Lenton Priory

A Report on a Geophysical Survey at Lenton Priory, Lenton, Nottingham

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Summary

- Trent & Peak Archaeology were commissioned by Nottingham City Council and Lenton Local Historical Society to undertake a geophysical survey on five areas of what was believed to be relatively undisturbed ground surrounding the remains of Lenton Priory and the Chapel of St Anthony. The aim of the project was to assess the level of preservation of buried archaeological remains allowing for a series of future research and management objectives to be devised based on the results of the survey.
- Although the five areas which were surveyed were reasonable small, numerous geophysical anomalies were identified. The magnetic responses ranged from reasonably strong to particularly faint and included positive, negative and dipolar features (a mixed positive/negative signal). The majority of the anomalies are believed to represent buried archaeological features and, based on the spatial organisation of the anomalies, it has been possible to provisionally phase them and tentatively attribute them to both medieval and post medieval periods of land use.

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1 Project Background

1.1.1 **Site name**: Lenton Geophysics.

1.1.2 Client: Nottingham City Council/Lenton Local History Society

2 Introduction

- 2.1.1 After recent public consultation, Trent & Peak Archaeology (TPA), part of the York Archaeological Trust, were contracted by Nottingham City Council and Lenton Local History Society to undertake a geophysical survey on the site of Lenton Priory in Lenton, Nottingham. Very little is known about the level of preservation of the priory complex and these surveys will be of great use in assessing this and will also hopefully provide information more about the organisation of the medieval site. The results will be used to establish a burgeoning project of research and heritage management which is expected to include wide reaching partnerships which involve academic institutions and interested participants from the local community alike.
- 2.1.2 A total of 22 20m x 20m grids were surveyed across five separate areas with a Geoscan FM36 gradiometer and a Geoscan RM15 resistivity instrument. The five surveyed areas include the churchyard of the Chapel of St Anthony, Priory park, two green areas to the east and the west of Old Church Street and the garden of the Boat Inn public house (figure 1). A more detailed breakdown of the grid sizes and locations is available in the methodology section. This following report discusses the methods and techniques employed and detailed interpretations as well as a proposal for a long term strategy of archaeological research and heritage management.



Figure 1. Location of survey areas

3 Archaeological Background and Previous Works

3.1.1 Lenton Priory, established in 1106-7, and abandoned by the monks in 1538, was one of the greatest monastic houses in England. The Chapel of St Anthony, a small portion of the wall of the nave and a pier from the apse of the conventual church are now the only standing parts of the priory complex.



Figure 2. Surviving pier within the footprint of the conventual church

- 3.1.2 The priory was founded by the Cluniac order, and became one of the wealthiest houses of an order noted for the size and magnificence of its churches. A seven-day fair held in the outer court of the priory was one of the leading fairs in England in the Middle Ages, attracting merchants throughout the country. The infrastructure was substantial and included houses called booths with penthouses behind them, in which stall holders could lodge with their goods. Despite its importance, relatively little is known of the physical form of the priory and the fair site.
- 3.1.3 Up until the recent exploratory slots on Old Church Street and Priory Street (conducted by Trent and Peak Archaeology in 2013) it was widely believed that the majority of the priory had been completely demolished (McAree, D. 2003). In lieu of information collected from formal excavations, the most informative guide to the priory site is that produced by Barnes (1987) and one of most reliable speculative model was formulated by Ellioitt and Burbank (1952). Direct observations from the recent investigative slots have shown that structural remains of the priory have survived, at least along Old Church Street and on the peripheries of Priory Street (Hobson, M and Flintoft. P. 2013). These unexpectedly positive results have lead to an optimistic response from the local history society and local councillors as well as local residents who recently participated in tours around the priory (www.archaeologyfestival.org.uk/events/636).

3.1.4 The aims of the works are to:

 Promote the knowhow and experience of non-intrusive techniques of archaeological prospection, such as geophysics and analytical earthwork surveys, to interested members of the local community.

- Assess the quantity and levels of preservation of buried medieval and post medieval features and structural remains, both intact and demolished.
- Attempt to establish any phasing of burials within the churchyard of the Chapel of St Anthony. For example, is there an obvious pattern of burials which pertain to medieval activities rather than the Victorian usage?
- Produce a series of 2-dimensional annotated plans to show accurately the location of known and unknown structures and features.
- Devise a series of research objectives based on the results of the survey which can be explored and expanded in the future by a partnership of interested parties in a sustainable programme of heritage management.
- Explore the dynamic topography of the churchyard. It is hoped that the surveys will provide an insight into what the uneven ground comprises (figure 11).

4 Methodology

Magnetometry

- 4.1.1 Magnetometry, using fluxgate gradiometer instruments, is the preferred geophysical technique for rapid evaluation of buried features such as kilns, hearths and even the buried remains of brick walls. It is also used to locate more subtle features such as boundary or enclosure ditches, pits and post holes which have been gradually in-filled by more humic material as 'positive' of 'negative' magnetic anomalies.
- 4.1.2 The strength of the present magnetic field in the United Kingdom is approximately 50,000nT (nanotesla) and most buried archaeological features usually result in very weak changes of less than 1nT to the magnetic field. However, changes as low as 0.03nT can be detected by using a fluxgate gradiometer such as the Geoscan FM36. The sensitivity of the instrument does however mean that metal objects will create severe anomalous results and streaking across the results and should be avoided.
- 4.1.3 The Instrument used in this survey was a Geoscan FM36 single sensor fluxgate gradiometer which has a typical depth penetration of approximately 0.5m-1m (however this would increase with stronger magnetic anomalies). The instrument has a single sensor and this necessitates calibration of the machine and the logging of drift at a control point in order to detect the anomaly caused by a buried feature.
- 4.1.4 Each grid was surveyed at 1m traverse intervals with the sampling at 0.25m intervals equating to 800 samples in a full grid. The survey was carried out in 'parallel' mode with precautions to minimise heading error on site. The range of the instrument was set at 100nT (0.01nT resolution). A total of 22 grids, 5 of which were complete and 17 of which were only partially surveyed due to available space within the specific area or as a result of a metallic contamination, were surveyed across the study area totalling approximately 8000m².

Resistivity

- 4.2.1 Resistivity measures changes in the resistance of sediments and geology to an electric current. Resistance to electrical current in the ground primarily depends on the moisture content, the soil particle size of the sediment/s being surveyed. The basis for archaeological earth resistance survey is that different types of sediment architectures have different conducting properties, which can be measured via resistance readings. It is useful technique used to identify buried cut features such as pits and ditches and is especially efficient at recognising buried built structures.
- 4.2.2 Two probes are placed in the ground at a distance away from the probes of the instrument. Readings in relative resistivity between the two pairs of probes are taken. Changes in resistivity up to 0.1 ohms will register on the instrument.
- 4.2.3 A Geoscan RM15 was used throughout the survey. This type instrument is commonly used to perform archaeological resistivity surveys. A reading was taken every metre and the transects were undertaken in a zigzag pattern. The instrument's current range was set to 1mA, a gain range of x10 and the baud rate was set 9600.

Grids

4.3.1 Each of the grids was walked westerly and the weather and conditions during the survey was hot and dry. Due to tree coverage and surrounding tall buildings around the survey area, only a very limited GPS signal could be maintained. As a result of this, the majority of the grids were established with tapes and string lines and were then located digitally where available. The five areas surveyed are detailed below;

The garden of the Boat Inn (SK 55247 38721). This plot of land is bounded to the north by what is believed to be the partial remains of the northern wall of the nave of the conventual

church. A single partial grid of a larger 20m x 20m grid will be completed in this space. The fluxgate gradiometer will only be able to survey a few transects due to the iron railings along the southern limit of the garden.

The churchyard of the Chapel of St Anthony's (SK 55286 38766). A total of 15 20m x 20m grids, many of which were partial were established in the churchyard of the chapel of St Anthony. This was by far the largest area which required surveying. A topographic survey by means of laser scanner was also conducted to use in conjunction with the geophysical data for a more informed and detailed interpretation.

Priory Park (the land on the corner of Gregory St and Abbey Street) (SK 55256 38820). Approximately a third of Priory Park is currently under tree cover and cannot be subjected to the survey. Iron railings surrounding the park to the north and the west will result in more limited results from the fluxgate gradiometer.

The green space to the east of Old Church Street (SK 55315 38717). This is one of the most intensively excavated and explored parts of the conventual church. The iron railings which surround the space to the east and south will mean that only particularly limited results from the single partial grid will be provided by the fluxgate gradiometer. Various excavations in this small parcel of land over the last 8 decades have largely disturbed this area.

The green space to the west of Old Church Street (SK 55287 38724). Two partial grids were established within this area. The magnetometer could only achieve limited transects due to the metal railings surrounding the plot to the south and the west.

Processing

- 4.1.8 The data were captured in the internal memory and then downloaded into a computer and archived on the TPA server. The data were downloaded and processed using Geoscans Geoplot 300 software. The data were minimally processed to remove any instrument error or survey effects in order to enhance any more subtle anomalies associated with archaeological features (Figure 4-7).
- 4.1.9 The data are presented as plots of raw data both a grey-scale plot (Figures 4-5), together with a grey-scale plot of the processed data (Figures 6-7). The processed data has not been clipped due to a number of high readings and the palette used was 99.ptt. Magnetic anomalies have been identified and presented separately on an interpretation of anomalies plots (Figures 8-10).

5 Results

- 5.1 Although the five areas which were surveyed were reasonable small, many geophysical anomalies were identified. The response of the anomalies ranged from been reasonably strong to particularly faint and included positive and negative and mixed positive/negative alike. The majority of the anomalies are believed to represent buried archaeological features and based on the spatial organisation of the anomalies, it has been possible to provisionally phase them and to broadly apply medieval and post medieval periods of use to them.
- 5.2 The Chapel of St Anthony Churchyard

5.2.1 Magnetometry survey

The magnetometry survey clearly demonstrates a series of anomalies along the western extent of the churchyard. In the south-western corner, a positive anomaly (1) appears to sinuously bend to the north-east. A further two small curving strong responses (2 and 3) interacts with anomaly 1. Anomaly 3 is tentatively thought to represent the latest activity within this cluster.

A very faint curving anomaly (4) to the north of 1-3 appears to extend from underneath the plot of land which flanks the eastern side of Abbey Street. This anomaly is somewhat faint and may actually represent a series of smaller signals.

Located in the north-western corner of the churchyard, anomalies 15-18 and are of significant interest. Both 18 and 15 are aligned north-westerly and are in direct alignment with 11th-12th century features which were discovered in excavations on the corner of Abbey Street and Gregory Street. Anomaly 18 does however display a very mixed positive/negative signal, suggesting potential modern contaminate or perhaps structural remains.

Broadly perpendicular to 15 and 18, negative anomalies 16 and 17 are oriented north-easterly. The alignment of these features is not to dissimilar to the scale and orientation of medieval and post medieval features on the Abbey Street excavations (Flintoft, P forthcoming).

Anomaly 9 is clearly located to the centre of the churchyard. This progresses along the line of a recently recorded, but no longer visible, pathway.

The curving south-eastern limit of the churchyard appears to have many anomalies which extend from underneath it. Anomalies 5, 12 and 13 are all examples of mixed positive/negative signals which are on a north-westerly alignment. The inclusion of 18 and 15 and the curving weak positive anomaly (14) to the north of 13 all demonstrate a propensity for north-westerly oriented linear anomalies. The mixed response of the signal does not readily suggest that they are cut features and may represent demolished building materials.

A series of diffuse curving positive anomalies (6,8 and11) and a further curving mixed anomaly (10) were located in-between 5 and 12. It is not apparent what there anomalies represent.

Oriented north-easterly, anomaly 7 appears to continue the curving line of the edge of the churchyard. This may represent an earlier boundary of the churchyard.

Surrounding the Chapel of St Anthony, anomalies 30, 31 and 32 suggest a level of continuing activity towards Gregory Street. In the plot of land to the north of the modern church, anomaly 30 appears to be broadly circular faint positive response. The proximity of such an enigmatic anomaly and the 12th century chapel hint at a possible medieval date.

A strong positive anomaly (31) and an irregular faint mixed anomaly (32) can be seen curving from underneath the eastern limit of the churchyard. It is not clear what these features represent, but the positioning of the anomalies does indicate the presence of modern utility

services.

5.2.2 Resistivity survey

Located in the south-western corner of the churchyard, anomaly 1 can be characterised as a strong irregular positive response. It is unclear what this represents.

Anomaly 2 is oriented north-easterly on the same alignment as the pathway in the centre of the churchyard. It is therefore suggested that the strong positive signal represents the pathway. Interestingly, the anomaly appears to fork off northerly and easterly which suggests that there may have once been a divergence of the path.

Located towards the centre of the churchyard, anomaly 6 runs on the same progression as 2 and possibly represents the pathway.

A positive anomaly (3) extending from the plot of land on the eastern side of Abbey Street can be seen in figures 7 and 9. This faint response progresses south-westerly and turns 90° to the north-east where it becomes particularly faint. There is once again a 90° turn, on this occasion towards the north-west where it dog legs and becomes a little clearer. This could be a particularly significant feature and may represent an important aspect of the medieval fair.

Anomalies 5, 7, 8, 10 and 14 run parallel to the north-westerly aligned section of anomaly 3. All of these positive responses suggests that there may have been internal partitions within the afore mentioned enclosure or they may alternatively represent a phase of re-organisation.

There are two faint positive anomalies (11 and 12) on a south westerly alignment, perpendicular to anomalies 5, 7, 8, 10 and 14. These may represent further partitions or phases of activities associated with the larger enclosure. Anomaly 14 seems to continue into Priory Park.

Anomaly 15 appears to represent a curvilinear feature which runs from 3 to 14. This suggests that there may have been smaller cells contained within the larger enclosure.

Another example of a smaller enclosure within 3 is positive anomaly 37. This can be characterised as a partial, broadly rectangular arrangement with a curving southern end. An oval anomaly (38) appears to be contained within 37. It is not clear what this anomaly represents.

Curving north-easterly from Priory Park, a positive anomaly (13) appears to have been another enclosure not to dissimilar to enclosure 3. The apparent continuation of the anomaly in Priory Park has also been numbered as 13.

A further anomaly (40) in Priory Park could also be the continuation anomaly 17-19.

Progressing north-easterly, positive anomaly 20 is on the same alignment and trajectory as part of anomaly 3. There appears to have been a great deal of investment in the division of land on a north-easterly and south-westerly alignment.

Parallel to anomaly 19, anomaly 9 is oriented north-easterly and terminates at anomaly 3. This is a faint positive anomaly which continues the trend of north-westerly aligned anomalies.

Anomaly 41 is a located towards the southern limit of the churchyard. It extends from the suspected wall of the nave of the conventual church, turns 90 and turns back towards the line of the nave. This presents a space or droveway approximately 7.5m in width between 41 and 9 and 3.

A further 4 curving and irregular anomalies (25, 27-29) were also located to the north of the Chapel. These positive anomalies do not appear to relate to the rest of the identified signals.

To the north of the Chapel of St Anthony, a series of anomalies were identified. This includes positive anomaly 26 which runs north-westerly along Gregory Street and turns to the south. It is possible that anomaly 26 is the continuation of enclosure 13. The Chapel of St Anthony is not within the enclosure and straddles the anomaly which tentatively suggests it pre-dates the 12th century chapel.

Other anomalies located to the north of the chapel also include 25, 27, 28 and 29. These are irregular curving anomalies which do not appear to correspond to any other features from either survey. It is unclear what these anomalies represent.

5.3 Priory Park

5.3.1 Magnetometry

There are two linear formations (19-21) aligned north-westerly which correspond with anomalies in the churchyard. Located towards the western extent of Priory Park, positive anomalies 19 and 20 are in a rather agreeable spatially alignment with anomaly 18 in the churchyard.

Progressing parallel to anomalies to 18-20, positive anomaly 21 also appears to continue into the churchyard as anomaly 15. Both of these linear arrangements are recognisable in the resistivity survey suggesting that they are sizable earthworks. These anomalies may relate to two large 11th/12th century features identified in the Abbey Street excavations.

Anomalies 22-24 are strong positive responses. There were noticeable areas of modern concrete hard standings and paths in this part of the park and it is suggested that these anomalies relate to these modern features.

The northern corner of the park contains five anomalies. The northernmost of these is 26, a curvilinear positive anomaly which follows the curve of the park. This could be the continuation of resistivity anomalies 26 and 13 which would form the corner of this enclosure.

On the southern limit of the northern grid, there are two positive anomalies (25 and 29). Only a partial part of these anomalies was detected and it is unclear what these represent.

Oriented south-westerly, positive anomaly 27 may correspond to other anomalies which are on the same alignment such as anomaly 20 from the resistivity survey. It may represent the northern boundary of the enclosure made up of resistivity anomalies 20, 16, 17 and 39 which contains the chapel.

Anomaly 28 does not appear to spatially fit with any other anomalies from either survey. It is unclear what this anomaly represents.

5.3.2 Resistivity

A series of faint positive anomalies from the churchyard can clearly be seen to continue through into Priory Park. Anomalies 13, 14 and 17 continue on the north-western orientation and it is also suggested that 39 is the continuation of enclosure 3. The continuation of these anomalies indicates that these enclosures were of a considerable size.

Anomalies in the northern grid of Priory Park include 23 and 24. These do not appear to spatially correspond to any other features recorded 0 either survey and may relate to modern features in the park.

5.3 The Garden of the Boat Public House

5.3.1 Magnetometry

Three positive anomalies (33-35) were identified in the garden of the boat, which would have been within the nave of the conventual church. None of these features appear to spatially relate to any of the other anomalies from the surveys or any obvious facets of the church. It is therefore suggested that these post date the dissolution.

5.3.2 Resistivity

The resistivity survey was slightly hampered by the dry ground which resulted in a failed connection in the signal. Despite this, a strong positive signal was recorded in the north-west corner. This anomaly is actually so strong that it may be due to modern activities.

Anomalies 31-33 are similar to those identified in the magnetometry survey. They are irregular and do not appear to spatially fit any of the other anomalies identified from the surveys.

5.4 Green space to the west of Old Church Street

5.4.1 Magnetometry

Two particularly interesting anomalies were detected in the green space to the west of Old Church Street. The southernmost of these, 37, is broadly circular and may represent a structural element associated with the conventual church such as a pier.

Anomaly 36 extends from the western limit of the plot of land and curves to the south and returns back under the western limit. This curving anomaly fits with the apsidal end of the conventual church and may relate to a architectural element of the church.

5.4.2 Resistivity

No anomalies were identified in this space during the resistivity survey.

5.5 Green space to the east of Old Church Street

5.5.1 Magnetometry

The area to the east of Old Church Street produced two anomalies. The easternmost of these, 39, runs from the east and then turns to the south. The curve of this anomaly is consistent with the apsidal end of the conventual church. This may therefore relate to activities associated with the priory.

Anomaly 38 does not appear to spatially fit with any other features from the survey. This may relate to the excavations which were conducted in 1977.

5.5.2 Resistivity

The results from the resistivity survey are broadly similar to those of the magnetometer survey. The curve of anomaly 36 is consistent with that of magnetometry survey anomaly 39 and 34-35 are likely to represent the same feature as magnetometry anomaly 38.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

- 6.1.1 A number of positive, positive/negative and negative magnetic anomalies were identified during the geophysical survey. Many of the signals, especially from the resistivity survey, were faint. Despite this, patterns of spatially coherent buried archaeological features were detected. The most notable of these were located in the churchyard and Priory Park. The anomalies which were detected in both of these localities appear to represent features which span several centuries of usage.
- 6.1.2 There are several indicators within the survey results which demonstrate a general pattern of activities and phases. Based on these indicators it appears as if resistivity anomaly 21 and magnetometetry anomalies 19, 20 (all three of these anomalies are thought to represent the same feature) and 21 are possibly the earliest. An earlier date for these anomalies is preferred as they are of a similar shape, size and alignment to those discovered in the recent Abbey Street excavations (Flintoft, P. forthcoming). These deep and broad ditches are believed to date to the 11th or 12th centuries and may well be directly associated with the early phases of the construction of the priory.
- 6.1.3 The surveys within Priory Park and the churchyard revealed a great deal of anomalies believed to represent buried features of archaeological interest (figures 5-10). The resistivity survey identified a series of linear anomalies which appear to progress north westerly. These are complemented by a sequence of anomalies aligned north-easterly which may form at least three enclosures. A collection of anomalies towards the western extent of the churchyard is thought to form an enclosure ditch (enclosure 1) (figure 10).
- 6.1.4 A series of anomalies on the same orientation as the previously discussed enclosure is believed to represent a second enclosure (enclosure 2) (figure 10). This may have been intended to surround the Chapel of St Anthony. Both of these anomaly groups are in spatial agreement with medieval features which were identified in the recent excavations on the corner of Abbey Street and Gregory Street. It is therefore suggested that both of these enclosures are medieval in date.
- 6.1.5 A further enclosure towards the northern extent of the churchyard (enclosure 3) may post-date the two medieval enclosures (figure 10). This not only appears to cut the earlier anomalies, but the course of the north-easterly section of the feature seems to run through the site of the Chapel of St Anthony. This feature may therefore have been created after the partial demolition of the chapel after the dissolution in 1536.
- 6.1.6 The magnetometry survey largely corroborated the results gleaned from the resistivity survey. As well as the previously discussed anomalies which were identified, three broad positive/negative anomalies extending from the south-western limit of the churchyard were detected which might relate to demolished stone structures such as the inner precinct wall.
- 6.1.7 The surveys did not provide a great deal of signals which offer a direct insight into why the topography in the churchyard is so dynamic. However, an interesting observation is that the southernmost 20m of the churchyard is a particularly changeable and uneven. This is within the proximity of the possible demolished walls and the irregular surface may comprise demolished building materials.
- 6.1.8 No burials, Victorian or otherwise, were identified during the survey. Information pertaining to the positions of the burials will have to be gleaned from other sources.
- 6.1.9 The areas to the east and west of Old Church Street and the garden of the boat revealed further anomalies but none quite as insightful as those in Priory Park and the churchyard. They may relate to buildings or activities associated with the priory or might alternatively be connected to previous excavation trenches (Green, H. 1936 and Bishop, M. 1977).
- 6.1.10 The majority of the features are oriented north-easterly and north-westerly which is

consistent with the medieval features from Abbey Street excavations. This is at odds with the orientation of the conventual church. More resolute dates for the features could explain the development of features within the immediate landscape and why there was a preference to organise the features on this alignment.

6.2 CONCLUSION

- 6.2.1 The results from the surveys presents a wealth of compelling geophysical anomalies. The anomalies undoubtedly represent buried archaeological features but the provisional dates and phases which have been attributed to them require further testing.
- 6.2.2 The absence of any apparent burials within the results is disappointing. It was hoped that at least a few of the burials would be revealed which could have provided conformation of spaces of undisturbed churchyard.

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9 Figures 1-4















