

NOTE FROM MANSHEAD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Excavations at Priory Middle School, Dunstable, 1992 – 2002

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The Manshead Archaeological Society carried out a series of trial excavations at Priory Middle School (TL 018 217) between 1991 and 2002 with the kind permission of the Headmaster, Mr. R. Pepworth (Hudspith forthcoming, Warren 1997).

In the NE corner of the school field excavations identified Roman and medieval features outside the precinct boundary of the Augustinian Priory of which only the Priory Church now remains standing (Fig 1). The earliest feature was a Roman ditch, aligned N-S, which contained a female burial of probable late Roman date cut into the fill. Overlying the ditch were a succession of medieval tracks, aligned NE-SW. These were initially indicated by cart ruts cut into the natural chalk and later sealed by a metallated surface of split flints, cobbles and tile fragments. The metallated track appeared to be heading towards an assumed gateway in the precinct wall. It may date to the 12th century (in un-metallated form) and appears to have gone out of use in the 16th century following the demolition of many of the Priory buildings. The track was bounded to the south

by a flattened chalk bank which overlay earlier cart ruts and may have served as a walkway. The bank was formed from the up-cast of a 1.5m wide and 1m deep 'V' cut ditch of medieval date. Within the medieval ditch fill were residual finds of potsherds, animal bones, iron knives, an arrowhead, a rowel spur (c. 15th century), a 12th century relief tile and large quantities of peg tile. These probably indicate post Dissolution dumping. The medieval ditch and bank were apparently contemporary with the metallated track and probably served both for drainage and as a physical boundary. A right of way dispute, between the Prior and the townfolk of Dunstable, regarding the enclosure of 'Gruteslane' is recorded in the Annals of Dunstable Priory for 1282.

In the SE corner of the school field, formerly an area of orchards, excavations revealed a broad, partially metallated, track of 17th – 18th century date besides residual Roman and medieval potsherds.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Warren, D, *Manshead Journal* 37, 1997, 1-10.

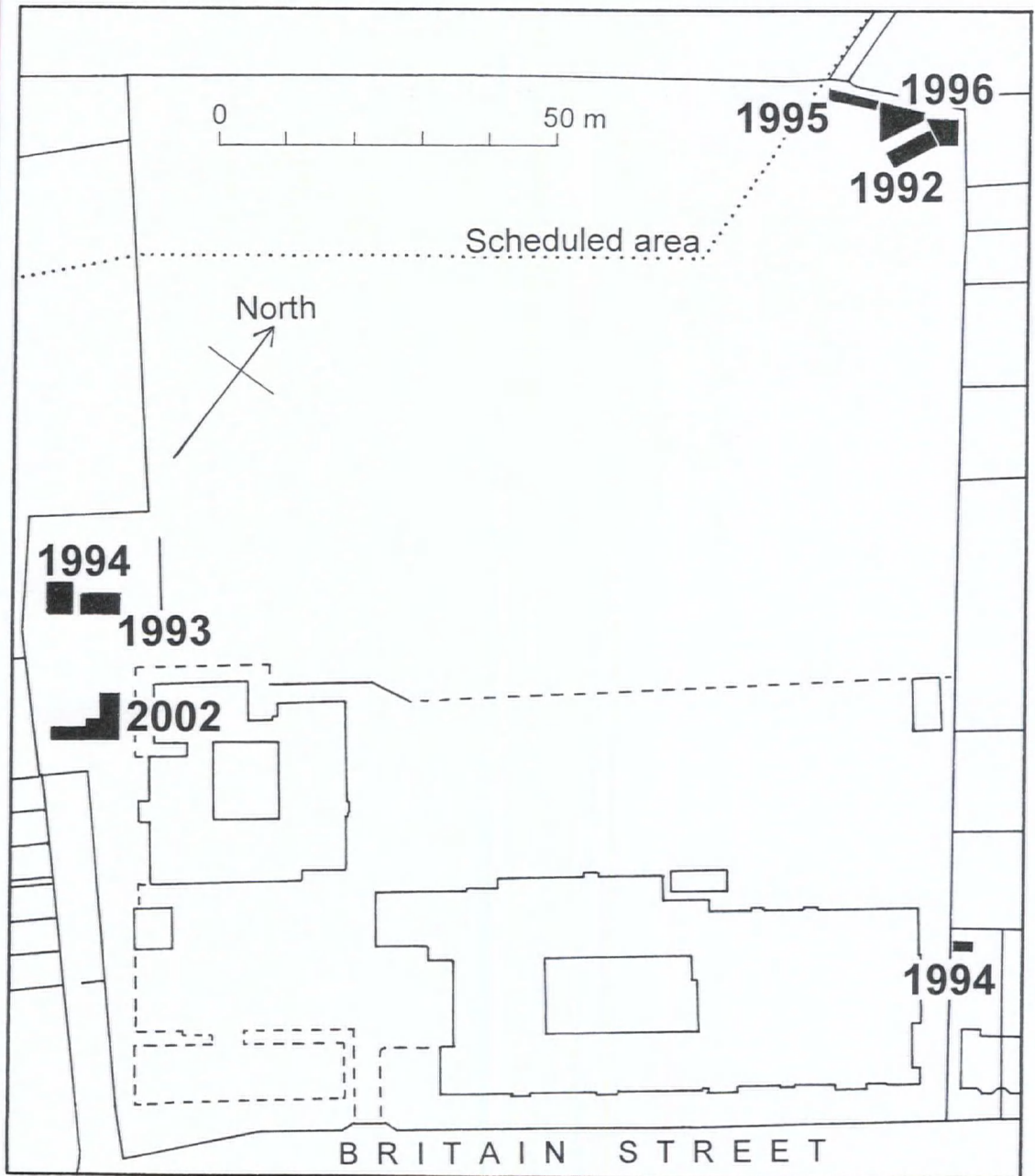


Figure 1 Locations of trial excavations at Priory Middle School, 1991 - 2002