

## Some architectural features

### *The south wall of the hall:*

From the terrace you can see that it is built of rubble, partly with a battered (ie. sloping) plinth.

The eastern two-light window is original, the upper part was destroyed when the hall was divided. The other two windows in this wall are 17<sup>th</sup> century, their sills were lowered two hundred years later.

In this wall also are the scars where buttresses have at some time been removed.

### *The north wall of the hall:*

The doorway in the north wall, now in the passageway, opening onto the staircase of about 1730.

At some date there was an attempt to make the north aspect of the house, facing into the courtyard, symmetrical. The addition of the entrance passageway masks the effect. Notice the fine doorway behind the reception desk.

### *Stone:*

Most of the stone was reworked from older masonry. The house is faced with Purbeck ashlar which is generally of indifferent quality; however there is some fine stone to be seen in lintels and fireplaces.

### *The Courtyard:*

The 17<sup>th</sup> century looplights in the undercroft on the north side of the courtyard.

*An undercroft is a (usually mediaeval) vaulted chamber built partly, sometimes wholly, underground. Frequently the upper parts of the walls are above ground level so that the undercroft can be lit with natural light. In consequence the 'ground' floor of the building is raised slightly and access is usually up a short flight of steps.*

### *Also look out for:*

Three 17<sup>th</sup> century doorways in the north range of the building. The moulded beams of the divided ceiling in the Drawing Room. The fine fireplace also in the Drawing Room.

### *Floors:*

Look beneath your feet. Notice how many flagstones carry patterns of wear that do not match up with modern traffic. These must be relaid stones from elsewhere on the site.

### *Garden Walls:*

Garden and boundary walls have been built with any odd leftover stones and show a crazy variation in size and shape. See the walls of the boathouse garden and, just to the north, the inside of the boundary wall close to the main entrance.

*Much of this description was derived from The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset. See especially V2 Pt.2 p317 where there is a detailed treatment together with a plan of the house.*

An architectural history of:

# The Priory Hotel

On the site of the former

## Lady St.Mary Priory

Compiled by Derek Moody



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## Today

There have been buildings on this site for over a thousand years and folk have dwelt hereabouts for at least two thousand more.

It is in the nature of builders to re-use whatever material they can salvage from a previous building when they construct anew. Some stones from the very first masonry buildings on the site are incorporated into the structure standing today. We describe the south wall of the 16<sup>th</sup> century hall as being made of rubble you must ask yourself “The rubble of what?”

The rubble of cell and chapel, of kitchen and hearth. The solid structures once familiar to a 14<sup>th</sup> century prior, an 11<sup>th</sup> century monk and even a 9<sup>th</sup> century nun; they are still here. Much altered, incorporated into foundations or reworked into walls or floors, they are still here.

*Tread softly for you tread on memory.*

## The House

The house dates from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was built with stones taken from the ruins of older buildings on the site. There are still a few masonry fragments standing at the western end of the the grounds. The most substantial of these, in the northwest corner, are of an undercroft<sup>[See over]</sup> which probably dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The original house comprised a high single-storey hall and a parlour with a chamber above to the east. The hall is now the Garden Room, the stairwell beyond and the rooms above whilst the parlour has been incorporated into the Drawing Room. The hall was divided into two storeys in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The staircase at the east end of the old hall is a later addition, dating from about 1730.

About the same time as these two storeys were created the buildings on the north and east sides of the courtyard were added, they were much altered during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The western end was largely rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century over an undercroft which is probably a century older.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century a coach house was built onto the southeast corner of the house and later incorporated into the main building. Now, with the old parlour, it forms the Drawing Room.

The single storey entrance passageway was added externally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The old entrance way with its 17<sup>th</sup> century doorway, reset in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, now forms the inner portal to the Garden and Drawing Rooms. The roofs are 18<sup>th</sup> century or later.

Conversion into an hotel in the 1970s required much sympathetic alteration; especially when installing modern plumbing. Great care was taken to preserve the older fabric.

## The Boathouse

Although usually described as a 16<sup>th</sup> century clay barn The Boathouse has probably been a general warehouse and an agricultural building as much as a clay barn.

Clay was and still is, a major export from Wareham. It used to be transported by water on shoal draught barges that used the riverbank and landward entrances and a small lading dock (now the terrace) for transshipment. It is unreasonable to suppose that only one commodity passed the doors and that goods passed in only one direction.

Despite its name, The Boathouse proved unsuitable for storing any but small vessels which needed to be manhandled awkwardly in and out of the water. The conversion into luxury hotel suites has thus preserved an humble building which has stood on the riverbank at least as long as The Priory itself.

Only the shell of the building is original. Internal arrangements must have changed several times in its history and the present conversion to hotel accommodation is unlikely to be the final chapter.

A short stroll along the far bank of the river presents a view of the boathouse in which the original purpose is easily perceived.