
Welcome to the Lossenham Project newsletter.
We will be regularly keeping you up to date with the
latest news and any events you can get involved in.



Geophysical Results: Priory found!

(with thanks to Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group)

Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group undertook a resistivity survey on the land directly in front of Lossenham Priory Farm. Conversations with the previous farmers led us to believe there may be some sort of building here, also confirmed by a large amount of tile, stone, and slate in the plough soil.

We would like to extend our thanks to the team that did the survey.



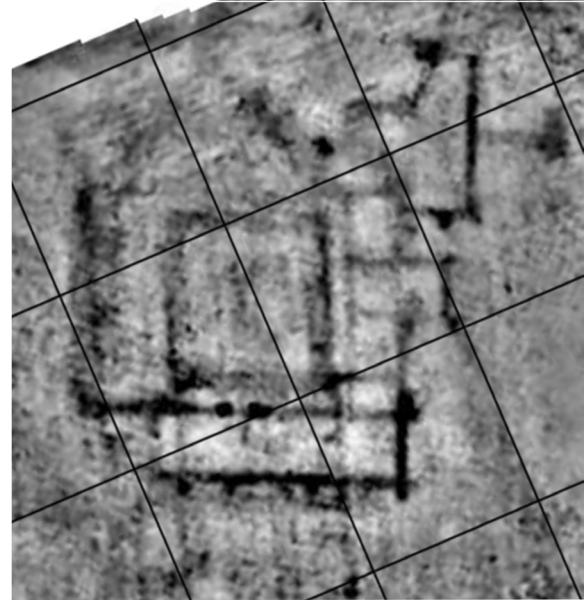
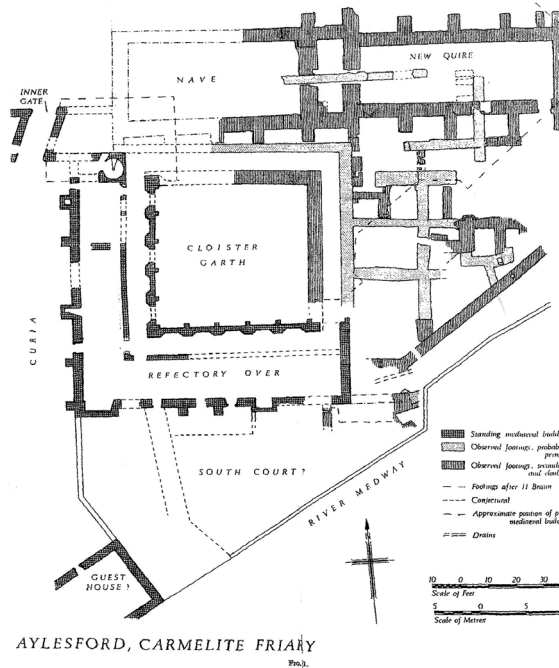
The geophysical results (the missing square has now been surveyed).

The results explained (Annie Partridge)



One of the commonly asked questions we have on site is 'How do you know it's a priory? Could it not be something else?'. Medieval religious buildings tend to have a very formulaic construction and a comparison made with Aylesford Carmelite Friary (thanks to Kevin Cornwell of HAARG) shows a similar layout.

Whilst not an identical copy there are enough similarities to start us off on our interpretation of the archaeology surviving at Lossenham.



Aylesford Friary compared to the Lossenham Geophysics (credit Kevin Cornwell, HAARG)

If the priory at Lossenham is arranged the same as Aylesford, then the buildings surround an open courtyard (the cloister). Some cloisters had a garden in the middle, and it would have had covered walkways around the outside to connect the buildings together.



Reconstruction of the cloister at Tintern Abbey

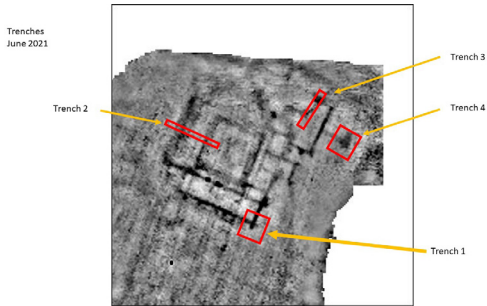


A reconstruction of Leiston Abbey

To the northern edge of the cloister is the church; the east range is thought to be the service buildings and kitchens; to the south is the refectory; and to the west is the dormitories.

The buildings would have been at least two stories tall and there would have been other rooms including rooms for the Prior, rooms for guests, and possibly an infirmary.

Dig Diary June 21-28 (Annie Partridge)



Our excavations have targeted particular areas of the Priory based off the geophysical results:

- **Trench 1** is over the corner of the refectory building (the strongest signal on the geophysical survey)
- **Trench 2** goes from the cloister to the outside of the external wall of what we believe to be the dormitory
- **Trench 3** targets the corner of a yet undetermined building, possibly part of the service range or related to the church
- **Trench 4** was to investigate the strong signal coming from this area and to establish what sort of feature it might be

Day One - Monday 21

Despite the absolutely appalling weather we forged ahead with the opening of Trenches 1, 2 & 3. The plough soil is not as deep as we thought and comes directly onto an orange layer, possibly the natural Wealden clay.

We weren't able to continue past lunchtime due to the site being too wet to work. Our volunteers cheerfully braved the morning in the wind and rain, so much for the great British summer!

T1 - was placed on top of the refectory in order to pick up the buttress walls. Machining took most of the plough soil off but a thin layer was left to be hand trowelled

Unfortunately the conditions were too wet to do that today so we focussed on straightening up the sides of the trenches

T2 - was stripped and some features were appearing, possibly robber trenches associated with the walls of the cloister and dormitory

T3 - was opened after lunch and produced a rubble chalk wall in a cut feature. We beat a hasty retreat to the tool shed to ride out the worst of the rain so will investigate this further tomorrow

T4 - Not opened yet



Day Two - Tuesday 22

The day started off wet and we noticed from the farmhouse that the trenches had started flooding overnight. After a quick squelchy walk to analyse the field we decided it was too wet underfoot to continue the excavation today.

The high amount of clay in the soil would have resulted in us churning the ground up with our feet – not good for those shallow archaeological features! It has allowed us to catch up with the all important paperwork, sort our finds out, and even walk down to the pillbox located on the levels to the south of the site (more on that another day!)



T1 – too wet to work

T2 – flooded!

T3 – flooded!

T4 – opened

Day Three - Wednesday 23

The day was glorious, despite Trenches 2 & 3 remaining flooded. It was our busiest day yet with volunteers and visitors (including those of a four-legged variety!). Progress was good but we encountered our next worst nightmare after flooding – baked soil! Interspersed with copious amounts of tea breaks we were able to start on the excavation proper.



T1 – suffering from being too wet and baked at the same time we started trowelling off the remnants of the plough soil in the areas we wouldn't be making a puddle in. Something resembling a feature full of stone has appeared but the ether it is a robbed-out trench or the foundations is yet to be seen

T2 – still flooded so left to drain

T3 – still flooded so left to drain

T4 – the remnants of the plough soil was removed and a large linear feature was discovered.

Excavation of this feature was begun and established its width, but not the depth so far. It is quite a size! Further investigation will tell us whether this is a robbed-out wall or a boundary ditch in due course

Day Four - Friday 25

Rain again, but only a little. Enough to get us damp but not enough to halt the excavation.

Progress was good in all trenches and we are beginning to form a picture of the archaeology preserved under the plough soil.

T1 - we're still taking the plough soil off the top of the trench. Around half of the trench is now uncovered and we have a feature full of rubble, likely to be the robber trench relating to the refectory. Outside of this appears to be a layer of mixed mortar, plaster, broken stone, and tile probably representing a levelling off of the material once the wall was removed

T2 - was left to dry out for another day

T3 - trowelling the surface revealed the chalk foundations of a wall return and other pits and ditches

T4 - there is a large ditch feature around 2m wide and over 1m deep which appears to terminate in the middle of the trench. Finds coming out of this are medieval and early post medieval, implying that it is connected to the priory in some way but as yet we are not sure what it is!

Theories include a boundary ditch with causeway entrance, a robber trench (but it is quite large), or something else entirely. The star find today was two complete glazed tiles



Day Five - Saturday 26

The day started off misty but it soon cleared away. The promised overnight rain didn't materialise so the soil in the trenches is even harder and drier than yesterday. Progress was slow due to the ground being extremely hard, but everyone did very well toiling in the humidity and heat. We managed to find time to treat ourselves to ice cream and a trip to Lossenham Manor open day too. We had the busiest day for visitors too with around 20 people coming to visit the site throughout the day.



T1 - removal of the plough soil continues and it is revealing the robber trench underneath. A small glass object was found, possibly a bead or ornamentation off a vessel, and we had our first glazed tile (the same style as the ones from T4 yesterday)

T2 - work started in this trench on cleaning up the surfaces after the flooding on Tuesday. The ground is incredibly difficult to work in here but we are making some small progress. One of the wall trenches produced lead window cane and some medieval window glass

T3 - some more work continued on the chalk wall to define the edges of the feature

T4 - we left this trench today to focus our efforts on getting Trenches 1 & 2 into shape



Day Six - Sunday 27

Today was our last day on site until July 19. Our objectives were to get the trenches cleaned up and photographed before covering them over with tarpaulin. Andrew took a group of people on the repeat of the May 27 walk in the morning leaving the rest of us to continue with the cleaning up. The rain (mostly) held off until the last moments of the day so we were successful in putting the trenches to bed until July.

T1 - the robber trench for the refectory building is looking much clearer now the remaining plough soil has been removed. There are a couple of other features popping up in this trench too

T2 - this trench flooded then dried out to concrete making it almost impossible to clean up

In the last moments of the day the rain started to show up potential grave cuts in the cloister courtyard. We were expecting this so it wasn't a surprise!

T3 - the chalk foundation was cleaned up nicely and photographed ready for further investigation. It is much wider than initially thought and we look forward to finding out which building this belongs to in due course

T4 - the function of the large feature still eludes us but some progress was made in finding the bottom of it



Upcoming Events - Dates for the Diary!

You do not need to sign up to a full week on the excavation but we do ask for a minimum half-day commitment. Days start at 10am and will finish at 5pm, with breaks. No experience is necessary and all equipment is provided, all you need is weather appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear.

We endeavour to make all our projects as accessible as possible. If you have particular requirements please let us know in advance so we can make adjustments to accommodate you.

If you are looking to pursue a career in archaeology let us know and we can look at designing a training program to fill in any knowledge gaps.

Excavation dates

Monday July 19 to Friday July 23

Saturday August 14 to Sunday August 22
(Wednesday August 18 is a rest day)

Monday September 13 to Sunday September 19
(Thursday September 16 is a rest day)

Saturday October 2 to Friday October 8
(Wednesday October 6 is a rest day)

