



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

An archaeological watching brief at Prior's Marston School 2013

An archaeological watching brief at Prior's Marston School 2013

Iain Soden BA MIfA

Summary

Despite its central location in the village and proximity to the churchyard of St Leonard's Parish Church, the site was devoid of archaeological features. It contained former 19th-century land drains damaged by the previous school buildings, suggesting the site had been an arable plot of long standing. A few un-stratified sherds of medieval and early Post-medieval pottery attest former, small scale occupation or refuse disposal, possibly from another plot.

Acknowledgements

IS Heritage is grateful to Harrabin Construction of Coventry for their commission, and to Nick Beer in particular. The fieldwork was carried out by freelance archaeologist Danny McAree MA PIfA MBA on behalf of IS Heritage, to whom I am grateful. Thanks to Candy Stevens of Archaeology Warwickshire for Fig 3.

Introduction

Full Planning Consent was granted by Stratford upon Avon District Council for the demolition of existing school buildings and the erection of new hall, reception and 3 classrooms, together with associated surrounding ground-works as set out in Planning Application S12/00538/FUL.

Since the site lies within the medieval settlement of Priors Marston at NGR SP 4950 5751, a condition (#7) was applied to the consent for a programme of archaeological fieldwork.

In accordance with this, an approach was made to the District's Archaeological Advisors at Warwickshire County Council, Anna Stocks and Caroline Rann, following receipt of condition. Accordingly they issued a generic brief (27/9/12) for either a limited archaeological evaluation of the site, to be carried out post-demolition, with the potential to expand the works to cover the footprint of the new-build, or to monitor stripping of the footprint and all other areas of disturbance, with the potential for a contingency for a set-piece excavation if significant archaeological remains were present. The latter option was chosen and following demolition and breaking up of the school foundation-slab a watching brief took place on stripping of the sub-base to natural geology on 9-11 April 2013, with a subsequent visit to note alterations for car-parking.

Prior's Marston School

Background

The site of the Priors Free School lies within the medieval core of Priors Marston village, noted in the Warwickshire Historic Environment Record (HER) as record MWA8999, but for which there are few other records to date.

The site lies on School Lane, off Shuckburgh Road. The lane skirts plots adjacent to the churchyard of the Parish Church (St Leonard's, On-line HER: MWA 720). While a possible medieval churchyard cross has previously been found nearby (On-line HER: MWA 721), there are no further related remains listed on-line there. Fieldwork for the construction of a new village Hall on Shuckburgh Rd, some time ago, found no significant archaeology (Archaeology Data Service records).



Fig 1: St Leonard's Church and churchyard (HER: MWA 720), adjacent to the development site



Fig 2: The former churchyard preaching cross-head (HER: MWA721), now on display in the chancel of St Leonard's church; it measures some 0.5m square. The figures are traditionally Christ Crucified, flanked by the Virgin Mary and the disciple John.

Prior's Marston School

The nearby school began as a small Victorian stone building put up in the 1840s, added to thereafter and greatly expanded in the 1960s. It was primarily the 1960s element of the complex which was being replaced in the current works. The west side of the school plot is contiguous with the churchyard on its east.

Historical Maps and Documents

Scrutiny of Ordnance survey maps shows that the old core of the Prior's school was built by 1884, but that the plot was otherwise empty of buildings. The current excavation area was previously partly occupied by the modern addition to this school, built by 1974.

The 1812 Ordnance Survey Surveyor's Map, available on-line through the British Library (www.bl.ac.uk , 'Towcester' sheet), shows that the plot was empty of buildings at that date.

Considerable early documentation survives for medieval Prior's Marston (then simply called *Merston*), in particular the rental and Cartulary entries for the Lord of the Manor, Coventry Benedictine Priory in 1410-11, which also held the advowson of St Leonard's Church (the right to present a Rector to the community). The document includes the details and extent of the Manor itself, which stood at c341 acres with numerous free tenants and dependent individuals (*The National Archives* E164/21). The manor house stands some 75 metres from both the Churchyard and the current development site. None of the free-tenanted lands can be pinpointed within the manor but worthy of note is a mention of John Frankeley. This is probably the same John Frankeley who at about this time is recorded as Rector or Vicar of Priors Marston (Both titles are used in the Cartulary). The Cartulary records that he sold an acre of the Priory's land in 1411 to John de Catesby, with the intention of building a house there. If the association of the two Johns is correct then this is probably the erection of the first rectory and may have stood near the churchyard. If he is not the same John Frankeley (ie not a member of their ecclesiastical community), then he had no right to make the sale on the Priory's behalf.

Frankeley was evidently a local family as a William Frankeley is also mentioned at the same date (*TNA*: E164/21 f221, no 3).

Watching brief results

The ground-works of removing the sub-base of the former 1960s school building, together with an easement all around were monitored by an archaeologist. The work was carried out by a 5-ton tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological control. The amount of overburden, comprising mainly disturbed topsoil and sub-soil, amounted to a thickness of between c600mm and 800mm, together with the broken-up slab and foundations of the former school buildings. Existing consumer connections to utilities were renewed on the south side towards the frontage, although no substantial new trenches were required beyond the new building footprint.

Prior's Marston School

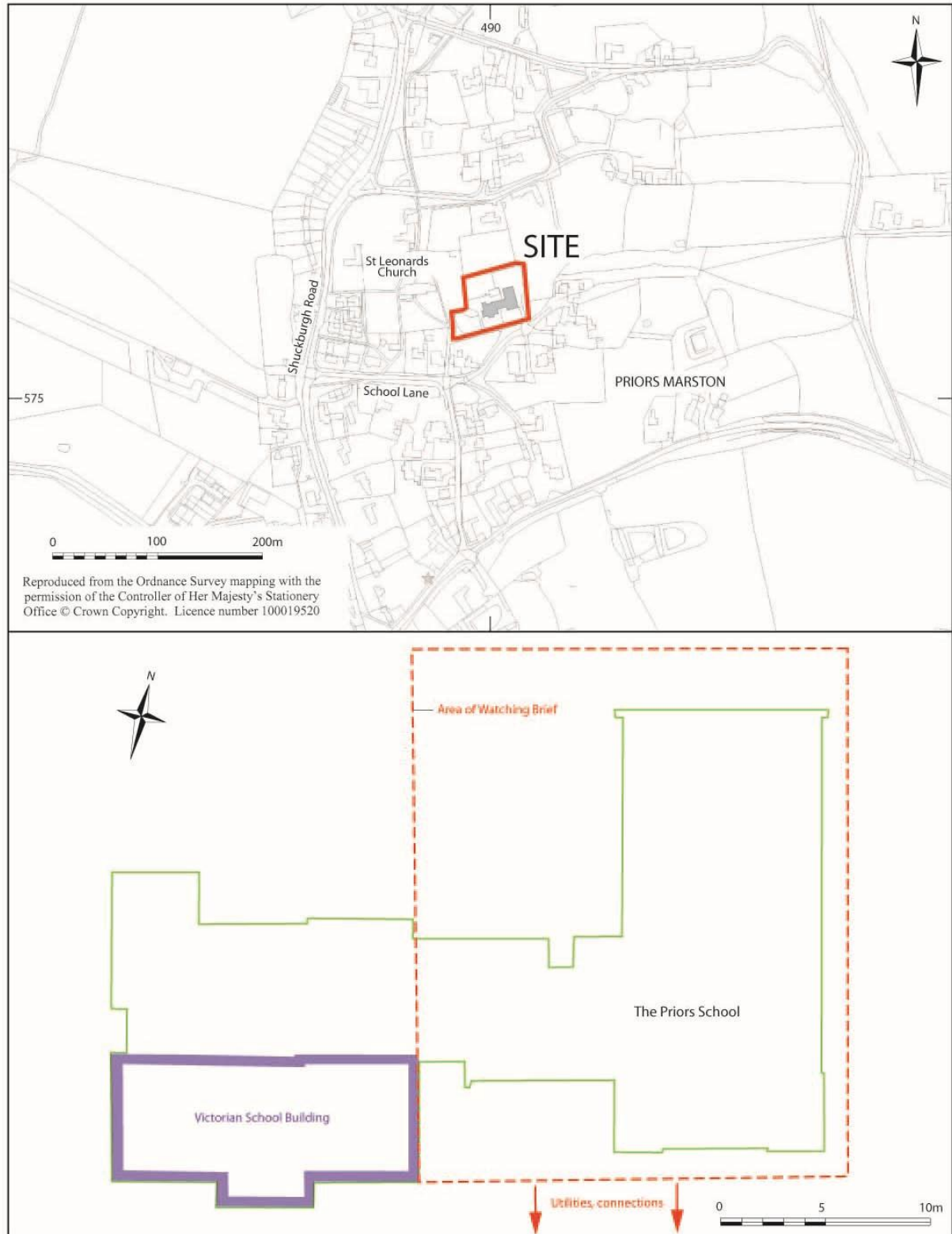


Fig 3: The site location, with the area of watching brief in relation to the school (Candy Stevens)

Prior's Marston School

The watching brief showed that no archaeological features or horizons had survived the construction of the 1960s buildings, if indeed there had ever been any there.

In places lay the interrupted lines of broken agricultural ceramic land-drains laid onto and just into the natural clay, denoting that before the school was built or alongside the early school, the plot was retained in agricultural, probably arable use. These were very fragmentary and had probably ceased to function when the 1960s buildings were erected.



Fig 4: The site, looking north, at the commencement of fieldwork, showing the northern and eastern extent of the area. Existing electricity supply retained at the standing block of brickwork



Fig 5: The site during mechanical stripping, looking south west, natural clays exposed. Existing cabling retained to the left of the brickwork. The existing foul sewer manhole is to the far right.

Finds

A few sherds of residual medieval and post-medieval pottery were present, but following positive identification in accordance with the Warwickshire County Type Series (unpublished manual and series by Stephanie Ratkai and Iain Soden, 1997), these were discarded as they originated wholly in layers of disturbed top- and sub-soil.

The pottery comprised:

- 5 sherds of 13th- to 14th-century Potterspury Ware bowl or jar with everted rim (Warks County Type series: WW10). The type is from the eponymous village industry in Northamptonshire, some 20 miles away and is a major type across that county (the Warwickshire/Northamptonshire county border is very close by). The industry straddled the Watling Street, and like Warwickshire's own Chilvers Coton industry, used that road to spread its wares far and wide.
- 1 sherd of probably 17th-century Midland Blackware (Warks County Type series: MB01). Un-diagnostic body sherd.

The pottery is of passing interest only to note the potential influence of a Northamptonshire supplier in a village which in administrative terms was closely allied with Coventry. Other than that, such a small number of sherds can denote nothing further.

Conclusions

No archaeological features or deposits were present. There was no evidence that the plot had been occupied at any period in the past.

While the medieval village's administrative links are primarily with Coventry, pottery in very small quantities, which could have been casual losses or dumping from an adjacent plot, suggest 13th- to 14th-century ceramic links through local markets with an industry in South Northamptonshire.

The plot may have been put to agricultural use in the 19th century, and in all probability long before that.



IS Heritage

20 May 2013