

# Priory Gatehouse



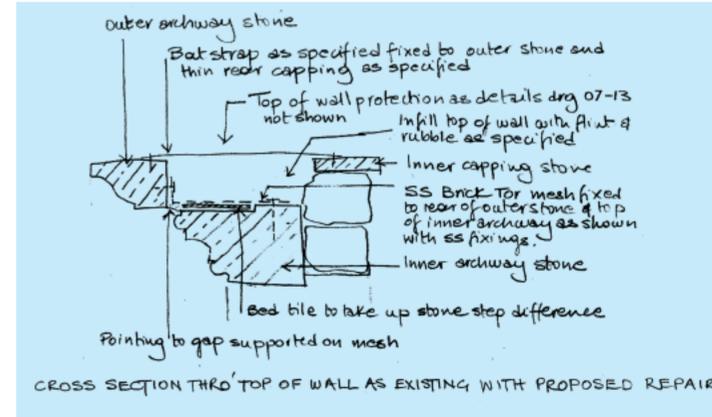
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The gateway by J. Newton 1787



The church in 1808 from the southwest by John Storer



Architect's archway repair sketch



The stone arch with reinforcement

## A Violent Incident

The Priory Annals record an incident which happened on December 16th 1276, when a group of the king's falconers, who were staying at the Priory, had an altercation with some of the canons and the chaplain. In the evening the falconers went out into the streets of Dunstable where they fatally wounded the chaplain. When they were refused re-entry by the gatekeeper he was beaten up and they then stormed through the Priory causing further injuries.

The alarm was raised by the pealing of the bells and the people of the town ran to intervene, but still the Prior, William, struggled to contain the fighting.

*The King's falconers stormed through the Priory in 1276*



The falconers went to the king the following day, complaining about their treatment, levelling serious accusations against the Prior, so Edward I referred the matter to the local justice.

After 12 local men swore on oath that the Prior, the canons and the townspeople were not at fault, the king refused to accept it, coming in person to the town.

At a hearing, 36 men from outside the locality declared before the king that there was no case to answer by the Prior or the canons and that whoever was responsible for the killing in the King's household should be punished – whether they were or not remains unclear.

## Unsuitable Repairwork

Why the arch of the gateway survives and wasn't pulled down with the rest of the structure, we can only speculate but it appears in a number of historic post medieval illustrations always in a semi-ruinous state.

Since the middle of the 19th century, the gateway has seen numerous repairs, some of which were less sympathetic than others, using material such as brick, flint and limestone.

## Major Conservation

In 2015, with the gateway, a scheduled monument, in danger of collapse, Dunstable Town Council commissioned a complete renovation with support from Central Bedfordshire Council and a major contribution from Historic England. This involved removing all the cement used in the previous repairs, repairing and replacing the damaged and missing stones. To ensure the lasting stability of the structure, the stone arch was reinforced at the top with hidden stainless steel mesh. All the stonework was rebuilt and pointed using lime mortar that closely matched the colour of the original.

Finally, new gates of solid oak were installed in 2016, with funds donated by various local organisations.

*Dunstable Town Council would like to acknowledge the assistance of the architect Rena Pitsilli-Graham, KDK Archaeology for the historic building report, Bakers of Danbury for the initial stabilisation repairs and Lodge & Son who undertook the conservation work and produced the oak gates.*



Top of wall protection



Selecting the correct size of brick



The slate was used to 'weather' the joints of the arch stones



Temporary support

Dunstable Town Council would like to thank the following for their generous donations towards the cost of producing the oak gates:

CHEZ JEROME

DUNSTABLE ROTARY CLUB

WATERSIDE ESTATES LTD.

DUNSTABLE & DISTRICT  
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

FRIENDS OF PRIORY HOUSE  
& GARDENS

WATLING STREET CLUB  
OF PAST ROTARIANS

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