

## The Priory Church of St. Peter, Dunstable, Bedfordshire

HN1220

Report No.964

<b>Site name and address:</b>	Priory Church of St. Peter, Dunstable, Bedfordshire.		
<b>County:</b>	Bedfordshire	<b>District:</b>	Bedford
<b>Village/town:</b>	Dunstable	<b>Parish:</b>	Dunstable
<b>Planning reference:</b>	n/a	<b>NGR:</b>	TL 0134 5125
<b>Client name and address:</b>	St. Peter's PCC, c/o Mrs Hilary Jackson, 19 Northcliffe, Eaton Bray, LU6 2DE		
<b>Nature of work:</b>	Exploratory test pits	<b>Present land use:</b>	Church
<b>Site Status:</b>	Listed Building	<b>Reason for investigation:</b>	Diocesan Faculty
<b>Position in planning process:</b>	N/A	<b>Project brief originator:</b>	N/A
<b>Size of affected area:</b>	0.75m <sup>2</sup>	<b>Size of area investigated:</b>	0.75m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Site Code:</b>	HN1220	<b>Other reference:</b>	n/a
<b>Organisation:</b>	Heritage Network	<b>Site Director:</b>	David Hillelson
<b>Project type, methods etc.</b>	Evaluation	<b>Archive Recipient:</b>	Luton Museum
<b>Start of work</b>	21/20/2015	<b>Finish of work</b>	23/10/2015
<b>Related HER Nos:</b>	HER 132	<b>Periods represented:</b>	Post-medieval
<b>Oasis UID:</b>	heritage1-219769	<b>Significant finds:</b>	Burial vault
<b>Monument types:</b>	Church		
<b>Physical archive:</b>	None		
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b>	No		

### Narrative:

As part of the exploratory works prior to the installation of underfloor heating at The Priory Church of St. Peter, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by the PCC to excavate a series of trial holes (TH) inside the church. The methodology for the work was agreed with the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser (DAA) as a requirement of the faculty granted for the investigation.

The Priory Church of St. Peter, Dunstable, which is a Grade I listed building, is located in the historic core of Dunstable, centred at NGR TL 02139 21868 (Figure 1). The present church represents the remains of the Augustinian Priory founded by Henry I in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century (<http://www.dunstableparish.org.uk/history-of-st-peters/>). After the Dissolution of the monasteries in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century only the parochial nave survived, to form the existing building. Two of the trial holes are located close to pillars in the arcades. These were built between 1150 and 1200 and extend to the roof, linked by arches. Lower arches were inserted later at the height of the side aisles, to create the arcades.

The groundworks involved the excavation of three small test pits in the north and south aisles of the church (Figure 2). These were designed to investigate the floor construction and to identify the presence of any existing features, such as graves. Following the removal of the present wooden flooring blocks and the underlying modern concrete by the groundworks contractors, the trial holes were excavated by hand to a maximum depth of 350mm.

**TH A** was located at the eastern end of the north aisle, adjacent to the eastern pillar of the arcade. It measured 0.60m by 0.50m and between 0.15m and 0.25m in depth (Plates 1&2). The stratigraphy consisted of a layer of concrete, 0.08m thick, over dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) loose sandy silty make up with brick, tile and chalk inclusions, 0.17m in depth. A red brick structure with a sloping roof, [101], which has been interpreted as a burial vault was encountered below the made ground. This was aligned north-south, perpendicular to the aisle. The bricks were bonded with a dry lime mortar, which also covered the surface of the vault, and were laid in stretcher bond. The apex of the vault, on the eastern edge of the trial hole, was approximately 0.15m below the surface of the concrete floor. On the western edge the level of the vault dropped to 0.25m below the concrete surface.

An existing gas pipe, of probable late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century date, was observed extending into the trial hole from the western baulk, above the probable vault.

No other features, deposits, or artefacts were observed in this trial hole.

**TH B** was located adjacent to a pillar at the eastern end of the southern arcade and measured 0.70m in length, 0.50m in width and 0.35m in depth (Plate 3). The stratigraphy consisted of a layer of concrete, 0.08m thick, over dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) loose sandy silty make up with brick, tile and chalk inclusions, 0.15m in depth. This overlay the white chalk natural substratum, >0.18m in depth.

No evidence for a foundation cut for the adjacent pillar was observed in the trial hole. It appears that the column base sits directly on the natural chalk.

No archaeological cut features, deposits, or artefacts were observed in this trial hole.

**TH C** was located to the south of Trial Hole B, close to the south wall of the church. It measured 0.50m in length, 0.40m in width and 0.40m in depth (Plate 4). The stratigraphy consisted of a layer of concrete 0.08m thick, over dark yellowish brown (10YR 4/4) loose sandy silty make up with brick, tile and chalk inclusions, 0.15m in depth. This overlay the white chalk natural substratum, >0.18m in depth.

No evidence associated with the construction of the south wall was encountered and no archaeological features, deposits, or artefacts were observed in this trial hole.

### **Discussion:**

The Priory Church of St. Peter (HER 132) dates predominately from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with some 15<sup>th</sup> century additions. TH B was located immediately adjacent one of the eastern pillars in the south arcade. No evidence for a construction cut was observed and it appears that the pillar rests directly on the natural chalk. No other medieval structures, features, deposits or finds were encountered during the present project.

The roof of a late post-medieval brick structure, presumably part of a burial vault, was encountered at a minimum depth of 0.15m below the present surface in TH A, at the eastern end of the north aisle. This structure was oriented north - south, perpendicular to the aisle.

The underlying natural chalk was observed in TH B and TH C at a depth of approximately 0.23m below the present surface. No human remains were observed or disturbed in the course of the work.

### **Conclusion:**

The present archaeological investigation has demonstrated that the modern floor sits on a layer of concrete, 0.08m in depth, above made ground, between 0.15m and 0.25m in depth. This lies directly above the natural chalk. The presence of post-medieval brick and tile fragments in this layer, together with the burial vault and gas pipe encountered in TH A, indicates regular post-medieval and modern disturbance within the north and south aisles.

Apart from the probable vault exposed in TH A, no other archaeological features, deposits or artefacts were observed during the course of the present project.

### **Sources consulted**

History of the church: <http://www.dunstableparish.org.uk/history-of-st-peters/>. Date accessed 2 November, 2015.

### **Illustrations:**

Figure 1 Site location

Figure 2 Site layout

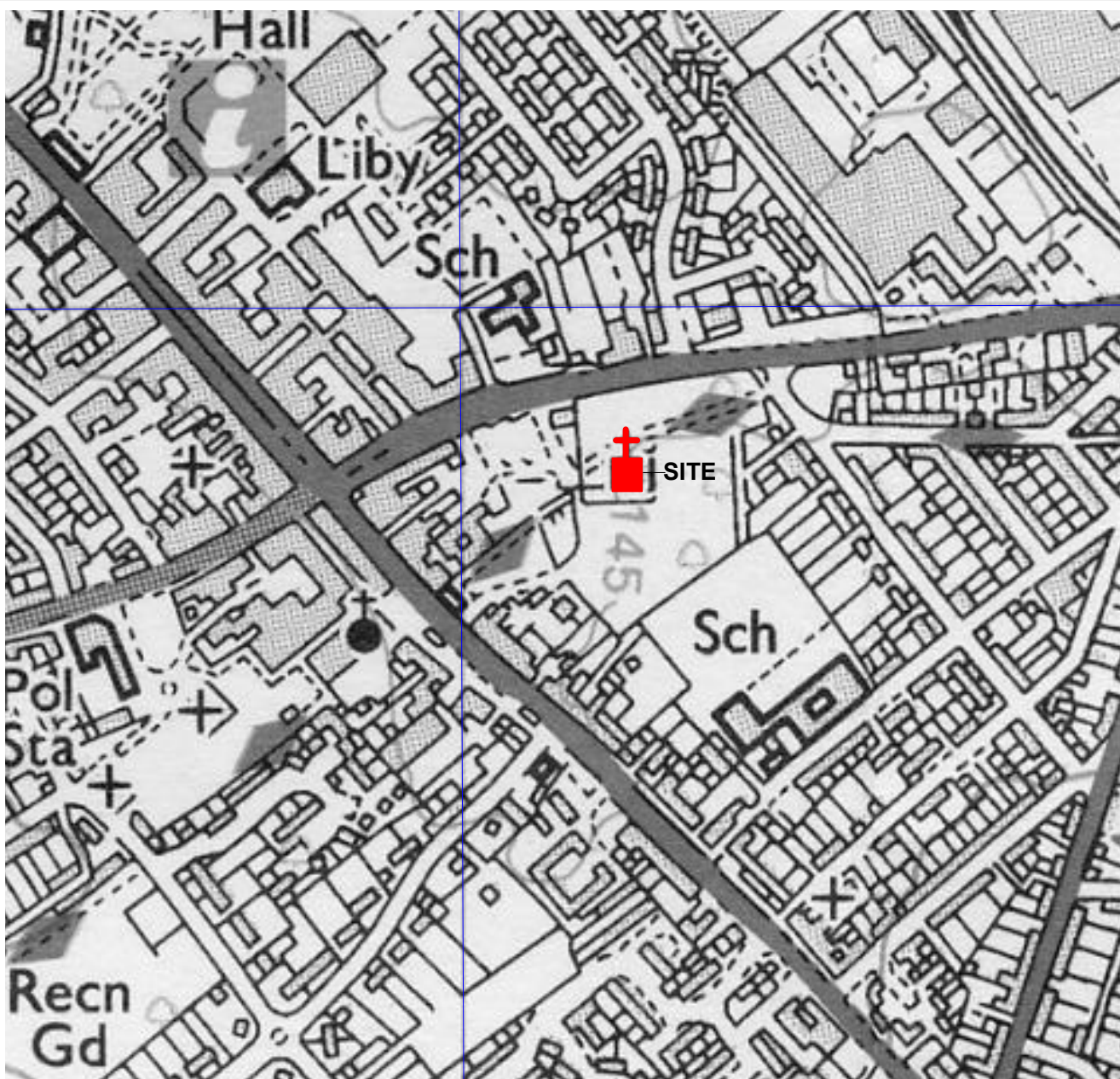
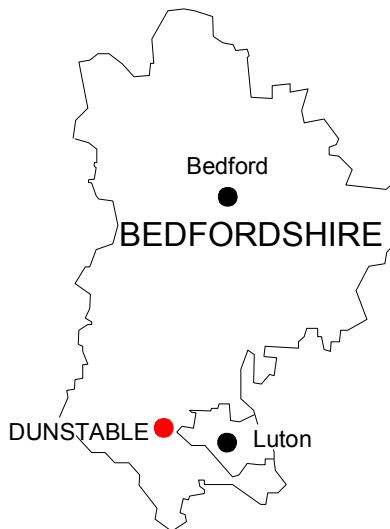
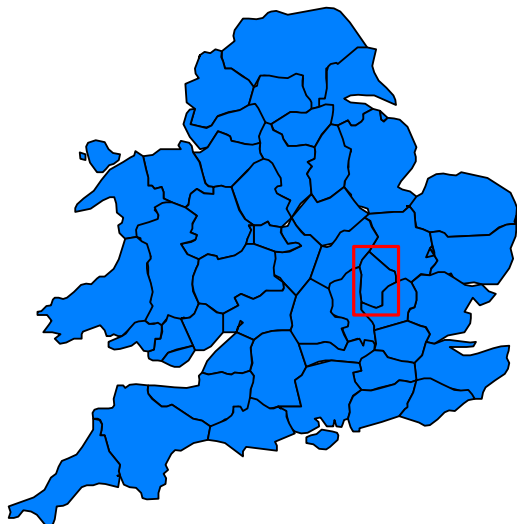
Plate 1 Trial Hole A looking south

Plate 2 Trial Hole A looking west

Plate 3 Trial Hole B looking west

Plate 4 Trial Hole C looking north

Greg Jones  
October 2015



Site Location

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Scale 1:5000

Figure 1





Plate 1: Trial Hole A Looking South



Plate 2: Trial Hole A Looking West



Plate 3 Trial Hole B Looking South



Plate 4 Trial Hole C Looking South