked to the existing site survey and Ordnance Survey Master Map.
- Plans and sections were made of any significant exposed features (eg tomb elevations).

- All areas have been recorded on a site location plan.
- No finds were recovered from stratified deposits. However unstratified finds found during the clearance of the site have been retained and marked with the area of the priory site in which they were found.
- All archaeological contexts are described to a standard format linked to a continuous numbering sequence.
- A selection of detached dressed stones (as advised by John Allan) were recorded using pro-forma recording sheets. Unfortunately this part of the project was not as extensive as originally planned due to time constraints.
- Registers of drawings, photographs, finds and contexts were maintained during the fieldwork.

5.2.2 Photographic record

A comprehensive photographic record of the site was undertaken in 2001 (see above note). New photography therefore concentrated on parts of the site revealing new information. Digital photography was used for publicity purposes.

6 Results

6.1 Summary

For the purpose of identifying the walls this report uses the same numbering system as that used in the 2001 survey report (Gossip 2002).

In addition to the general clearance work listed below in Section 6.2 selective small-scale excavation was undertaken in order to define walls that had become obscured by soil/turf or vegetation:

Wall 1

Removal of turf and loose earth around the base of the wall revealed dressed block foundations offset from the main elevation of the wall by 0.1m. A moulded chamfer stop was also revealed at the base of the moulded door jamb.

Removal of turf to the west of wall 1 in the corner of the site revealed a 0.4m wide 'L' shaped wall (aligned E-W and N-S, see Fig 6), partially visible during the survey work of 2001. These are possibly footings for cloister walls.

Wall 2/3

Removal of turf revealed a stub of wall (3) projecting southwards from wall 2 marking the north side of a doorway (the southern side comprising wall 1). Clearance of the west side and along the southern edge of wall 2 revealed chamfered plinth blocks (4) confirming that these were external elevations, probably opening onto the cloister yard.

Removal of turf at the western end of wall 2 showed that this wall continues below ground level at least as far as the western boundary wall.

Wall 5

Removal of soil on the north side of wall 5 revealed the continuation of the wall as far as its truncation by the modern concrete block wall (the eastern boundary of the site).

Tomb 6

Loose masonry and accumulated rubbish was removed from the tomb of Roger de Horton to a depth of 1.2m (Figs 7 and 8). The tomb sides were constructed of coursed volcanic tuff blocks with a base of flat slate slabs. A projecting course on the north side was pierced with notches, perhaps to support a grave cover or canopy. Two fragments of a large grave cover were found in the Presbytery and these have been placed over the backfilled tomb.

Walls 7 and 8

Turf removal revealed the bases of choir stalls running parallel with walls 2 and 14.

Presbytery steps 11

Removal of turf from above the altar steps revealed several surviving *in situ* blocks, cut with a rebate in order to fit ceramic tiles (Fig 9). Where these were missing slate blocks had been used to replace them.

High altar structure 12

Clearance of loose soil and masonry above and around this structure revealed numerous carved or dressed Beer stone fragments including pieces of shaft and relief sculpture. A large block of dressed Beer stone was also found. It is thought likely that the structure as it survives today is the rubble core of the high altar (Figs 10 and 11) which would have been faced with stone and supporting a carved stone reredos screen (see Allan below). A hitherto unknown shaft base was revealed adjacent to the structure on the northern side of wall 18 and may have supported part of this screen (Fig 12).

Shaft base 13

Clearance of vegetation revealed a large shaft base which had become obscured since 2001 (Fig 13). A trefoil shaft base was also uncovered on the north side of the wall to the west of tomb 16. The wall was found leaning severely on its northern side and had also been disturbed by roots of a sycamore tree.

Wall 14

Removal of turf along the southern side of the wall revealed slate rubble footings offset by 0.35m from the face of the wall (Fig 14) and choir stall foundations (8).

Wall 15

Clearance of a large quantity of loose fragmented masonry and clearance of turf at the base of the wall showed that the wall face had been robbed of stone on its eastern side. De-turfing also revealed sub-surface stonework indicating a possible continuation of the wall towards the north, possibly to meet wall 20 (Fig 15). Close inspection of the join shows that wall 15 abuts wall 14 and its masonry is not tied-in.

Tomb 16

Overhanging dense vegetation, loose masonry and accumulated rubbish was removed from the tomb of Stephen Tredydan (Fig 16) to a depth of 1m, at which point a layer of sand and clay was reached. This contained numerous fragmented human long bones which had been deposited there following a 'clean-up' operation in 1976 (Arthur Wills *pers comm*). This material was not excavated but a sondage was cut to establish the depth of the grave. A single large slate slab formed the base at a depth of 1.4m, viewed at the base of the sondage cut through the sandy backfill. The east, west and north elevations were slate rubble coursed whilst the south elevation comprised dressed volcanic tuff blocks.

Wall 17

Removal of loose masonry and soil enabled effective consolidation and turfing of the wall (Fig 17).

Steps 19

Soil and rubble was removed from the north side of steps 19 revealing *in situ* patches of wall plaster. This was quickly covered and the ground reinstated to prevent any further degradation.

Wall 21

Excavation at the base of the northern side of the wall revealed a chamfered plinth base 0.05 below ground extending around stairs 22 (Fig 18). Removal of a bank of soil at ground level at the eastern end revealed a well-preserved southern face with patches of plaster *in situ* – this has been covered to protect this plaster.

Along the southern side of the wall offset foundation stones (up to 0.35m from the wall face) were recorded below ground.

Steps 22

Clearance of loose masonry and soil enabled consolidation of the porch steps. Slabs forming the base step were raised to remove a large buddleia root and re-laid (Fig 19).

Wall 23

Clearance of loose stone and soil of the wall top revealed that stone facing had been robbed from the eastern elevation and the north side of wall 30. Clearance of turf and excavation of soil at the base of the eastern side of the wall uncovered large dressed stone blocks 0.35m below ground, suggesting foundations or the remains of a possible earlier phase wall (Fig 20).

Wall 24 – possible buttress

Loose soil and vegetation was cleared from the eastern side of the wall in order to clarify its return (Fig 21). Excavation revealed dressed blocks facing the eastern elevation and northern end of the wall below ground level, built upon a chamfered plinth base 0.35m below surface.

6.2 Inventory of work carried out

Wall/feature number	Description of work	Notes
1	Loose stone and earth removed. Base of wall excavated and defined.	Offset dressed block foundations revealed below north end of wall. Moulded stop at base of moulded jamb
2	Substantial loose stone removed from wall top and base of wall defined. Some loose stone and earth remaining on wall top to define shape of wall when turfed.	
3	Return of doorway de-turfed and redefined.	Agreed possible to build up with suitable material so the wall does not get 'lost' when returfed (APJ)
4	Chamfered plinth revealed at western end of wall 2, southern side	Suggests original exterior wall
5	Loose stone and earth removed. North face at eastern end cleared of loose soil and stone to show the extent of the wall	Truncated by modern block wall
6	Tomb of Prior Roger de Horton emptied of rubbish and rubble and recorded.	

Wall/feature number	Description of work	Notes
7	Choir stall base revealed by deturfing.	Very poor stonework
8	Choir stall base revealed by deturfing.	Very poor stonework
9	Tomb edge redefined/tidied.	Slate sides missing in places
10	Tomb edge redefined/tidied.	Slate sides missing in places
11	Altar steps revealed by selective deturfing.	Many stones of both lower and upper steps survive. Original in situ stones cut with rebate for tiled floor. Some original stones have been replaced with slate.
12	High altar foundations structure cleared of significant amounts of loose earth and stones and the two niches emptied.	Numerous carved or dressed 'Beer Stone' fragments recovered from the clearance of this structure. A hitherto unknown shaft base was revealed adjacent to the altar structure on the northern side of wall 18.
13	Loose stone and earth removed.	Large shaft base and wall revealed. Trefoil shaft base on north side of wall to west of tomb 16. The wall was found leaning severely on its northern side and had also been disturbed by a sycamore tree.
14	Wall top cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth.	Slate rubble footings revealed to south side (offset by 0.35m from the face of the wall). Collapsed moulded shaft section at western end to be re-erected.
15	Wall top cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth.	Inspection of the build shows wall 15 to abutt wall 14 and not tied-in. Wall face robbed of stone on its eastern side. Deturfing revealed a possible continuation of the wall towards the north, possibly to meet wall 20.
16	Tomb of Prior Stephen Tredydan emptied of rubbish and rubble and recorded.	Overall depth of the tomb was 1m below ground surface. The lowest 0.3m had been backfilled with redeposited natural clay (this occurred sometime after 1976). The base of the tomb comprised a single slab of slate.
17	Wall cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth.	A section of moulded shaft was replaced at the eastern end of the wall (adjacent to steps 19).
18	Earth and stone cleared from above wall.	Clearance revealed a section of wall with moulded trefoil shaft base at western end and smaller shaft base on southern side at 45 degrees to the wall.
19	Turf removed to reveal steps.	In situ plaster revealed on steps and turf reinstated for protection.
20	Wall cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth.	Wall in very poor condition. Mainly slate rubble build. Appears to extend west under earth bank.
21	Wall cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth. Earth/spoil removed at eastern end of wall on southern side.	Excavation at the base of the northern side of the wall revealed a chamfered plinth base extending around stair 22. Removal of soil at eastern end revealed a well-preserved southern face with patches of plaster <i>in situ</i> . Offset footings were recorded below ground along the southern side of the wall, offset by 0.35m.
22	Steps cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth.	Dead buddleia appeared to have destabilised base of steps.
23	Wall cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth and base of eastern side excavated.	Stone facing robbed from eastern elevation and north side of wall 30. Large dressed blocks 0.35m below ground suggest foundations or possible earlier phase wall.
24	'Buttress' cleared of vegetation, loose stone and earth on western, northern and part of eastern return.	Excavation revealed dressed block facing of eastern elevation and chamfered plinth base 0.35m below surface.

6.3 Watching brief results

6.3.1 Gate post

Part of the consolidation works included widening of the entrance gateway into the priory site. Below the existing southern granite post earlier wall footings were recorded comprising slate rubble bonded by lime mortar. The wall measured 0.5m wide on the southern side of the 1.2m wide opening. The trench depth was 0.45m.

6.3.2 Bench base

A trench was excavated to the north of wall 20 at the base of the earth bank, measuring 1.1m wide, 2.2m long and 0.3m deep. Overburden comprised topsoil and rubble 0.15m deep above loose crushed shillet in a pale yellowish brown matrix at least 0.15m thick.

6.3.3 'Cresset stone' base

A square trench was excavated below the bottom altar step in order to stabilise and secure the 'cresset stone' in an upright position. This measured 0.9m x 0.9m and was 0.2m deep.

Overburden comprised topsoil and rubble 0.15m deep above shillet and light greyish yellow silty clay. Foundation stones were exposed at the base of the step to a depth of 0.22m below ground.

6.3.4 Trench around east side of wall 22

A trench measuring 1m wide and 0.2m-0.3m deep was excavated around the base of this wall in order to expose the chamfered wall plinth identified during the previous minor excavation. All overburden comprised mixed topsoil and demolition rubble.

6.3.5 Partial removal of 'spoil heap' mound

Removal of the corner of the spoil mound closest to the entrance path and remodelling of the mound slope revealed a narrow wall just below turf level. This was aligned north-south projecting from the north-eastern corner of wall 23 and measured 0.5m wide and at least 1.5m long at which point it ran below the spoil mound. The wall comprised slate rubble blocks.

7 Notes towards an architectural history of Launceston Priory

John Allan

7.1 Introduction

In the summer of 2008 a programme of conservation and redisplay was carried at Launceston Priory, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and advised by English Heritage. The site had been excavated and published in the 1880s and 1890s by the architect and antiquary Otho Peter (Peter 1889; 1892; 1893a; 1893b; 1895; 1910). The displayed monument consists of the core of the priory he discovered: the choir and presbytery, with their flanking aisles and a room to the north. Although it seems to have been much visited in the early 20th century, the site suffered neglect in the recent past and had become badly overgrown.

The archaeological component of the project was undertaken by Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council, led by James Gossip. The writer was invited to provide advice about various aspects of the site: the likely date of the

exposed monument; the interpretation of the architectural fragments; the other finds, and a possible reconstruction of the priory which could be presented to the public. The present report represents the fruits of seven days' work contributing to a range of questions relating to the priory, but treating none of them exhaustively; it ought to form a step towards a more substantial project which would reconsider the archaeology of the monastery and place its architectural history in a wider setting.

7.2 The site plan

The plan of the priory, published by Peter in 1893 and subsequently reproduced on a number of occasions, is of great interest (Fig 22; Peter 1893a; 1893b; Wills 2001, 11); as Nicholas Orme has recently pointed out, it is much the fullest record of the layout of any of the Cornish monastic houses (Orme 2007, 42–3). Unfortunately the scale of the published drawing is so small that it shows little detail; if a larger original existed from which the published plan was copied, it has not been located. In an effort to examine its accuracy, the portion of the plan representing the exposed monument has been superimposed on the recent CAU survey of the area (Gossip 2002, fig. 2). Comparison shows that they are markedly at variance (Fig 23). There are also alarming discrepancies between the depiction of the east end of the church in the 1893 plan and Peter's carefully measured and annotated plan of this area, published four years earlier (Fig. 24; Peter 1889, between pp. 8 and 9). The most likely reason is that the 1889 plan is accurate but it was redrawn inaccurately at a small scale in 1893.

7.3 The eastern limb of the priory church

The Lady Chapel and flanking chapels

Peter's record of 1889 provides information not only about the ground plan of the Lady Chapel and its flanking chapels, but about floor surfaces, burials and internal fittings; his notes add further information about the demolished superstructure, including evidence for stone vaults in the flanking chapels (Peter 1889, 17–18).

The Lady Chapel consisted of four bays, the most westerly being flanked by chapels to the north and south, roughly square in plan, with three bays projecting eastward beyond them, the bay divisions being marked by wide, shallow buttresses. The foundations of the walls were unusually substantial (3 feet 6 inches [1.07m] wide). The explanation is likely to be that the site was formerly marshy; Peter records that the foundations extended to a depth of as much as 11 feet [3.35m] below the present ground level, and on the north side wooden piles were employed (Peter 1889, 17–18).

The presbytery, choir and adjacent aisles (Fig 25)

The portion of the church now exposed to view consists of the choir and presbytery, with aisles to the north and south and a porch or tower to the north of the north aisle; Fig 25 shows an interpretation of the plan of the monument, based on the survey of 2001. In the main vessel of the church the rhythm of the bays is indicated by the engaged triple shafts; their form is shown in Fig 26 (engaged shaft 2). They rise from the inner wall faces; three survive on the north side including the most easterly (exposed below modern debris in 2008), spaced at intervals of 3.95m (centre-to-centre), with only the base of the central one of the corresponding three on the south side. They define bays which, unusually in a large medieval church, are almost square.

Within the choir are narrow footings marking the fronts of the platforms for the canons' stalls, which backed onto the north and south walls of the choir. No floor surface was visible between them in 2008. To the east, the floor of the presbytery, formerly consisting of a rich pavement of inlaid tiles, rises in two steps. A sophisticated detail is the use of dressed blocks to form the risers;

behind a raised edging strip of stone, the upper surface of each block was recessed to accommodate floor-tiles bedded in a thin layer of mortar, flush with the raised edge of the step.

A substantial foundation of slate rubble projects from the centre of the east wall of the presbytery in the expected position of the high altar. Its front face consists of three short flat lengths of rough slate, the central one placed on the central axis of the presbytery, interrupted by trenches with ragged sides. These remains are intelligible as the rubble core of the high altar, formerly faced with blocks of dressed ashlar and covered by the slab of the altar stone. The trenches would presumably have accommodated dressed stone blocks, perhaps with projecting shafts framing the panels in front of the rubble core. In 2008 a loose flat block of dressed Beer stone c.150mm thick was noted, leaning on the north side of the foundation. Small parts of the face of a wall rising behind the altar are visible to each side; a large block with a horizontal upper face just above floor level on the southern side is probably the sill of a doorway.

The wall separating the south side of the choir from the south aisle and adjacent cloister differs from all the others, being clay-bonded, having a chamfered plinth on its outer side (which turns south, marking the north-east corner of the cloister) and being appreciably thicker than the other walls (1.46m at the foot of the plinth, 1.38m above; the others 1.03–1.05m). It does not align with the south wall of the presbytery and is so close to the front wall of the southern choir stall that it is unlikely that they stood together. All these points indicate that this wall is earlier than the others, as Gossip and Berry concluded (Gossip 2002).

The choir aisles

Oddly, the doorways on the north and south sides of the choir do not align, nor are they placed at the centre of the choir or aisle bays. They open into aisles whose bays do not correspond to those in the choir (reconstructed in Fig 25). At the west end of the north choir wall a further archway into the north aisle repeats this uncomfortable pattern. The base of its eastern respond was trimmed back in the later Middle Ages, perhaps to accommodate a chantry or screen within the arch. In the north aisle the shaft bases now stand well above ground level, showing that the 19th-century excavators dug through the medieval floor level. The lavish mouldings of the north doorway are shown in Fig 27.

The northern room

At the modern entrance to the site, on the north side of the church, part of a square room is displayed. The doorway between this room and the adjacent north aisle again shows a wilful disregard for conventional symmetry, aligning neither with the centre of the aisle bay nor with the doorway to its south (Fig 25). Examination of the relationship between this room, the north aisle and the stair turret at their junction revealed no visible breaks; they seem to have been built together.

It is reasonable to conclude that the massive fragment of vault lying within this room did indeed come from there; it consists of the springing for a plain ribbed vault with a portion of the vault web. This is an interesting constructional feature. In a conventional ribbed vault the ribs are formed of different stones from the webs, whereas they are normally cut from the same stones in fan vaults. The curvature of this, however, suggests a four-centred arch rather than the two-centred form used in fan-vaulting.

This room evidently had a plain vaulted ground floor and an upper room (indicated by the stair). The positioning of the doorway suggests that this was not a porch forming a major entry into the church. The masonry seems too insubstantial for a tower, and the absence of buttresses supports this conclusion.

It may have served as a secure first-floor room such as a treasury or archive room, perhaps over a vestry.

7.4 The architectural fragments

The architectural fragments from the priory form a large and highly informative collection, much of it in excellent condition. The stones remaining on the site amount to about 300–400 substantial pieces, including components of window tracery, mullions, jambs and hood mouldings; vaulting bases, shafts, ribs and bosses; doorway jambs and bases; arch mouldings; coping stones, and portions of internal fittings. Peter published sketches of only two of them, alongside three Romanesque fragments which do not survive in the collection today and elevations of three different base mouldings which he found *in situ* (Peter 1889, opp. p.17). Some preliminary comments were made about the collection in 2002 (Gossip 2002). It is surprising that such an important group of finds has not attracted more extensive interest.

Some of the most distinctive fragments can be recognised in photographs and postcards showing the priory remains (for example the two in Launceston Museum, c. 1900–30?; at that time they had been placed on the wall-tops). A few choice specimens were taken to the Lawrence House Museum, where they have been joined by various other architectural fragments found elsewhere in Launceston which have been thought to come from the priory. In fact many of these museum pieces are clearly of post-medieval date, and must have been introduced from elsewhere. In view of the uncertainties about their provenance, they have been excluded from the present study.

The precise provenance of the material now displayed at the site was not recorded by Peter, although he mentions that many carved stones were found on the site of the Lady Chapel and flanking chapels (Peter 1889, 16–17); these presumably form part of the collection which survives today. Although the most fragments must come from the church, the material may include pieces from other priory buildings.

In tackling this collection, the profiles of the moulded masonry surviving *in situ* in the monument were first drawn (Figs 26–27); corresponding pieces were identified among the loose fragments. The most significant of the other architectural fragments examined were as follows:

Vault ribs

Two different profiles of vault rib were noted, one simpler and probably earlier than the other (Fig 28, Ribs 1 and 2). All the examples of type 2 are ridge ribs, whose straight faces and key-shaped upper projection are readily distinguishable from curving tiercerons. One important fragment (Fig 28, lower) incorporates the profile of a rib of this type in an arch voussoir. This provides possible evidence for a transverse vault rib; the relationship could arise at its junction with the outer mouldings of the clerestorey windows. It may alternatively mark the junction of the ridge rib with the outer voussoirs of the east or west window, although a boss might be expected at that junction.

Window mullions and jambs

Numerous examples of common mullions are represented; their profile (with a central slot for window glass) is shown in Fig 29. At least two jambs from large windows have the precisely same profile at the centre and therefore come from windows of the same design (superimposed in Fig 29). In both of them the moulding corresponding to the common mullion is flanked on each side by an outer roll-and-fillet moulding. This can be interpreted as showing that the large window from which they come had both common mullions which survive and king mullions (which have the additional mouldings needed to frame pairs of lights or

groups of three lights); no examples of the latter type were identified. There must therefore have been at least four lights in these windows, grouped in two pairs.

Window tracery

The most exciting feature of the architectural fragments is the series of portions of tracery from complex windows in the Decorated style. These can only be interpreted accurately if detailed measured drawings of each piece are prepared – a task outside the scope of the present project. A single example of precise drawing leading to this kind of reconstruction is shown here: the junction of the heads of two cinquefoil lights, with a pair of upper foils which can each be restored as parts of trefoils (Fig 30). Various other components of window lights and circular motifs with internal foils are shown in Fig. 31. There is also a portion of a circle with what may be one side of an internal *mouchette* (curving dagger-shaped motif) which is clearly from a complex pattern; Richard Parker's provisional sketches of the restored design are shown in Fig 32, left side. Another fragment shows part of a wheel motif with two abutting internal foils, a possible restoration of which is also shown (Fig. 32, right side).

Fragments of canopies from the area of the high altar

In his account of his excavation of the presbytery, Peter recorded that 'numerous fragments of beautifully carved Bere [Beer] stone have been discovered around the site of the [high] altar (Peter 1893a). In the course of cleaning in 1976 a series of richly carved white limestone fragments was recovered by Mr Arthur Wills; these are certainly of Beer stone, confirming Peter's identification of the source. They are exquisitely carved. Portions of finials, shafts and foliage ornaments from miniature canopies are represented; the most telling piece is the terminal from a pendant of a small canopy with an internal ribbed vault and with lively foliage carving on the underside (Fig 33).

7.5 Floor-tiles

The substantial collection of floor-tiles encountered by Peter, specimens of which survive in the Lawrence House Museum and the British Museum (Eames 1980, I, nos 11,339–41), is probably the largest and perhaps the most interesting series of its type in Cornwall. Peter's paper on this subject focused on the tiles' designs (he recorded no fewer than 25 patterns) and arrangement (Peter 1895). Surprisingly, no subsequent work on them has been published. As a step towards that end, petrological study of selected tiles was carried out in the present project, demonstrating that the priory was decorated with elaborate pavements made in tileries operating at a wide range of different sources (Taylor, Appendix II below).

Series 1

One component in the assemblage is a series of heraldic tiles in fine red earthenware (Peter 1895, designs 2, 12–16, 17). These came principally or entirely from the chapel on the northern side of the Lady Chapel (Peter 1892). This group includes several design matches to tiles from the Exeter area (Allan and Keen 1984, series 1). Loose finds collected from the choir in 1976 included one new design: a depiction of Sagittarius (rather like a pantomime horse – Fig 34). The only known match to this design is a series of fragments from Polsloe Priory, Exeter (Allan and Keen 1984, 239, design 64). The Devon evidence dates this series to c. 1280–1340 (*ibid.*). It is probable that these tiles were brought to Launceston from the Exeter area; petrological study should be carried out to confirm or refute this.

Series 2

A second distinctive group is extraordinary (possibly unique) in a British context in being made of white earthenware, inlaid with red. Petrological study (Appendix 2 below) shows that Peter (1895, 307) was right in believing that these were probably of local origin; advances in geological mapping in the 1970s now allow the probable source of the clay employed in these tiles to be established with some precision (Taylor, Appendix 2 below). If, as is probable, these tiles were primary furnishings of the choir, they can be dated to c.1330–50.

Other series

Dr Taylor's examination of the petrology of the remaining tiles shows that at least two other series of tiles contained granite-derived inclusions. There is scope for work to see whether these match, for example, the finds from Tavistock Abbey or Plympton Priory (Devon).

7.6 Discussion

When the plans of the eastern limbs of some of the major monastic and collegiate churches of the Diocese of Exeter are compared, the ambitious scale of Launceston is apparent (Fig 35). The largest of the group, naturally, was Exeter Cathedral, built in the years around 1280, whose plan of a three-bay Lady Chapel, the western bay flanked by small rectangular chapels, was a popular one; it probably derived from Salisbury Cathedral. Glasney, Ottery and Crediton had scaled-down versions of this layout, but at Launceston a four-bay Lady Chapel was built, almost as long as the cathedral's. Comparison of the plans of Launceston and Glasney with Ottery and Crediton emphasises the grander scale of the two Cornish buildings. On the other hand, Ottery and probably Glasney had the deeply projecting buttresses needed to support a stone vault, whereas the shallow pilaster-like buttresses at Launceston, alongside Peter's record of roofing slates, suggest that, like Crediton, it simply had a timber roof. The closely set buttresses at Launceston would not have given scope for the wide traceried windows which were a progressive feature of Exeter, and were probably to be seen at Glasney. Thus, although the eastern limb of the priory was ambitious in scale, its design was probably not in the forefront of West Country fashion.

When attention turns to the main vessel of the church, a number of very unusual features become apparent. Major churches of the 13th and 14th centuries almost always had arcades supported on piers separating the main vessel of the church from the aisles. They marked the bay divisions; the rhythm of the bays of the choir and aisle therefore corresponded. At Launceston, however, continuous stone walls, punctuated at intervals by arches and doorways, separated the choir from the aisles. This arrangement is hard to match, and only two large churches with similar designs come to mind: Calke Abbey (Norfolk) and Rochester Cathedral (Kent). The use of continuous walls must have excluded much of the light in the aisles from the choir and presbytery. Moreover, the bay divisions in the aisles did not correspond with those in the central vessel of the church; therefore it would not have been easy to produce a coherent elevation in which the clerestorey windows were placed above those in the aisle.

Did the choir have a two-part elevation (ground-floor wall with clerestorey windows above) or one of three registers (with the addition of a triforium between the two)? The thinness of the walls (1.03–1.05m) excludes the possibility that the elevations could have incorporated a wall-passage; this argues against the presence of a triforium, whose structural purpose was to support the passage. A two-part elevation appears to be indicated. The plan of the choir includes no substantial buttresses of the sort which might be expected in a structure built on low-lying ground with a heavy stone vault. Considered with the

thin walls and the evidence for a ribbed vault, this suggests that the elevations were not particularly tall.

The impressive features of the choir and presbytery must have been their vaults and windows. Although the engaged shafts surviving in the walls seem rather small (Fig 26, shaft 2), the loose fragments show that there was a vault with an elaborately moulded ridge rib, and it probably had a cross-rib as well. In view of the diagonal setting of the base of the north-east corner shaft and the use of bundles of three mouldings in the attached shafts in the north and south walls, it appears that the vault incorporated diagonal ribs. Since no bosses or elements of the *tas-de-charge* appear to survive among the other fragments, insufficient evidence survives to allow a more detailed reconstruction of its form.

The fragments show clearly that the priory had the most inventive and complex Decorated windows in the diocese after those at Exeter Cathedral. Although no precise matches have been established, they display the same vocabulary as the cathedral's famous series, including elements of grouped trefoils; adjacent spherical triangles within circles; paired or grouped circles with multifoils within; ogee elements which may be mouchettes; etc. There are so many different patterns that it seems probable that, like Exeter Cathedral, the choir of Launceston was unusual in having different tracery in each bay. The designs appear to relate most closely to the later stages of the building programme at Exeter (c.1310–40). They show a number of features typical of the later stages of flamboyant Decorated style: for example, the heads of the principal lights were of cinquefoil rather than trefoil form, and the mullion profiles introduced hollow chamfers in place of the simple flat chamfers of the cathedral.

The fragments throw light on the most important of the internal furnishings of the church: the setting of the high altar. A novel feature of a group of major early 14th-century West Country churches was their development of a grand reredos providing an impressive setting for the high altar. The earliest of them was at Exeter (c.1313–26); it was followed by grand structures at Ottery (1330s) and Christchurch Priory, Dorset (1330s–40s). The presence of a substantial wall at Launceston, arising continuously from the rear of the altar, is therefore of great interest; it suggests that Launceston had such a feature; like the examples quoted, this too was of Beer stone. The superb quality of the fragments recovered by Arthur Wills suggests that the priory may well have installed something as elaborate as the Ottery or Christchurch screens.

In sum, the priory church reflected an interesting mix of influences from outside and within the diocese; a reconstruction of its appearance is shown in Fig 36. The design of the main elevations, with their complex doorway mouldings, shafts and vault ribs, is completely different from that of any other in the diocese; more work is needed to trace its affinities. On the other hand, the patterns of the priory's window tracery, the Series 1 tile pavement and the superb altar screen relate closely to Exeter Cathedral; in some regards these were in the forefront of early 14th-century work in England.

8 Conclusion

Although lengthy and taking many years to come to fruition the consolidation of Launceston Priory has been a successful project employing people from many different disciplines including archaeologists, historians, conservation experts, architects and local volunteers. The clearance and excavation work revealed hitherto hidden fragments of the priory and enabled a fresh interpretation of its origins and development, information that can be disseminated to a wide audience. The work by Darrock and Brown has been completed to a very high standard, thanks to both their skill and experience and close monitoring and

liaison from Parkes Lees Architects, Ann Preston-Jones (working on behalf of English Heritage) and HE.

With a rigorous site management regime in place it is expected that the priory ruins will be enjoyed by the people of Launceston and its visitors into the foreseeable future.

9 Project archive

The HE project number is **2008044**

The project's documentary, photographic and drawn archive is housed at the offices of the Historic Environment, Cornwall Council, Kennall Building, Old County Hall, Station Road, Truro, TR1 3AY. The contents of this archive are as listed below:

1. A project file containing site records and notes, project correspondence and administration, including stone recording sheets (File no. 2008044)
2. Field plans stored in an A2-size plastic envelope (GRE 675).
3. Electronic drawings stored in the directory R:\Historic Environment (CAD)\CAD Archive\Sites L\Launceston Priory consolidation 2008044
4. Black and White negatives archived under the number GBP 2076
5. Digital photographs stored in the directory R:\Historic Environment (Images)\SITES.I-L\Launceston priory consolidation works 2008044
6. This report held in digital form as: G:\Historic Environment (Documents)\HE Projects\Sites\Sites L\LAUNCESTON\Launceston Priory consolidation works 2008044
7. English Heritage/ADS OASIS online reference: cornwall2-97403

9.1 The finds

- 1 x box finds – unstratified artefacts retrieved during the project are stored at the Lawrence House Museum, Launceston. These comprise:
 - Fragments of floor tile x 6
 - Fragments of Bere stone (possibly rood screen) x 4

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11 Appendix I

The building stones of Launceston Priory

Roger T Taylor

11.1 Stone types

At the invitation of John Allan the writer examined the exposed walls of the priory, the large piles of architectural material accumulated at the site, fragments at Launceston Museum from Peter's excavation, and further pieces in the Arthur Wills collection. The following building stones are represented:

11.1.1 Slate

The standing walls of the priory are predominantly of local grey slate, which forms rectangular blocks of consistent thickness. The Geological Survey Sheet 337 (Tavistock) indicates that such slate underlies the site and the general area around Launceston.

11.1.2 Greenstones and Tuffs

In the south wall of the choir courses of rough ashlar blocks are interlayered with the slate. These are of soft cindery-textured greenish-grey and purple volcanic tuffs, containing some slate clasts.

Numerous window tracery and attached shaft bases on the priory site were examined. These are of gabbroic greenstone and greyish-green volcanic tuff. Some of the latter weathered to an iron-flecked buff colour. The tuff has some similarity to that used in St Thomas's church (see below).

The moulded blocks of the pillar base reassembled beside Thomas's church include a fine gabbroic greenstone showing traces of relict ophitic texture between feldspar and amphibole/pyroxene; the upper section is probably volcanic tuff. There is also a greenish agglomerate with purple clasts, similar to that used Thomas's church.

It has not proved possible to suggest a particular rock outcrop or quarry sources for these local stones but the general stone type could have been quarried within a few kilometres of the site. Greenstone basic rocks, some probably intrusive, are mapped in several elongated outcrops extending NE from Polyphant to the SE of Launceston. Similar rocks crop out on either side of the Tamar at Greystone Bridge (SX 736 980) about 4km south of Launceston. Here the river provides a possible transport route for stone.

11.1.3 Polyphant stone

Polyphant stone is a distinctive altered peridotite resembling serpentine. It is readily carved and was quarried just to the north of the village of Polyphant (SX 260 826).

A fragment of a crucifix preserved in Launceston Museum appears to be of Polyphant stone. Only two further small fragments were seen on the site.

11.1.4 Granite

A few worked fragments of a light-coloured medium-grained granite with small feldspar megacrysts are present on the site. They are likely to have been obtained from the Bodmin granite to the west.

11.1.5 Beer stone

Otho Peter had identified the limestone found around the high altar as Beer stone – a fine white Lower Chalk freestone quarried near Beer in south-east Devon. A

series of fragments of this stone was examined; they included sculpted heads excavated by Peter, now in Launceston Museum; the very delicately worked shafts and canopy fragments in the Arthur Wills collection, and a single large fragment about 0.25m thick, still lying against the eastern side of the high altar. All are indeed Beer stone.

11.1.6 Mortar sand

The sand used for construction and rendering is fairly coarse, alluvial sand consisting mainly of reddish and grey rounded slate fragments with some quartz. It was probably sourced locally from the River Kensey or the Tamar.

11.2 Other related remains

11.2.1 Thomas's Church

Large ashlar blocks up to 1.34 x 0.35m on the south side of the church are of a light greyish-green agglomeratic tuff with purple angular lava fragments in a light greyish-green matrix. There is also much use of a finer-grained greyish-green tuffaceous rock, similar to that used in the arch of the Norman doorway at the White Hart Hotel (see below). Tabular local grey slate is used in the walls of the chancel. Grey granite is also used occasionally. The large size of some of the ashlar used in the church, with some individual tuff blocks probably weighing in excess of 0.25 tonne, suggests relatively short transport distances.

11.2.2 Norman doorway reset at the White Hart Hotel, Launceston

The building from which this fine Romanesque doorway was taken is not firmly known; it may have come from the priory, from Launceston Castle, or from a local parish church. The shafts forming its sides are of very dark volcanic agglomerate containing a scatter of clasts of purple lava. The arch is formed of greyish-green tuffaceous sediment with brown iron stained flecks, possibly pyrite. The colour contrast suggests that the shafts and arch come from different quarry sources within a volcanic succession.

Volcanic rocks including ashes and agglomerates are widespread. The nearest source of such rocks to the Priory is the belt 3–4 km long, extending from Launceston westwards, with more extensive NW trending outcrops extending from Trebulet through Lewannick to St Clether.

12 Appendix II

Petrological examination of floor-tiles from Launceston Priory

Roger T. Taylor

12.1 Series 1

No examples were examined.

12.2 Series 2

12.2.1 Sample 1: Tile examined March 2002 (ex L Keen)

Hard-fired inlaid floor-tile with a white-firing clay body. Temper forms 10–15% of the body.

Quartz: colourless transparent to translucent, angular to sub-angular grains with abraded angles, 0.1–1.1mm.

Hornfels: micaceous slaty, grey and weathered, light pinkish to reddish-brown, generally tabular sub-rounded fragments, 2.5mm, rarely 7mm.

Feldspar: white, angular to sub-angular grains, some showing cleavage surfaces, 0.3–0.8mm.

Tourmaline: black fragments probably of tourmalinised slate and black vitreous angular fragments of schorl, 0.1–0.3mm.

Mica: rare cleavage flakes of biotite, 0.05–1mm.

Clay matrix: white-firing clay with white quartz up to 0.1mm and some finely divided white mica.

12.2.2 Sample 2: floor-tile at Launceston Museum

Inlaid corner fragment of Peter design 19, right (diagonal cross with dots and edge lines: Peter 1895, 311), 25mm thick, with bevelled edges; small deep scoops at corners and centre. The clay body has fired pale cream; the inlaid pattern is in white slip. Temper forms c. 20% of the fabric.

Quartz: transparent to translucent colourless, angular to sub-angular grains, 0.1–1.5mm, rarely 2.5mm.

Rock fragments: slate, weathered brownish-red, sometimes buff to grey, oblate rounded fragments, 0.3–2.5mm. Siltstone/fine-grained sandstone, reddened rounded oblate fragments, 0.8–5.5mm.

Feldspar: white sub-angular grains, some showing cleavage, 0.4–1mm, rarely 1.5mm.

Tourmaline: rare black vitreous angular grains, 0.2mm.

Mica: biotite, sparse brown cleavage flakes, sometimes reddened, 0.1–0.6mm.

Matrix: creamy-white clay body with some fine-grained quartz and sparse finely divided muscovite.

Large inclusion: a sub-angular fragment, 41mm across, apparently a piece of previously fired clay, slightly greyer in colour. The mineral content is generally finer than that of the enclosing tile but has similar constituents including quartz, feldspar, muscovite and tourmaline with sparse biotite and grey slate/siltstone fragments. Muscovite is more abundant.

Comment

These two samples were chosen from many tiles of the same type; their clay and temper are so similar to one another that it may be presumed that they come from the same kiln source. Their unusual cream- to white-firing fabric clearly shows that they have a different clay source from the samples of the other series. Such pale-firing clays are characteristic of the Tertiary ball clay deposits of Devon, and are extremely rare in Cornwall. One small deposit of such Tertiary clay and sand is, however, exposed in the River Ottery, a tributary of the Tamar, where it flows through Werrington Park, about 1.6 km north of the Priory [SX 337 866–340 867] and in a stream about one km to the south [SX 344 860–349 386]. This deposit was described for the first time as recently as 1982 (Freshney *et al.* 1982), but was evidently known previously: in 1928 it was worked in a small pit, producing bricks for local use [at SX 344 862]. As these clays are naturally exposed in stream banks to the east of Dutson, they are likely to have been known long before that. When test-fired, a mixed sample of these clays had a white to slightly off-white colour; they are almost certainly the source of the medieval floor-tiles of Series 2.

The most likely source of the tempering sand for these tiles is the River Lyd. The rarity of mica is unusual. Only the headwaters of the Lyd drain from the Dartmoor

granite; this would account for the relatively low proportion of granite-derived minerals in the sand compared with sedimentary-derived fragments. Other immediately local rivers do not drain from the granite.

12.3 The granite-derived fabrics

12.3.1 Sample 3: floor-tile fragment

Hard-fired, pale pink oxidised to light grey reduced, 17mm thick. Inlaid white slip (*fleur de lis* fragment?) on upper face, with iron-speckled brownish-green lead glaze over body, blotchy dark yellow over slip. Underside incorporating lump of slip clay(?), and with colourless glaze. Temper forms c. 20% of the fabric.

Quartz: transparent to translucent colourless to white, angular to sub-angular, very rarely well-rounded, 0.1–2mm, rare white vein quartz up to 3mm and one tabular fragment, 11mm.

Rock fragments: sandstone, light grey fine-grained quartzose, sub-angular to sub-rounded fragments, 1–4mm; siltstone, medium-grey finely micaceous sub-angular to rounded oblate, 1–2mm.

Fused fragments: dark grey to black vitreous, angular to well-rounded oblate fragments some with a finely vesicular, apparently partly fused, interior. Some appear as black spherical glassy bubbles, 0.2–3.5mm.

Feldspar: white to translucent, angular to sub-rounded grains, 0.1–1mm.

Mica: rare altered reddened cleavage flakes up to 2mm.

Slip: contains very fine-grained colourless angular quartz up to 0.05mm.

Comment

An unusual temper with a granite and country rock-derived stream sand component, together with vesicular partially fused fragments. Their source is uncertain, but as the tile matrix shows no evidence of particularly high-temperature firing, it seems likely that they are kiln cinder debris.

Sample 4: Launceston Museum 1534-1984

Floor-tile. Moderately hard-fired, pink oxidised fabric, with bevelled edge, the upper surface with parallel diagonal bands of inlaid white slip. The lead glaze smudged, greenish-yellow over the slip, mid-brown over the body, with some iron bleeding. Lower surface split off. Temper forms 5–10% of the fabric.

Quartz: transparent to translucent colourless angular to sub-angular grains, 0.1–2.1mm.

Feldspar: a scatter of white angular to sub-rounded grains, 0.2–1.8mm.

Rock: a scatter of red and grey sub-rounded oblate slate/mudstone fragments, 0.5–2.0mm.

Tourmaline: sparse black angular grains, 0.1–0.5mm.

Mica: rare cleavage flakes of muscovite and biotite, up to 0.6mm.

Comment: A sparse temper with granite-derived inclusions intermixed with slates/mudstones.

12.3.2 Sample 5: floor-tile at Launceston Museum

Corner fragment of a floor-tile, oxidised outer surface, medium-grey reduced core, the upper surface split off, the bevelled edges with smudges of white slip and glaze spots; the underside has been laid on a bed of sand. Temper forms 30–40% of the fabric.

Quartz: abundant angular to sub-angular and rarely sub-rounded grains, 0.1–1.8mm.

Feldspar: white, soft altered and hard translucent cleaved grains, 0.1–1.2mm.

Mica – Biotite, cleavage flakes 0.8–1mm, rarely 1.6mm.

Muscovite, cleavage flakes 0.2–0.4mm.

Tourmaline: sparse black sub-angular grains, 0.1–0.2mm.

Composite grains: quartz/biotite, quartz/feldspar grains, 0.8–1.2mm.

Rock fragments: slate, rare reddish brown and grey sub-angular to rounded fragments, 0.8–2.1mm.

Comment: A tile with a granite-derived sand temper generally similar to the ridge tile no. 6 below.

12.3.3 Sample 6

Ridge tile with moulded crest. Oxidised surfaces with medium grey reduced core. Temper c. 30% in the fabric, with sanded surfaces.

Quartz: translucent to transparent, colourless angular to sub-angular and sometimes sub-rounded grains, 0.1–1mm.

Feldspar: soft white altered sub-angular grains; translucent to white less altered grains, some showing reflective cleavage surfaces, 0.1–1.2mm.

Mica – Biotite, a scatter of dark brown cleavage flakes, 0.1–0.8mm.

Muscovite, Fine cleavage flakes in the matrix mainly less than 0.05 mm.

Tourmaline: black angular grains, 0.2 mm.

Rock fragments: rare reddish-brown, tabular and rounded, micaceous slate fragments 0.8 and 2.5mm.

Comment: A granite-derived temper, sourced from stream sand outside the granite contact zone. The relatively well-sorted nature of the sand suggests some form of preparation such as sieving.

12.4 General comment on the granite-derived fabrics

The floor- and ridge-tile fragments examined show wide variations in temper and firing, although they share the common element of tempering sand composed of a mixture of inclusions derived in varying proportions from the Dartmoor granite and the local country rocks. This could indicate different manufacturing sites or different production batches. The predominantly granite sands could have been dug from the beds of the Rivers Tavy or Walkham, which have extensive headwaters on the Dartmoor granite sand; collection at different times could account for the varying proportions of granitic and country rock elements. If these rivers are the sources of the tempering sand, the estuarine sediments of the Lower Tavy and Tamar could have been the sources of clay.

13 Appendix III: Management plan

Nigel Thomas

13.1 Introduction

In the summer of 2008 the walls of Launceston Priory were professionally consolidated to ensure the long term preservation of the monument for local people and visitors to enjoy. The site enjoys protection as a Scheduled Monument and a strategy is essential to guide future management works. This document sets out brief management proposals for both routine maintenance (which does not need Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage) and for more complex or invasive repair works which will require consent.

13.2 Location

Launceston Priory is situated to the south of St Thomas' Church, on land alongside the southern bank of the River Kensey. The site is centred at NGR SX 3280 8500 and incorporates all the excavated area of the priory, as shown in Fig 1.

13.3 History

13.3.1 The origins and demise of the Priory

The priory was founded in 1126 by the Bishop of Exeter as a house of Augustinian canons, and by the time of its dissolution (1539) was the wealthiest religious house in Cornwall with a net income of £354. This superseded an earlier monastic institution at St Stephens to the north, and became one of the larger houses of the Augustinian order, but the consequences of the Black Death were such that by 1381 there were only 13 canons remaining. The priory was surrendered in 1539 with only 9 canons. Following the dissolution the land occupied by the priory buildings was acquired by Garen Carew who used the buildings as stables, bakehouses and piggeries, but by the end of the 16th century the buildings were ruinous and subsequently levelled. It is likely that whilst standing the priory ruins were extensively robbed for their masonry, and there is much anecdotal evidence for the re-use of priory stone elsewhere in Launceston. Examples include the Norman doorway incorporated into the White Hart Hotel and the Norman font and tympanum at St Thomas' church. Stones from the priory walls are said to have been used to build a wall around the gas-holder over the eastern end of the building and a section of window tracery perhaps having its origins at the priory can today be seen forming part of a bench outside a house close to Newport Bridge.

13.3.2 Rediscovery of the Priory

The site was rediscovered by Launceston solicitor and historian OB Peter during the construction of the London and South Western Railway to the south, and gasholders to the east of the priory site. In a series of excavations taking place between 1886 and 1892 Peter revealed walls, floors and moulded stones of a large structure stretching over 200 feet long east to west and including (in Peter's interpretation) Nave, Choir, Tower, Lady Chapel, Aisles, Cloisters, Cellarer's Buildings and other features. Enough of the priory was revealed to show that its plan was typical of other large monastic sites of the period, but the remains visible today represent only the small portion of the priory that could be saved as a monument.

13.4 Statement of significance

Although only a small portion of the original priory remains visible, it is important in demonstrating the layout and architecture of the main religious establishment of medieval Cornwall. Its present condition reflects well the changing attitudes to religion which occurred at the Reformation and its re-discovery in the late 19th century demonstrates the impact of industrial development at the time. The surviving fabric is important for showing the design of the church and the many fragments of stonework on the site have high potential for interpreting the architectural detail. Small-scale excavation undertaken as part of this consolidation project has established the below-ground archaeological potential of the site. Alongside the better preserved castle, it is of great significance to the history of Launceston.

The priory site is considered to be of national importance, and this is reflected in its designation as a Scheduled Monument.

Scheduled Monuments have Statutory Protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. These are sites that have been identified by English Heritage, the Government's archaeological advisory body, and included in the statutory lists maintained by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. A schedule has been kept since 1882 of monuments whose preservation is given priority over other land uses. The current legislation supports a formal system of Scheduled Monument Consent for any work to a designated monument.

13.5 Status

In addition to being a Scheduled Monument (SM Number 268), Launceston Priory lies within a Conservation Area and is within the curtilage of a Grade II* Listed church. The Scheduled Monument designation takes precedence.

13.5.1 The implications of Scheduled Monument status

Scheduled Monument status means that there are restrictions on the types of work which may be undertaken on the sites without consent. Work such as grass cutting and scrub clearance, which does not involve ground disturbance, can be undertaken without consent and regimes for such ongoing maintenance are detailed in this document. Other works which do involve disturbance, such as the consolidation of walling, etc, will need consent from English Heritage and are not included within this plan.

13.5.2 Changes to Heritage Legislation

New heritage protection measures are currently being considered by English Heritage as part of the Heritage Protection Review (HPR). Introduction of a new Heritage Protection Bill was due in the autumn of 2008, but has been delayed by Parliament. Some proposals from HPR which do not require primary legislation will nonetheless be introduced. Although proposed measures from the HPR will result in many changes to nomenclature, procedures and policies, Launceston Priory ruins will remain protected. Any concerns or questions in relation to these changes should be addressed to the English Heritage Historic Environment Field Advisor or to the Inspector of Ancient Monuments at English Heritage's regional office (contact details at the end).

13.6 Purpose of plan

This management plan sets out a series of management actions for the site that are appropriate and can be carried out by Launceston Town Council (LTC)'s staff and/or designated contractors.

13.7 Principles of repair

The primary purpose of repair is to restrain the process of decay without damaging the character of the historic asset, altering the features which define their historic and architectural importance, or unnecessarily disturb or destroy their historic fabric.

Intervention through repair must be kept to the minimum required to conserve the asset, with the aim of achieving a sufficiently sound structure to ensure their long-term survival and to meet the requirements of its use.

13.8 Objectives of the plan

The primary objectives of the plan are to achieve a long-term and beneficial management regime for this important archaeological site, sustaining and where possible enhancing its historic character.

LTC will, in collaboration with statutory bodies:

- Protect, maintain and conserve the standing remains and buried archaeology at Launceston priory.
- Ensure that the remains are presented professionally to the general public who visit it.
- Improve knowledge and understanding of the site and encourage an increased appreciation of it as a historic monument in relation to the wider archaeological heritage of Launceston and Cornwall.
- Endeavour to maximise the benefits to local people and visitors of the site as an important community asset, for quiet enjoyment and recreation, but also as a resource for lifelong learning.

The above objectives will be achieved by good regular maintenance and monitoring, as itemised in the next section.

13.9 Suggested management measures

13.9.1 Daily

Litter removal

The site will be opened and closed on a daily basis and should be regularly monitored for litter, which should be removed when necessary.

13.9.2 Monthly

Grass cutting

LTC will aim to cut the grass between the preserved walls and on the turf wall cappings monthly between April and September. The ground (but not the wall cappings) may need cutting more frequently in the summer and less frequently (on an *ad hoc* basis) during the winter months.

Interpretation board

An interpretation board erected within the site will be regularly monitored for vandalism and erosion around it.

Wall capping maintenance

The turf cappings on the preserved priory walls may need watering in times of prolonged drought.

The turf cappings are unsuitable for cutting with a mower and will need to be cut by strimmer or hand cut.

13.9.3 Every six months

Removal of intrusive vegetation from stonework

Vegetation growing into the upstanding fabric has the potential to do damage to the structures. Such vegetation will be carefully controlled through cutting, where this is felt appropriate, in order to protect the fabric.

Note:

- The vegetation must be cut, not be pulled out, as this could damage the archaeological remains.
- Plants that should be controlled include woody species with invasive root systems such as bramble, ivy, valerian, saplings.
- Small herbaceous plants with non-invasive root systems such as Wall Pennywort, Herb Robert and small ferns should be left.
- Spraying with herbicide is not recommended as this could damage the wall capping or the non-damaging plants.

Clearance of weeds from gravelled areas

Small gravelled areas such as the infilled tombs and pathways will need regular weed control. Spraying with an appropriate herbicide will be needed from time to time, probably initially at 6 monthly intervals but this can be reviewed as required. Care should be taken to ensure that the spray does not blow onto adjacent grassy areas.

Cutting of vegetation on banks

Low vegetation growing on perimeter banks and surroundings to the preserved walls will need regular strimming/cutting back but this is likely to be needed less frequently than grass cutting of the main areas.

Carved stonework around perimeter of site

Any weeds growing on these will need to be controlled by occasional spraying (taking care not to allow spray to drift onto wall plants).

Perimeter shrubs and climbers

Friends to LP to carry out regular weeding until shrubs and climbers are well established.

13.9.4 Yearly

Regular inspections of fabric

In order to protect the remains of Launceston Priory, a regime of regular inspections will be carried out by LTC and/or designated people. At least two members of the LTC will carry out inspections and record any areas of damage or concern on a standard form and site plan which is attached as an Appendix. These forms and plans will be kept in a binder for future reference. In particular, the current and cumulative impact of visitors to the site and occurrences such as vandalism will be carefully monitored.

13.9.5 Every 5 years

SMC applications and repairs to preserved walls

Any damage requiring repair will be reported to the English Heritage Historic Environment Field Advisor (HEFA) and Scheduled Monument Consent for repairs will be sought where necessary. The repair works will then be carried out by the LTC or approved contractors, guided by the advice of the HEFA.

Review and update management plan

Review of management requirements and frequency of tasks to ensure the site is well presented but with efficient use of resources.

13.10 Recording form for maintenance actions

Monitoring sheet for Launceston Priory

Date:

LTC members and/or designated people:

Condition report (eg. damage to wall, erosion, intrusive vegetation, litter, vandalism) Annotate attached plan where necessary.

Walls of ruins

Tombs

Altar

Loose carved stones

Boundaries

Trellis and creepers

Gate to site

Paths

Interpretation board

Erosion

Vandalism

Litter

Intrusive vegetation

Any other?

Actions taken:

Issues reported to LTC:

Issues reported to English Heritage Historic Environment Field Advisor:

Contact details:

English Heritage Historic Environment Field Advisor

Ann Preston-Jones

c/o Historic Environment, Cornwall Council

Kennall Building

Old County Hall

Truro

TR1 3AY

Tel 01872 323691, or 01872 271382

ann.preston-jones@english-heritage.org.uk

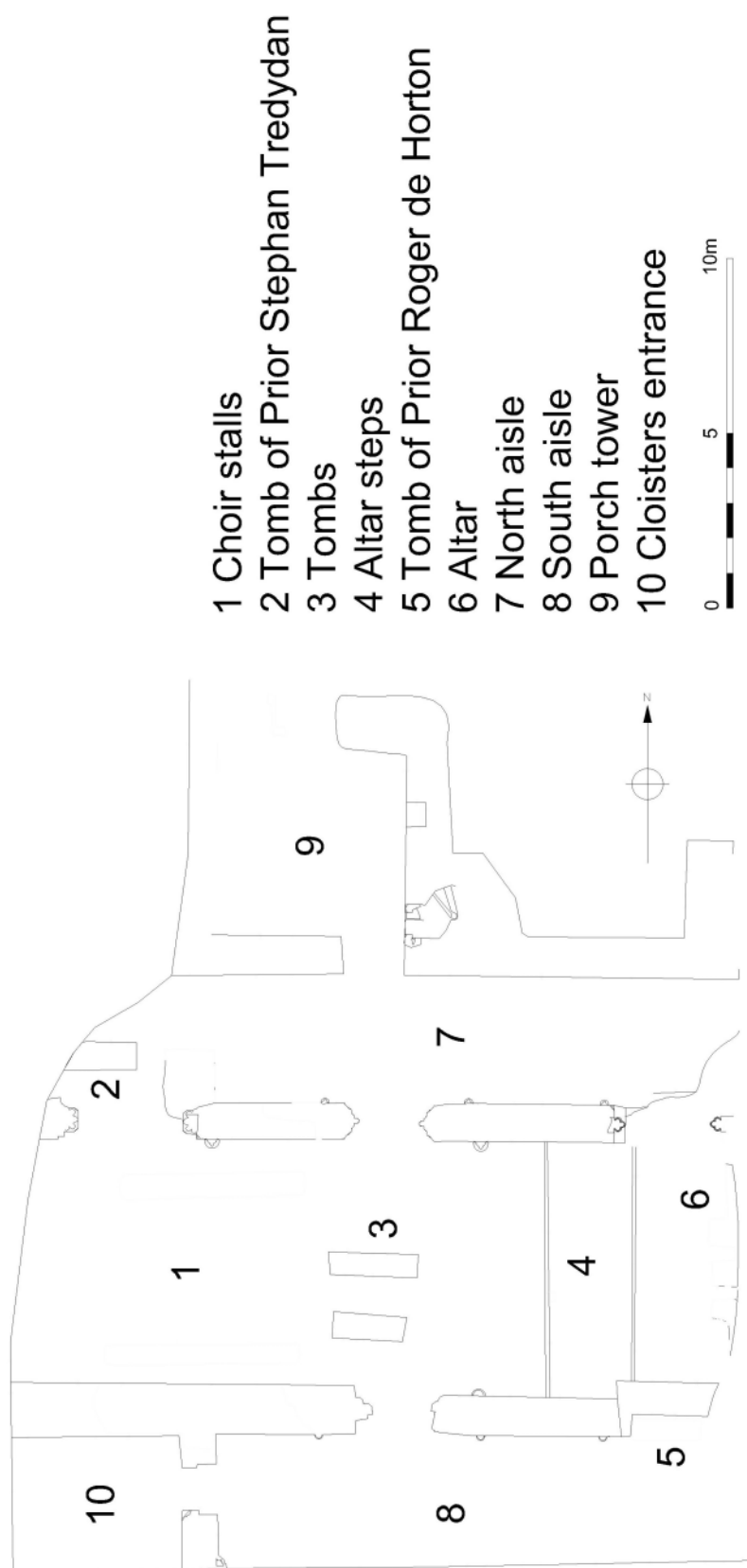
English Heritage Inspector of Ancient Monuments

29 Queen Square

Bristol

BS1 3ND

Tel 0117 975 3000



Launceston Priory Monitoring Sheet: Condition report plan

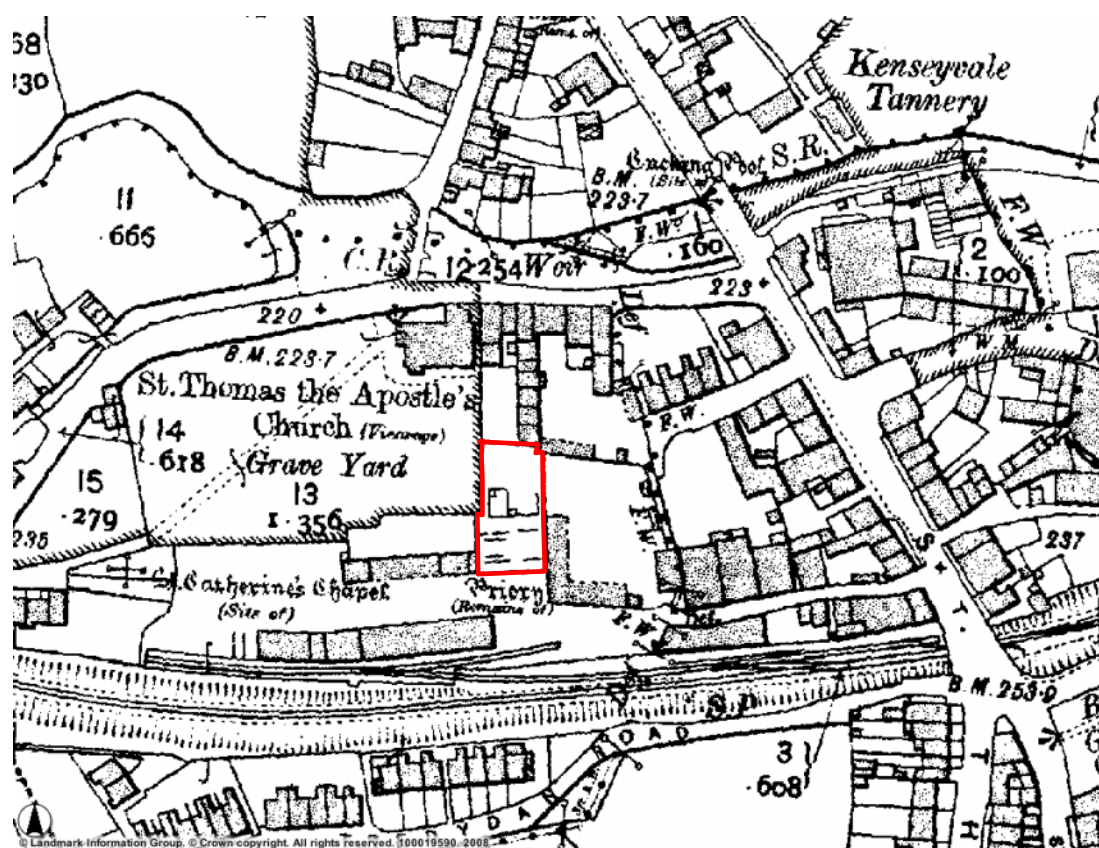


Fig 1: The Launceston Priory site, as shown on the Ordnance Survey 25 Inch Map (Second Edition, c1907) and highlighted in red.

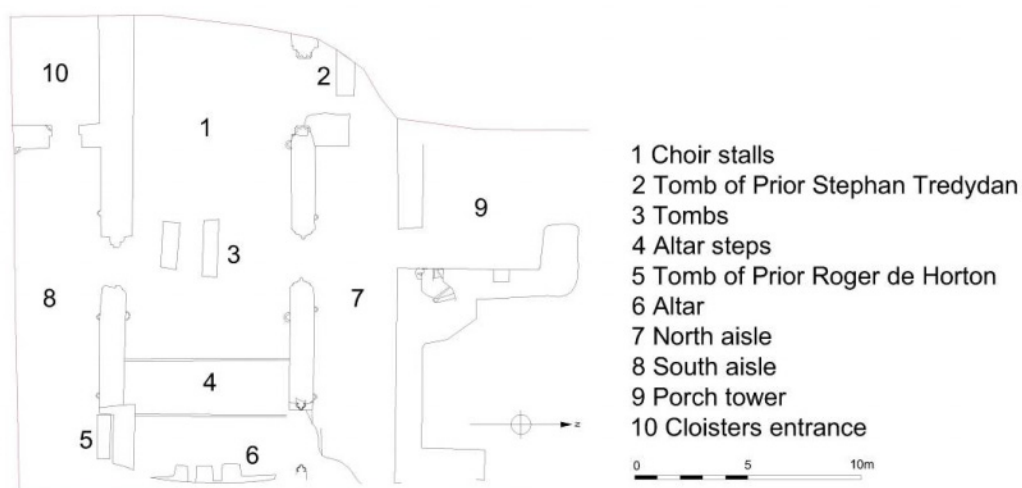


Fig 2: plan of the standing remains of Launceston Priory, as excavated by Peter

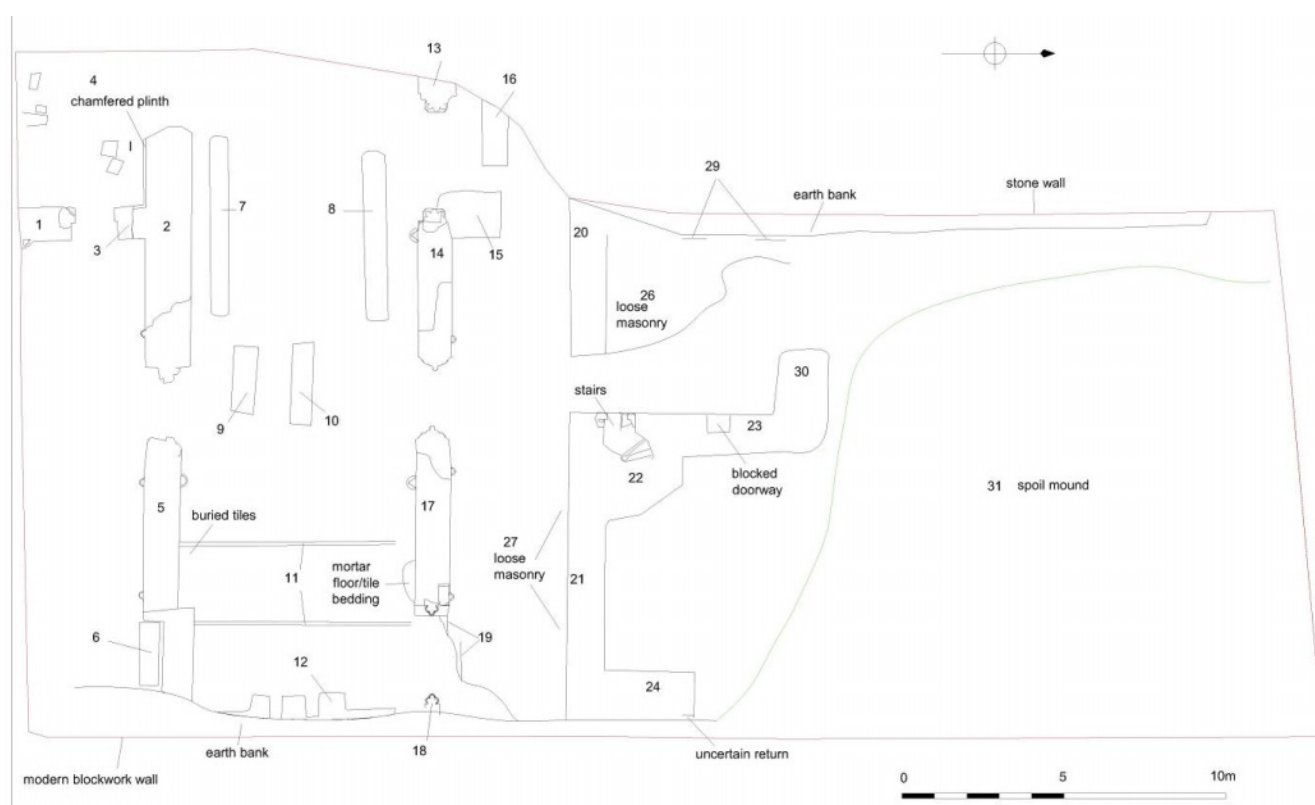


Fig 3: 2003 survey of Launceston Priory by HES. Numbers are those used in this text.



Fig 4: Clearance work underway, June 2008



Fig 5: Clearance work underway, June 2008

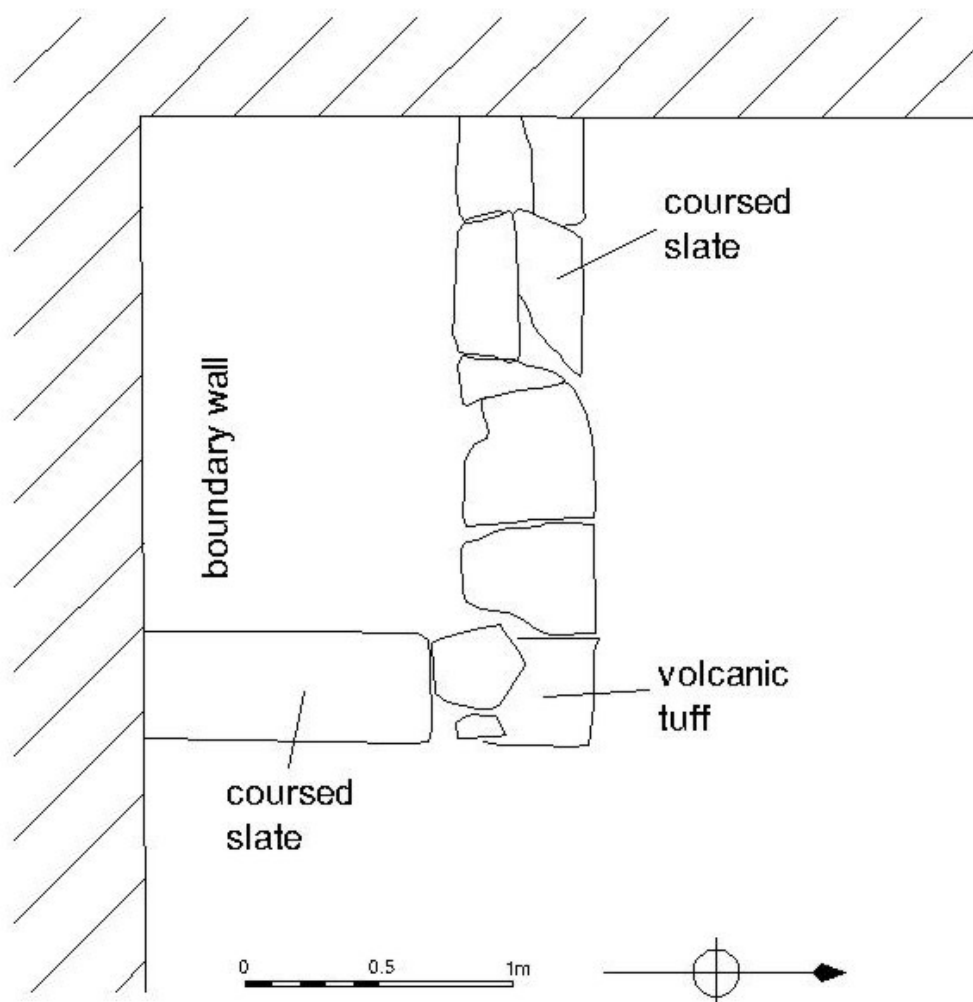


Fig 6: Cloister foundations revealed in the south-west corner of the priory site



Fig 7: Tomb of Roger de Horton excavated to its base

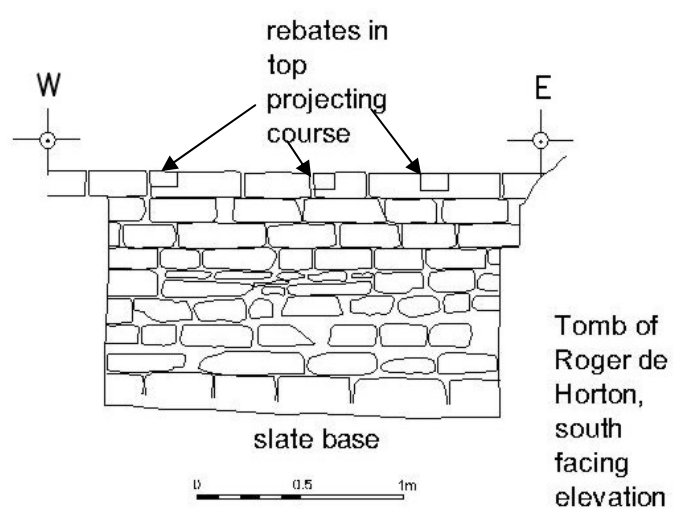
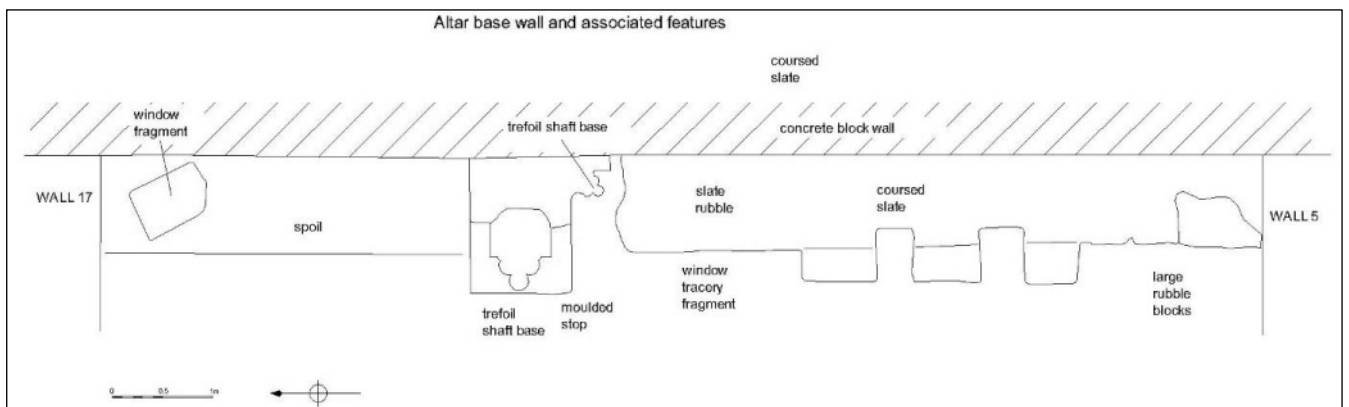


Fig 8: Tomb of Roger de Horton, south facing elevation



Fig 9: Presbytery steps (11) showing the rebated riser blocks to accommodate tiles



Figs 10 and 11: the foundations of the high altar (12) being cleared of rubble



Fig 12 Shaft base 18 to the north of the high altar



Fig 13: Shaft base 13 cleared of loose masonry and vegetation



Fig 14 North wall of choir (14) with offset foundations and foundations of choir stalls (8) revealed



Fig 15: Wall 15 with robbed west face revealed and possible continuation to the north



Fig 16: Before and After – Tomb of Stephen Tredydan (16)



Fig 17: Before and after: Wall 17, north wall of presbytery



Fig 18: Wall 22 exterior wall of porch stairwell, chamfered plinth revealed by clearance



Fig 19: Before and After – Wall 21 (north wall of north aisle) and porch steps 23



Fig 20: Wall 23 (east side of porch) showing robbed wall face and offset foundations



Fig 21: Wall 24, edges of buttress revealed by clearance

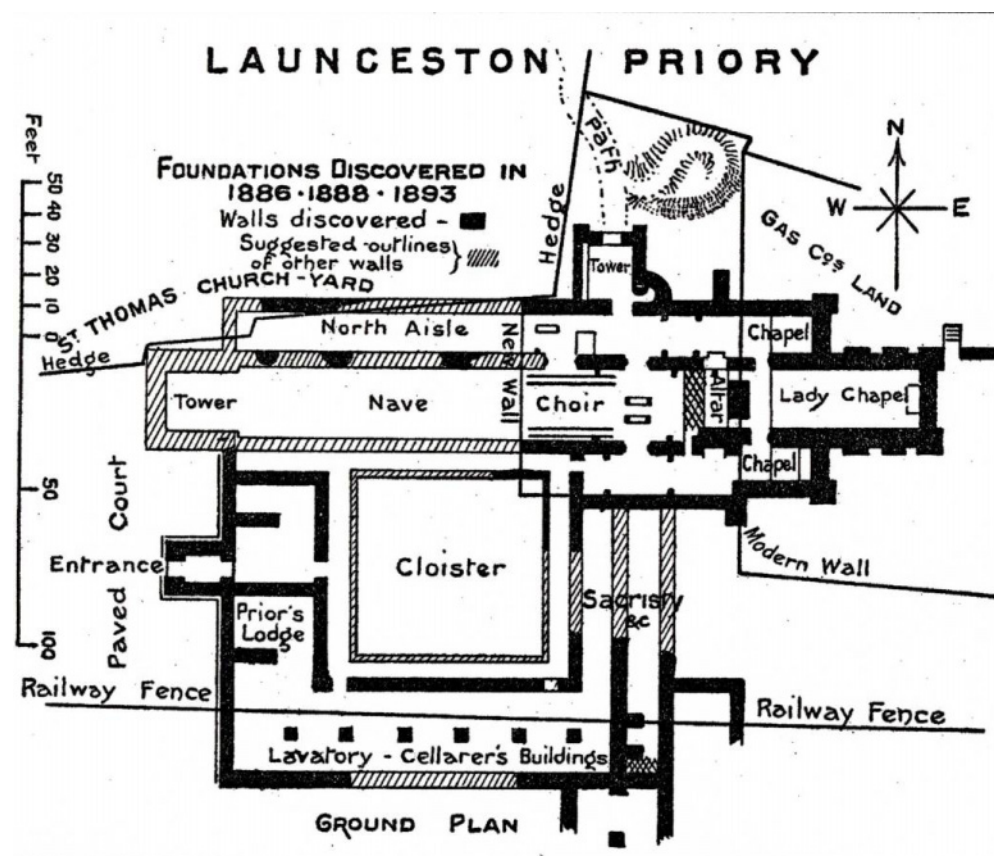


Fig 22: Launceston Priory: Peter's overall site plan of 1893 (Peter 1893b)

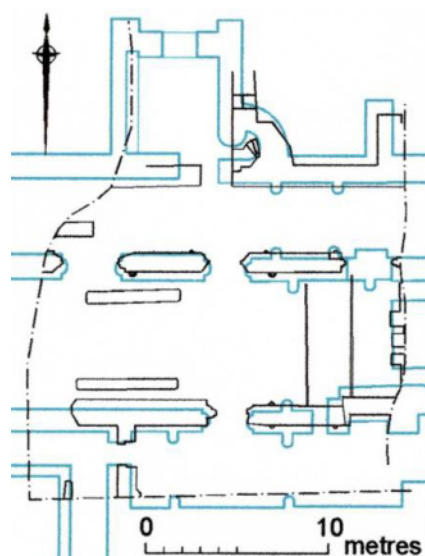


Fig 23: Launceston Priory: best fit of the HES plan of the monument, 2003 (black) with Peter's (blue) 1893 record of the same area

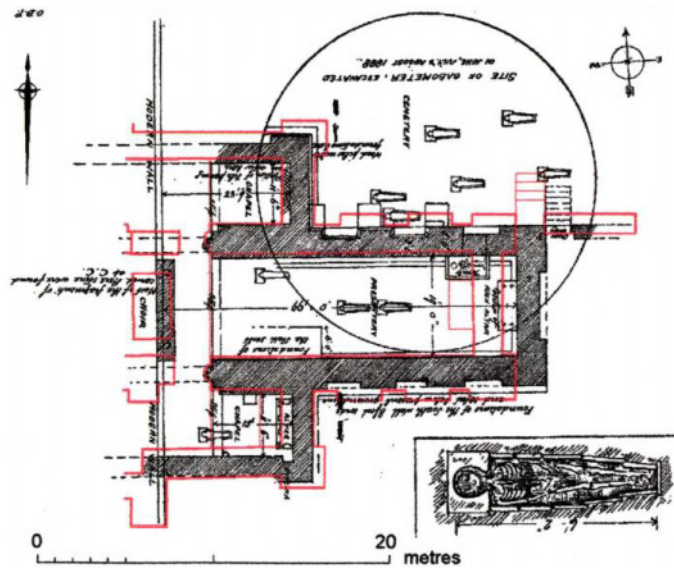


Fig 24: Launceston Priory: Peter's plan of the east end 1893 (red) superimposed on his more detailed record published in 1889

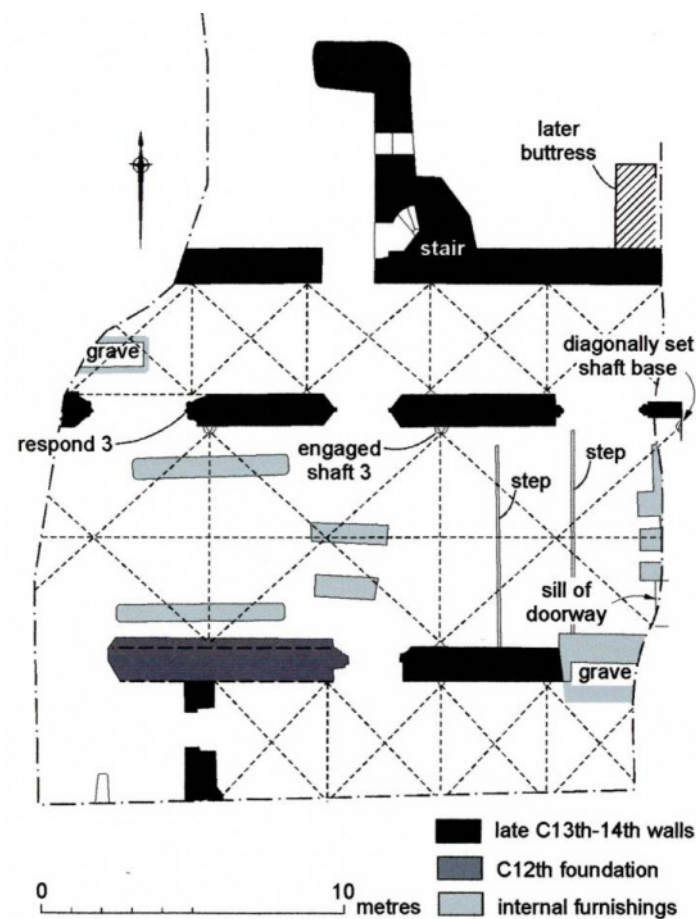
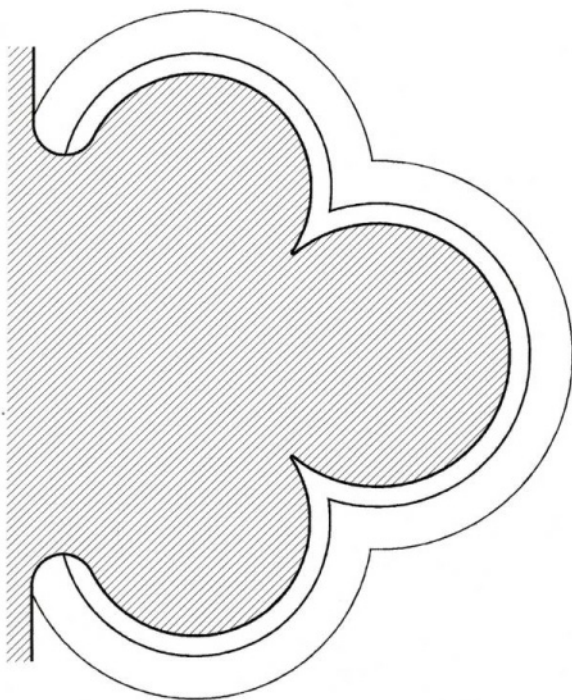
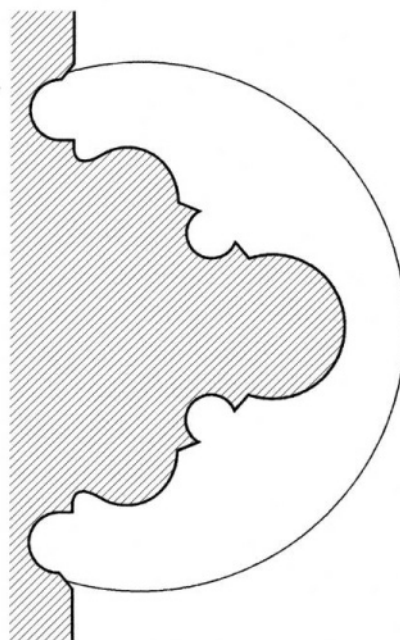


Fig 25: Launceston Priory: plan of the standing monument (HES 2003 with additions by JA 2008), with reconstructed vault plan

Engaged Shaft 1



Engaged Shaft 2



Respond 3

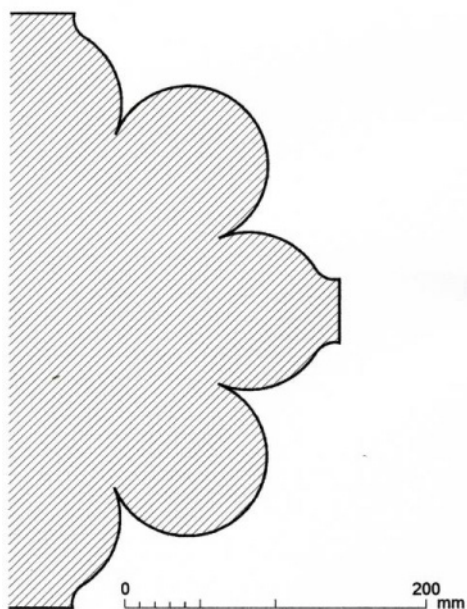


Fig 26: Launceston Priory: profiles of engaged shafts and respond; view of shaft 1 rebuilt beside St Thomas' church.

North Doorway, east side

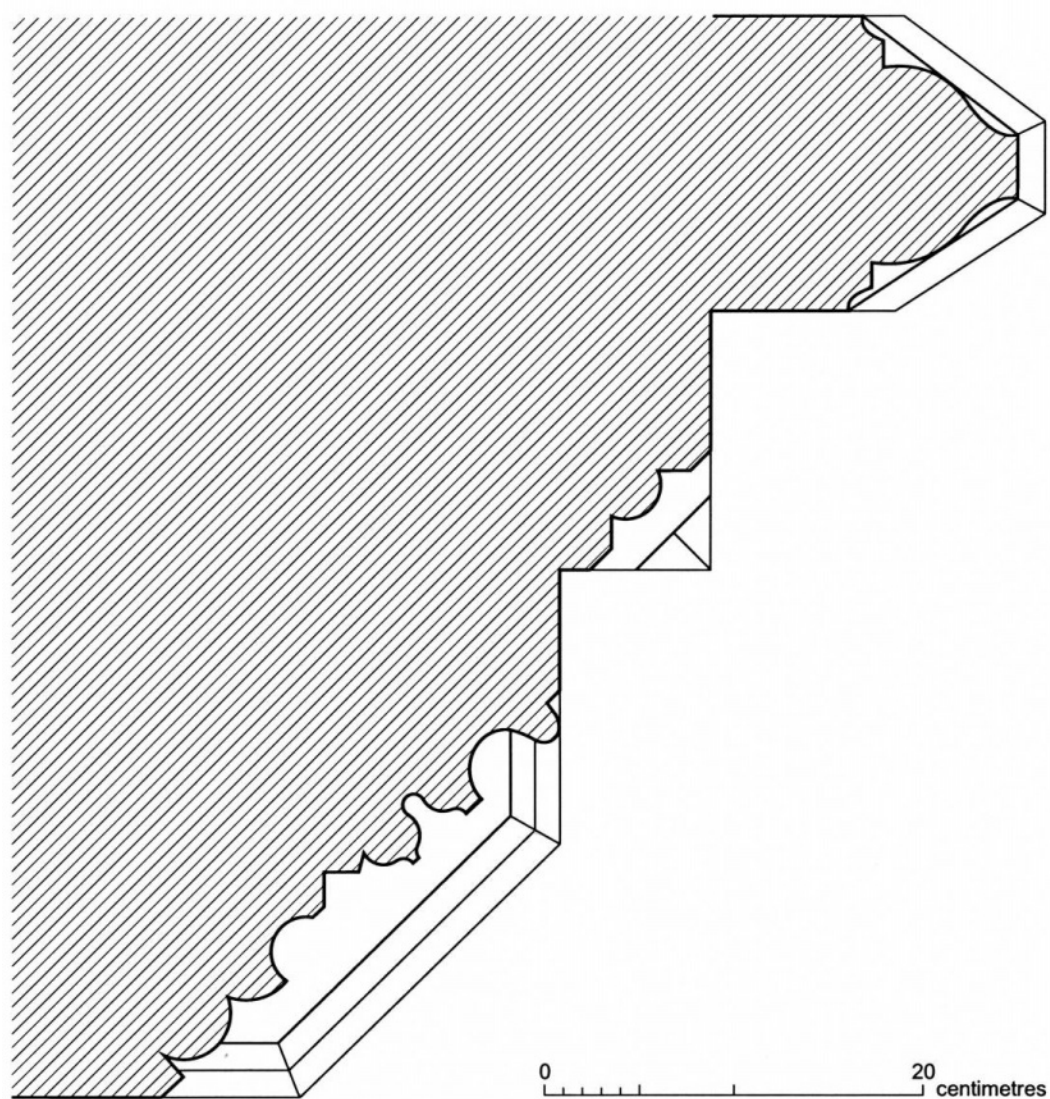
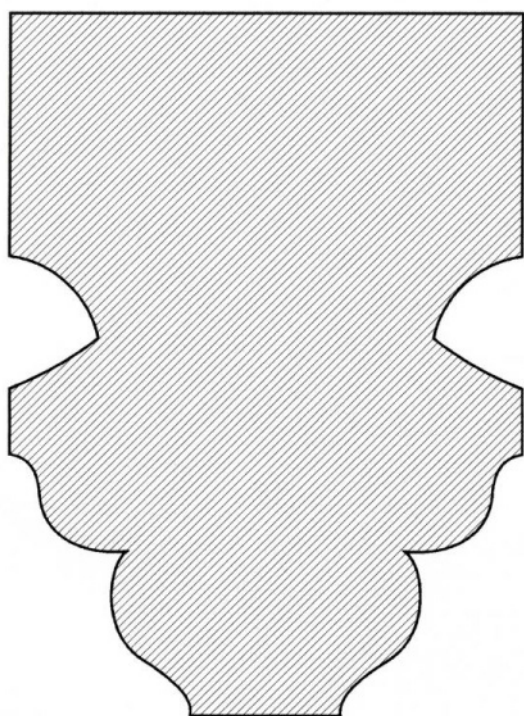


Fig 27 Launceston Priory: mouldings of the north doorway of the choir

Rib 1



Rib 2

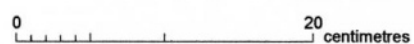
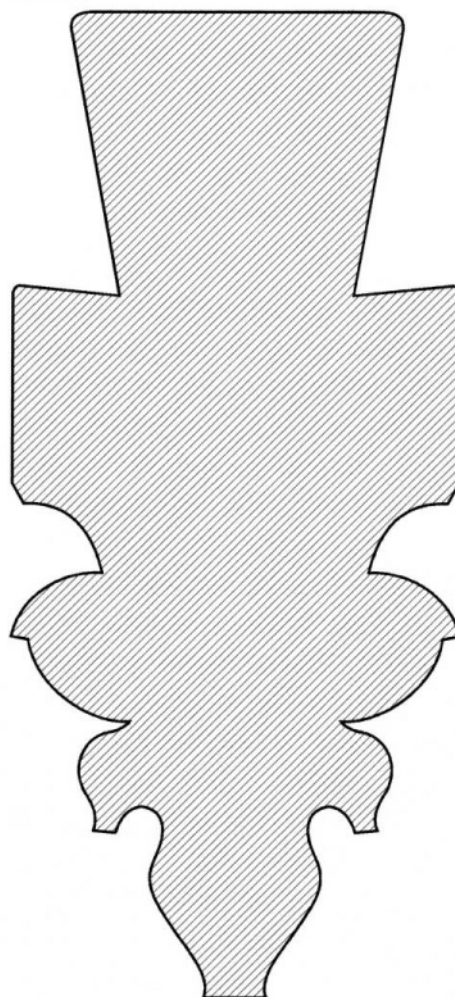
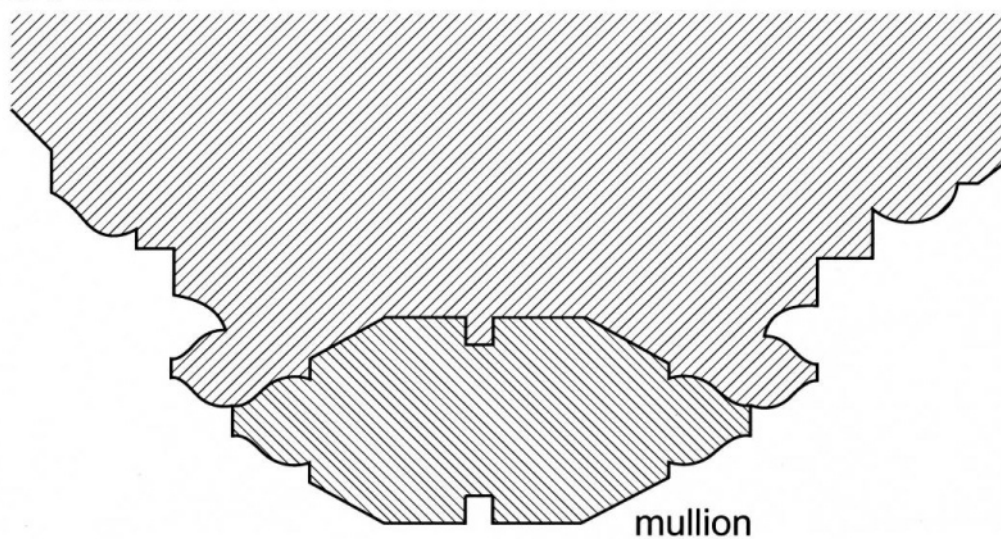
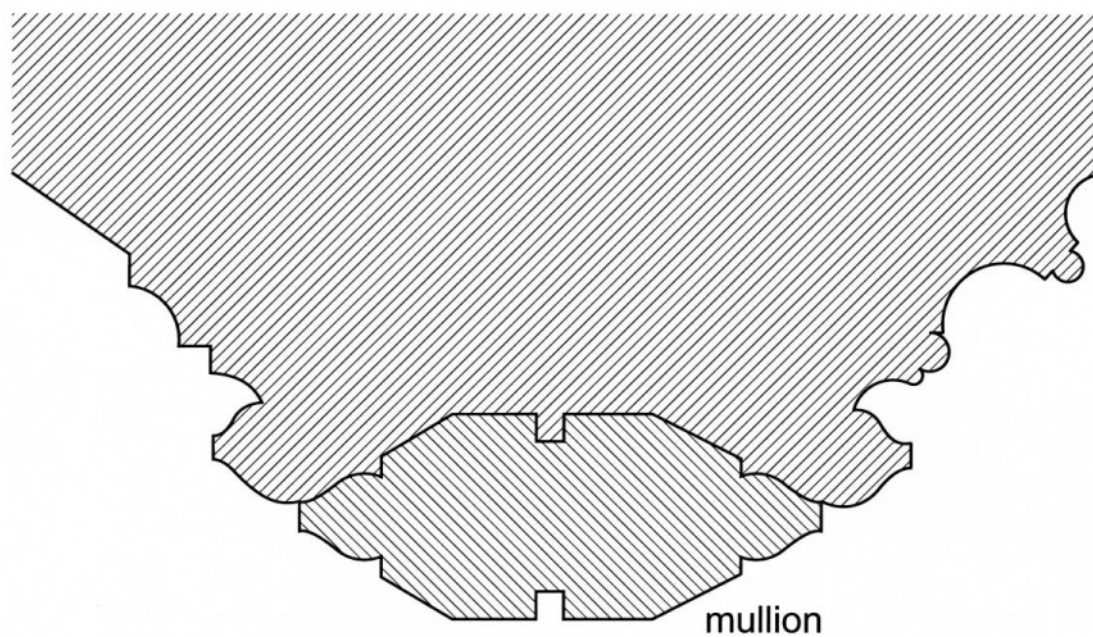


Fig 28: Launceston Priory: vault rib mouldings

Window Jamb 1



Window Jamb 2



0 20 centimetres

Fig 29: Launceston Priory: window mullion profiles superimposed over two jamb mouldings

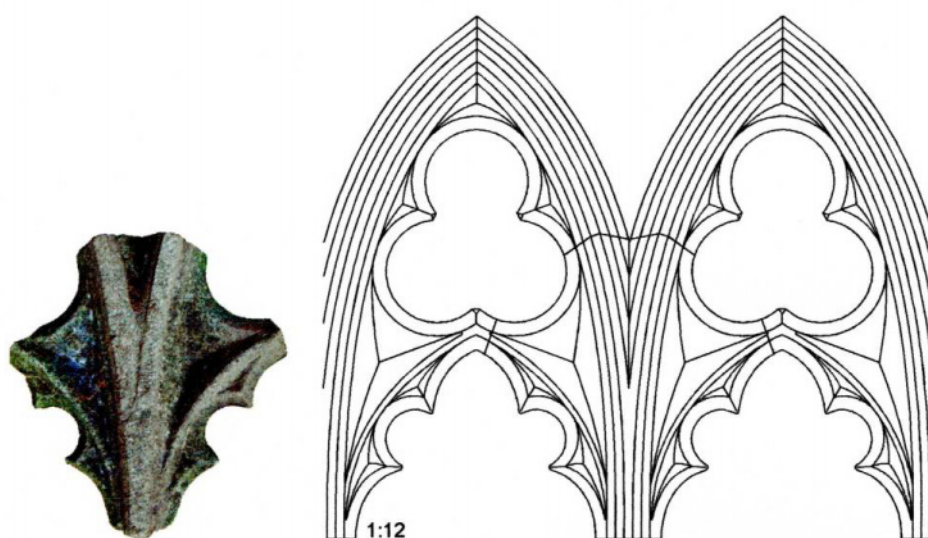


Fig 30: Launceston Priory: tracery fragment with proposed reconstruction



Fig 31: Launceston Priory: fragments of Decorated window tracery

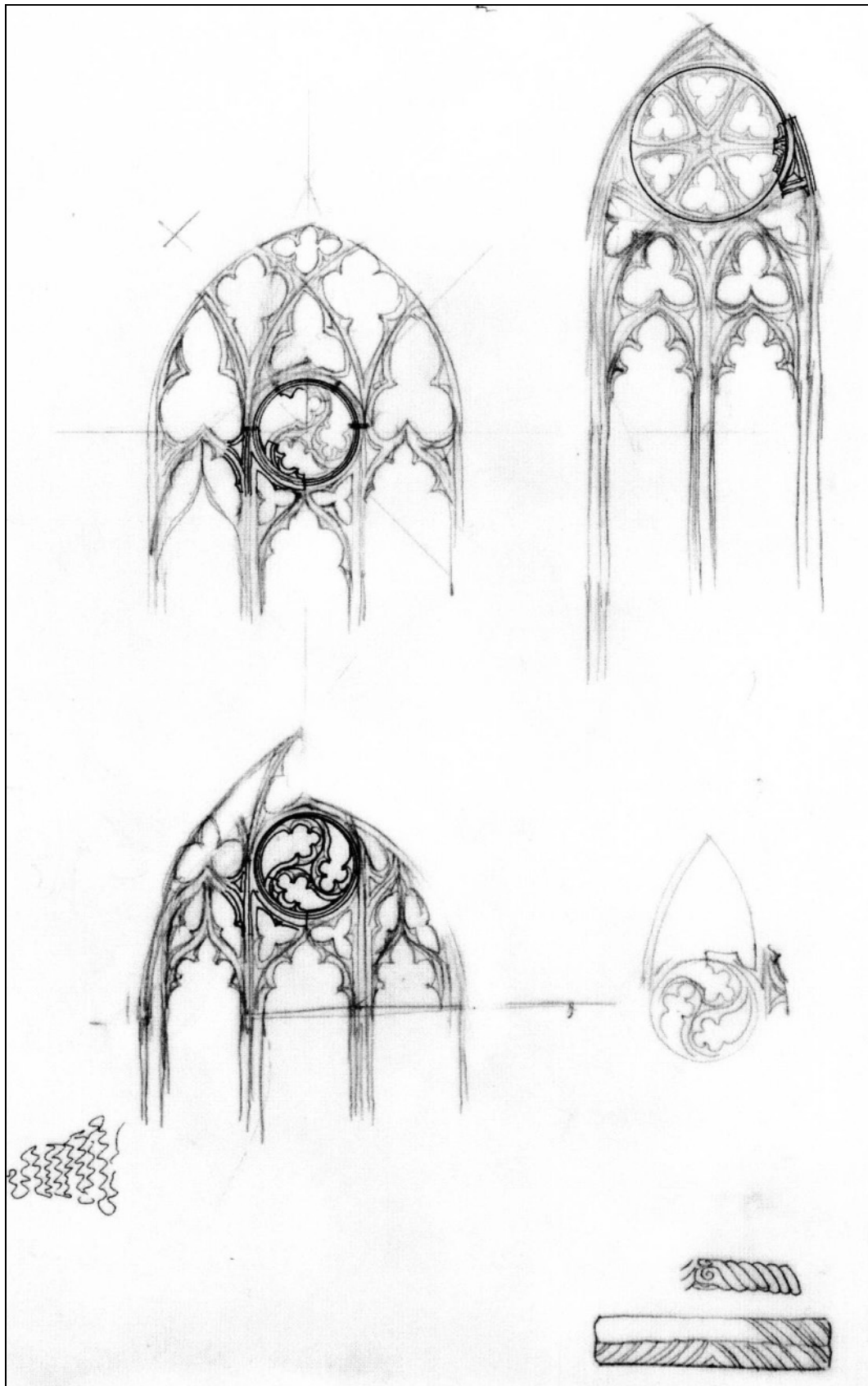


Fig 32: Launceston Priory: Richard Parker's sketches showing tentative reconstructions of window tracery



Fig 33: Launceston Priory: Beer stone fragments salvaged from the area of the high altar by Arthur Wills in 1976



Fig 34: Launceston Priory: floor tile of Exeter Series 1 showing Sagittarius, found by Arthur Wills in 1976

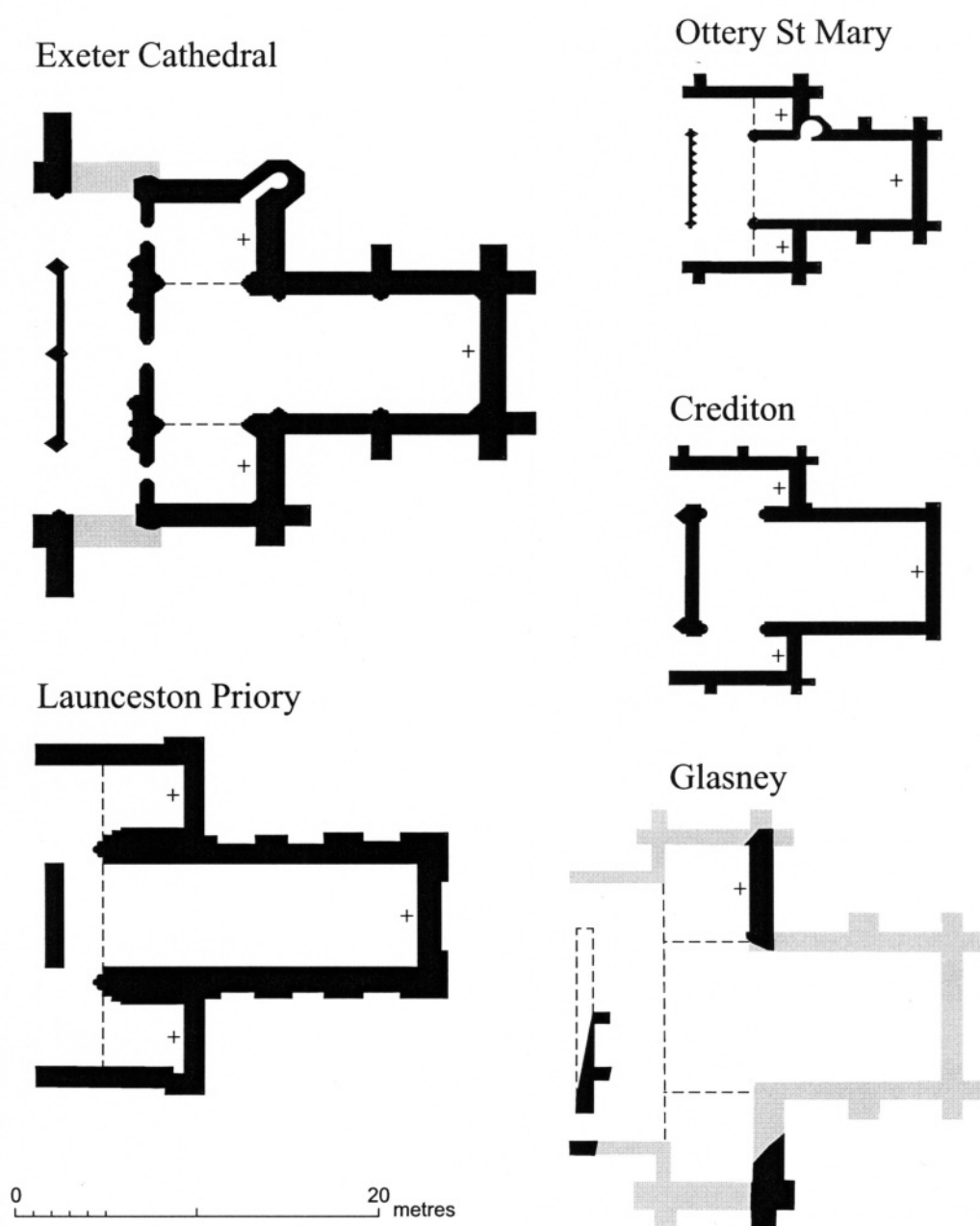


Fig 35: Comparative plans of eastern ends of major churches in the Diocese of Exeter

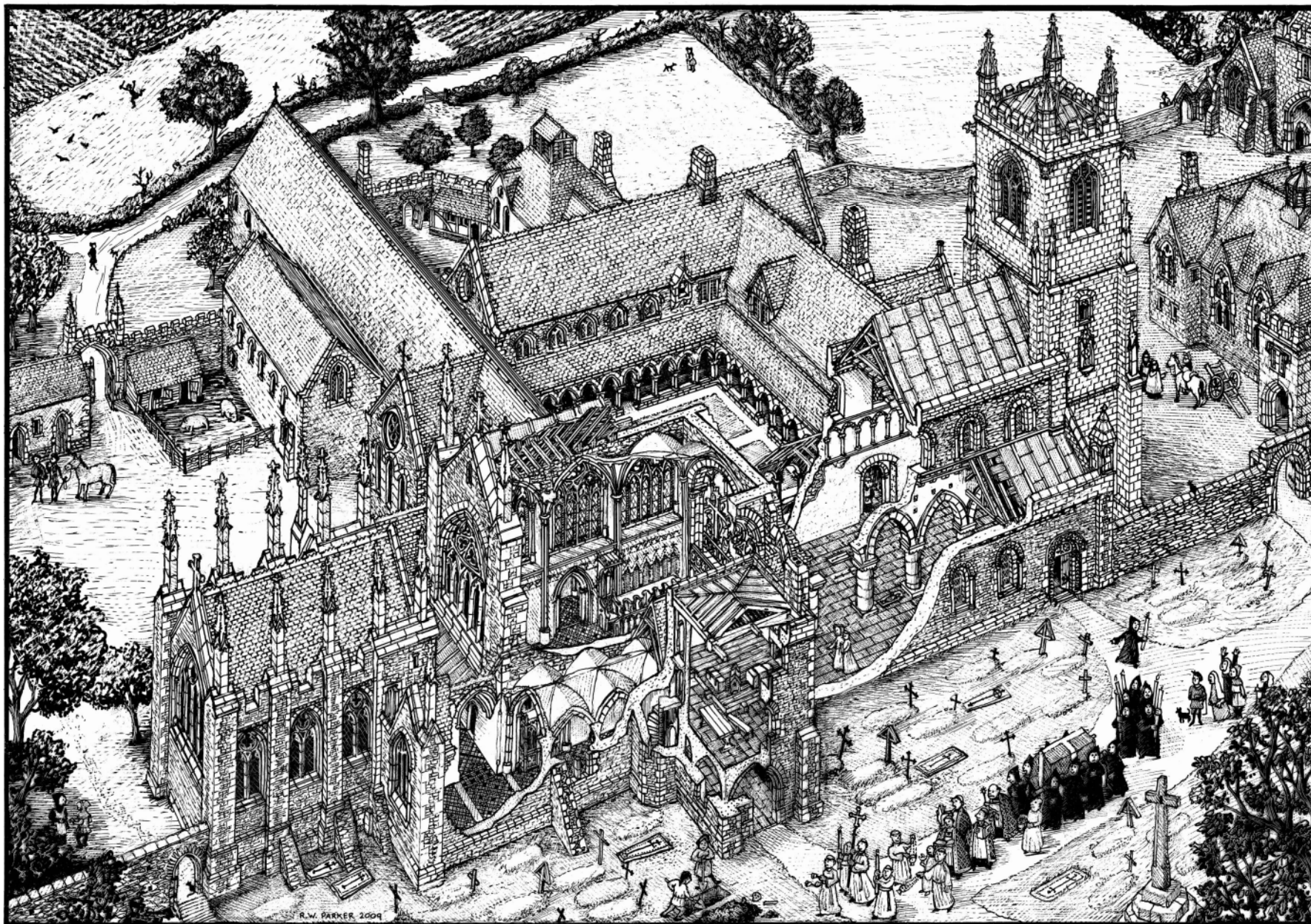


Fig 36: Launceston Priory: Richard Parker's reconstruction drawing of the priory as it may have appeared c 1500