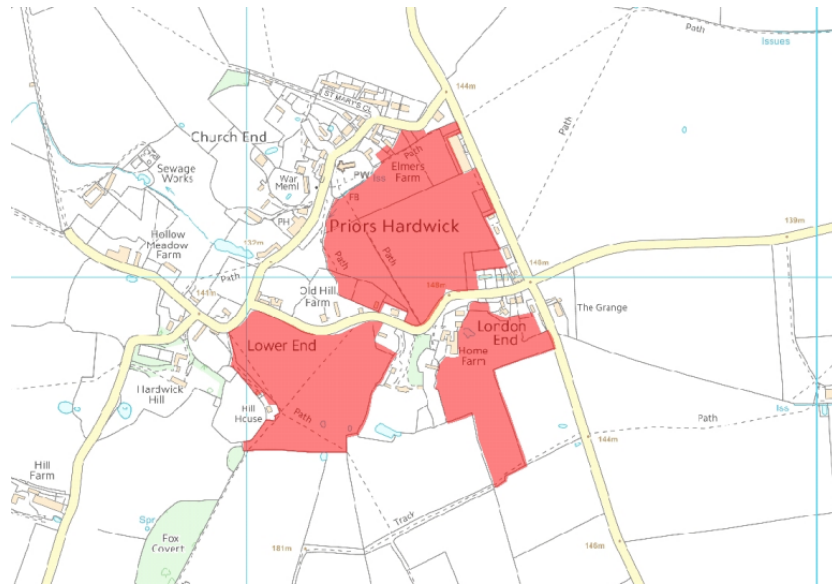


Priors Hardwick Scheduled Ancient Monument

1000 Years of History

In Priors Hardwick we have three fields which are listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). This is the same listing which applies to Stonehenge, for example, and means it is a nationally important archaeological site and therefore protected by Historic England. This plan shows the three areas in red:



Modern Ordnance Survey mapping

Why is it listed?

To understand that we need to go back in the mists of time to when the village was founded in the year 1043 by Leofric, Earl of Mercia. He was given the land to establish a monastery in Coventry and the grant was confirmed by Edward the Confessor. Leofric is perhaps better known these days as the husband of Lady Godiva and the cause of her ride through the streets of Coventry less than well-dressed, but he was one of the most powerful men in England at the time. Edward the Confessor was the King and the only English monarch to have ever been canonised, becoming a saint about a century after his death. Here is a picture of Leofric and Edward together:



Domesday Book 3rd Ed, National Archives UK

The monastery which Leofric founded in 1043 was St Mary's Priory in Coventry and this is the first recorded event in the history of Coventry. Leofric and Godiva were both buried there but it was destroyed in Henry VIII's dissolution and little now remains.



Ruins of St Mary's Priory, Coventry. Stock image.

Large monastic houses in cities often had outlying farms with arable, animal pastures and fishponds to provide food for the monastery and its guests and that is exactly what Priors Hardwick was. Now we have the origin not only of our existence but also our name: Priors because it belonged to the Priory, Hardwick from the Old English word 'heorde' meaning herd or flock and 'wic' meaning an outlying farm or settlement. Priors Hardwick, the Priory Farm. Our church is also called St Mary's, another link to the Priory.

The village then grew during the medieval period to become a locally important place. It was much bigger than today with a higher population and the neighbouring villages of Priors Marston, Lower Shuckburgh and Stoneton were chapelries, ie subordinate to Priors Hardwick church. The existing church building dates from the 13th century and was first recorded in 1260.

However the population fell drastically in the 15th and early 16th century, thought to be due to the Priory's intensification of wool production in the area. The open fields were enclosed for sheep farming which reduced the availability of land for farming, people began to move away and the village declined. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1542 it passed to Sir Edmund Knightly (of Fawsley Hall) and eventually to the Spencer family (ancestors of Princess Diana) in 1633. By this time the majority of the medieval village had gone and apart from the church the oldest buildings still standing today date from the 17th century.

When you visit Priors Hardwick today your first impression is that the village is 'strung out'. There is a cluster of buildings in the centre of the village by the church but the rest of it spreads, with a house here and there but a lot of open space between them and the village centre. It is what's known as a shrunken medieval village, reflecting the fact that it was much bigger in medieval times. (There are several deserted medieval villages in our locality which disappeared altogether or perhaps just leaving one house; Stoneton and Radbourne are examples. Southend, which was near Northend, no longer exists but was one of the largest settlements in Warwickshire in medieval times. Priors Hardwick didn't disappear, it just shrank!)

These open spaces are the remains of the medieval village and are listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Here are some aerial photos of them as well as a LIDAR image of the Village:

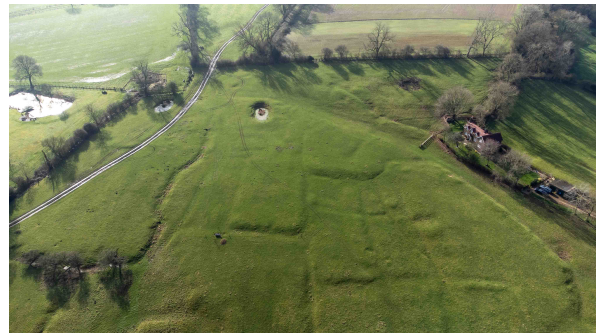




What you can see in the various lumps and bumps are the buried remains of the medieval village. They show roadways, platforms on which stood houses and other buildings such as barns, enclosed crofts and paddocks, and also fishponds. These were important as we are so far from the sea

and no meat, only fish, could be eaten on Fridays and other holy days. At least one of the medieval fishponds still exists today, in the SAM field behind Home Farm.

It is thought that the buildings were partly constructed from stone which was rare in Warwickshire and perhaps reflects the wealth of the Priory. In particular, the large square earthwork which can be seen behind the church may have been the manorial hall. You can also see distinct 'ridge and furrow' features which were caused by the strip farming system of the time where cultivation of the strips with



heavy ploughs pulled by oxen produced long, wide ridges.



Why is it important?

The remains of Priors Hardwick medieval village are rare because they are well preserved and relatively undisturbed. After the village became depopulated, for many centuries it was rather too remote to encourage substantial resettlement so there has not been extensive building to destroy the remains as in many places. Much of the land in this area is more suitable for grazing pasture than arable so there hasn't been repeated ploughing over the years to disturb the remains of ridge and furrow.

In this part of central England villages were the most distinctive aspect of rural life and their archaeological remains are one of the most important sources of understanding the five centuries after the Norman conquest in 1066. Similarly ridge and furrow in its original context adjacent to village earthworks is an important source of information about medieval agrarian life. Priors Hardwick is also (and rarely) complemented by a series of documentary sources dating from Anglo Saxon times.

The buildings are of different status, ranging from the manor to common village housing, which can provide information about the relative wealth and activities of members of the community. Also changing methods and forms of housing and building techniques and development of agricultural technologies.

This is what some of the common houses may have looked like:



Cosmeston Medieval Village Reconstruction

This reconstruction, from Cosmeston in Wales, looks remarkably similar to this Priors Hardwick house which was still standing until well into the 20th century in one of the SAM fields:



What does a Scheduled Ancient Monument listing mean?

It is how we protect our heritage.

These sites are selected on the basis of archaeological and/or historical interest. Archaeological interest means there is interest in carrying out expert investigations at some point into the evidence a place holds of past human activity. Historical interest is about how the present can be connected through a place to past people, events and aspects of life. The idea is that the sites will be handed on to future generations in the same or better state than we found them.

As such, Scheduled Monument Consent is needed to carry out any works on a scheduled monument. Works are defined as demolishing, destroying, damaging, removing, repairing, altering, adding to, flooding or tipping material. Carrying out works without consent is a criminal offence.

If you own land on the monument, here is a link to the Historic England Guide for Owners and Occupiers.

[Scheduled Monuments - A Guide for Owners and Occupiers | Historic England](#)

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Sources

Historicengland.co.uk listings 1016567 (Priors Hardwick) and 1076588 (St Mary's Priory)

Timetrail.warwickshire.gov.uk

Archaeology Warwickshire report, The Old Vicarage March 2022

Wikipedia, Leofric Earl of Mercia and Edward the Confessor