

Archaeological Impact Assessment

**Memorial Bench and Tree
at Lewes Priory, East Sussex**

**NGR 541494 109623
TQ 415 096**

Prepared for Lewes Priory Trust

By Richard James BA, MIFA

ASE Project No: 6189

ASE Report No: 2013153

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Archaeology South-East (a division of the University College London Centre for Applied Archaeology) has been commissioned by Lewes Priory Trust to assess the impact of a proposed new memorial bench and tree within the grounds at Lewes Priory, East Sussex (Figs 1 & 2).

1.2 The site lies within the former precinct of Lewes Priory. The site is extremely sensitive in heritage terms, and lies entirely within the following designated heritage areas:

- Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 28890);
- Lewes Conservation Area;
- Archaeological Notification Area.

In addition, the Priory ruins are Grade I Listed Buildings.

1.3 The purpose of the present document is to assess the impact of the proposed development on the archaeological resource. To achieve this, it has been necessary to briefly research the archaeological and historical background of the immediate Site to establish the currently understood layout of the abbey buildings; establish (as far as possible) the nature and degree of past impacts (including archaeological interventions) on and around the site; to use this information to predict the character and depth of underlying archaeological deposits; and to assess the likely impact of the proposals on those predicted deposits. This approach has been developed in discussion with English Heritage.

1.4 The particular historical significance of the site is derived from its location within the historic core of the former medieval Cluniac Priory of St. Pancras, Lewes, immediately east of the demolished priory church.

1.5 *Details of the Proposed Development*

The proposed development is located within the extreme north-eastern corner of the site, on a terrace situated c. 1.2m higher than the surrounding priory ruins as currently laid out. This triangular terrace is bounded by the railway line to the north-west, by a flint wall to the east (with a bowling green beyond), and by a former putting green to the south. The ruins of the Infirmary Chapel lie immediately to the west of the south-west corner of this terrace.

1.6 The proposed development comprises the installation of a memorial bench and tree within the centre of the terrace (Figs 2 & 3). The bench will be erected on a concrete and hardcore base measuring 1.83m in length and 0.6m in width, and sunk within the terrace to a depth of 0.25m. A tree will be planted immediately north of the bench. The dimensions of the

planting hole have not been finalised, but the assessment has assumed a hole of c. 1m in diameter and c. 1m in depth.

- 1.7 No height data is currently available. However, a digital terrain model created during a Ground Penetrating Radar survey in 2007 (Archer 2007) indicates that the terrace has an approximate level of 10m OD, and is approximately 1.2m higher than the ground level immediately to the south. This difference in level conforms to visual inspection using a graduated ranging pole (Plates 1 & 2).

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (after Russell 2009)

- 2.1 The Priory of St. Pancras was founded by William de Warenne, a leading Norman baron and brother-in-law of the Conqueror, sometime between 1078 and 1082, on the site of an earlier Saxon church. Lewes Priory was the first monastic house in England to belong to the reformed Benedictine Order of Cluny. The priory became one of the wealthiest monasteries in England, largely due to the great lands presented to it by the founders and their descendents. Yet the priory had no significant role in national, political or religious affairs, except during the Second Barons' War when it was occupied by King Henry III both before and after the Battle of Lewes in 1264.
- 2.2 The priory expanded through the 11th and 12th centuries. The main buildings, including the great priory church, were built in Quarr limestone between c. 1082 and c. 1100 and in Caen limestone from c. 1145 to the 13th century. However from the late 13th century to the mid-15th century the monastery was rarely free of debt (caused in part by the French wars), which limited the scope of its later building projects to largely repair work and led to the reduction in the number of monks at Lewes from over 100 in 1240, to 50 by 1279, 40 by 1381 and just 29 by 1534 (Mayhew 2008, 5).
- 2.3 At the time of its dissolution in November 1537, Lewes Priory was still one of the great English monasteries and the chief house of the Cluniac Order in England (Mayhew 2008, 6). As recompense, its monks received pensions, whilst the Prior acquired several benefices, including the treasurership of Chichester Cathedral.
- 2.4 Thomas Cromwell (who organised the dissolution of the monasteries in England) contracted the Italian military engineer Giovanni Portinari and his men to totally destroy the churches at Lewes Priory in March 1538 (Mayhew 2008, 6). This was achieved in a matter of days by excavating trenches to undermine the walls, so that the masonry could be propped up with timber and set alight for the stonework to crash down. The surviving domestic buildings in the prior's lodgings complex were adapted as a home for Thomas Cromwell's son (*ibid*, 8).
- 2.5 On Cromwell's execution in 1540 his Lewes land was in part retained by the crown and granted to King Henry VIII's divorced fourth wife, Anne of Cleves (Poole 2000, 34). The rest of the old precinct, c. 20 acres of the original 39 acres, was leased for 21 years to Nicolas Jenney, a former priory servant (Mayhew 2008, 8). On his death in 1550, the remaining time of the lease was acquired by William Newton. Newton used stone from the priory to, for example, built Southover Grange just beyond the north wall of the former priory precinct. On the death of Anne in 1559, the

manor of Southover passed to Sir Richard Sackville who used the prior's lodgings only sporadically (Poole 2000, 34; Mayhew 2008, 9). His son later occupied Lord's Place (as it was known from the 1570s) for just a few days a year. Lord's Place and the borough of Southover passed to John Tuffon, the second Earl of Thanet, and it was his son Thomas who in 1668 sold the ruinous house to local builders as a source of building material (Poole 2000, 35; Mayhew 2008, 9). He sold the manor of Southover and the priory lands to Nathaniel Trayton in 1705 (Poole 2000, 36-37). When Trayton's son died in debt in 1761, the estate was left to his chief creditor Samuel Durrant. On his death in 1782, the land was passed to his cousin, also Samuel Durrant.

- 2.6 Later episodes of quarrying at the priory site, including the extensive cross-shaped dovecot, are recorded as having occurred during the early 19th century, in order to supply the construction industry or improve the pasturage (Mayhew 2008, 10).
- 2.7 In 1845 the cutting for the new railway line between Lewes and Brighton cut a diagonal section across the ruins of Lewes Priory.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND HISTORIC IMPACTS

- 3.1 The site falls within the original historic precinct, but lay just beyond the main core of buildings. The east end of the church lay c. 15m to the north-west of the terrace, with the main conventual complex (cloisters, dormitories, refectory etc) to the south-west. Immediately south-west of the terrace lay the infirmary chapel (and original church), with the infirmary hall laid out to its south. The east end of the church was destroyed during the construction of the railway line in 1845. The Lewes historian M.A. Lower reported that the works uncovered at least 100 graves situated to the east of the church, together with a large 3m diameter pit full of human remains (and interpreted as a mass burial pit relating to the Battle of Lewes in 1264). These details suggest that the area east of the buildings, including the current site, lay within the monks' cemetery. Mayhew also conjectures, based on comparative sites elsewhere, that a Lantern of the Dead, a small tower containing a lamp illuminating the cemetery during the night, may also have stood here (Mayhew 2008, 20).
- 3.2 The infirmary chapel was excavated by W.H. St. John Hope in 1900-02. It was reported that he removed 8 feet (2.4m) of accumulated debris (Lyne 1997, 15). The existing terrace is c. 1.2m higher than the excavated floor level of the chapel, as laid out for display, suggesting that the current terrace was formed from a larger, more extensive mound of material that was twice the current height and which extended across the adjacent excavated ruins.
- 3.3 The derivation of this material is unclear – there is no evidence that it formed part of any original mound in this location, and Richard Budgen's sketch of the priory ruins in 1724 (reproduced in Everson 2005) shows only the existing Calvary Mount to the east, with the area around the site as flat. It is not shown on the 1844 Tithe map, but first appears on the Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1874-75. The terrace is assumed to have been created from spoil excavated during the construction of the railway, perhaps dumped on top of demolition deposits (Mayhew 2008, 20). The GPR survey in 2007 recorded two 'high-reflectance rectangular structures' located within the upper 0.5m of the terrace, which were interpreted as wall footings associated with mid-19th century structures constructed during the railway works (Figure 4), although the character and age of these anomalies remains unconfirmed (Archer 2007, 4).
- 3.4 Three phases of archaeological works have taken place in this part of the Priory site; St. John Hope in 1900-02, Richard Lewis in 1969-82, and recent works by Archaeology South-East during the recent public access works (St. John Hope 1906; Lyne 1997; Stevens 2011). None of these interventions examined the Site itself. Consequently, it remains a

possibility that at least two phases of possible archaeological deposits remain within and beneath the terrace: medieval monastic burials at the level of the original ground level (i.e. c.1-1.2m below the top of the terrace), and the remains of possible 19th century structures associated with the railway works within the upper 0.5m of the terrace.

4 THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED WORKS

4.1 Based on the available details of the proposed works, the following impacts are predicted:

4.2 The Bench

4.2.1 The bench will involve a shallow disturbance of only 0.25m in the top of the terrace. This is of insufficient depth to reach any surviving medieval deposits (which are predicted at a depth of at least 1m), but may damage deposits relating to the anomalies recorded in the GPR survey that have been interpreted as 19th century structures.

4.3 The Tree

4.3.1 The exact details of the tree planting are not available, but it has been assumed that a hole up to c. 1m deep by c. 1m in diameter may be necessary. If so, any buried medieval deposits may be damaged by the excavation, although only in a relatively localised area. The hole will also cut through any deposits associated with the supposed 19th century structures suggested by the GPR results.

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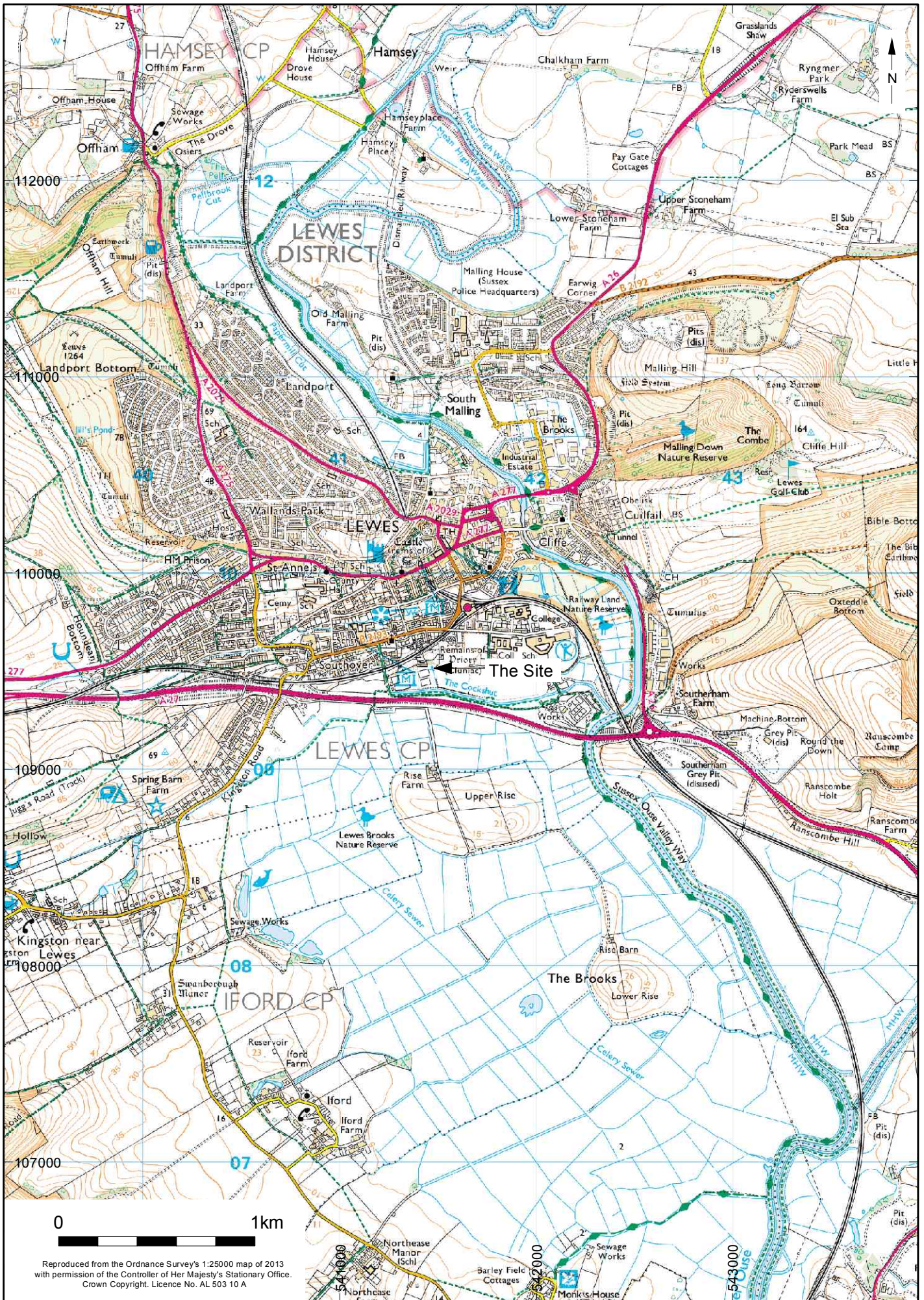
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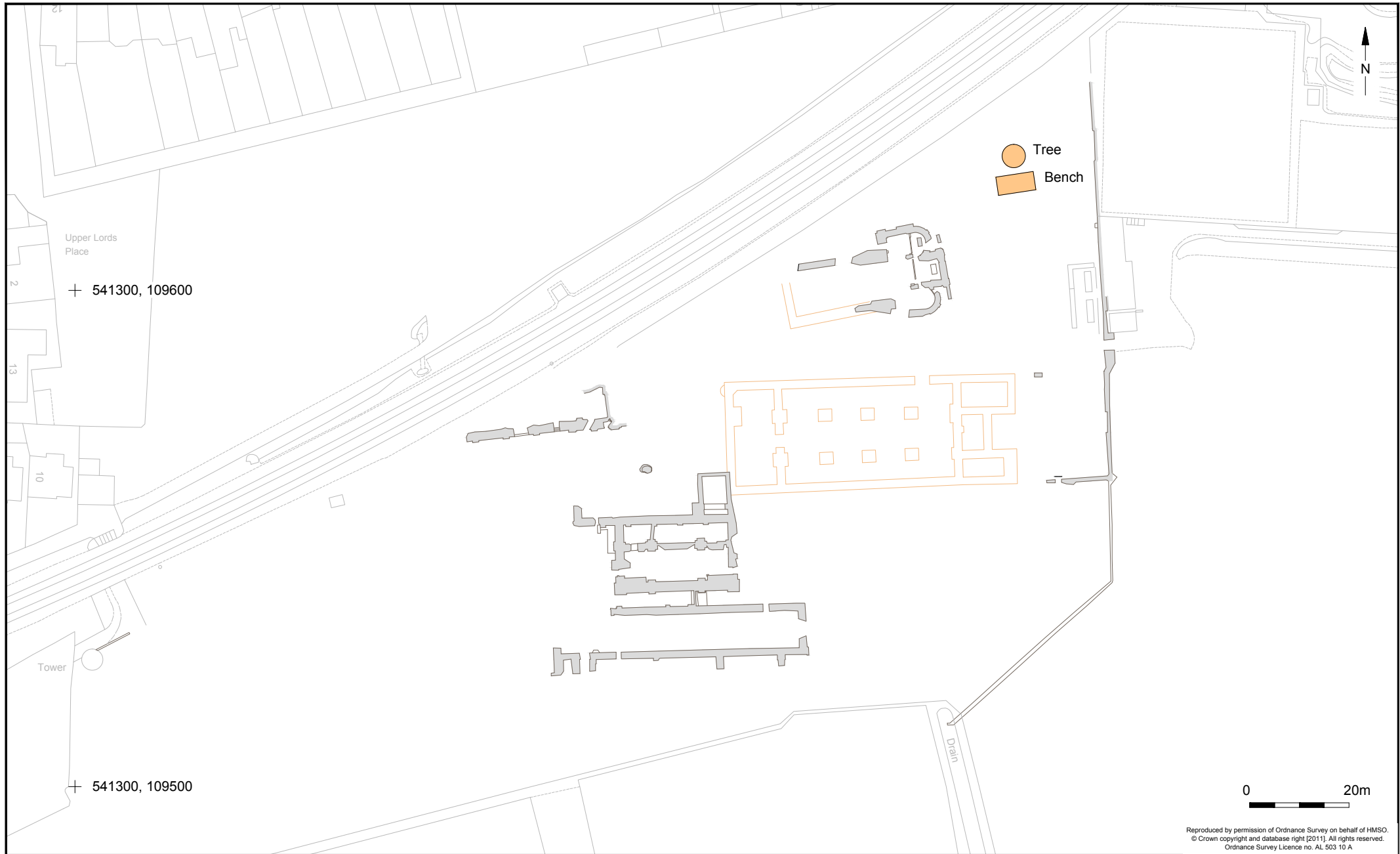
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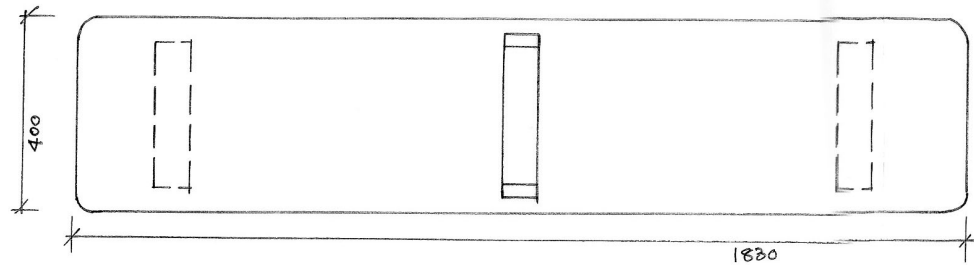
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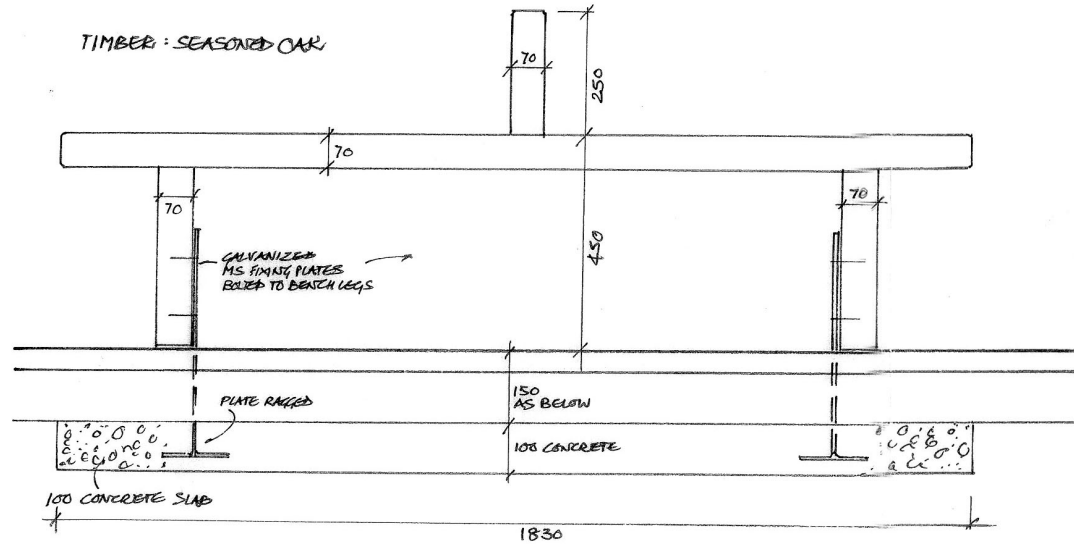
© Archaeology South-East		Lewes Priory	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 6189	June 2013	Site location	
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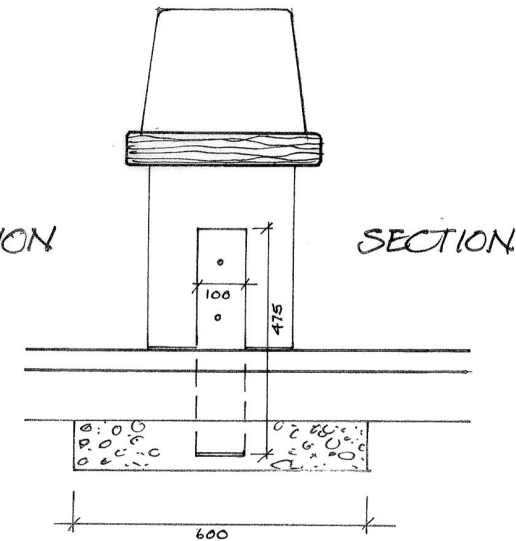
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Project Ref:6189	June 2013	Plan of proposed development	
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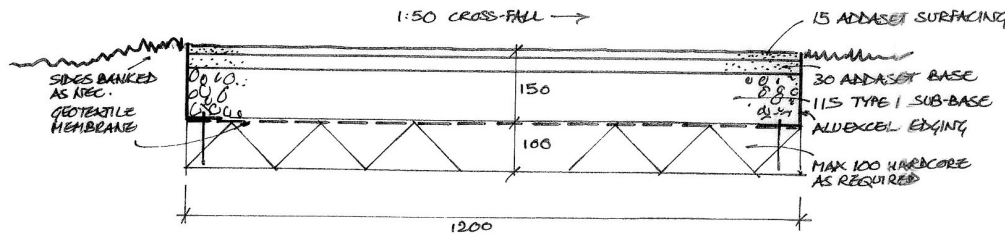
PLAN



ELEVATION



SECTION



PATH CONSTRUCTION

LEWES PRIORY PARK
 SOUTHOVER, LEWES, E.SUSSEX
 PATHS & BENCHES

CARDEN & GODFREY Architects
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© Archaeology South-East		Lewes Priory		Fig. 3
Project Ref: 6189	June 2013	Plan and elevation of proposed bench		
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© Archaeology South-East		Lewes Priory	Fig. 4
Project Ref:6189	June 2013	Proposed development in relation to anomalies detected by Arrow Geophysics 2007 GPR survey	
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Plate 1: West end of terrace in relation to Infirmary Chapel



Plate 2: View of site from the south

© Archaeology South-East		Lewes Priory	Plates 1 & 2
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