

NORTON PRIORY: MONASTERY TO MUSEUM EXCAVATIONS 1970-87

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Front cover: The undercroft of the west range, used as the entrance hall to the Classical house from 1868

Rear Cover: The west range from the south-east, across the cloister garth

Page xxiii: The three orders of men

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Abbreviations

BP	Before Present
CRO	Cheshire Record Office
DISH	Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis
HFI	<i>Hyperostosis frontalis interna</i>
NISP	Number of individual species
OA	Osteoarthritis
OD	Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
RCAHMWM	Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire
TB	Timber Building
U/ID	Unidentified
U/S	Unstratified

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Foreword

I am delighted to have the opportunity to write this foreword because the publication of this book is so vitally important to the progress of the Norton Priory Museum Trust. Firstly, I must offer the Trust's sincere thanks to English Heritage, Oxford Archaeology North, and the others who have contributed to this report with their expertise, support, and, of course, the funding that made it all possible. The work has been done using the most up-to-date techniques by a dedicated and committed team from these partners and from the staff at Norton Priory, in particular our Senior Keeper, Lynn Smith.

To all museums, the collection is their most valuable physical asset and, generally, is the primary reason for their existence. All forward-looking museums seek to exploit (in the most constructive and responsible manner) their collection as the inspiration for their interpretation, visitor attraction, and learning and community activities. Therefore it is absolutely vital that the collection is as well researched and interpreted as it is possible and practical to achieve. I believe that the contents of this report deliver this aim in the most admirable fashion and will enable the Trust to maximise the benefits it can offer to its wide range of audiences and visitors. We are in the process of formulating an ambitious development programme aimed at achieving these benefits, and this report is one of the essential foundation blocks upon which that programme will depend for its success.

I hope that this report will also be of use and interest to the wider academic community and will move forward understanding of the subjects involved. Hopefully, it will provide the inspiration for further research in the various subjects covered and will enable links and relationships with other collections to be established and evaluated to the benefit of a wider understanding. To this end, I would like to extend a welcome to Norton Priory and its collection to any relevant, responsible, and accredited research project.

Paul Mathews
Chairman, Norton Priory Museum Trust
2008

Summary

The Priory of St Mary was founded at Norton, Cheshire, in 1134, when the Augustinian canons of the Priory of St Bertelin, founded in Runcorn in 1115, were relocated to the site 'at the request of Roger, bishop of Chester'. The priory was originally founded by William fitz Nigel, second baron of Halton, and moved to Norton by his successor, William fitz William. Its earliest buildings were of timber, probably erected to house both the canons and the vast army of workmen needed to build such a fine Romanesque monastery. By the end of the twelfth century, the stone buildings of the monastery were not only complete, but were being expanded to accommodate more members of the order. Despite the setback of a major fire in 1236, and the more general financial and social problems of the fourteenth century, Norton had attained the status of abbey by its end, and its abbot was a senior and much respected member of the Augustinian Order.

The priory was the burial place of lesser members of the family of the barons of Halton, but never, it seems, of the barons themselves. From the mid-twelfth century its principal benefactors were the Duttons, descendants of Odard, a founder donor, who adopted it as their burial place and continued to maintain a family chapel there until the Dissolution. Of particular interest is the mixture of senior clerics and laity who were buried in the body of the church and in the cloister; few can be identified by name, but they include a young male leper buried with three children (his own?) in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, six males with Paget's disease, an hereditary condition, which suggests that all were related, and most probably were members of the Dutton family. Also of interest is the presence of an elderly male showing some of the skeletal symptoms of Down's Syndrome, well-fed and living into his late 40s or 50s.

The abbey (as it was by then) met its end in April 1536, in the first phase of Henry VIII's dissolution of all religious houses. Eight years later the site was sold to the Brooke family, who remained in residence for the next 400 years. Moving into the abbot's accommodation and retaining the monastic kitchen complex, and other buildings of the outer courtyard, for their use, the midden they allowed to build up behind their house in the former monastic cloister has provided a wealth of information about changing thoughts and attitudes to daily life from the later sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century. In the mid-eighteenth century, most of the old house was demolished. Only the undercroft of the west range of the monastery survived, serving as cellars to a new house in the Classical idiom, which stood until the site was abandoned, after which it, too, was demolished, in 1928. The finds associated with this phase of the site continued to chart changes of fashion and attitude in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural Cheshire.

In 1966, the site of Norton Priory was presented to Runcorn Development Corporation by Sir Richard Brooke, whose family had owned it for more than 400 years. Following the demolition of the Classical mansion, the area had fallen into decay and little of the medieval structure remained standing or even visible. The potential of the site for display as a public amenity was, however, recognised at an early stage, and ground-breaking large-scale archaeological excavations were begun in 1970 and continued until 1987. These exposed much of the ground plan of the monastery and investigated the development of the complex. In addition, the excavations revealed a wealth of information about the later use of the site by the Brooke family and their household.

In 1989, J Patrick Greene, the director of excavations, published an award-winning account of the growth and development of the medieval monastery (*Norton Priory: the archaeology of a medieval religious house*), based on the results of the excavation and his own research, including that on the experimental production of medieval-type floor tiles. Greene's work was largely synthetic, and as a consequence the detailed stratigraphy and the large assemblage of finds and other data, both from the medieval period and the later occupation of the site, remained largely unpublished. This book, funded by English Heritage, with the support of the Trustees of the Norton Priory Museum Trust, seeks to redress this, bringing a full account of the results of the excavations into the public domain.

Résumé

Le Prieuré de Sainte-Marie a été fondé à Norton, Cheshire, en 1134, quand les chanoines de l'ordre de Saint-Augustin du Prieuré de Saint Bertelin, alors établis à Runcorn en 1115, furent transférés au site « à la demande de Roger, l'évêque de Chester ». À l'origine, le prieuré avait été fondé par William Fitz Nigel, deuxième baron de Halton. Il fut déplacé à Norton par son successeur, William Fitz William. Les premières constructions, édifiées en bois, ont abrité tant les chanoines que la considérable population d'ouvriers venue construire le monastère. Vers la fin du XII^e siècle, les édifices, alors en pierre, furent non seulement achevés, mais également agrandis. Ils purent ainsi accueillir davantage de membres de l'ordre religieux. Malgré l'incendie majeur de 1236 et les troubles socio-économiques propres au XIV^e siècle, du statut de Prieuré, Norton est passé à celui d'abbaye. Son abbé est, quant à lui, devenu la figure la plus respectée de l'Ordre de Saint-Augustin.

Le Prieuré a accueilli les sépultures de la famille des barons de Halton, du moins, semble-t-il, celles des membres de moindre importance. À partir du milieu du XII^e siècle, les Dutton, descendants d'Odard - donateur du Prieuré et qui l'avait choisi comme lieu de sépulture familial - deviennent ses principaux bienfaiteurs. Jusqu'à la Dissolution, la chapelle familiale est entretenue. On notera tout l'intérêt de la mixité des populations ecclésiastiques et laïques des zones sépulcrales alors situées dans l'église et dans le cloître. Peu de noms ont été identifiés. Toutefois, on a clairement reconnu la sépulture d'un jeune lépreux enterré vers les XIII^e-XIV^e siècle avec trois enfants (peut-être les siens) ainsi que celles de six autres sujets de sexe masculin porteurs de la maladie de Paget. Cette dernière indique que tous ces individus, à divers degrés, étaient apparentés, voire rattachés à la famille Dutton. On soulignera également la découverte d'un sujet de sexe masculin porteur des symptômes de trisomie 21 et décédé autour de 40 ou 50 ans.

Les activités et le rayonnement de l'abbaye prirent fin en avril 1536, c'est-à-dire lors de la première phase de la Dissolution de toutes les « maisons » religieuses promulguée par Henri VIII. L'abbaye est vendue huit ans plus tard aux Brooke. Cette famille y résida pendant les 400 années suivantes. Au gré de tous ces événements, le site a donc subi des modifications. Toutefois, le complexe de cuisine monastique initial ainsi que d'autres bâtiments de la cour extérieure ont été conservés. Certains parties ont ainsi changé de fonction, notamment celle située derrière la maison familiale, dans l'ancien cloître monastique. Ce secteur a d'ailleurs fourni une quantité considérable d'informations sur la vie quotidienne et son évolution entre les XVI^e et XVIII^e siècles. Au milieu du XVIII^e siècle, l'édifice est démoli. Seule la voûte souterraine à l'ouest du monastère a échappé à la destruction, ayant servi de cave à une nouvelle maison dont l'occupation a perduré jusqu'à l'abandon du site et sa destruction en 1928. Le mobilier associé à cette phase du site a, quant à lui, livré de nombreuses informations sur la vie quotidienne des campagnes du Cheshire entre les XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles. Après la démolition de l'hôtel particulier classique, le site est tombé dans la décrépitude. Peu de structures médiévales étaient encore en élévation, voire visibles.

En 1966, le site de Prieuré de Norton a été présenté à la Société de Développement Runcorn par Richard Brooke dont la famille a été propriétaire des lieux pendant plus de 400 ans. Le potentiel du site a été reconnu et en 1970, des fouilles archéologiques à grande échelle ont été entamées. Elles se sont poursuivies jusqu'en 1987. Les nombreux plans qui ont été dressés ont permis d'observer les différentes phases de développement du complexe. Le projet a également livré de nombreux témoignages sur l'occupation tardive du site par la famille Brooke.

En 1989, J. Patrick Greene, directeur de fouilles, a publié des travaux – qui ont été récompensés – sur le développement du monastère médiéval (*Le Prieuré de Norton : l'archéologie d'une maison religieuse médiévale*). Cette publication s'est fondée sur les résultats des fouilles et sur ses propres recherches comme celles menées sur la production expérimentale de tuiles de sols médiévales. Le travail de Greene est synthétique. En conséquence, toutes les précisions sur la stratigraphie et le mobilier ainsi que sur d'autres données n'apparaissent pas. Aussi, cette présente publication, financée par l'English Heritage, avec l'appui des Administrateurs du Norton Priory Museum Trust, a-t-elle pour objet de livrer toutes ces données au domaine public.

Zusammenfassung

Das Priorat der St Mary wurde 1134 in Norton, Cheshire gegründet, als die Augustinischen Kanoniker des Klosters St Bertelin, welches 1115 in Runcorn gegründet wurde, "im Auftrag des Roger, Bischof von Chester" an diesen Ort versetzt wurden. Die ursprüngliche Gründung des Priorats erfolgte durch William fitz Nigel, Zweitem Baron (von) Halton, und wurde durch dessen Nachfolger, William fitz William nach Norton verlegt. Die ältesten Gebäude des Klosters waren aus Holz und wurden aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach gebaut, um die Kanoniker und die zahlreichen Arbeiter zu beheimaten, die für die Errichtung eines solch edlen romanischen Klosters nötig waren. Gegen Ende des zwölften Jahrhunderts waren die steinernen Bauten des Klosters nicht nur fertiggestellt, sondern im Zuge des Ausbaus um weitere Mitglieder des Ordens zu beherbergen. Trotz der Verzögerung durch ein grosses Feuer im Jahre 1236 und den allgemeineren finanziellen und sozialen Problemen des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts erhielt Norton seinen Rang als Kloster am Ausgang des Jahrhunderts und sein Abt war ein hochrangiges und angesehenes Mitglied des Augustinerordens.

Das Priorat diente für weniger hochgestellte Familienmitglieder der Barone Halton als Begräbnisstätte, jedoch offenbar niemals für die Barone selbst. Ab Mitte des zwölften Jahrhunderts galt die Familie Dutton als Haupt-Benefaktor; diese waren Nachkömmlinge des Odard, eines Gründervaters, welcher das Kloster als ihren Begräbnisplatz auswählte und bis zu dessen Auflösung dort eine Familienkapelle betrieb. Von besonderem Interesse ist die Mischung höherrangiger Geistlicher und Laien, die im Hauptteil der Kirche und im Kreuzgang begraben waren; nur wenige hiervon konnten mit Namen identifiziert werden. Unter ihnen waren jedoch ein junger Leprakranker Mann mit drei Kindern (seine eigenen?) aus dem dreizehnten oder vierzehnten Jahrhundert, sechs Männer, bei denen die Krankheit Osteitis deformans festgestellt werden konnte, welche aufgrund ihrer Erblichkeit für Verwandtschaft unter diesen Personen spricht, die aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach Angehörige der Dutton Familie waren. Des Weiteren von Interesse waren die Knochen eines älteren Mannes, die die Symptome des Down-Syndroms aufwiesen. Dieser Mann war gut ernährt und lebte bis in seine späten vierziger oder fünfziger, und es ist möglich, dass er sich zu Lebzeiten in Obhut der Kanoniker befand bzw. selber ein Kanoniker war .

Das Kloster (in seinem damaligen Zustand) kam im April 1536, zur Zeit der Auflösung aller religiösen Stätten durch Heinrich VIII, zum Stillstand. Acht Jahre später wurden die Länder an die Familie Brooke verkauft, die für die darauffolgenden 400 Jahre dort lebte. Der Umzug in die Gemächer des Abts und die damit zusammenhängende Weiterbenutzung der klösterlichen Küchen und anderer Gebäude im Aussenhof, sowie der Müllhaufen, welchen die Familie sich hinter ihrem Haus zu etablieren erlaubte, hat in grosser Hinsicht zu dem heutigen Kenntnisschatz über Veränderungen im Denken und persönlichen Einstellungen im Alltag des späteren sechzehnten bis frühen achtzehnten Jahrhunderts beigetragen. Mitte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts wurde der grösste Teil des Hauses zerstört. Nur die Krypta des Westflügels des Klosters blieb bestehen und diente dem neuen, im klassischen Stil gebauten Herrenhaus als Keller. Dieses neue Haus blieb bis 1928 stehen, bis das Gelände aufgegeben und es ebenfalls zerstört wurde. Die Funde, welche mit dieser Nutzungsphase assoziiert werden, vermitteln weiterhin Wissen über Veränderungen in der Mode und Einstellung im ländlichen Cheshire des achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhunderts.

1966 wurden die Länder der Norton Priory durch Sir Richard Brooke, dessen Familie das Anwesen für über 400 Jahre in Besitz hatte, an die Runcorn Development Corporation verschenkt. Nach der Zerstörung des Herrenhauses im klassischen Stil verfiel das Gelände, vom mittelalterlichen Gebäude blieb kaum ein Teil stehen oder war gar sichtbar. Das Potenzial des Geländes für eine öffentliche kulturelle Einrichtung wurde jedoch früh erkannt, und im Jahre 1970 wurden bahnbrechende, gross-angelegte archäologische Untersuchungen begonnen, die bis 1987 andauerten. Diese Grabungen legten einen Grossteil des Grundrisses des Klosters frei und dienten der Erforschung der Entwicklung des Komplexes. Ferner wurde ein Reichtum an Informationen über die spätere Nutzung des Geländes durch die Brooke Familie und deren Haushalt gewonnen.

Im Jahre 1989 publizierte der Grabungsdirektor, J. Patrick Greene, einen preisgekrönten Bericht über das Wachstum und die Entwicklung des mittelalterlichen Klosters (*Norton Priory: the archaeology of a medieval religious house*), welcher auf den Grabungsergebnissen und seinen eigenen Forschungen, wie z.B. über die experimentelle Produktion mittelalterlicher Bodenfliesen, basiert. Greene's Arbeit beruhte jedoch zum grössten Teil auf synthetischer Basis, und aus diesem Grunde blieben die detaillierte Stratigraphie, die zahlreichen Funde und andere Daten unpubliziert. Dieses Buch, finanziert durch English Heritage, mit der Unterstützung der Trustees of the Norton Priory Museum Trust, hat als Ziel, diese Daten neu auszuwerten und der Öffentlichkeit einen vollständigen Bericht der Grabungsergebnisse zur Verfügung stellen.

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Jon Marrow and Lynn Smith, successive Keepers of Archaeology at Norton Priory Museum, and the late Margaret Warhurst, Steve Miller, and Claire McDade, successive Directors, are also thanked; all have provided unstinting and invaluable help over the years of the project. Thanks must also go to their various assistants and the other employees of the museum, who have always greeted our requests and queries with their full attention.

Excavations were instigated and funded by the then Runcorn Development Corporation, with some evaluation of the site being undertaken in 1970 by the late Hugh Thompson. J Patrick Greene directed the excavations from 1971 to 1983, assisted firstly by Jan Roberts, then by Jennifer Laing in the second season. After that, Bevis Sale worked as Assistant Director throughout, assuming the direction of the last few seasons. During the excavations, Beryl Noake took responsibility for the finds and undertook some post-excavation analysis. Much of the excavation was undertaken by volunteers, who essentially became the Norton Priory Society, and from 1976, the site became an annual teaching excavation, organised in conjunction with the Institute of Extension Studies at Liverpool University, under the guidance of Peter Davey. The completion of the archive, post-excavation assessment, analysis of the material, and this publication have all been generously funded by English Heritage, Tony Wilmott and Mark Bowden acting as monitors throughout the long process. Richard Short and John Westaway, under the supervision of Mark Leah, undertook the arduous task of creating a context database from the site notebooks and of digitising the site plans, whilst Christine Howard-Davis compiled a database for the artefacts. Jem Ashbee also played a considerable role at the inception of the project. The post-excavation assessment was largely undertaken by Christine Howard-Davis, with input from Jenny Vaughan of the Northern Counties Archaeological Service, and Ruth Hurst Vose, with advice from Sue Stallibrass, English Heritage's Science Advisor for the North West, and Anthea Boylston of the University of Bradford. The analysis phase was undertaken, for what had by then become Oxford Archaeology North, initially by Erika Guttman, but for the most part by Fraser Brown and Chris Howard-Davis, who also collated the specialist reports, under the management of Alison Plummer. Rachel Newman managed the completion of the site archive and the post-excavation assessment, and has seen the draft text through to publication. Emma Carter and Adam Parsons provided the publication illustrations, and Adam also designed the cover; the typesetting has been undertaken by Marie Rowland. The summary was translated into French by Magali Bailliot, and into German by Anna Hodgkinson.

Many specialists have contributed to this report, and thanks are due to them all, especially Beryl Noake whose detailed report on the tiles has been drawn upon heavily, and Pauline Bearpark, whose report on the grave slabs was likewise drawn upon; Elizabeth Ellison and Sandra Frake both worked on analyses of the skeletal material before the inception of this project, and Judi Caton wrote the original report on the animal bone, all again extensively drawn upon for this publication. More recently, Alan Bowden worked on the geological analysis and identification of the whetstones. Without their early contributions, this report would be the lesser.

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Thanks are due to J Patrick Greene for permission to use redrawn versions of several of his analytical maps, first published in his 1989 synthesis. Illustrations of the tiles and tile patterns are largely redrawn from the early report by Beryl Noakes, and illustrations of the grave slabs are likewise redrawn from the early report by Pauline Bearpark; both are held within the Norton Priory Museum archive.

Thanks are also due to the Norton Priory Museum Trust for permission to reproduce photographs from their extensive archive and, unless otherwise stated, all plates can be attributed to the Trust. Plates 93, 101, 102, 106, 107, and 115 were provided by Alan Ogden, Plates 200 and 203 are by the late Chris Johnston of Cheshire County Council, Plate 204 is by Barry Hamilton of Denbighshire County Council, Plate 221 by Adam Parsons, and Plates 11, 207, and 222 are by Christine Howard-Davis.

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*This book is inscribed to the canons of Norton Priory,
and to the Brooke family, its guardians for 400 years*

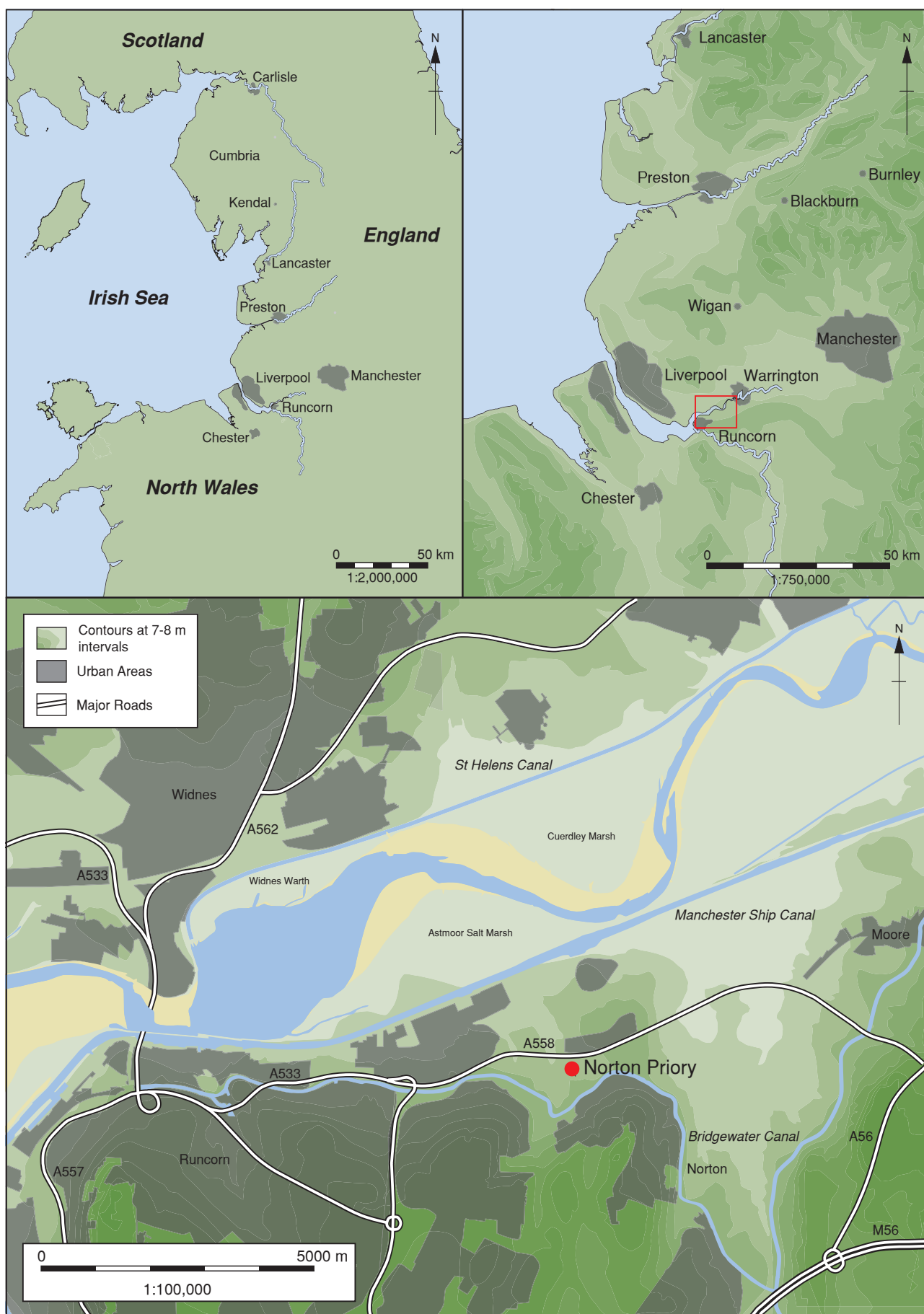


Figure 1: Location of Norton Priory