

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Priory of St Pancras

PARISH: LEWES

DISTRICT: LEWES

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 28890

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TQ4142109555
TQ4137109613

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the known extent of the confirmed remains of Lewes Priory, a Cluniac foundation, which has evidence of Saxon building pre-dating the priory. The Priory stands on the low Southover ridge which runs parallel and south of a higher chalk spur on which the town of Lewes lies. This ridge, in the 11th century when the Priory was founded, formed the shore of the tidal Ouse estuary. In 1845 the cutting for the Brighton and Hastings railway line cut a section across the Priory church, cloister and cloistral buildings. Most of the priory exists as buried remains, but parts are upstanding ruins and are listed Grade I.

The priory includes a 12th century monastic church at the north end of the site, with cloister and cloistral buildings to the south of the church. The church survives as buried remains, apart from the ruins of part of its south west tower, which recently were extant. Much of the northern side of the cloister, to the south of the nave of the church survives as buried remains, although its southern side, and the chapter house adjoining its east side were cut by the railway cutting. To the south of the cloister is part of the south wall of the frater, the dining hall of the monastery, dating to the 11th century. The frater wall stands, in places, to over 2m high, and part of an oven survives in the railway embankment. To the south of the chancel of the church is the infirmary chapel, lying on a ridge overlooking the domestic or ancillary buildings to the south. The infirmary chapel, dating to the 11th century, is thought to have been built as the first monastic church on the site, but was superseded when the large Priory Church was built in the 12th century. The infirmary chapel has a square chancel flanked by apsidal ended side chapels, and finds of Saxon pottery in addition to the discovery of graves in a crypt below the chapel floor confirm its early origin. To the south of this is the infirmary hall which was built 1180 to 1200, with later additions about 1219. The hall is about 48m long by 31m wide and survives as buried remains. The first reredorter, the toilet block, lies to the south of the frater and to the west of the infirmary hall. This building, dating to the late 11th century, is about 32m long by 8m wide, and would have been flushed by the original course of the Upper Cockshut stream. When the dorter extension was built to the south, part of the original structure was

demolished and the ground floor became an undercroft. The dorter extension, built in the late 12th century, is where the monks slept, and at its greatest extent was about 71m long by 24m wide. The second reredorter to the south was built in about 1180, and replaced the earlier reredorter. Most of the ruins of these ancillary buildings still stand to over 5m high. To the west of each reredorter are 11th century sewers channelling waste from these latrines. To the west and south west end of the church were barns, stables and the Lord's Place. The Lord's Place was constructed from the Priors Lodgings when the Priory was closed in 1538, and it was eventually demolished in 1668.

William of Warenne, who fought with the Conqueror at Hastings in 1066, was rewarded with lands in Sussex. Some time between 1078 and 1082 he and his wife Gundrada founded the Priory on a site which had been occupied during the Saxon period. The Priory developed and expanded through the 11th and 12 centuries. During the Barons' Wars it was occupied by Henry III's army, and its buildings were damaged by Simon De Montfort's attacks. The Priory continued until the Dissolution, and in 1538 Thomas Cromwell contracted the Italian demolition expert Giovanni Portinari to destroy the buildings. Two Renaissance mansions were constructed from the ruins, Lord's Place and Southover Grange. The first, constructed for Cromwell, was later owned by Lord Buckhurst, and was demolished by its last owner the Earl of Thanet soon after 1668. The second building, the work of William Newton, still stands to the north of the Priory precinct.

The cutting for the railway in 1845 inadvertently gave impetus to the recovery of the plan of the Priory. The excavation cut through part of the great monastic church and cloistral buildings, including the 12th century chapter house where the remains of the Priory founder William de Warenne and his wife Gundrada were discovered re-interred in lead chests. At the time of the construction of the railway cutting, an entrance passage to an underground chamber, known as the 'Lantern', was re-discovered, which was interpreted as having been an ecclesiastical prison.

About 1850 excavations were carried out at the west end of the church by John Blaker, but were never published.

Although digging on the site continued through much of the mid-19th century, the next recorded excavations were carried out by William St John Hope in 1886. He recorded a plan of the structures, and interpreted the phases of monastic building as it spread south to the floodplain. Between 1899 and 1902, whilst working on the eastern side of the site, he uncovered the small late 11th century church, originally thought to have been the Infirmary Chapel, but re-interpreted as being the first monastic church on the site. In 1902 Nicholas Brakspear discovered the remains of a circular lavatorium above the 'Lantern' on the south side of the Cloister.

There were no further excavations until 1969 when Richard Lewis began a two year programme of excavation, clearing the Dorter Extension Undercroft and 12th century Reredorter. In 1972 the excavation of the eastern part of the Infirmary Chapel began, and lasted for the next 10 years.

The extent of the monastic precinct is known, but survival of remains beyond the church and cloistral buildings and their exact location is uncertain, therefore they are not included in the scheduling at the present time.

A number of features are excluded from the scheduling; these are the glasshouses, buildings and their bases, all wooden pale and wire fencing, the

raised beds in the herb garden, the concrete footpath, the cement post and wire fencing, all signposts, the sculpture, the surface and fittings in the childrens' playground, all telegraph poles, all litter bins and the tennis court fencing; the ground beneath all these features is, however, included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

From the time of St Augustine's mission to re-establish Christianity in AD 597 to the reign of Henry VIII, monasticism formed an important facet of both religious and secular life in the British Isles. Settlements of religious communities, including monasteries, were built to house communities of monks, canons (priests), and sometimes lay-brothers, living a common life of religious observance under some form of systematic discipline. It is estimated from documentary evidence that over 700 monasteries were founded in England. These ranged in size from major communities with several hundred members to tiny establishments with a handful of brethren. They belonged to a wide variety of different religious orders, each with its own philosophy. As a result, they vary considerably in the detail of their appearance and layout, although all possess the basic elements of church, domestic accommodation for the community, and work buildings. Monasteries were inextricably woven into the fabric of medieval society, acting not only as centres of worship, learning and charity, but also, because of the vast landholdings of some orders, as centres of immense wealth and political influence. They were established in all parts of England, some in towns and others in the remotest of areas. Many monasteries acted as the foci of wide networks including parish churches, almshouses, hospitals, farming estates and tenant villages. The Cluniac order had its origins in the monastic reformations which swept across continental Europe in the tenth century. The reformations which occurred were partly a response to the impact of Viking raids and attacks on established monastic sites in the preceding century but were also a reaction against the corruption and excesses which were increasingly noted amongst earlier establishments. The Cluniacs were amongst the most successful of the new reformed orders that developed. The founding house of Cluny in south-east France was established in AD 910. Here the community obeyed a stringent set of rules which, amongst other things, involved celibacy, communal living and abstention from eating meat. The ideals of the Cluniac reformers passed on to England in the tenth century. Influential Cluniac houses had been established in England by 1077. Once established, Cluniac houses were notable for the strong links they maintained both with the founding house of Cluny in France and also with other houses of their order. Most Cluniac houses in England were established near major towns and they particularly sought locations in valley bottoms within the protection of a nearby castle. Cluniac monasteries are notable for highly decorated, elaborate buildings. Cluniac houses are relatively rare, with some forty-four houses known in England, and all examples exhibiting good survival of archaeological remains are worthy of protection.

The Priory of St Pancras is significant in its own right as a good example of a medieval Cluniac house, and also in its association with nearby Lewes

Castle which lies only 500m to the north of the Priory. The Priory played an important part in the aftermath of the battle of Lewes, since Henry III was taken there after his defeat in the battle, and the Priory was besieged by Simon De Montfort's men. Peace was negotiated, resulting in the Mise of Lewes, which set up a council to take over the powers of the monarchy, and was the start of parliamentary democracy. Much is already known about the history of the priory, and there is still a lot of archaeological potential in the site. The priory at Lewes was the first Cluniac establishment in England, and has the unusual dedication to St Pancras. The ruins, which have public access adjacent, provide an important amenity and learning opportunity, and add to the unique identity of the town of Lewes.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 19th November 1929 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Sussex 25
NAME: Lewes Priory

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:
COUNTY/NUMBER: East Sussex 25
NAME: Lewes Priory

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 28890
NAME: Priory of St Pancras

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 22nd April 2005