

**Malvern Museum:
Archaeological investigation and recording of
historic timberwork.**



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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Historic Environment Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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Summary:

Small scale recording was undertaken at Malvern Museum of the base of a timber Jamb which forms part of the Historic Priory Gatehouse which had become structurally unsound and required partial replacement. Two contrasting profiles / sections were produced in order to illustrate the degree of erosion / damage to the timber and a watching brief was undertaken to investigate the foundation of the Jamb.

The base of the timber had been repeatedly struck by motor vehicles prior to the gatehouse being pedestrianised and this, in conjunction with a degree of rotting due to water retention had rendered the jamb structurally unsound.

The effected portion of the timber was removed by a specialist conservation building firm and the ground immediately under the jamb excavated under archaeological supervision. It was found that the jamb was jointed by a tenon into a single stone slab with a mortice slot cut into it. No finds or dating evidence was recovered.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

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Introduction

This report (WSM 67992), provides an account of small scale structural recording and a watching brief carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology at Malvern Museum, the building was once the gatehouse to Great Malvern's Benedictine priory, and was built c.1480. The gatehouse is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade II* Listed building, (Scheduled Monument No: SM WT 258, HA 100530).

The watching brief was required in order to comply with Scheduled Monument Consent and to provide a drawn and photographic record of the works associated with the replacement of the lower portion of one of the large timber jambs which once supported a pair of gates.

The fieldwork comprised the recording by photographic record of the timber jamb, the production of two profile / section drawings in order to compare and contrast the original shape of the post with the eroded / damaged portion, and a watching brief in order to record the type and condition of the foundation for the base of the jamb.

It is believed that, due to the location of the jamb, (immediately to the south of the medieval elements of the gatehouse and built into the fabric of the post-reformation additions to the gatehouse), that this timber is post medieval in date. The possibility of it coming from an older structure and therefore being considerably older but re-used cannot, however, be ruled out.

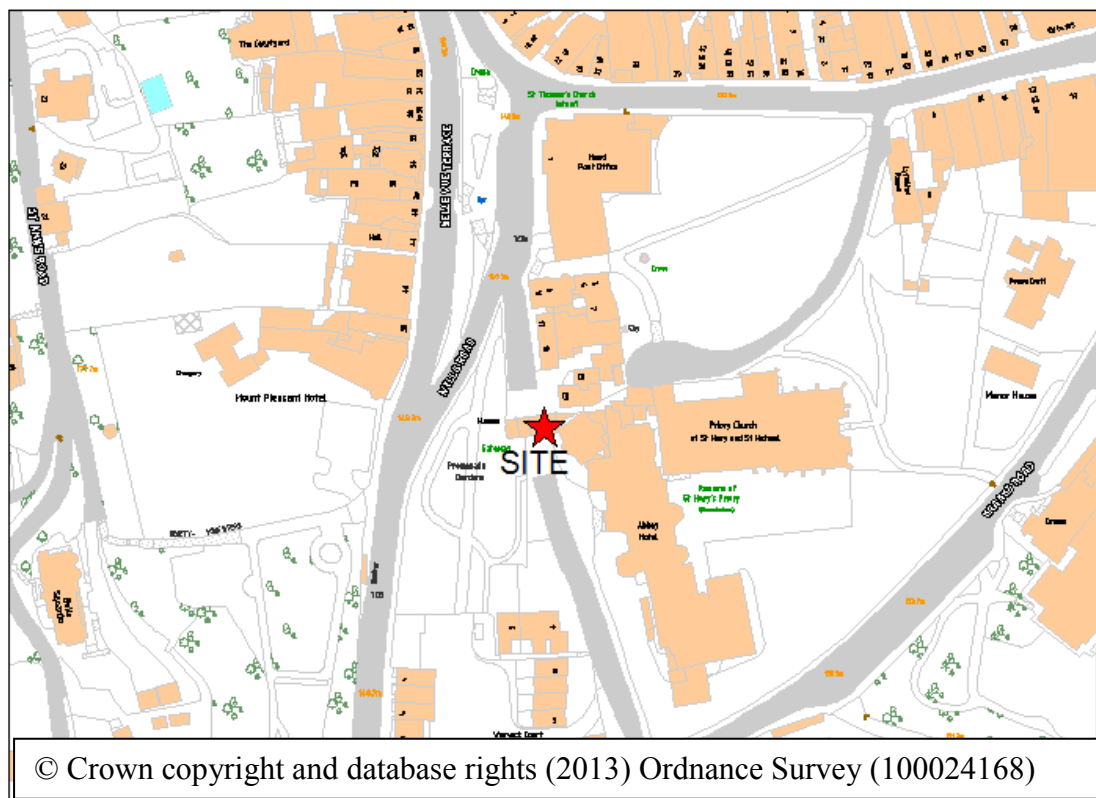


Figure 1: Site location of the gatehouse in relation to the modern streetscape.

Fieldwork

Site work took place on 25th May 2016 and 3rd June 2016. The works comprised the recording of the timber jamb prior to conservation building works taking place and the recording by watching brief of the works associated with the hand excavation of the base of the jamb.

The jamb subject to the works outlined above, comprises the eastern jamb of a pair which held a pair of gates during the early post medieval period. Each jamb is approximately 0.3m wide (north / south) and 0.4m thick (east / west) and has a plain chamfer on its south-western corner (see figure 2, cross section at 0.8m above present ground level). The jamb is one of a pair which support a cross beam of similar proportions and this, in turn, supports part of the post-reformation first floor.

The lower portion of the timber jambs on both sides of the gateway have clearly been damaged over time. This appears to be principally caused by glancing blows from motor vehicles and other vehicles which have removed large splinters from the corners of the jambs and abraded the internal face of each jamb. A range of paint colours are on the jambs, presumably as a result of these collisions. The eastern jamb, however, is also rotten at its base to such a degree that it no longer touched the present ground surface and it is for this reason that the replacement works were deemed necessary. Due to the eroded / damaged nature of both jambs, the presence and type of any form of chamfer stop at the base of the jambs cannot be ascertained.

Fieldwork comprised the photographic recording of each face of the jamb followed by the production of scaled drawings of the cross section / profile of the jamb. Two cross sections / profiles were produced. One was produced at a height of 0.8m above the present ground level in order to document the original dimensions and form of the jamb, (Figure 2, top illustration). The second cross section / profile was produced at a height of 0.2m above the present ground level, (figure 2, lower illustration), in order to document the extent of the damage / erosion close to the base of the jamb.

A second site visit was made in order to record the deposits / footings immediately below the jamb, once the base of the jamb had been removed. The base of the jamb comprised a well rotted wood which had been encased in concrete during the recent past in order to fill voids and maintain the appearance of the jamb. This however appears to have had a detrimental effect upon the wood as water has run odd the present ground surface and pooled within the concrete, making the base of the jamb damper and increasing the rotting effect. The concrete was attached to a single flat stone at a depth of approximately 0.17m. The stone appears to be a fine sandstone and has a mortice hole cut into its top approximately 8cm deep, 12cm wide and 22cm long, (plate 3 and Plate 4). This suggests that it was designed and therefore put in place during the erection of the jambs and that each jamb (assuming that they are the same), originally had a tenon at its base to slot into the mortice hole.



Plate 1: Timber jamb looking east, showing the extent of the damage and rot.



Plate 2: Detail showing splintering and abrasion to the jamb.



Plate 3: Detail of northern face of the Jamb.

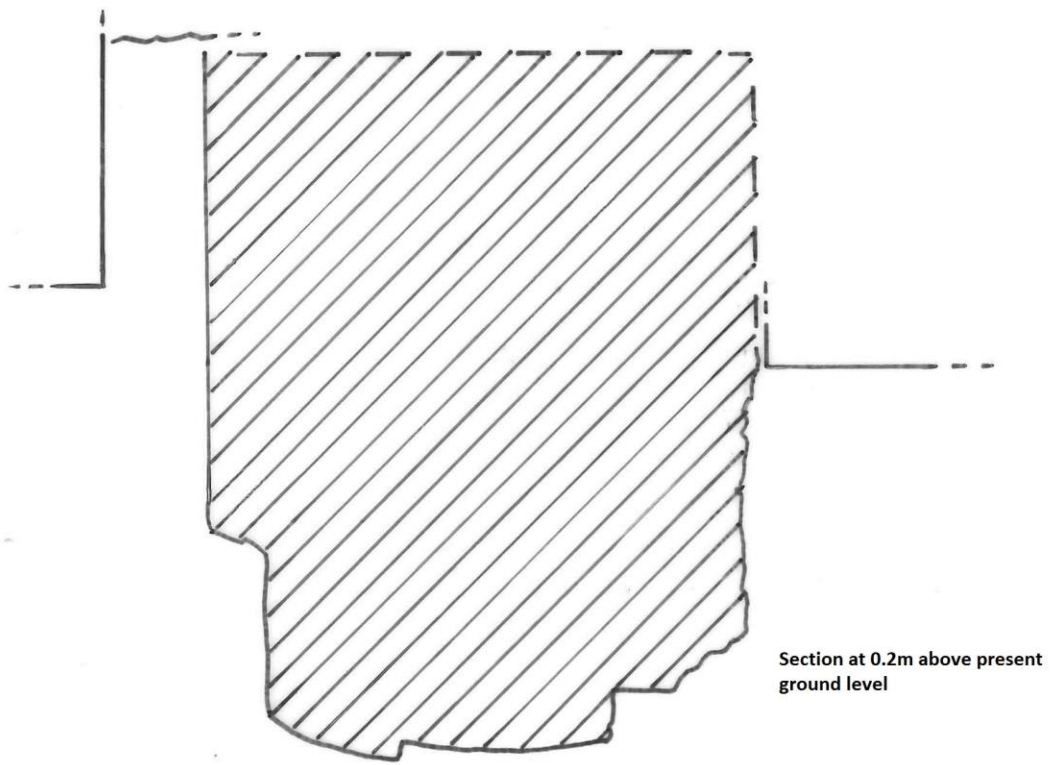
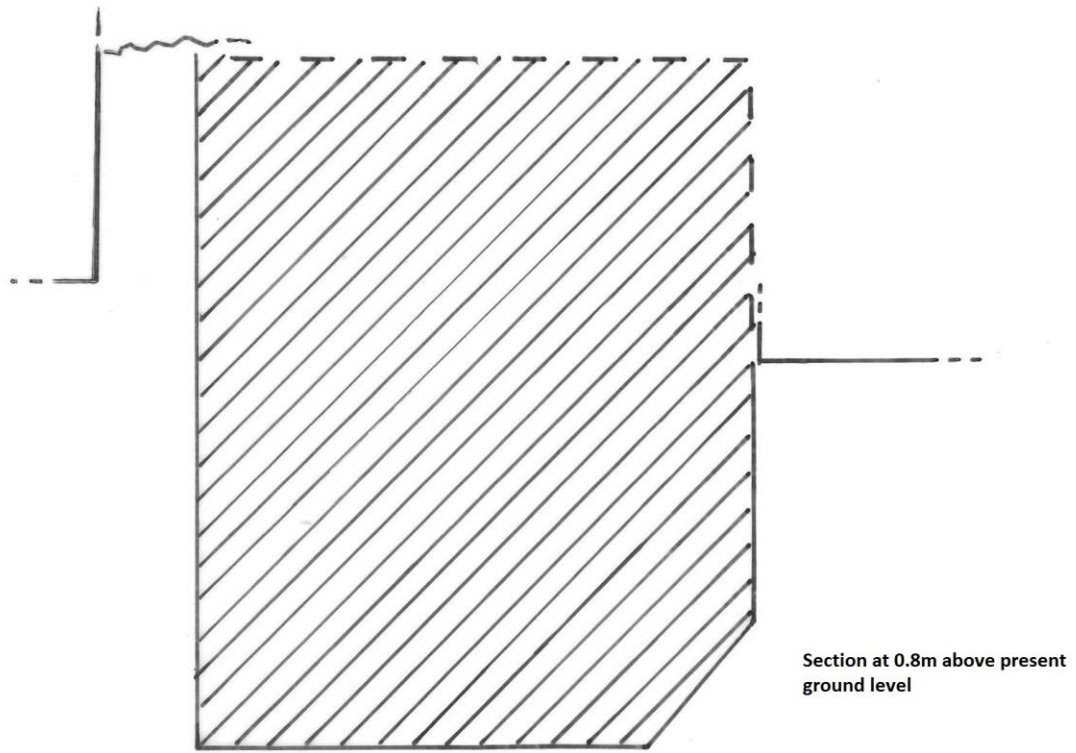


Figure 2: Cross sections of the Jamb at 0.8m and 0.2m above present ground level.



Plate 3: The Jamb after removal of its base and excavation of loose material.



Plate 4: Foundation / pad stone with cut mortice in it

Conclusions

The archaeological recording and conservation works have assisted at least a small way in furthering the understanding of the construction and development of the Priory Gatehouse. The mortice cut into the stone pad was an unexpected discovery as was the neatness of its execution. It also suggests the level of the late medieval / early post medieval ground surface as it is likely that the stone into which the jamb was located was at ground level (or perhaps slightly proud of ground level in order to minimise water pooling around the tenon) rather than the post being buried in the ground to a considerable depth.

The origins of the timber jambs remain unclear. Were they made specifically for the gatehouse during its re-modelling, or did they come from an existing building and re-used as jambs? The author finds it unusual that only the one corner is chamfered when both the north western and south western corners are equally visible. The stops of the chamfer end on both jambs with a pyramidal chamfer stop close to the top of each jamb. Unfortunately there is a significant date range for this type of chamfer stop spanning most of the medieval period and into the 17th century. Whilst undoubtedly impressive in size and certainly suitable to hang gates from, the plainness of decoration, when compared to the rest of the structure, seems unusual.

Site Archive

- 40 digital photographs
- 1 site notebook entry
- 1 field drawing
- 1 inked drawing
- This document

Acknowledgements

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