Herefordshire Council

CRASWALL PRIORY, ABBEY FARM, CRASWALL, HEREFORDSHIRE

A BASIC MANAGEMENT PLAN
TO ASSIST IN GUIDING THE MANAGEMENT
OF THE MONUMENT AS PART OF A
HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

Prepared by Tim Hoverd
Archaeological Projects Manager
Herefordshire Archaeology

December 2015

Historic Environmental Record
Event Number: EHE 80179.

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 357

CONTENTS

CRASWALL PRIORY MANAGEMENT PLAN

MONUMENT NAME: **Craswall Grandmontine Priory**

Scheduled Monument No: **1014536**

HSM Number: **HSM 167**

OWNER: **TC & JW Richards**

Agreement Ref No: **AG00620452**

VISIT: **26th November 2015**

PREPARED BY: **Tim Hoverd (HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY)**

1 Introduction

As part of a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement under Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Scheme, a management plan has been prepared to guide future management of the monument.

Natural England is contributing £400 for the production of a Management Plan for the Scheduled Monument to look at areas where the soft capping undertaken some years ago has failed and the stonework is exposed and at risk. The aim is to use Stewardship grant to undertake capping and grass cover to stabilise and protect the stonework at this rare and valuable site. The Plan will also identify where saplings and scrub pose a threat to the stability and condition of the monument.

The principal actions / areas for consideration in the plan are:

- Site walkover to identify areas of failure and suitability for replacement soft capping following the modern method or consideration of a complete turf cover for protection on very fragile areas.
- Consider whether the green membrane used in previous capping exercise should be removed where it is now visible in 'good' sections
- Make clear management recommendations to cover the extent, method and location of any proposed repairs.
- Advise on any archaeological input needed during the works if applicable.
- Identify where scrub, saplings and invasive vegetation need to be controlled over the extent of the priory remains.
- Consider the impact of these recommendations on European Protected Species e.g. newts and bats and advise on any consents/permissions required if applicable in addition to Scheduled Monument Consent.
- Make brief recommendations for ongoing future management of the Monument.

A site visit was made to the site to briefly assess the site with particular reference to the standing masonry elements, record current management risks to the monument and recommend possible improvements. The visit was made on the 26th November 2015. The involvement of Herefordshire Archaeology was partly covered by a management plan payment through the scheme.

2 Archaeology

Craswall Priory is a Scheduled Monument (Scheduled Monument Number 1014536) and is of national importance.

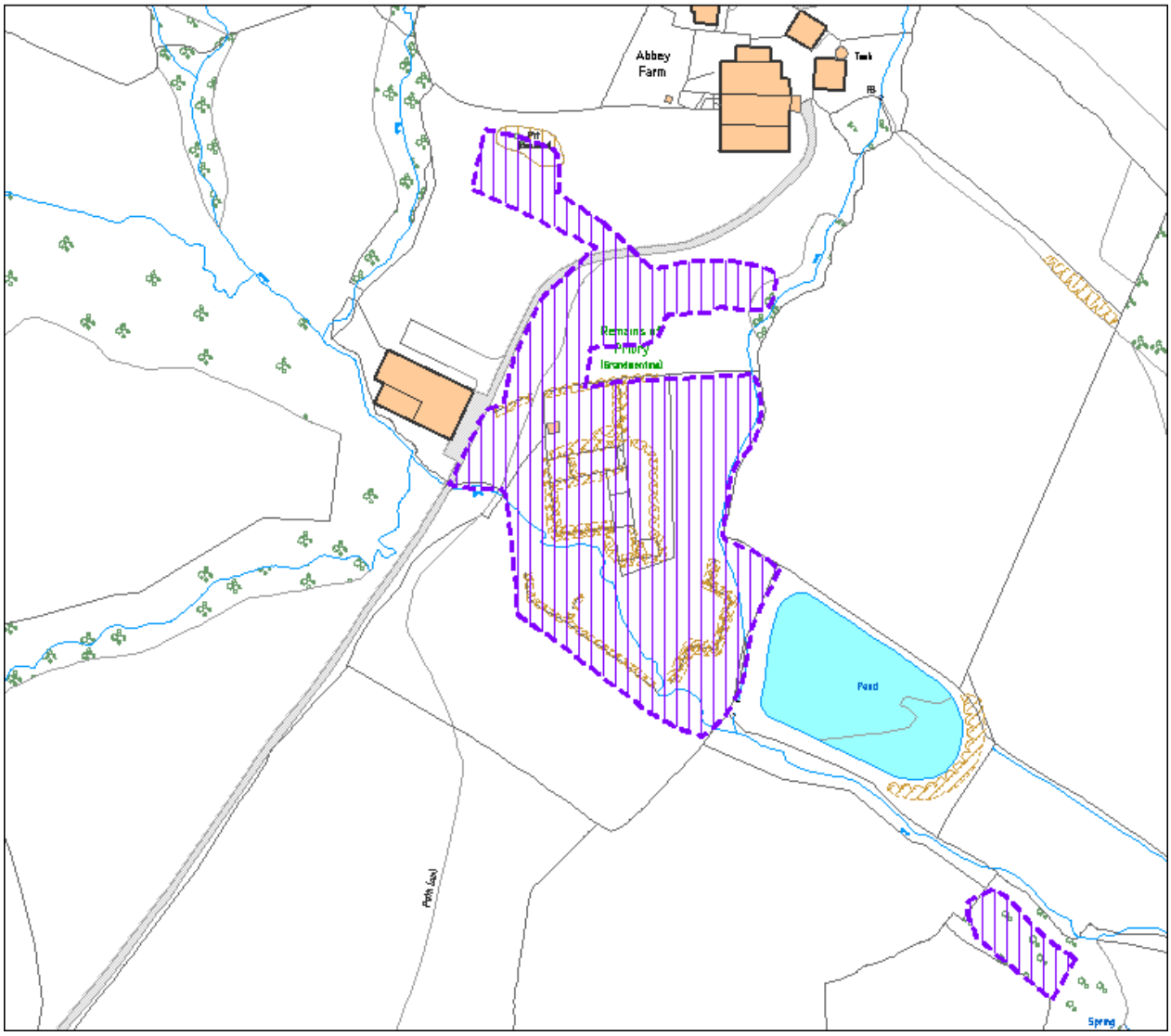

Figure 1: Scheduled Monument area (purple) of Craswall Priory

The Scheduled Monument documentation describes the monument as:

The earthwork, buried and ruined remains of the Grandmontine Priory of St. Mary, situated on a south-west facing slope near the head of the Monnow Valley, north-west of Craswall. Craswall was the second of three Grandmontine houses established in England, and was founded in c.1225 by Walther de Lacy.

The monument includes a small precinct enclosing 1.2ha, within which is a church with north and south chapels which formed the northern side of a cloistral group. The east range comprised a chapter house with undercroft with dorter / dormitory above. The south range comprised the kitchen and refectory whilst the west range contained storage rooms and guest accommodation. The precinct was surrounded by a stone rubble wall on its north, west and southern sides

Figure 2: Extract from 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1886-7

3 Historical Land Use

Cartographic evidence gives the following historical land use of the site:

- 1840, Craswall Tithe Map shows solid buildings on the site and lists it as "homestead".
- 1886-7 1st Edition Ordnance Survey shows the principal wall lines, including the line of the northern precinct boundary wall (Figure 2).

4 Current land use and management

The upstanding remains of the Priory (within its own field), are managed as rough grazing. The remainder of the Scheduled Area is under permanent pasture.

Plate 1: General view of priory from access gate.

5 Management risks and opportunities for the monument and proposed resolutions.

The upstanding remains of the priory are generally in good condition with much of the re-pointing and capping having withstood the test of time. There are however, localised areas of erosion, loss of individual facing stones or eroded core-work, which need to be addressed.

This section addresses the limited management issues in relation to the monument. Please relate to Figure 3 in order to accurately locate the features described below.

- Repair localised areas of masonry which have already been subject to consolidation.
- Repair localised areas of masonry which have not already been subject to consolidation.
- Remove and re-cap areas of wall top and shelving.
- Control of areas of scrub

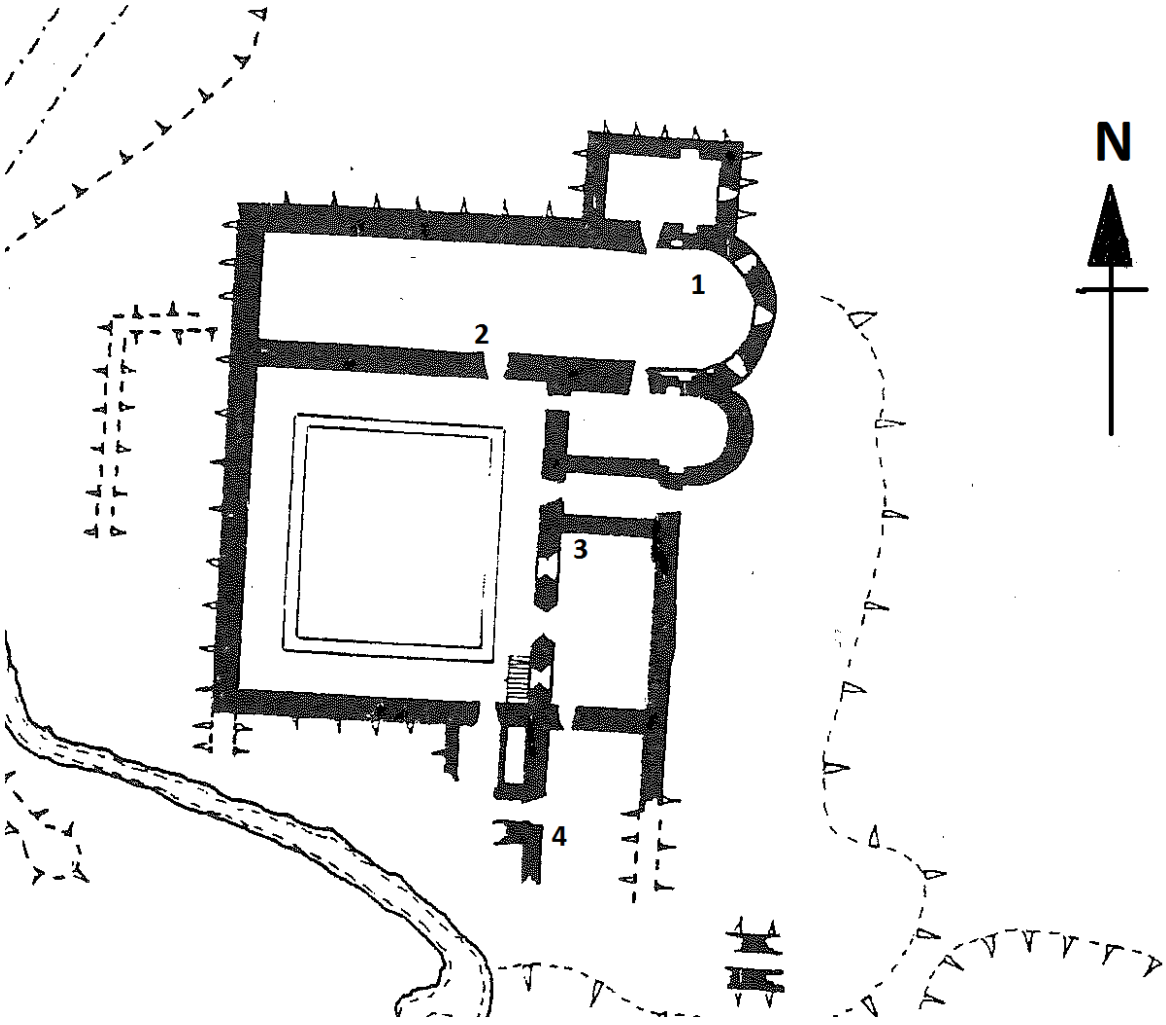

Figure 3: Location of management risks (labelled 1-4) in relation to the monument.

Repair of localised areas of facing / core work which have already been subject to consolidation

1. Two facing stones (or parts thereof), have fallen from the internal face of the northern side of the chancel (see Plate 2 and figure 3).One fragment of displaced stone is on the ground immediately below the void.

Plate 2: Northern internal face of Chancel showing localised area of face erosion.

Repair of localised areas of facing / core work which have not already been subject to consolidation.

A single area of very active erosion has been identified during the site visit.

2. Area of core and face erosion on wall stub of south wall of nave. (Plates 3 & 4 and figure 3). A considerable number of stones and other core material has recently been displaced from the east facing wall stub which formed the doorway from the nave into the cloister. It would appear that this area has been badly affected by rain water within the core and would benefit from consolidation and capping. Erosion is still active.

Plate 3: doorway from the nave into the Cloister showing recent tumble.

Plate 4: Detail of tumble and exposed core.

Localised areas of facing / core work which have not already been subject to consolidation but may require attention.

Two areas of masonry appear to be at risk of imminent erosion / collapse.

3. Area of face erosion imminent within north wall of Chapterhouse. (Plate 5 and figure 3). A significant area of upper coursing close to the north-western corner of the chapterhouse is unsupported and requires consolidation. It appears to be at more of an angle than the 1997 recording work illustrates, suggesting slow movement.

Plate 5: Unsupported and vulnerable face of northern chapterhouse wall.

4. Imminent collapse of southern jamb / wall stub of reredorter stair door (Plate 6 and figure 3). This length of wall is in danger of significant collapse, particularly at its northern end due to vegetation and voids.

Plate 6: Southern jamb / wall stub of reredorter stair door.

Remove and replace areas of wall top and shelving capping

A number of areas / lengths of capping relating to the 1997 consolidation works have been identified as requiring additional works. These works relate to the condition and type of capping utilised during the 1997 works.

Following the consolidation works a geotextile membrane (terram) was laid along wall tops and “shelves” in walls and the vegetation which had been removed from the wall tops in order to facilitate the consolidation works, replaced on top of the membrane. The membrane was used in order to prevent / minimise the intrusion of roots into the wall tops which would affect the integrity of the walls.

Over the majority of the capping there is a good, stable covering of vegetation, mostly comprising grasses and mosses. This not only provides a degree of protection to the masonry in terms of insulation from extreme temperature change, but also adds an element of “softening” of the appearance of the monument within the landscape. There are however localised areas where either the vegetation did not take, has died due to lack of moisture, has been rubbed off by branches or has washed off due to too much water.

Plate 7: Vegetative capping along northern nave wall (looking west). The light areas are the geotextile between the masonry and the vegetation.

Plate 8: General view of exterior, southern wall of Chancel showing dead, dry vegetation over geotextile membrane.

Plate 9: North nave wall looking east showing loose geotextile membrane.

Plate 10: Nave north wall internal elevation showing loose geotextile membrane on core “shelf”.

Plate 11: Displaced and loose geotextile membrane under yew tree on northern side of Chancel. The vegetation has been affected by light levels and eroded by dripping water from the tree branches.

There are a number of factors relating to the success or otherwise of the vegetative capping. Some areas appear to be maintaining a good, mature thickness of well bonded soil and root which supports a thick moss or grass growth and appears to be stable. However, due to the nature of the capping, applying a geotextile membrane directly between the masonry and the vegetative cap, this has only been successful in areas where:

- There has been enough water but not too much
- The area is not too shaded by trees
- The area is not affected by strong wind
- The area can regenerate prior to excessive loss of soil

It is clear that this has not been achievable in some locations (see figure 4 areas of red for rough locations / extent). It appears that the smaller / narrower the area covered by geotextile membrane, the more prone to vegetation loss and therefore failure the capped area is. This can be seen on many of the “shelf” areas of core-work in the Chancel and Nave and also along the eastern wall of the Chapterhouse, (see Plate 10).

Localised areas of capping are showing advanced signs of drought stress (as can be seen in Plate 8) where what was once a thick, well developed cap of vegetation is even now (November 2015), dry and brown. This has led to the loss of soil from around the edges which, in turn, has led to the exposure of the geotextile membrane around the edges. This has led to further erosion as the exposed geotextile edges are blown by the wind.

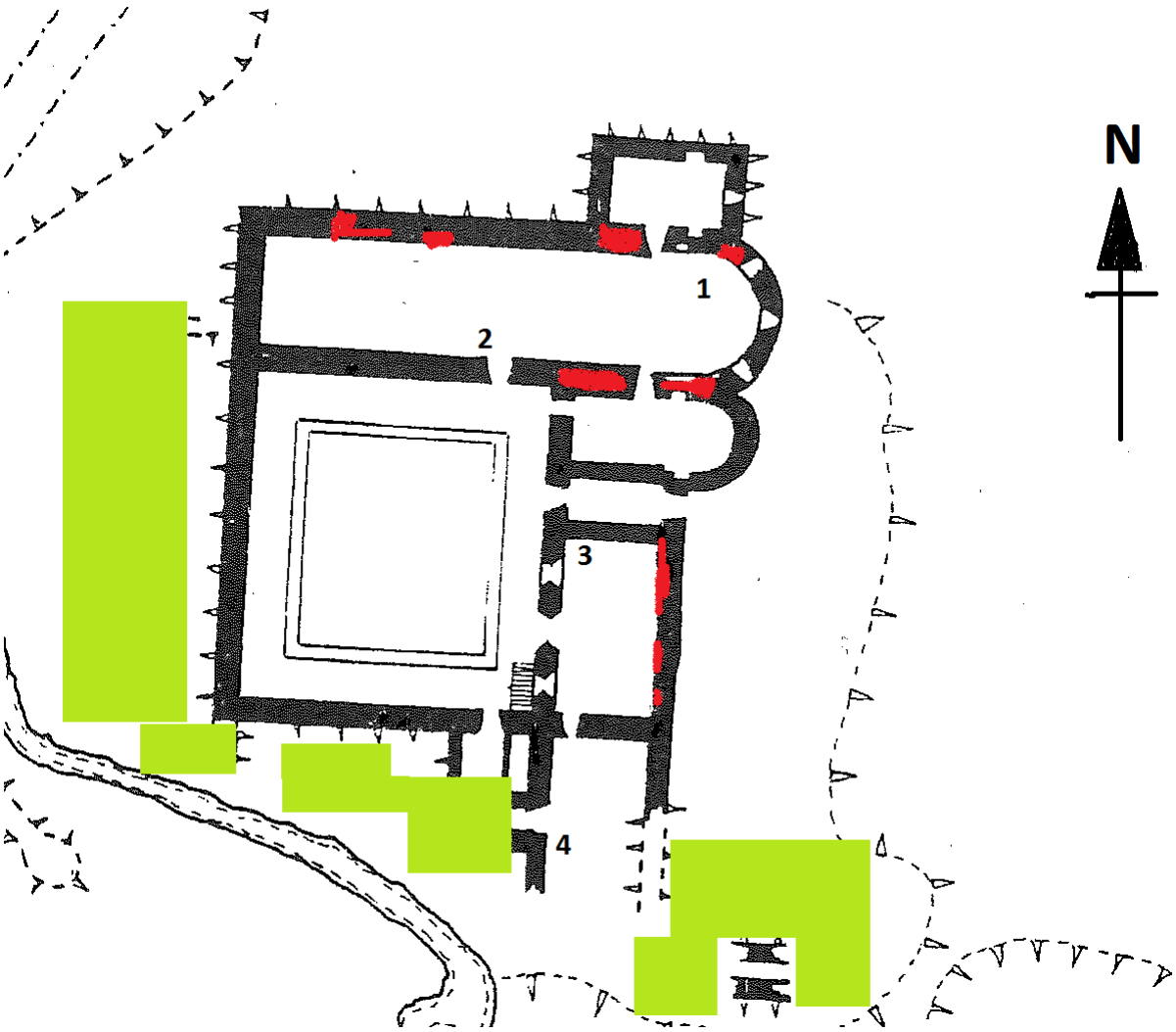

Figure 4: Areas of soft capping to be replaced (red) Areas where Tree and scrub growth need to be controlled (green).

Two areas appear to have been affected by excess water and localised lack of light. Plates 9 and 11 show areas where the vegetation cap has died away exposing the geotextile. In the case of Plate 9, close to the western end of the Nave, it appears that due to shading from the mature Ash tree and the very considerable Yew tree, little if any vegetation cover had been achieved, the lack of sustainable vegetation cover has then led to the soil being washed off by rain and water dripping from branches. It would appear from the folded and displaced nature of the geotextile, that it is being caught by the wind and may be gradually eroding the vegetation cap

further along the wall. Plate 11 shows a localised area under a very mature Yew tree on the northern side of the Chancel. Again lack of light and the dripping of water from branches has precluded vegetation growth and washed soil from this area.

Plate 12: Heavy moss cover along north Chancel wall top.

Proposed Actions:

1. ***Repair of localised areas of facing / core work which have already been subject to consolidation***
   Two facing stones (or parts thereof), have fallen from the internal face of the northern side of the chancel (see Plate 2 and figure 3). The consolidation and filling of this void will stop further erosion of this area.

2. ***Repair of localised areas of facing / core work which have not already been subject to consolidation****.*

Area of core and face erosion on wall stub of south wall of nave. (Plates 2 & 3 and figure 3). Erosion is still active in this area and this area of masonry should be consolidated and capped.

3. ***Localised areas of facing / core work which have not already been subject to consolidation but may require attention.***
   Area of face erosion imminent within north wall of Chapterhouse. (Plate 5 and figure 3). This area should be consolidated and capped in order to avoid collapse of facing stone.

   Southern jamb / wall stub of reredorter stair door (Plate 6 and figure 3). This length of wall is in danger of significant collapse, particularly at its northern end due to vegetation and voids. This piece of masonry should be consolidated and capped.

4. ***Replacement / reinstatement of localised areas of capping***
   Where practicable, areas of failed vegetation capping should be replaced. This will require the removal of the geotextile from the wall / shelf and the importation of a suitable soil matrix (subject to the approval of Historic England) and the provision of suitable vegetation to be re-planted. It is recommended that the geotextile is not replaced in these areas. It is recommended that failed capping together with the associated geotextile is removed from areas of core "shelf" and not replaced.

Tree and scrub growth

Active small tree and scrub growth management was noted during the visit. This was, in the main, confined to the southern portion of the site, particularly the area between the reredorter and the stream. Further management is needed within this area together with the removal of scrub on the western side of the site outside of the western wall of the Cloister (see Plates 13 and 14).

Proposed Actions:

1. *Continue to remove / coppice hazel, hawthorn and elder along stream bank and remove elder from the grass area to the west of the Cloister.*

Plate 13: Elder growth to west of Cloister.

Plate 14: Elder growth to west of Cloister.

Additional observations:

During the site visit it was noted that after over 30 years the shed, used to store conservation tools, to shelter in and even to sleep in, has begun to collapse. This needs removing from site. (Plate 15)

The site is in desperate need of new, updated signage / display boards. The present board has rotted and fallen over and is practically unreadable. (Plate 16)

The wooden support for the masonry stub (semi encased by the Yew tree), at the western end of the Chancel has rotted at its base and is providing no support. A decision needs to be made concerning the stability of this piece of wall ant the effect that the Yew tree is having upon it. If a prop is required this should be constructed in stone in order to provide a suitable level of support. (Plate 17)

It was also apparent that a number of pieces of agricultural machinery are being parked / stored within the scheduled area (immediately outside of the fenced elements of the Priory). The process of moving such machinery may have a negative impact upon shallowly buried archaeological features / deposits and certainly inhibits the growth of stable grass cover. They also add to the general feeling that the site is currently "un-loved". (Plate 18)

It would be useful to undertake a survey of the larger trees on the site in order to assess their health, stability and the need for crowning.

6 Constraints to better management

There are a number of constraints to better management of the site, which include statutory or regulatory constraints.

- **Scheduled Monument Consent –** Works within the Scheduled Ancient Monument are controlled by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. As such there can be no unauthorised ground disturbances, no tipping or flooding. Proposals for such works must be the subject of an application for Scheduled Monument Consent to English Heritage. The works associated with any structural changes to the walls, the removal and / or reinstatement of the capping material would require Scheduled Monument Consent.

- **Felling Licence –** The felling of timber is controlled by the Forestry Act 1967. As such a felling licence from the Forestry Commission may be required to fell timber and where this is required it is an offence to do so without authorisation. (subject to an arborist's report)

7 Actions required in order to achieve successful management outcomes.

It is clear that some areas of tree and scrub growth have been subject to control. This needs to continue and the areas extended - particularly around the area to the west of the cloister.

The site needs to be assessed by a suitably qualified Conservation Architect, (preferably Historic England staff), in order to achieve a better understanding of the extent of any additional areas of masonry which may require consolidation and to provide an informed brief for the re-capping and consolidation works described within this document.

The Shed needs to be removed (including its concrete block supports).

New signage / display panels are required.

An arborist should be employed to comment on the health of the larger trees and to assess their stability or lack thereof in relation to mitigating damage to the upstanding fabric of the monument.

Plate 15: The shed

Plate 16: The only signage / display panel on the site.

Plate 17: Wall Section with rotted timber “support”.

Plate 18: Agricultural machinery parked within Scheduled Monument (excluding the land Rover).