

## **OLD PROIRY BUILDINGS LEOMINSTER, GROUP AND LANDUSE TEXT (OPL05)**

### **PERIOD 1 Geology and Topography:**

The priory church of St Peter and Paul is situated on the edge of a flat topped plateau (ground surface *c* 76, OD). The land surface slopes away towards the north and east. These slopes have been created by the down cutting action of the Rivers Lugg and Kenwater. To the north of the site there was the former course of the Piddlewell Brook (now diverted). The Priory and the historic core of the town are located on this plateau which is flood free. The low-lying areas of the town around the Kenwater have a long history of flooding

The underlying solid geology consists of Old Red Sandstone and the overlying soils locally consist of reddish silty, alluvial sediments. A reddish clayey marl (top 73.03m OD) was interpreted as part of the Devonian Marl and a pre-Saxon soil horizon.

#### **Group 1**

##### **Subgroup 1.**

Contexts [94] reddish clayey marl.

### **PERIOD 2 Pre-Saxon activity**

Prehistoric activity on site is indicated by finds of two residual struck flints.

Part of a small pit of Roman date (no more precise dating possible) was found (G2). Two Roman tile fragments were found in Saxon contexts, it is not certain if this ceramic building material is simply residual material or whether it was brought to the site during the Saxon period for reuse, perhaps for lining hearths. Three Roman residual sherds were recovered from site. There is other evidence of Roman activity in the vicinity and nearby excavations recently uncovered a dump of Roman iron smithing slag probably of 2nd century date (Lewis *et al* 2005, 126).

#### **Group 2 Roman**

##### **Subgroup 3.**

Contexts [62, 75]

Portion of small pit of unknown function probably of Roman date. Roman pot.

## **PERIOD 3 Middle/late Saxon activity**

Initial Saxon activity consisted of dumping subsoil and marl to level up the natural south to north ground slope (G3). The earliest features were a series of ditches and pits (G4), which only contained numerous animal bones and daub. Two radiocarbon dates (obtained from animal bone samples) are from SG6 (UB-6670 BP 1351 +/- 32, cal AD 650-730, 93% probability) and SG7 (UB-6671 BP 1311 +/- 32, cal AD 655-775, 95% probability) These two dates clearly indicate activity on site during the late 7th or early 8th century AD. This means that the initial Saxon activity is contemporary with the documented foundation of a church/monastery in *c* AD 660 by St Edfrith a Northumbrian missionary (Hillaby 1987, 560-70, 600). It is probable that this church was always part of a minster or *monasteria*, which means that it would have included a small monastic community of priests or missionaries, who would have provided pastoral care in the Leominster region. The original mid 7th-century foundation at Leominster was unlikely to have been either a nunnery or a double house (containing monks and nuns), but by 1046 it is documented that it had become a nunnery (Hillaby 1987, 562).

A wide variety of large and small animal bones, including a concentration of fish bone were present, suggesting that the area was used for rubbish disposal during the Saxon period, and indicating that the monastic kitchens may have been situated nearby.

### **Group 3 Middle Saxon levelling dumps**

#### **Subgroup 2.**

Contexts [77, 91, 92, 93]

Dumped or redeposited subsoil horizons, not excavated top surface defined in plan. Contained charcoal flecks and shows evidence of biological reworking. There is no finds dating for these deposits, which pre-dates groups 6, 7 and 8 so it is earlier than AD 655-775.

### **Group 4 Middle Saxon features**

#### **Subgroup 6.**

Contexts [82, 83]

SW-NE ditch or gully, domestic rubbish/ midden fill, very rich in animal bones, bulk sample 2 [82]. C14 sample [82] UB-6670 BP 1351 +/- 32, cal AD 650-730.

#### **Subgroup 7.**

Contexts [84, 85, 86]

N portion of large oval rubbish pit, domestic rubbish/midden fill, very rich in animal bird/fish bones, bulk samples 1 [84] and 3 [86]. C14 sample [86] (UB-6671 BP 1311 +/- 32, cal AD 655-730.

#### **Subgroup 8.**

Contexts [78, 79, 95]

Robbed out stakehole [95] and N-S slot or gully with terminal at N end. Saxon? Pre-9th century.

### **Group 5 late Saxon activity**

It is apparent from the range of the C14 dates that activity continued until the 9th century. A third date was obtained from a ditch (SG 5) (UB-6668 BP 1180 +/- 31, cal AD 775-900, 95% probability), which was later cut by an oval pit (SG 4). The middle Saxon features (G4) were sealed by series of levelling dumps (SG4 which were also rich in animal bones from the next to top spit another date was obtained (UB-6669 BP 1167 +/- 31, cal AD 770-900, 92% probability). It appears that this naturally sloping area was on the periphery of the settled area and being used systematically for food waste disposal and that attempts were being made to level the site by dumping soil and food waste.

#### **Subgroup 4.**

Contexts [67, 68]

Portion of large oval pit(s) of unknown function possibly Saxon (post AD 770)

#### **Subgroup 5.**

Contexts [70, 71]

N-S ditch, filled with redeposited topsoil. C14 sample [70] UB-6668 BP 1180 +/- 31, cal AD 772-900.

#### **Subgroup 9.**

Contexts [63, 72, 73, 74, 76]

Spits of topsoil horizon, containing domestic rubbish/midden material, clear evidence of biological activity might be external dumping which later was converted into a top soil by natural processes. C14 sample [72] from next to top spit UB-6669 BP 1167 +/- 31, cal AD 776-902. No datable finds.

## **PERIOD 4: The Medieval Priory**

In 1046 Leominster nunnery was involved in a scandal, when the Earl of Herefordshire abducted and seduced the Abbes Eadgifu, who he then kept “as his wife” for almost year, until he was persuaded to release her by the bishop of Worcester and the archbishop of Canterbury (Hillaby 1987, 655). It appears that between 1046 and 1066 the extensive estates of Leominster church were sequestrated by the Earls of Hereford to finance a series of border wars with the Welsh (Hillaby 1987, 655-60).

In 1123 Henry I gave Leominster church and its remaining estates to Reading Abbey. By this date it is uncertain what remained of the nunnery, its church and other buildings, as it is assumed that after the events of 1046 the nunnery was dissolved. It is believed that building work on the Priory of St Peter and St Paul started immediately after Reading Abbey took over, as in c1132 Bishop Robert de Bethune consecrated two chapels in the nave of the new church. The Romanesque priory

church consisted of twin aisled nave, while to the east was the choir or monastic church; it consisted of a semicircular presbytery, with transeptal chapels (RCHM 1934, 111). To the north of the church were the cloisters (Freeman 1863, 227) and domestic buildings, some of which are still standing. During the 13th century a new south or parochial nave was added to the church and during the 14th century a new south aisle was added to this nave (RCHM 1934, 113). The eastern portion of the church was uncovered during the 1850s and its ground plan established from the robbed out foundations (Freeman 1853). A hypothetical plan of the entire priory has been recently compiled by Brown and Wilson (1994, illus 37). This plan shows that the area of the site as lying across the western arm of the cloisters and the part of the cloister garth.

The evaluation located the western arm of the priory cloisters in their expected position (G6). The width of the cloister ambulatory or walkway was 2.5m. The remains of mortar bedding for the tile or stone paving (of which there was no trace) indicated the approximate height of its robbed out floor of the cloister walkway stood at 73.8m OD, which is some 1.2m below the floor level of the north aisle of the 12th-century priory church. Clearly the various elements of the priory had 'stepped' floor levels to take account of the sloping ground surface. The floor level of the western arm of the cloisters, explains why the blocked door in the north wall of the north aisle (next to the toilet entrance) of the 12th-century church relates to a much lower floor level, it must have originally possessed steps on its southern side which have since been infilled.

The remains of part of a substantial cellared masonry building attached to the western side of the cloister walk was found. Its walls and floor levels had been entirely removed by Post-Dissolution robbing. The date of this building is uncertain but the presence of late 14th or 15th-century pottery in the robbing debris indicates that it may have been a later addition to 12th-century cloisters.

## **Group 6 the original cloister garth**

### **Subgroup 11.**

Contexts [80, 81]

1st phase of western arm of cloister garth wall foundation [80], N-S trench built mortared (very decayed) roughly coursed sandstone rubble. Assumed to be post 1123 and therefore part of the 12th century priory, certainly post 9th century.

## **Group 7 first rebuilding of the cloister garth**

### **Subgroup 12.**

Contexts [89, 90]

This trench-built foundation was built directly on top of the earlier foundations (G6) and its construction presumably involved the demolition of the superstructure and perhaps the truncation of the earlier foundations. This random sandstone rubble foundation was 0.86m wide and bonded by a cream coloured sandy lime mortar. This wall appears to have built as series of linear segments, not as a continuous structure. There is no finds dating evidence for this activity, but it is pre-late 14th century.

### **Group 8 Second rebuilding of the cloister garth**

This phase of the cloister ambulatory or walkway was 2.5m wide. The late 14th or 15th century rebuilding of the cloister garth was fairly drastic as it appears to have removed any earlier floor surfaces and involved the removal of parts of the earlier wall (SG 13), creating a void which was then spanned by ramshackle masonry (SG14). The nature of the new cloister garth wall is uncertain as all but one blocks of stone (SG 16) was later robbed out. The relatively shallow nature of this replacement foundation suggests that it was either a dwarf wall or supported a timber-framed structure. The area of the cloister walkway was levelled (SG 15), then mortar bedding laid.

The remains of mortar bedding for the tile or stone paving (SG21) (of which there was no trace) indicated the approximate height of its robbed out floor of the cloister walkway stood at 73.8m OD, which is some 1.2m below the floor level of the north aisle of the 12th-century priory church. Clearly the various elements of the priory had 'stepped' floor levels to take account of the sloping ground surface. The floor level of the western arm of the cloisters, explains why the blocked door in the north wall of the north aisle (next to the toilet entrance) of the 12th-century church relates to a much lower floor level, it must have originally possessed steps on its southern side which have since been infilled.

#### **Subgroup 13.**

Contexts [64, 65]

Robbing out S end of wall SG11. [64] late 14th/15th century pot.

#### **Subgroup 14.**

Contexts [87, 88]

N-S ramshackle unmortared masonry placed within void created by SG13 to support replacement wall foundation SG16. No datable finds, Late 14th/15th century rebuild.

#### **Subgroup 15.**

Contexts [56, 57, 59]

Levelling dumps under W cloister walk. Med pot, post dates SG13, so late 14/15th century. [59] med?. Late 14th/15th century?

#### **Subgroup 16.**

Contexts [48, 49]

2nd phase of phase of western arm of cloister garth wall foundation, shallow N-S trench foundation 50cm wide and 13cm deep, only 1 mortared block left in-situ, rest of masonry robbed out down to mortar bedding. No datable finds. Late 14th/15th century rebuild.

#### **Subgroup 21.**

Contexts [30]

A patchy spread of mortar bedding for robbed out paving (nature unknown) within the W arm of cloister walk (Max width 2.60m). No datable finds, presumably late

14th/15th century. The top surface of this truncated surface varied from 73.68 to 73.73m OD.

### **Group 9 Cellared Building on the western side of the cloister walk**

The remains of part of a substantial half cellared masonry building attached to the western side of the cloister walk was discovered. Its walls and floor levels had been entirely removed by Post-Dissolution robbing. The date of this building is uncertain, but the presence of late 14th or 15th-century pottery in the robbing debris indicates that it may have been a later addition to 12th-century cloisters. The earlier dumping on the site of this building (SG 10) was disturbed during the post-medieval period, so provides no useful dating evidence for the construction of the building.

The plan and function of this building is hard to determine because it had been completely robbed out and its associated deposits disturbed during the post-medieval period. It is interpreted as half-cellared because of the absence of floor levels (see G11, SG 17) at similar level to the bedding for the paving or tiles within the western arm of the 15th-century cloister (G8).

#### **Subgroup 10.**

Contexts [66, 69]

External dumping and top soil horizons, like SG9, clear evidence of biological reworking. Very mixed ceramics of 13th to 17th century date, probably mixture of disturbed medieval construction and post-medieval robbing debris within building attached to west side of cloisters. [66] 14th-15th century pot; [69] 13th-15th or 16th-17th century pot. Clearly this material was disturbed after the Dissolution (P5).

### **Group 10 The medieval cloister garth**

A linear ditch with a concave profile within the cloister garth is attributed to this group as it contains a medieval coin, other wise it would have been interpreted as Saxon. Possibly this ditch served as boundary or perhaps a bedding trench.

#### **Subgroup 18.**

Contexts [41, 42]

N-S ditch? [41] Med coin could be residual. Finds included a fragment of grit or mill stone.

#### **Subgroup 19.**

Contexts [58]

There was a top/garden soil horizon within the cloister garth. [58] (top 73.34m OD) containing 13th century pot. There were a few fragments of disarticulated human bone within this context, as there were no burials within this area this material might derived from tipping soil from the nearby cemetery.

## **PERIOD 5: The Dissolution**

After the suppression of the priory in 1539, both the cloister and choir were demolished and then extensively quarried for building stone. In 1611 and 1613 it is documented that stone was being salvaged from the site of the cloisters (Hillaby forthcoming). Interestingly the sequence of events concerning the demolition and robbing of the western arm of the cloisters can be reconstructed in detail:

1. The tiled or paved floor of the cloister walk was removed (uncontexted).
2. Scaffolding was erected along the line of the western cloister walkway, presumably to allow the roofs to be stripped of stone slates and the standing walls demolished (SG 24). Then the cloister garth wall foundations were robbed out (SG 23). The debris (SG 17, 22) within the remains of the half cellared building probably was deposited at this time when the superstructure of the building was demolished.
3. The area of the former cloister garth was used to sort salvaged material and hundreds of fragments of broken glazed floor tiles were discarded here. A lot of sandstone roof slate fragments were also discarded here. This activity is dated by associated pottery to the 17th century (SG20).
4. The deep masonry foundations of the building attached to the western side of the cloisters were completely dug out (SG25). Sherds of 17th/18th-century pottery and clay tobacco pipe bowls dated to 1650-75 were recovered from the backfill of these trenches (William Underwood of Ludlow 1650-75 and a locally made wheel stamped design 1660-70, Allan Peacey pers comm). During the 17th century the site a north-south aligned ditch was dug across the area of the cloister garth this was probably a property boundary, perhaps connected with occupation within priory building to the east which were retained building adjoining the eastern arm of the cloisters. In the 16th century the 'Priory House' became the town residence of the Coningsbys of Hampton Court.
5. Afterwards the site was levelled (SG26) during the later 17th and early 18th century.

The most important medieval finds from the site were the 539 fragments of glazed floor tiles and other building materials including broken stone roof slates and lumps of tufa all found in post-dissolution contexts (mostly SG20). The floor tiles were probably locally produced in the Hereford area. Thin section and chemical analysis suggest that these tiles are Bredon type tiles (Vince 2006). The vast majority of the tiles were cream and dark green in colour and presumably laid chequer board fashion, but there were some fragments depicting other decorative schemes.

### **Group 11 the demolition the cloisters and the subsequent robbing out of their foundations.**

#### **Subgroup 20.**

Contexts [46, 53]

Rubbly soil dumping within cloister garth. The area of the former cloister garth or garden was used after the dissolution to sort salvaged material building material and hundreds of fragments of broken glazed medieval floor tiles were discarded here [46]. The vast majority of the tiles were cream and dark green in colour and presumably

laid chequer board fashion, but there were some fragments depicting other decorative schemes. A lot of sandstone roof slate fragments were also discarded here. [46] 17th century pot. The early 18th century pot [53] is intrusive.

### **Subgroup 17.**

Contexts [61]

Mixed construction and demolition and robbing debris within remains of building attached to W arm of cloisters (G10). There was no sign of any floors probably due to robbing, the top of this deposit was 73.48m OD. [61] 14/15th century pot, residual post-dates SG10 so post-Dissolution?

### **Subgroup 22.**

Contexts [29, 40, 45, 47, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55]

Charcoal spread [54] and number of levelling dumps, containing freq stone roof slate frags, on site of or within remains of building attached to W arm of cloisters. [29] 16th century, [52] 15th-early 16th century, with residual earlier material. Post dissolution destruction deposits. [29] and [40] 16th century pottery; [45] 14/15th century pottery; [52] 15th-early 16th century; [55] 14th/15th century.

### **Subgroup 23.**

Contexts [31, 32]

Robbing out of later cloister garth wall SG 16 down to its mortar bedding. No dating evidence. Post 1539?

### **Subgroup 24.**

Contexts [34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 43, 44]

L shaped arrangement of four robbed out postholes within walkway of cloister garth. These probably held timber scaffolding poles to facilitate demolish of superstructure of cloisters. No dating evidence, post 1539.

### **Subgroup 25.**

Contexts [33, 23]

Complete robbing out foundations of building adjoining W arm of cloisters, backfill mortar and tiny rubble fragments, all larger stones removed. [23] CTP William Underwood of Ludlow 1650-75 and a locally made wheel stamped design 1660-70; [23] 17/18th century pottery.

### **Subgroup 26.**

Contexts [7, 17, 24, 25, 28]

Charcoal spread [25] a series of levelling dumps, containing demolition material (mainly frags of stone roof slate) and dumped top soil [17]. [7] CTP John Grub married in Leominster in 1666; [24] William Underwood of Ludlow 1650-75; [28] 1650-60 bowl type, [17] 17th/18th century pot, [28] early 18th century pot.

### **Subgroup 27.**

Contexts [26, 27]

Small N-S ditch, probably a property boundary. [26] 17th century pot.



## PERIOD 6: the 18th to 20th centuries

### Group 12 paved trackway

By 1825 according to Gallier's map of Leominster the site of the cloister was open-space, crossed a south-west to north-east aligned trackway, represented on site by an area of pitched sandstone paving (dated to post 1650) (SG28).

### Subgroup 28.

Contexts [22]

Area of pitched sandstone rubble paving, probably part of track or pathway. Post SG 25, therefore post 1650.

### Group 13 the workhouse garden

By 1886 the site was part of the Leominster Workhouse gardens, during this period soil was dumped here to raise the general ground level (SG29). Various postholes may be 19th-century garden features (SG31) and top soil horizons (SG 30) contained pottery of 18th to 20th century date, coins of George III and George V, tokens, a bone toggle and a slate pencil.

### Subgroup 29.

Contexts [6, 16]

Mixture of levelling dumps and garden soil, evidence of biological reworking. CTP [16] stamped RE *c* 1690-1720, unidentified Herefordshire pipemaker possibly based in Leominster; [6] late 18th century pot.

### Subgroup 30.

Contexts [4,5]

Rubbly levelling dumps of top soil. Probably 19th century, post 18th century.

### Subgroup 31.

Contexts [10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21]

Series of robbed out postholes, garden features, part of the Workhouse garden (established between 1838 and *circa* 1880. [11] and [20] residual med pot; [13] 19/20th century pottery.

### Group 14 the hospital car park

In 1948 the Workhouse became part of the NHS and was converted into a hospital a number of drains and other services were installed (SG 32) and soon after the site was converted into a tarmac car park with a large circular raised border complete with a central flagpole (constructed before 1968). There were dense rubble car park foundations around this border (SG33). This work involved further raising of the ground level. During 1978-81 as part of the restoration of the adjoining priory reredorter and infirmary buildings the entire car park was repaved in brick (SG 34)

and is now used as staff parking by Herefordshire Social Services Council staff working in the adjoining buildings (Brown and Wilson 1994).

### **Subgroup 32.**

Contexts [8, 9, 14,15]

1950s (live) service trenches armoured electric cable [9] and salt glazed stoneware foul drain [15], there was also two cast iron pipes aligned SW-NE (both uncontexted), the eastern one (1.5" diameter) is probably gas or water and the western one (1.0" diameter) was a water pipe. All these services were installed before the tarmac surface was laid (SG23). Mid 20th century (post 1948).

### **Subgroup 33.**

Contexts [2,1]

Shortly after 1948 the area of the Workhouse garden was largely covered with tarmac [2] to provide access and parking, part of the existing gardens were retained as a series of raised beds, the most prominent being a large circular bed with flagpole in the centre in the SW corner of the car park. The southern half of this circular bed was located (within the western portion of the trench) complete its central flagpole and its garden soil partly was excavated [1]. 1950s NHS car park. Finds: [1] CTP William Bryan late 18th century stamped stem possibly Bromyard and 19th century pot, 1d coin 1917, George III 1799 1d or ½d, 2 post-med tokens?, buttons, a bone toggle, a ceramic wig curler, a broken slate pencil and a glass marble.

The mass of limestone rubble used to raise the tarmac area around the circular border and create the foundations for the car park (which finished some 50 cm below present ground level), created a massive 'shadow', which the GPR projected deep into the underlying stratigraphy (to a depth of over 2.0m), but at the same time this false signal obscured the remains of the cloisters and other archaeological features within the area. (Barker and Rarity 2003).

### **Subgroup 34.**

Contexts [3]

During 1978-81 the entire area was covered with herring bone brick paving for use as staff parking by the people working in the adjoining county council offices. It is now used by Herefordshire Social Services staff.

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