

HERITAGE NETWORK



**PRIORY HOUSE,
33 High Street South,
Dunstable, Beds.**

HN924

***ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING REPORT***

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

PRIORY HOUSE
33 High Street South, Dunstable
Bedfordshire

Project Ref.: HN924
Luton Museum Accession no: 2011.63
LPA ref.: CB/10/01935/LB

Archaeological Monitoring Report

Prepared on behalf of Dunstable Town Council

by

James Snee, BSc (HONS), AIFA

Report no. 676

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The cover photograph shows Priory House, looking northeast

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Greg Jones and James Snee. The report text and illustrations were prepared by James Snee, and edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Dunstable Town Council and Hannah Firth, Development Management, Central Bedfordshire Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU6 3RZ		
County:	Bedfordshire	District:	Central Bedfordshire
Village/town:	Dunstable	Parish:	Dunstable
Planning reference:	CB/10/01935/LB	NGR:	TL 01987 21774
Client name and address:	Dunstable Town Council, Grove House, 76 High Street Nth, Dunstable, LU6 1NF		
Nature of work:	Drainage	Former land use:	Pavement
Site status:	LB & SM	Reason for investigation:	Direction of LPA (PPS5)
Position in planning process:	Post-determination	Project brief originator:	Local Authority
Size of affected area:	7.5m ²	Size of area investigated:	7.5m ²
Site Code:	HN 924	Accession no.:	LUTNM: 2011.63
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson
Project type, methods etc.:	Monitoring	Archive recipient:	Luton Museum
Start of work	27/6/2011	Finish of work	28/6/2011
Related HER Nos:	HER 131	Periods represented:	Modern
Oasis UID	heritage1-100654	Significant finds:	None
Monument types:	None		
Physical archive:	n/a		
Previous summaries/reports:	n/a		

Synopsis:

In response to a condition on the planning consent for stabilisation and repair works at Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Dunstable Town Council to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring of the development groundworks, specifically the excavation of a French drain. Priory House is a Grade II* listed building and forms part of Dunstable Priory Scheduled Monument (SM BD3). It was formerly a private house, constructed on the remains of the former *hospitium* (guest house) of the Augustinian priory and contains an original thirteenth century undercroft with vaulted stone ceiling.

The observation of the groundworks identified no significant archaeological features or deposits, although the foundations of the existing building were exposed and this demonstrated that the 18th century brick frontage sits on natural chalk and does not rest on any earlier (monastic) masonry.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of Dunstable Town Council, as part of a programme of archaeological monitoring of drainage works undertaken as part of the stabilisation and repair of Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

1.2 Planning permission for the development (ref: CB/10/01935/LB) granted by Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), was subject to an archaeological condition issued in line with the Department of Communities and Local Government's *Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5)*. The extent of the work was defined in a *Brief for a Programme of Archaeological Observation, Investigation, Recording, Analysis and Publication at Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire*, prepared by the Archaeological Officer (AO) of the Archaeology Team of Development Management, Central Bedfordshire Council, the unitary authority covering the site.

1.3 Priory House is located on the northeast side of High Street South and is centred on NGR TL 01987 21774. It is bounded to the east by Priory Gardens and to the northwest and southeast by road frontage properties, numbers 31 and 35 respectively.

1.4 Dunstable is located within a complex prehistoric landscape that extends across the Dunstable Downs and the Chilterns. The town is the site of the Roman settlement of *Durocbrivis* (HER 135 & 11284), founded on the crossroads of the prehistoric Icknield Way (HER 353) and the Roman Road known as Watling Street (HER 5508). In the early medieval period, the precursor of modern Dunstable was a planned market town (HER 16986), exploiting the advantageous location of the crossroads, and serving the needs of the pastoral economy of the surrounding area. Two religious houses were established in the southern half of the town (Albion Archaeology 2003). In the post medieval period, the town became dominated by the coach trade and had numerous inns. With the coming of the railways the coach trade collapsed and many inns went out of business, but were replaced by hat factories. The hat industry played a major part in Dunstable's economy until the 20th century, when it was eclipsed by Luton (*ibid.*).

1.5 Priory House is a Grade II* listed building. It was a private house constructed on the remains of the former *hospitium* (guest house) of the Augustinian priory and contains an original thirteenth century undercroft with vaulted stone ceiling.

1.6 The aim of the present project has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any remains which were liable to be threatened by the development, and to establish a local and regional archaeological and historical context for them, if they should be discovered, in accordance with the current published local and regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000; Oake et al 2007; Medleycott and Brown 2008).

1.7 In addition, it was considered that the present project had the potential to contribute to an increased understanding of:

- the character and development of the Roman small town at *Durocbrivis*, particularly in the later Roman period;
- the line of Watling Street, and any roadside activity;
- the development of the Augustinian Priory;

- the character and development of the planned medieval town at Dunstable;
- the relationship between the medieval town and the Priory.

1.8 The programme of stabilisation and repair works comprised stone repairs to the undercroft, the removal of inappropriate cement render and replacement in lime render, the provision of a French drain to the front elevation and other miscellaneous repairs. In line with the brief issued by the AO, archaeological monitoring was limited to the supervision of the excavation of the French drain, including the lifting of paving slabs.

2. Fieldwork

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

2.1 The study area consists of a small area of street frontage on the north-east side of High Street South (Figure 2). The site sits on roughly level ground at approximately 145m AOD.

2.2 As the site is located in an urban landscape, the local soils have not been mapped. However, around the town soils are marked as belonging to the Upton 1 Association (342a) described as ‘Shallow well drained calcareous silty soils over chalk.’ (SSEW 1984).

2.3 The underlying geology comprises Holywell Nodular chalk formation and New Pit undifferentiated chalk formation (bgs.ac.uk).

METHODOLOGY

2.4 In accordance with the requirements of the planning authority, the fieldwork comprised a programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording during the construction of the French drain. An archaeologist from the Heritage Network was present on site from the removal of the flagstones onwards and continuously until the excavation of the drain was completed.

2.5 The French drain was excavated by hand to a width of 0.5m and a maximum depth of 0.45m, along the southern half of the frontage of Priory House.

2.6 All recording work was carried out in accordance with the approved Project Design, current health and safety legislation, and both IfA and ALGAO standards.

MONITORING AND RECORDING

2.7 The lifting of the paving stones at the northern end of the study area exposed a layer of concrete. Excavation for the French drain revealed that this was 0.14m thick (Plate 1). Below the concrete was a layer of crushed mortar, sand and modern brick and tile fragments, 0.25m thick. Further south, the paving slabs were replaced by brick paving (Plate 2). This was set on a layer of building sand, approximately 0.30m thick. The natural chalk was exposed at a depth of between 0.35 and 0.40m below the present ground surface.

2.8 The brickwork of the front wall was rendered to a level approximately 0.20m below the existing ground level. Below the render were two courses of exposed brick resting on natural chalk (Plate 3).

2.9 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were revealed during the course of the present project.

Finds

2.10 No finds were observed or collected during the fieldwork.

3. Discussion

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTING

3.1 Priory House is a Grade II* listed building dating to the 18th century and incorporating elements of 13th century date, which lies in a well defined archaeological landscape.

Archaeological and Historical Background

3.2 The Augustinian Priory at Dunstable (HER 131) was founded in 1131 or 1132 by Henry I and was dissolved in 1539 by Henry VIII. Remaining Priory buildings include the Church of St Peter (HER 132), part of the gateway (HER 6329) and the undercroft at Priory House (HER 6311). Priory House itself was one of the ancillary buildings and is believed to have been a *hospitium*, a guest house for pilgrims and visitors to the Priory. The Listing for Priory House describes it as:

C18, cement rendered C19. Mansard Welsh slate roof. 2 storeys and attics. 4 round-headed windows with archivolts and keyblocks. Door surround of architrave, consoles and pediment. Parapet. Original garden front of good design. Red brick, stone dressings and in-and-out quoins. Ground floor windows in architraves, let floor windows in eared archivolts. Pedimented Roman Doric doorway. Moulded cornice, parapet with stone coping. Pedimented slight central projection. On site of Priory Guesthouse. Reputed to contain C13 vaulted room.

3.3 A visit to the Central Bedfordshire and Luton Historic Environment Record was made on 12th May 2011. There are 223 HER records and 28 Events listed within a radius of 500m of the present site. These include:

- The prehistoric routeway known as the Icknield Way (HER 353), to the north of the Priory;
- The Roman town of Durocobrivis (HER 135 & 11284), centred on the crossroads of the Icknield Way and Wattling Street (HER 5508). A number of small scale excavations have been undertaken in the northeast quadrant of the Roman town, north of the present investigation, and have revealed strong evidence of urban settlement including roads, buildings and wells;
- An enclosed Roman cemetery (HER 11284) has been partially excavated at Friary Field, to the west of Priory House;
- The medieval town of Dunstable (HER 16986), founded by Henry I and believed to centre on the crossroads;
- A Royal residence (HER 148) known as Kingsbury, to the north;
- The Augustinian Priory, of which Priory House is part, founded in the 12th century (HER 131);
- A Dominican Friary (HER 141), founded in the 13th century immediately across the road from the Priory.

3.4 Following dissolution of the Priory in 1539, most of the Priory buildings were demolished. Priory House appears to have become a private dwelling. As such it underwent a number of structural changes before becoming part of a hat factory in the 19th century. The only surviving medieval elements are represented by the large vaulted undercroft with 1m thick rubble walls on the north, west and east sides of the building. Priory House and its undercroft were substantially restored in the late 20th century (HER 6311). A building record was made in the course of repairs to the building in 2003 and 2004 (Cooper-Reade & Phillips 2004).

NEW DATA

3.5 The observation of the present groundworks identified no significant features or deposits. The observations of the base of the frontage wall provided a limited view of the construction of the 18th century frontage.

CONCLUSIONS

3.6 It was considered that the present project had the potential to contribute to an understanding of a number of aspects of the development of the town, including its character in the Roman period, the development of the Priory, and the relationship between the medieval town and the Priory. Collected evidence was limited, however, to a demonstration that the 18th century brick frontage sits on natural chalk, and not on earlier (monastic) masonry.

Confidence Rating

3.7 An archaeologist was present for the whole of the excavation of the French drain. The groundworks were undertaken by hand and the weather and ground conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. On this basis, the confidence rating for the work undertaken may be considered to be High.

4. Schedule of site visits

Date	Staff	Hours	Comments
27/6/11	GJ	10	Observation of French drain.
28/6/11	JGS	2	Observation of French drain.

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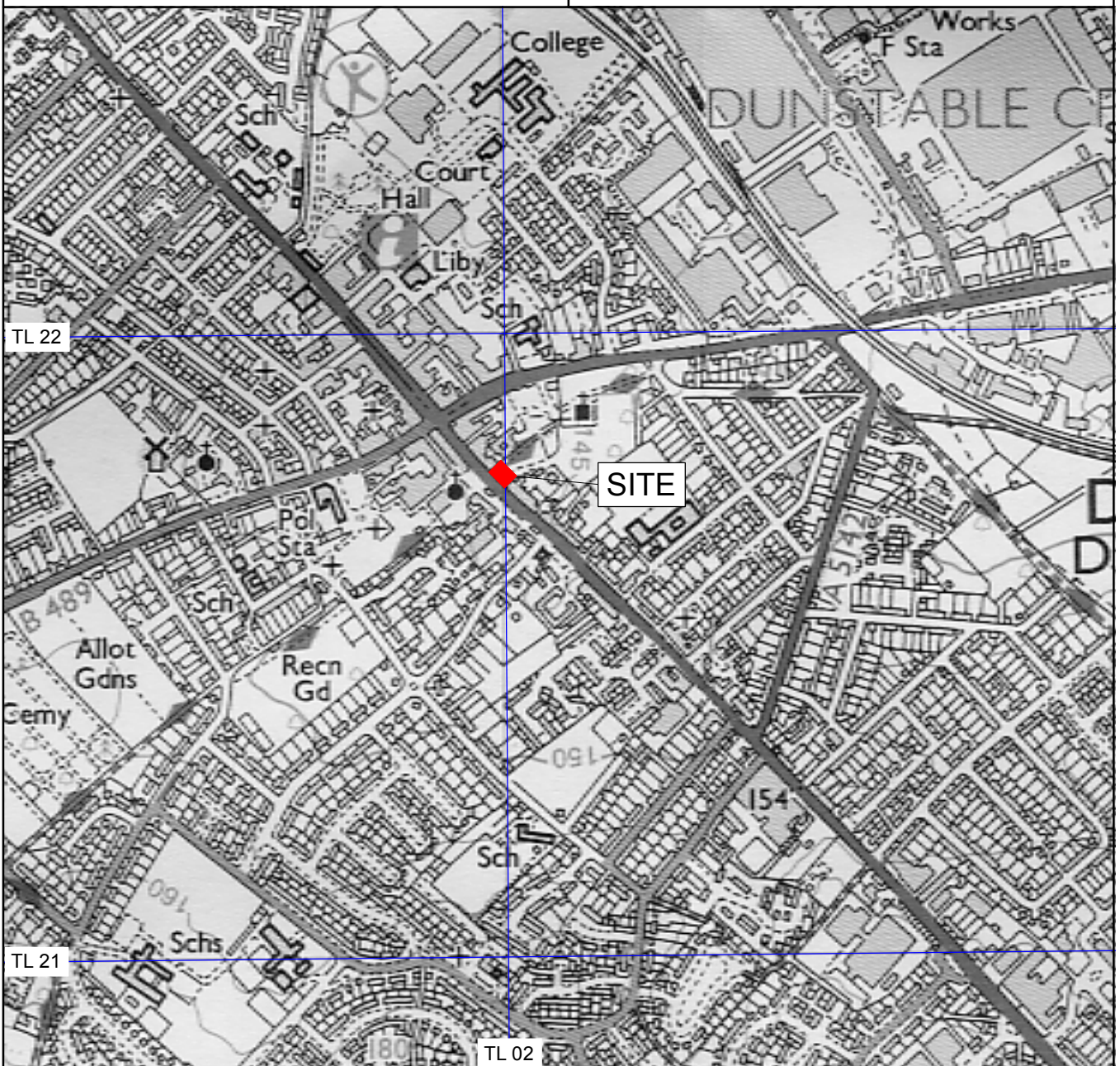
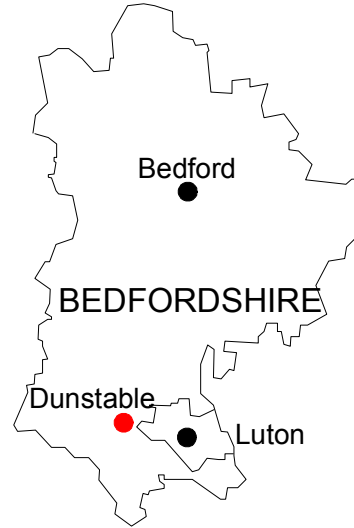
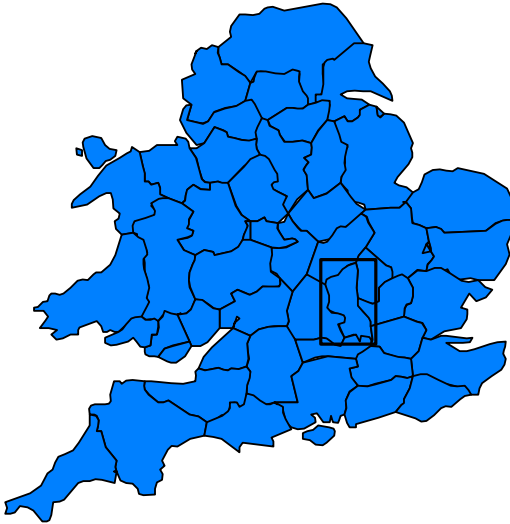
6. Illustrations

- Figure 1..... Site Location
- Figure 2..... Site Layout
- Plate 1..... View of French drain, looking southeast
- Plate 2..... View of French drain, looking northwest
- Plate 3..... Exposed brickwork resting on natural chalk, looking northeast

THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Priory House, 33 High Street South,
Dunstable

HN924

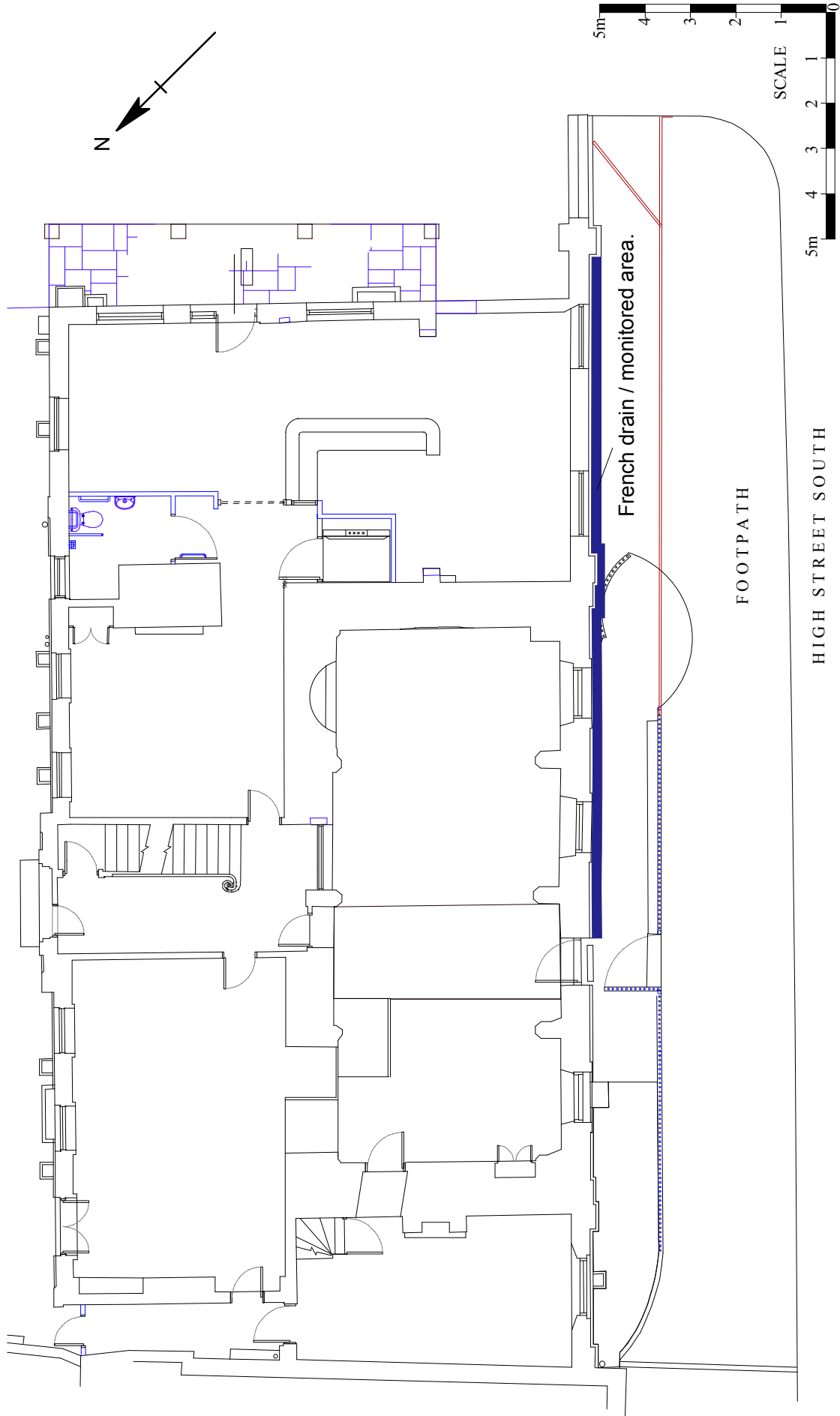


Site Location

Scale 1:10000

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Figure 1



Site Layout

Plan courtesy of Brasier Freeth LLP

Scale 1:125

Figure 2



Plate 1: View of French drain, looking southeast.



Plate 2: View of French drain, looking northwest.



Plate 3: Exposed brickwork resting on natural chalk, looking northeast.

Appendix

OASIS ID: heritage1-100654	
Project details	
Project name	Dunstable, Priory House, 33 High Street South
Short description of the project	<p>In response to a condition on the planning consent for stabilisation and repair works at Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Dunstable Town Council to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring of the development groundworks, specifically the excavation of a French drain. Priory House is a Grade II* listed building and forms part of Dunstable Priory Scheduled Monument (SM BD3). It was formerly a private house, constructed on the remains of the former <i>hospitium</i> (guest house) of the Augustinian priory and contains an original thirteenth century undercroft with vaulted stone ceiling.</p> <p>The observation of the groundworks identified no significant archaeological features or deposits, although the foundations of the existing building were exposed and this demonstrated that the 18th century brick frontage sits on natural chalk and does not rest on any earlier (monastic) masonry.</p>
Project dates	Start: 27-06-2011 End: 28-06-2011
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Associated project reference codes	HN924 - Contracting Unit No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Listed Building
Site Status	Scheduled Monument
Current Land use	Other 2 - In use as a building
Monument type	BUILDING Post-medieval
Methods & techniques	'Recorded Observation'
Development type	French drain
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Post determination
Project location	
Country	England
Site location	BEDFORDSHIRE SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE DUNSTABLE Priory House, 33 High Street South
Postcode	LU6 3RZ
Study area	7.5 Square metres
Site coordinates	TL 01987 21774 51.8847409360 -0.518024189864 51 53 05 N 000 31 04 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 145m Max: 145m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Heritage Network
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Heritage Network
Project director	David Hillelson
Project supervisor	James Snee
Type of sponsor/funding body	Landowner

Name of sponsor/ funding body	Dunstable Town Council
Project archives	
Physical Archive Exists?	No
Digital Archive recipient	Luton Museum
Digital Media available	'Images raster / digital photography'. 'Text'
Paper Archive recipient	Luton Museum
Paper Media available	'Diary', 'Plan', 'Report', 'Section'
Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Beds.
Author(s)/Editor(s))	Snee, J.
Other bibliographic details	Heritage Network Report No: 676
Date	2011
Issuer or publisher	Heritage Network
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Description	A4 booklet, comb bound, green cover, 8 pages, 2 figures, 3 plates