

Archaeological watching brief at Great Malvern Priory, Church Street, Malvern, Worcestershire



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Worcestershire Archaeology
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Status:

Date: 7 November 2014

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Project reference: P4292

Report reference: 2156

HER reference: WSM 57086

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Graham Arnold and Tom Vaughan

With contributions by Laura Griffin and Shona Robson-Glyde

Background information

<i>Client</i>	Buildings and Grounds Group of Great Malvern Priory
<i>National Grid reference</i>	SO 77624 45875
<i>Historic Environment Record ref.</i>	WSM 57086
<i>Planning authority</i>	Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)
<i>Brief</i>	WCC 2014
<i>Project design</i>	WA 2014
<i>Project parameters</i>	IfA 2012

Site Background

The project proposed the installation a new gas heating supply to the Priory, which was considered by the Curator to have the potential to affect a heritage asset with archaeological interest.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The Priory Church of St Mary and St Michael (WSM 00491) was originally a Benedictine Priory (WSM 00492) which is thought to have been founded c 1085. To the east of the surviving Priory church building there is documentary evidence of two 15th century tile kilns having been revealed in c 1833 and 1902 (WSM 00505). The HER search indicated that there was a good to excellent potential for below ground archaeological features and deposits, primarily medieval structures and features associated with the Priory and its precinct. The geophysical survey highlighted a number of utilities, burials and other possible buried structures within the churchyard (Stratascan 2012).

Aims

The aim of the watching brief was to observe all ground breaking activity and record archaeological deposits, and to determine their extent, state of preservation, date and type, as far as reasonably possible.

Methods

General specification for fieldwork

WA 2012

Sources consulted

HER

Stratascan 2012

Date(s) of fieldwork

2 June to 4 September 2014

Dimensions of excavated areas observed (Fig 2)

See Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Access to or visibility of deposits

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during machine excavation using a toothless bucket. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe well-differentiated archaeological deposits.

Statement of confidence

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

Deposit description

The trench descriptions and specific deposit details are given in Appendix 1.

Artefactual analysis, by Laura Griffin

The artefactual assemblage recovered consisted of six fragments of medieval tile weighing 1896g. The group could be dated to the mid 15th century and came from two disturbed contexts (made ground 502 and backfill of service trench 801) which were clearly modern in date. Despite this, the level of preservation was excellent with the tile fragments displaying low levels of abrasion. Although just six fragments of tile were recovered, the group included both decorated and plain examples (Plate 10). All could be seen to be well made in the mould, and were bevelled slightly towards the base to allow the tiles to be set edge to edge without gaps or mortar showing from above and all were sanded on the base.

Decorated tiles

Four decorated tiles were identified, the most interesting of which came from service trench backfill 801 and consisted of three fragments, two of which were clearly 'wasters'. Despite the small size of these fragments, it was still possible to identify the specific designs from the surviving decoration and complete examples of all three can be found displayed in the Priory today.

Decorative designs

A shield of arms design contained the 'Instruments of the Passion' (Eames 1980, design no. 1693). This is thought to be part of a repeating pattern composed of a series of tiles made up of double-outlined open quatrefoils with various motifs in the spaces between them, including the sacred monogram crowned and the arms of Westminster Abbey on a shield (Eames 1980, 236). This example was clearly a waster due to the base of another tile being fused to the glazed upper surface. Whether this was due to the kiln being poorly stacked or the collapse of stacked tiles during firing is not clear.

The second design (Eames 1980, design no. 1321) could be identified as one of 5-part panel decorated with a series of architectural niches containing shields of arms and badges. An example of this panel which can still be seen in the Priory today, displays a dated inscription which puts production of this particular design at 1458/9 (Eames 1980, 236). Although not classed as a waster, this tile fragment has an uneven underside with part of the sanded surface lost, possibly as a result of fusing to another tile surface as in the above example.

The final identifiable design is part of a multi-tile foliate pattern (Eames 1980, design no. 2688). This particular example is of particular note because of its thickness. Tiles of Great Malvern production are generally between 30-40mm thick, whereas this tile is over 50mm and is more like a thin brick than a tile in appearance. In addition, this tile is clearly a waster as like the first example, it can be seen to have fused to other tiles during firing.

The remaining decorated tile was from made ground 502 and too abraded for the design to be identified. It is also different to those described above, resembling floor tiles of Worcester production both in fabric and the thin nature of the slip application, the majority of which has been completely worn away. The dimensions of this example are also more consistent with

Worcester examples being smaller than those of Malvern production at 123mm square and 30mm thick (Griffin 2002; Griffin 2004).

Plain tiles

In addition to the decorated tiles, two plain examples were retrieved from made ground 502. The first and most complete of these was a triangular tile, 33mm thick and decorated with an uneven yellow glaze containing green speckles. This tile was originally produced as a diagonally scored square tile and snapped following firing to be used as a pavement edging tile. Another tile has an uneven dark brown glaze and is 30mm thick. Not enough of this tile survives to be able to tell whether it was originally square, triangular or rectangular. Although the fabric of both of these tiles varies in quantity of inclusions, both contain large pieces of the acid igneous rock characteristic of ceramics produced in Malvern.

Bricks, by Shona Robson Glyde

A small number of bricks were recovered from culvert 1003 in Trench 10 (Plates 7-9). The bricks can be quite closely dated to between 1826-1850. The mark on one, DRA(?), stands for 'DRAIN'. When the brick tax was introduced in 1784, bricks and tiles used for drainage were also taxed. This was repealed in 1826 and bricks for this use had to be marked 'DRAIN' in order to avoid the tax. The entire brick tax was repealed in 1850. The size of bricks increased with changes in the tax. These bricks are typical for this period, particularly the large 3 ¼" depth.

Discussion

Prior to excavations a geophysical survey was undertaken in 2012 (Stratascan 2012) to highlight any graves and structural remains in the study area in order to try and avoid any unnecessary disturbance. The survey identified a number of utilities and areas of previously disturbed ground. From this data the majority of the trenches were excavated along footpaths, car parks and next to roads, following modern service trenches.

No articulated human remains were uncovered or definite grave cuts identified during the works. Any disarticulated human bone was retained on site for immediate reburial within the trenches.

Trenches 1 to 3 were excavated in front of the Lyttleton Rooms (Plate 1) and consisted of topsoil, mixed graveyard soil over the natural orange clay substrate at 0.80m below ground level. These were later extended to open cut between the test pits (Plate 2). The pipe was then moled between Trenches 3 and 7, so there was nothing to observe.

Trenches 4 to 6 contained only redeposited or disturbed made ground (Plates 3 and 4), although this did contain some medieval floor tile which was not in situ (context 502). Further medieval tile and wasters were found in the backfill of service trenches in Trench 8 (context 801). Trenches 8 to 10 followed existing service trenches so revealed largely redeposited churchyard soils (Plates 5-9).

In Trench 10, a 19th century brick culvert was revealed, aligned east to west, parallel with the Priory, along with a spur to the north-west (Plates 7-9). This was conjectured to be a gas main following the geophysical survey (Stratascan 2012), but was in fact a functioning surface water drain for the Priory roof and drive, and some of the upper levels of the town.

Conclusions, by Graham Arnold, Tom Vaughan and Laura Griffin

No structural remains relating to medieval activity or any defined grave cuts were uncovered during the ground works. The trenches for the heating pipes were either moled or lay within previously disturbed areas such as car parks, footpaths, roadways and modern service trenches. The decorated medieval floor tiles and wasters, although recovered from disturbed made ground in Trenches 5 and 8, are indicative of tile production in the vicinity, attested during groundworks to the east of the Priory in c 1833 and 1902.

A brick culvert uncovered close to the Priory, thought to represent a gas pipe from the geophysical survey, dates to between 1826-1850 and is still in use today to carry surface water from the Priory and upper levels of the town.

Although small, the assemblage of medieval tile is significant. The identification of waster fragments displaying designs represented in the Priory itself, provides physical evidence which can clearly be related to the documentary records for the two kilns discovered 200m from the east end of the Priory in c 1833 and 1902 (WSM 00505). Furthermore, the presence of these tiles in 'made-ground' contexts leads to the question of whether these deposits are made up of the re-deposited spoil from the kiln excavations, in which case there may be more fragments and evidence of production to be found throughout the graveyard and Priory grounds.

Furthermore, the presence of a decorated tile thought to be of Worcester production may lead to the question of whether these tiles were being used in the Priory prior to on-site production commencing in the mid 15th century, and perhaps replaced at that time.

Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Buildings and Grounds Group of Great Malvern Priory at the Priory, Church Street, Great Malvern, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO 77624 45875 ; HER ref WSM 57086). The trenches were excavated through made ground following earlier service trenches and along existing footpaths. A 19th century brick culvert, still in use for draining surface water, was found, aligned east to west along the north side of the Priory, with a spur to the north-west. Tiles and wasters dating to the medieval period were recovered from later deposits, which are indicative of tile production within the vicinity of the Priory. No articulated human remains were disturbed, nor grave cuts identified.

Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Michael Angling and Howard Wells, (Buildings and Grounds Group, Parish Church Council), Victoria Bryant (Archaeological Advisor, Diocesan Advisory Committee, and Manager, Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service) and Mike Glyde (Historic Environment Planning Officer, Worcestershire County Council).

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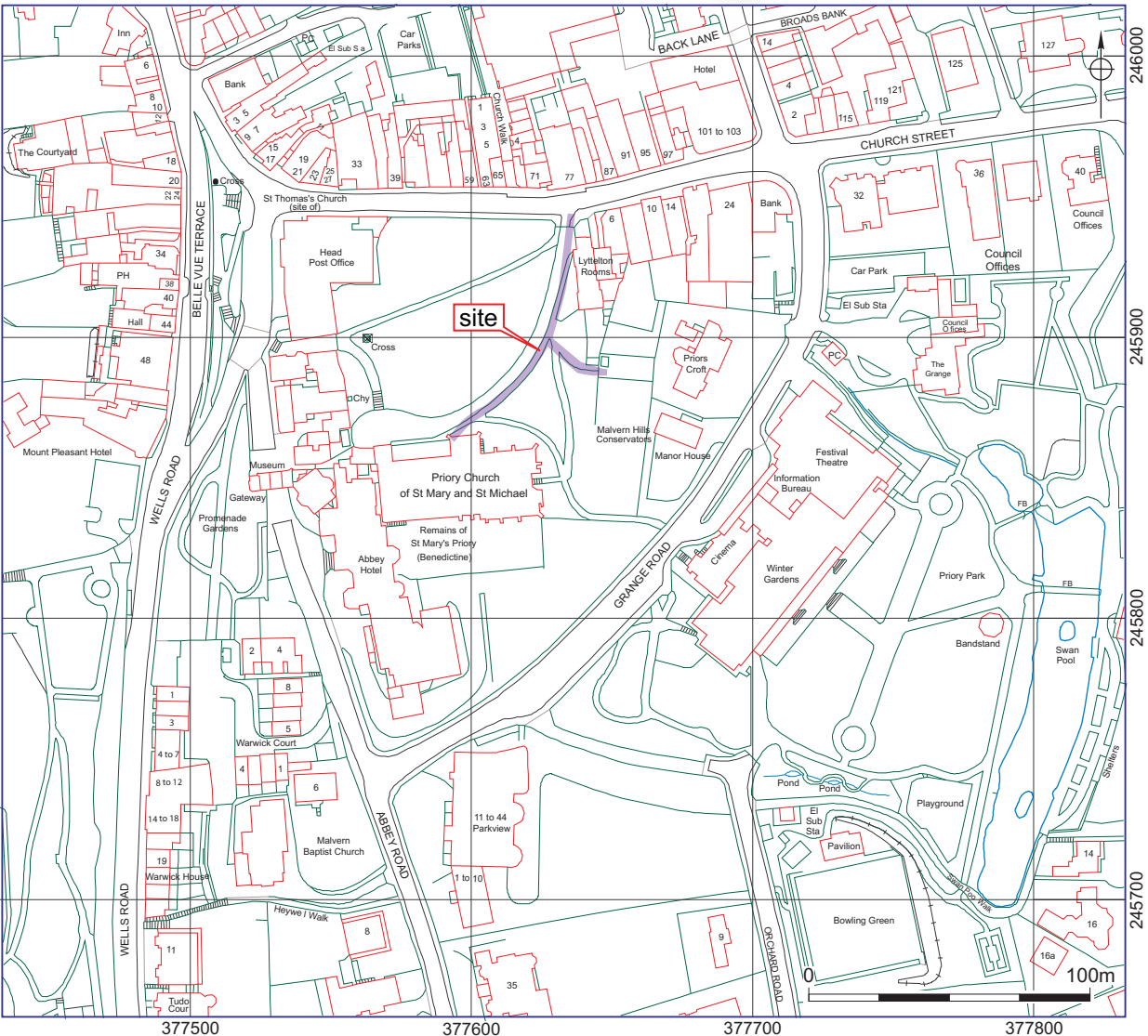
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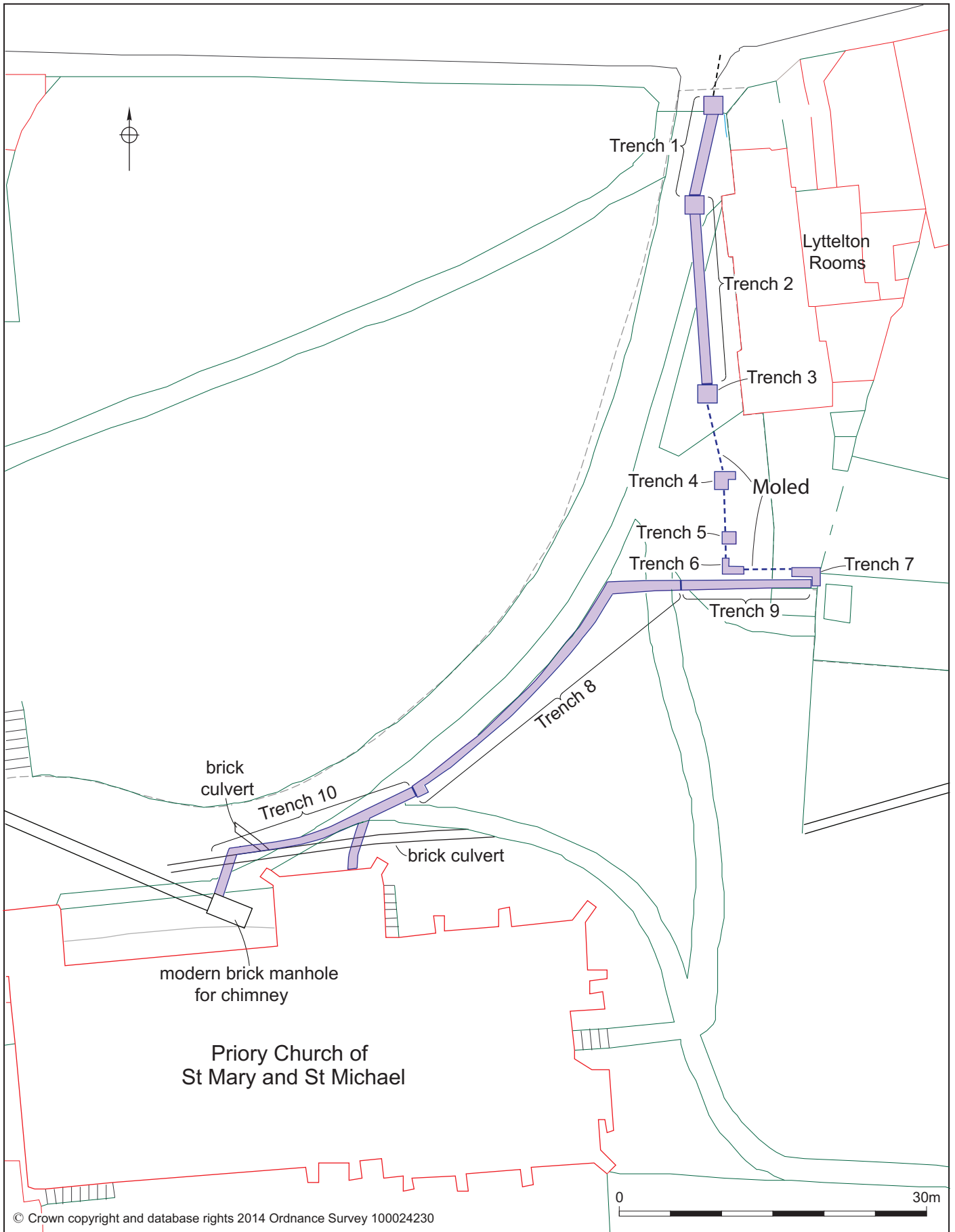
Figures



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Location of the site

Figure 1



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Trench location plan

Figure 2

Plates



Plate 1 The Priory churchyard entrance, view south



Plate 2 Continuous Trenches 1-3, view south



Plate 3 Trench 4 in the car park, made ground and natural clay



Plate 4 Trench 5 pit for moling machine, view east



Plate 5 Trench 9, modern surfaces and services, view west



Plate 6 Trench 8 existing water and gas pipes visible, view south-west



Plate 7 Trench 10, 19th century brick culvert (left), view east



Plate 8 Trench 10, 19th century brick culvert across trench, view south



Plate 9 Trench 10, 19th century brick culvert across trench, view west



Plate 10 Medieval tile fragments from Trench 5 (left) and wasters from Trench 8 (right)

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Main deposit descriptions

Trench 1

Maximum dimensions: Length: 10.80m Width: 0.40m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
100	Tarmac	Road surface	0 – 0.10m
101	Hardcore	Redeposited moderately compact light orange brown silty clay with frequent gravels, occasional modern cbm and mortar. Bedding for tarmac road	0.10 – 0.30m
102	Graveyard soil	Compact dark reddish brown silty clay with frequent roots, occasional mortar and small rounded stones.	0.30 – 0.80m

Trench 2

Maximum dimensions: Length: 18.50m Width: 0.40m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
200	Topsoil	Turf and friable humic dark brown clayey silt topsoil	0 – 0.40m
201	Graveyard soil	Rich moderately compact dark brown clayey silt with occasional small pebbles and rare small disarticulated bone fragments	0.40 – 0.80m
202	Natural	Compact light brownish orange clay with blue silt mottling.	0.80m +

Trench 3

Maximum dimensions: Length: 0.80m Width: 0.40m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
300	Topsoil	Turf and friable humic dark brown clayey silt topsoil	0 – 0.40m
301	Graveyard soil	Rich moderately compact dark brown clayey silt with occasional small pebbles and rare small disarticulated bone fragments	0.40 – 0.80m
302	Natural	Compact light brownish orange clay with blue silt mottling.	0.80m +

Trench 4

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.00m Width: 1.00m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: E-W with N-S spur

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
400	Tarmac	Car Park surfacing	0 – 0.10m
401	Hardcore	Type 1 grey stone chipping levelling bedding material for tarmac surface	0.10 – 0.35m
402	Disturbed made ground	Compact mid reddish brown silty clay with frequent sub-rounded stones.	0.35 – 0.80m

Trench 5

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50m Width: 0.40m Depth: 0.80m

Orientation: N-S

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
500	Tarmac	Car Park surfacing	0 – 0.10m
501	Hardcore	Type 1 grey stone chipping levelling bedding material for tarmac surface	0.10 – 0.35m
502	Disturbed made ground	Compact mid reddish brown silty clay with frequent sub-rounded stones. Occasional cbm and rare broken medieval floor tile, rare small disarticulated bone fragments.	0.35 – 0.80m

Trench 6

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50m Width: 1.50m Depth: 1.10m

Orientation: E-W with N-S spur

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
600	Tarmac	road surfacing	0 – 0.10m
601	Hardcore	Type 1 grey stone chipping levelling bedding material for tarmac surface with occasional concrete.	0.10 – 0.30m
602	Disturbed made ground	Compact, cohesive mid reddish brown sandy clay with frequent roots from hedge, moderate angular gravels modern cbm and brick fragments. Ground disturbed by services and road laying.	0.30 – 0.60m
603	Natural	Compact reddish sand, gravels and Mercian mudstone	0.60 – 1.10m +

Trench 7

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50 Width 0.50m Depth 1.10m

Orientation: E-W with N-S spur

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
700	Tarmac	Car Park surfacing	0 – 0.10m
701	Hardcore, backfill of modern drain	Type 1 grey stone chipping filling modern drain	0.10 – 0.70m
702	Natural	Compact reddish sand, gravels and Mercian mudstone	0.70 – 1.00m +

Trench 8

Maximum dimensions: Length: 1.50 Width 0.50m Depth 1.10m

Orientation: NE-SW with E-W spur

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
800	Topsoil	Dark greyish brown humic silty loam	0 – 0.10m
801	backfill of modern service trench	Disturbed stoney ground. Mid greyish brown silty clay with frequent large gravels stone and modern cbm. Rare decorated floor tile / wasters.	0.10 – 0.50m
802	Natural	Compact mid brown sandy clay with frequent flat angular limestone pieces and gravels.	0.50 – 0.90m +

Trench 9

Maximum dimensions: Length: 20m Width 0.60m Depth 0.90m

Orientation: E-W

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
900	Tarmac	road surfacing	0 – 0.10m
901	Hardcore	Type 1 grey stone chipping levelling bedding material for tarmac surface with occasional concrete.	0.10 – 0.30m
902	Disturbed made ground	Compact, cohesive mid reddish brown sandy clay with frequent roots from hedge, moderate angular gravels modern cbm and brick fragments. Ground disturbed by services including modern storm drain and road laying	0.30 – 0.70m
903	Natural	Compact reddish sand, gravels and Mercian mudstone	0.60 – 1.10m +

Trench 10

Maximum dimensions: Length: 40m Width 0.60m Depth 0.90m - 1.20m

Orientation: E-W with two NNE-SSW spurs

Context	Classification	Description	Depth below ground surface (b.g.s) – top and bottom of deposits
1000	Tarmac	road surfacing	0 – 0.10m
1001	Hardcore	Type 1 grey stone chipping levelling bedding material for tarmac surface.	0.10 – 0.30m
1002	Disturbed made ground	Compact, cohesive mid reddish brown sandy clay moderate angular gravels modern cbm and brick fragments. Ground disturbed by services including modern manhole for drain	0.30 – 0.60m
1003	Brick Drain	19 th century brick culvert, 1.00m wide 0.50m height. Reused by Priory as modern surface water drain	0.40 – 0.90m
1004	Modern structure	Service trench to chimney measuring 2.50m long x 1.00 wide x 1.20m depth containing mixed materials including modern concrete, cbm and brick fragments	0 - 1.20m
1005	Natural	Compact mid brown sandy clay with frequent flat angular limestone pieces and gravels.	0.90m +

Appendix 2 Technical information

The archive (site code: WSM 57086)

The archive consists of:

- 2 Field progress reports AS2
- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 77 Digital photographs
- 3 Scale drawings
- 9 Trench record sheets AS41
- 1 Box of finds
- 1 Computer disk
- 1 Copy of this report (bound hard copy)

The project archive is intended to be placed at:

Worcestershire County Museum
Museums Worcestershire
Hartlebury Castle
Hartlebury
Near Kidderminster
Worcestershire DY11 7XZ
Tel Hartlebury (01299) 250416