

*Archaeological Investigations at
St Austin's Friars and Bridge Street,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire*

by
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Archaeology Service



Shropshire
County Council

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT
ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET,
SHREWSBURY, SHROPSHIRE**

by
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A Report for

MORRIS
PROPERTY

Morris Property

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SUMMARY

In 2007 work was carried out to erect a two-storey office extension following the demolition of a former school house building at Bridge Street, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, and to relocate the school house building on land at St Austin's Friars, Shrewsbury. The development site lies within the historic core of the medieval town and continued to be developed throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. A desk-based assessment by R K Morriss in 1996 and a field evaluation by the Archaeology Service, SCC, in 1997 had identified archaeological features within the development area. These included the line of the 13th century town wall and part of the town's Augustinian Friary lay within the development areas.

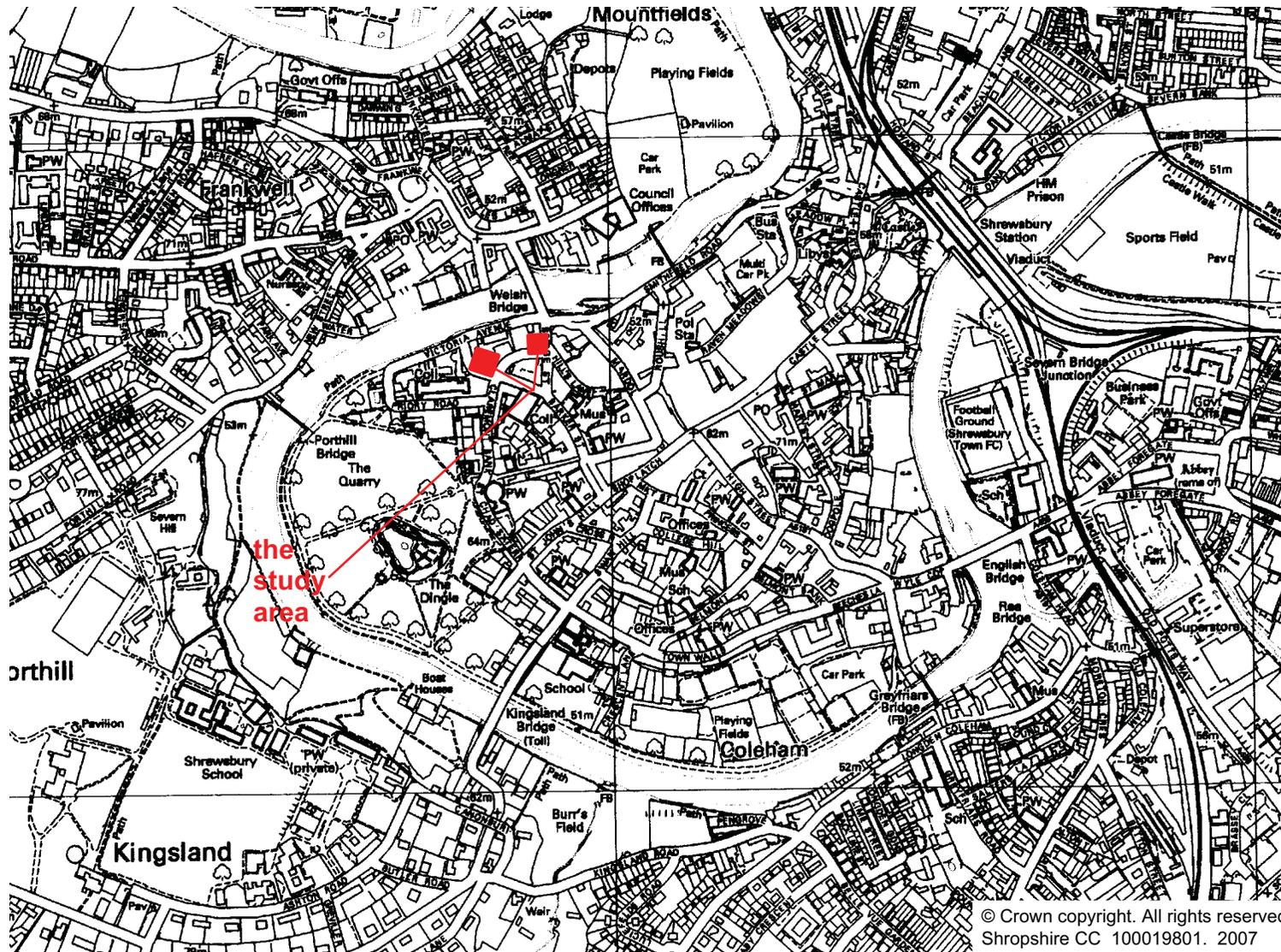
A programme of archaeological work was included as part of the development to record these and any other archaeological features that might be revealed. The work was carried out by the Archaeology Service, SCC, in April and May 2007. On the St Austin's Friars site this work revealed a sequence of medieval features and yards, a late medieval sandstone wall and the remains of a post-medieval house, the White House, demolished in 1978. On the Bridge Street site a number of medieval and post-medieval pits were revealed, the latter possibly associated with a tanning industry. The town wall was shown to have probably followed the line of the northern boundary of the site, where sandstone stonework is incorporated into the current buildings.

1 INTRODUCTION

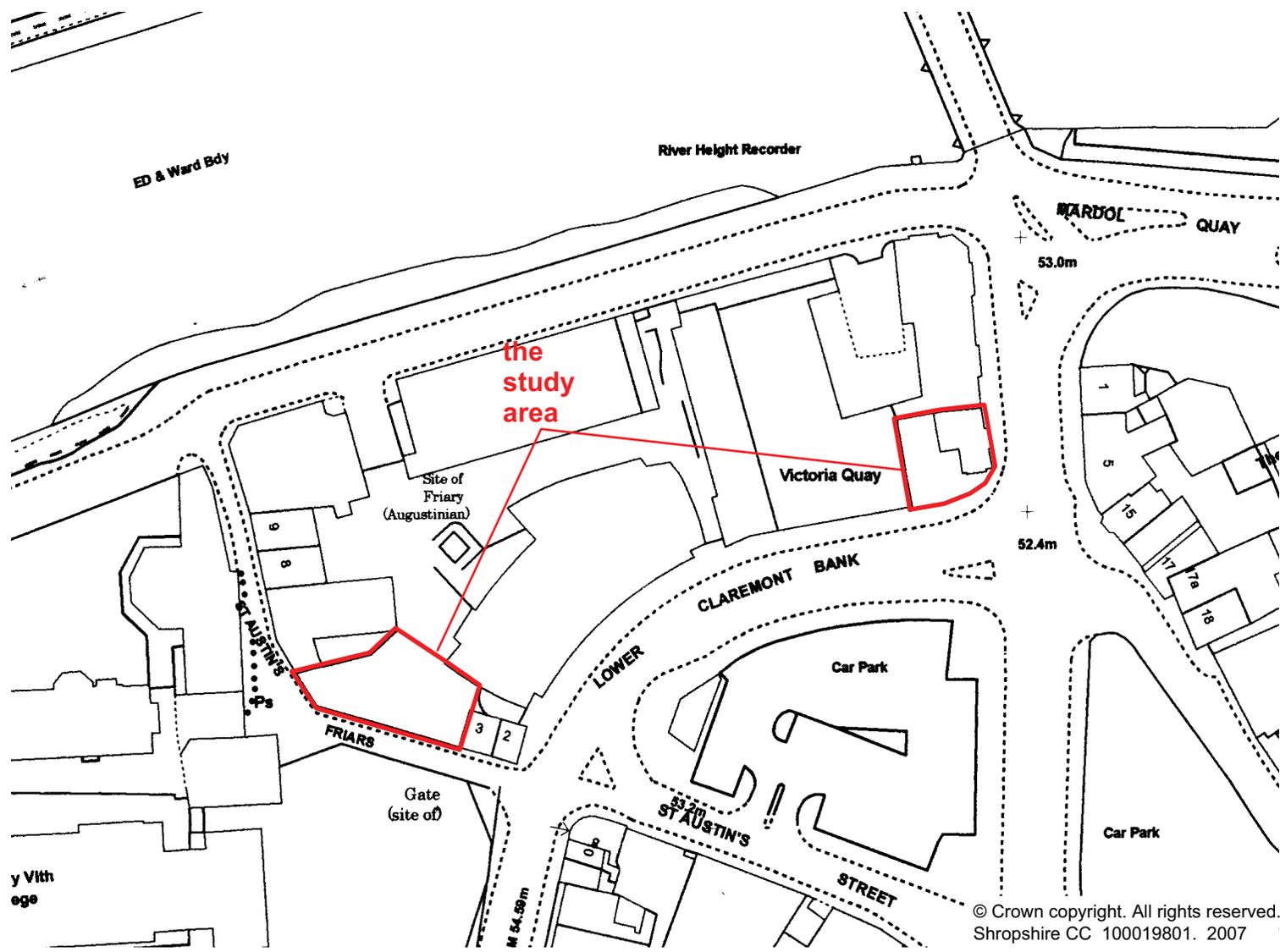
In 2007 work was carried out to erect a two-storey office extension following the demolition of a former school house building (County Sites and Monuments Record [SMR] No. 10116) at Bridge Street, Shrewsbury, Shropshire (NGR SJ 4888 1268) and to relocate the school house building on land at St Austin's Friars, Shrewsbury, Shropshire (NGR SJ 4880 1265). The office extension site lies in the historic core of the medieval town and is crossed by the line of the 13th century town wall (SMR No. 62563) and is adjacent to a medieval gate through the wall known as the Cripple Lode Gate (SMR No. 01456). The site of the re-location of the school house lies within the precinct of an Augustinian Friary founded in the 13th century (SMR No 01466). The site was more recently occupied by a building, known as "The White House", demolished in c. 1978 (SMR PRN 10492). At the time of the current work, the only remains of the White House were its former garden wall (SMR PRN 10493), now the boundary wall to the development site on the St Austin's Friars frontage.

The development site lies within the historic core of the medieval town and in an area that is likely to have been in existence in Anglo-Saxon times and which continued to be developed throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. In view of the archaeological potential of the site, it was made a condition of planning permission that a programme of archaeological work should accompany the development.

The programme of investigation was informed by previous work on the site, including a desk-based assessment of the study area (Morriss, 1996) and trial excavation (Hannaford 1997). The investigations were carried out by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire County Council, between April and May 2007, and comprised the excavation of an area 10 metres long by 5 metres wide on the St Austin's Friars site, and the trial excavation of an area 10 metres long by 2 metres wide on the Bridge Street site. The subsequent ground disturbance associated with the developments was carried out under archaeological supervision.



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007
Figure 1: Shrewsbury town centre showing the location of the study area 1:10,000 scale



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007
 Figure 2: The location of the study area 1:1,000 scale

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

An archaeological desk-top study was carried out in 1996 of the block between St Austin's Friars and Bridge Street that included both the present Bridge Street and the St Austin's Friars sites (Morriss, 1996). The desk-top survey confirmed the historical and potential archaeological significance of the two sites.

An archaeological evaluation of the St Austin's Friars part of the study area was undertaken in 1997 (Hannaford, 1997); this included a trial trench a short distance from the Bridge Street site.

The desk-based research identified a number of potential sites features within the study area that might be affected by the work on the two development sites.

The Town Wall

Following an attack on the town in 1215 by Welsh forces under Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, king Henry III ordered the burgesses of Shrewsbury build a town wall. The town received its first grant of murage in 1220, and work on the walls may have been largely completed by 1242, although work continued on the defences over many years. Where the town wall has been recorded archaeologically, its original build has been shown to be uniform. The wall was terraced into the natural sand and clay slope overlooking the river. It is faced with small, squared blocks of red sandstone ashlar, and the lower courses of the outer face have a simple chamfered plinth. Behind the face is a rubble core. The masonry is bonded with a greenish, gritty mortar. For most of its circuit the wall was fronted by a ditch. (Baker, forthcoming)

The medieval and post-medieval town wall is known to have run north down Claremont Bank with a gateway, the Romaldesham Gate (SMR No. 01455), at the end of St Austin's Friars. It turned to the east, passing through the current Bridge Street site; the site of another gate, the Cripple Lode Gate (SMR No. 01456), is believed to lie here beneath Bridge Street. The wall continued east from here to link with the former St George's Bridge at the end of Mardol. The wall was seen and recorded during the archaeological evaluation of the study area 1997 when an exceptionally well preserved section of the town wall was revealed at a depth of 1m below the ground surface (Hannaford, 1997). The fabric employed in the construction of this wall is similar to that employed on other sections of the 13th-century town wall seen in recent years, as described above (N Baker, pers. comm.; Barker, 1961, pp184-5 & Fig. 47). Pottery from the foundation cut for this section of the wall also suggested a 13th-century date for its construction.

The Augustinian Friary

The Augustinian or Austin Friars established their first house in Shrewsbury c. 1254. Initially, the friars are thought to have settled just outside the defences at the northern end of the town at Cowlane, close to the castle at the neck of the river loop. In the same year Henry III made the friars a grant of land, possibly that of the friary site beyond the Romaldesham Gate, and in 1269 made them a grant of 10 marks towards the building of their church. It is unclear however exactly when the friars moved to the Romaldesham Gate site – they were given further land there in c. 1295 and granted a royal licence for the move in 1298. The friars developed their new site during the early 14th century, and were given several further grants of land there at this time. In 1392, in return for being allowed to enclose some of this land, the friars were required to provide a "good broad way for men and carts from the town wall to Severn"; this may refer to the St Austin's Friars street. The

friary prospered in the later 14th century, but by the time of its surrender in 1540, it was impoverished and many of its buildings ruinous. After the dissolution, the site was acquired by the Pope family, who built a large house on the site. One fragment of the friary, a red sandstone two-storey structure with a first floor hall over an undercroft, still stood as late as 1942. (Morriss, 1996; SMR file PRN 01466)

In 1995, service trenches cut along the east side of the Armoury building revealed two sets of two parallel sandstone walls. The walls were of rectangular, faced, blocks of purple sandstone bonded in a buff mortar, and were aligned approximately east - west. These may have been the northern and southern end walls of the building demolished in 1942, or possibly have belonged to another adjacent friary building.

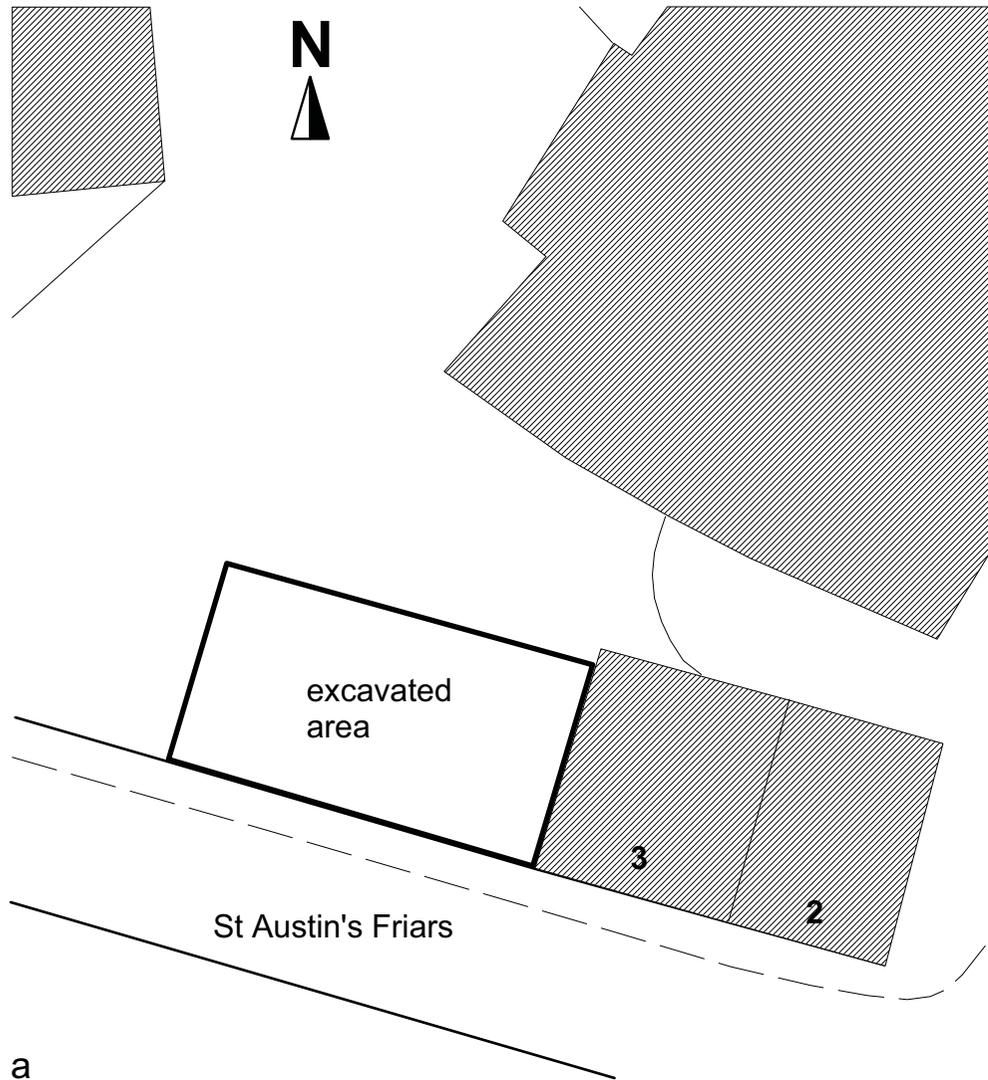
Subsequent to the desk-top evaluation of 1996 (Morriss, 1996) an archaeological evaluation of the St Austin's Friars part of the study area was undertaken in 1997 (Hannaford, 1997). This evaluation found the remains of the east wall of a building which almost certainly belonged to the friary. The wall ran north to south and at least two courses of faced red sandstone ashlar blockwork survived at its southern end adjacent to St Austin's Friars. At this end of the trench, the remains of a second sandstone wall (24), bonded in buff mortar and orange sandy clay, ran off to the west beyond the trench edge. A pebble surface also of medieval date may have represented the edge of a medieval street or roadway giving access into the friary precinct. The only deposits dating to the post-medieval period were a layer of demolition rubble, presumably deriving from friary buildings, and an 18th- to 19th-century garden or yard soil. (Hannaford, 1997)

The White House

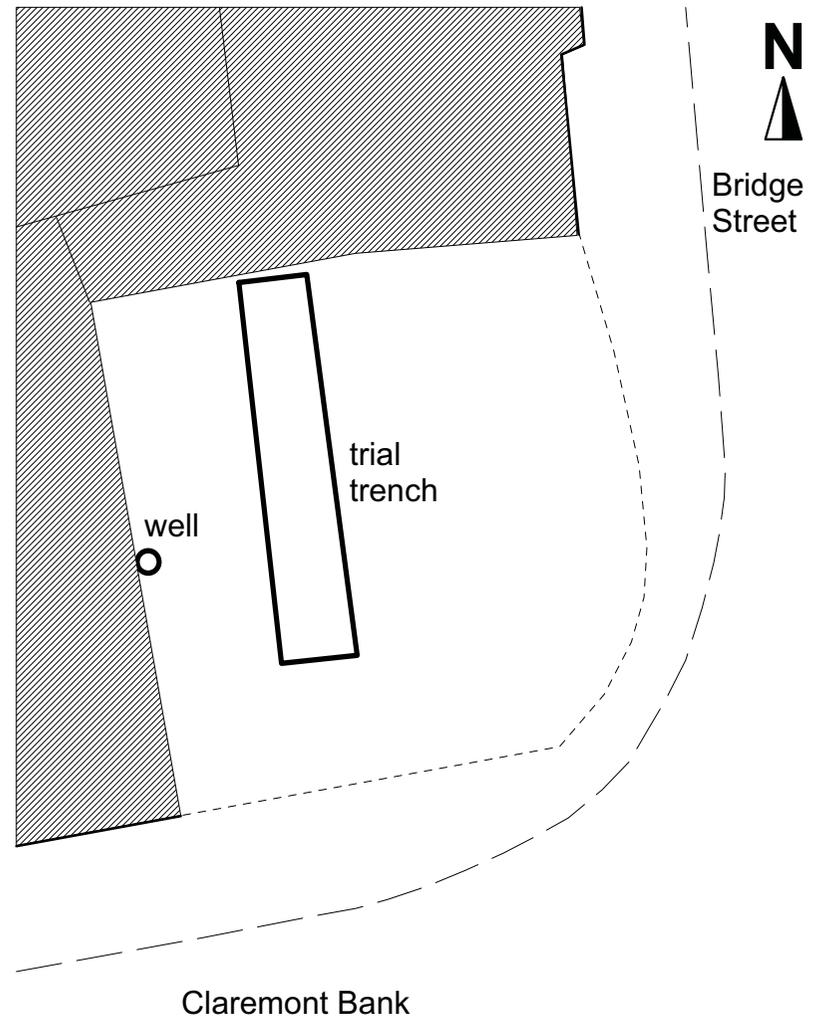
The White House was a large L-shaped house, with a garden to west, situated on the northeast side of St Austin's Friars. The house was partially timber framed but was reported to have had a stone cellar. The house is likely to have dated in part at least to the 17th century. The house was demolished in 1978, and all that remained of the house in 2007 was a wall along the north side of St Austin's Friars, constructed of red sandstone with upper courses of brick, and with a doorway inscribed with the name "The White House". The wall had previously been a Grade II listed structure, though had recently been de-listed.

St Chad's School House

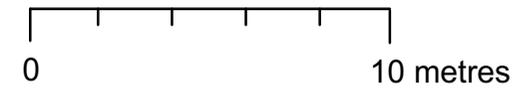
The desk-based assessment indicates that the area around the Cripplelode Gate was re-developed when Bridge Street was created in c. 1796 to access the newly finished Welsh Bridge. This part of the study area was re-developed again in 1859 when land between St Austin's Street and Bridge Street was acquired for the St Chad's National School. The headmaster's house was built on the Bridge Street site soon after (Morriss, 1996). The building was taken down in 2007 prior to being re-erected on the St Austin's Friars site. A public toilet block was built on the northwestern part of the site in the second half of the 20th century, and demolished in the first few years of the present century.



a



b



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007

Figure 3: The location of the excavations a) St Austin's Friars; b) Bridge Street; 1:200 scale

3 THE SITE INVESTIGATIONS

3.1 St Austin's Friars

On the St Austin's Friars site, the development was required to include a programme of archaeological work to comprise of the excavation of a sample area and a subsequent watching brief on ground disturbance associated with the development.

The Excavation

The tarmac of the existing car park surface (dating to c. 1997) and its formation layer of stone chippings were removed over an area 10m long by 5m wide on the St Austin's Friars frontage (see Fig.3a). The southern boundary of the excavation was formed by the red sandstone foundation of the former property boundary wall along the street frontage; the eastern edge of the excavated area was formed by the west wall of 3 St Austin's Friars.

The natural subsoil was seen to comprise a buff to light greyish brown sandy silty clay (Figs. 4a & 6-8; 46). This layer sloped down slightly to east and north, lying 1.10m below the tarmac at the southwestern corner of the excavated area at 52.01m AOD, dropping to 51.78m AOD at the eastern edge of the study area.

Cut into the natural subsoil at the eastern edge of the site was a circular pit (58) 1.2m in diameter by 0.3m deep. The pit extended under the foundations of 3 St Austin's Friars. The pit was filled with a moist, dark grey sandy silt (57), containing pebbles, animal bone, and a quantity of 12th- to 13th-century medieval pottery. The pit was sealed by a layer of dark grey sandy silt (53 & 56) with a high organic content which also produced 12th- 13th-century pottery.

At the western end of the excavated area, a shallow gully with a rounded terminal (55) was also cut into the surface of the natural. The gully was filled with a dark grey sandy silt (54). The gully was sealed with a layer of dark grey sandy silt (37) containing 12th- to 13th-century pottery.

Spreads of pebbles and cobbles (Figs. 4b & 7; 30, 31, & 36) lay on top of the grey silt (37) at the western end of the excavated area. A rough pebble and cobble surface (Figs. 4b & 6; 52) in a dark grey sandy silt matrix also overlay the natural in the central part of the area, and also sealed the top of the eastern end of the gully (55). These cobble spreads may have been the disturbed remains of a yard surface; they were partially sealed by a dark grey sandy silt (28, 29 & 51) also containing pebbles, animal bone and 12th – 14th-century pottery. This layer extended right across the central and eastern parts of the excavated area where it sealed the pebble surface (52) and organic silts (53/6).

In the southern part of the area this silt (51) was overlain by a thin pebble and gravel surface (Fig.5a; 21) which ran parallel to the modern road. This surface was probably the same as one seen in the 1997 evaluation trench (SAF97b 1026), and would be at a similar level to the 'paved roadway' seen 2' 6" below St Austin's Friars by J A Morris in the early 20th century.

A layer (c. 0.10m thick) of crushed red and purple sandstone in red clay mottled with yellow clay (50) covered the northern half of the excavation area, overlapping slightly the northern edge of the gravel surface (21). At the western end of the area this was sealed with a further deposit of dark grey silty loam (25). To the east it was covered by a

succession of deposits: a thin but distinct reddish brown sandy silt (47), followed by a compact crushed red sandstone in dark grey sandy silt matrix (7 & 35), a buff sandy silt (34), a dark grey sandy silt (44), a dark greyish brown sandy silt (33) and a similar dark greyish brown sandy silt (32) with 13th- to 15th-century pottery. A band of these layers (7, 24, 34 & 35) containing red sandstone fragments and buff sandy silt had the appearance of a construction deposit, although they were not connected to any structure.

These last deposits were cut by the foundation trench for a red sandstone wall (Figs. 5, 6 & 8; 41) that ran below but on a slightly different alignment to the red brick west wall of 3 St Austin's Friars. Recently installed concrete underpinning for the brick wall separated these two walls.

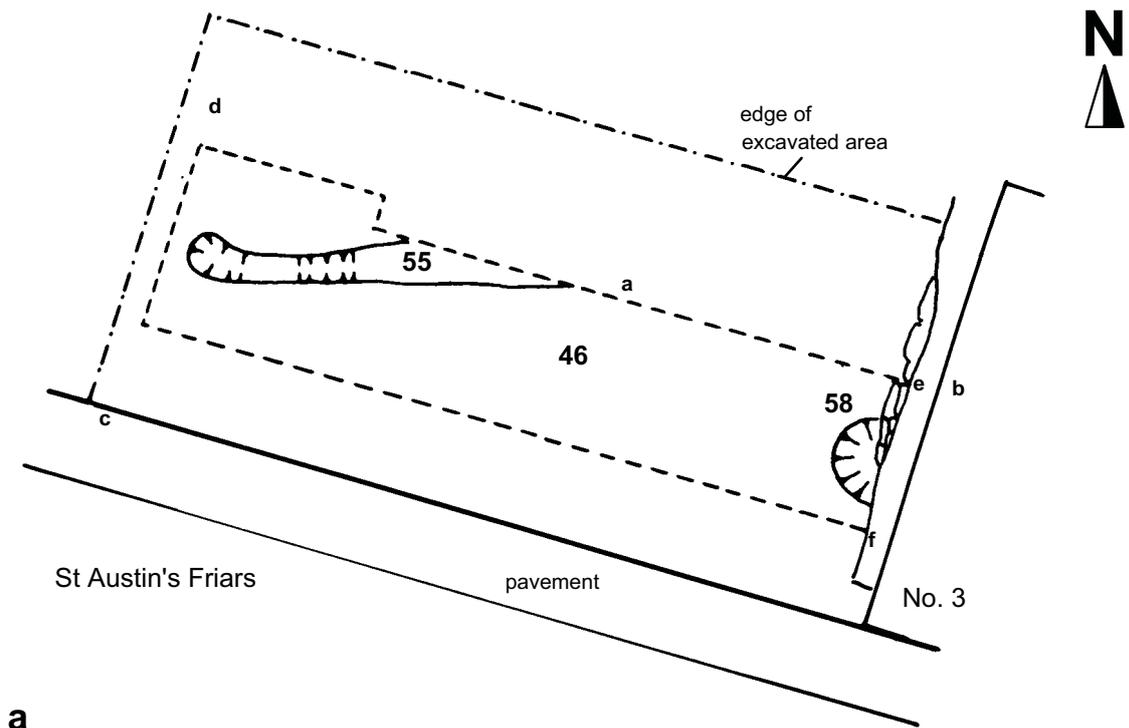
The foundations (Fig 5b; 62) of the former southern site boundary wall ran along the southern edge of the excavated area. These foundations were entirely of red sandstone rubble bonded in orange-brown sand. The foundations incorporated what appeared to be a discrete sandstone plinth feature (61). Both these had been built over the pebble surface (21), but further deposits that might have related this wall to the stratified sequence had been removed in the past, possibly in 1997 when the tarmac was laid or in 1978 when the White House was demolished.

Along the northern edge of the study area were the brick and sandstone footings of the west wing of the White House and the steps into and south wall of its cellar (Fig.5b; 4, 10-16). The truncated remains of a robber trench (6) of another wall were also seen running between the base of a chimney (11 & 13) and the site boundary wall (62).

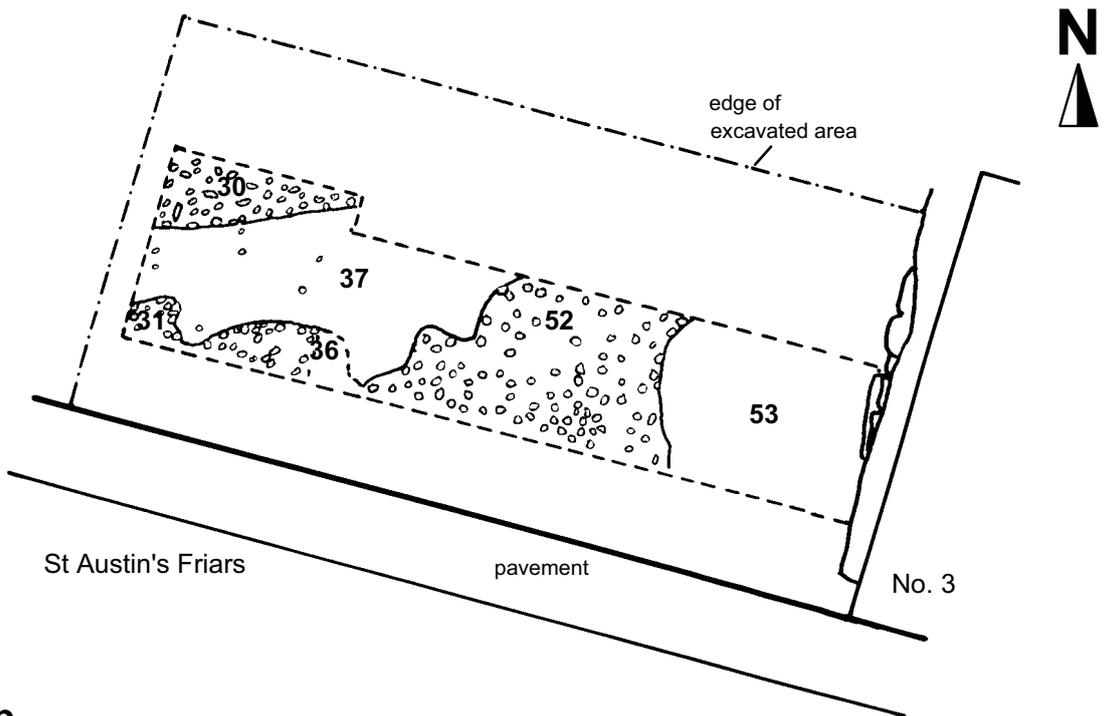
All of these features and deposits were sealed by a layer of grey stone chippings (Fig. 7; 2) and the car-park tarmac (1).

The Watching Brief

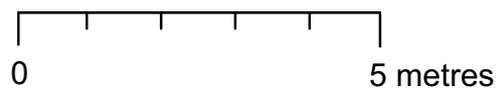
The watching brief on the preparation of the site for piling revealed that the brick footings seen at the northern edge of the study area lay on top of the red sandstone lining of the cellar, whose steps were recorded during the excavation. The cellar had been back-filled with brick and timber rubble, presumably demolition rubble from the superstructure of the former White House. No further features or deposits were seen during the watching brief on the site.



a

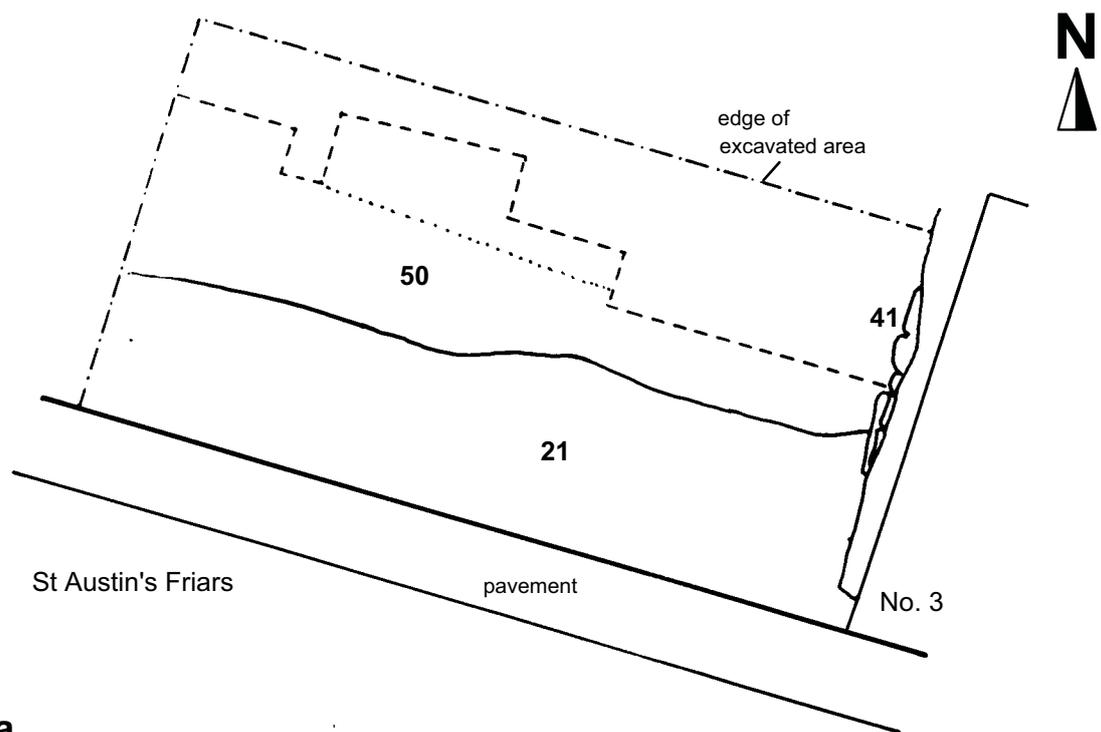


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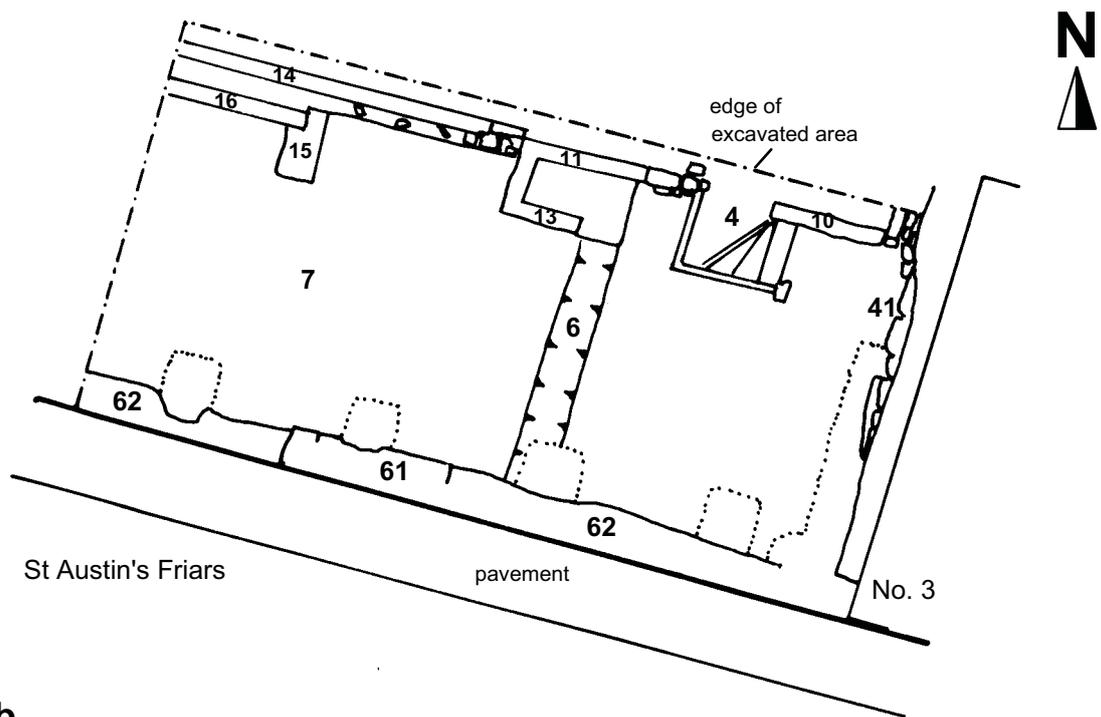


ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007

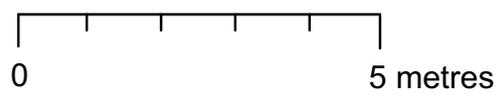
Figure 4: St Austin's Friars, a) showing 12th-14th C features; b) showing 12th-14th C yard surfaces 1:100 scale



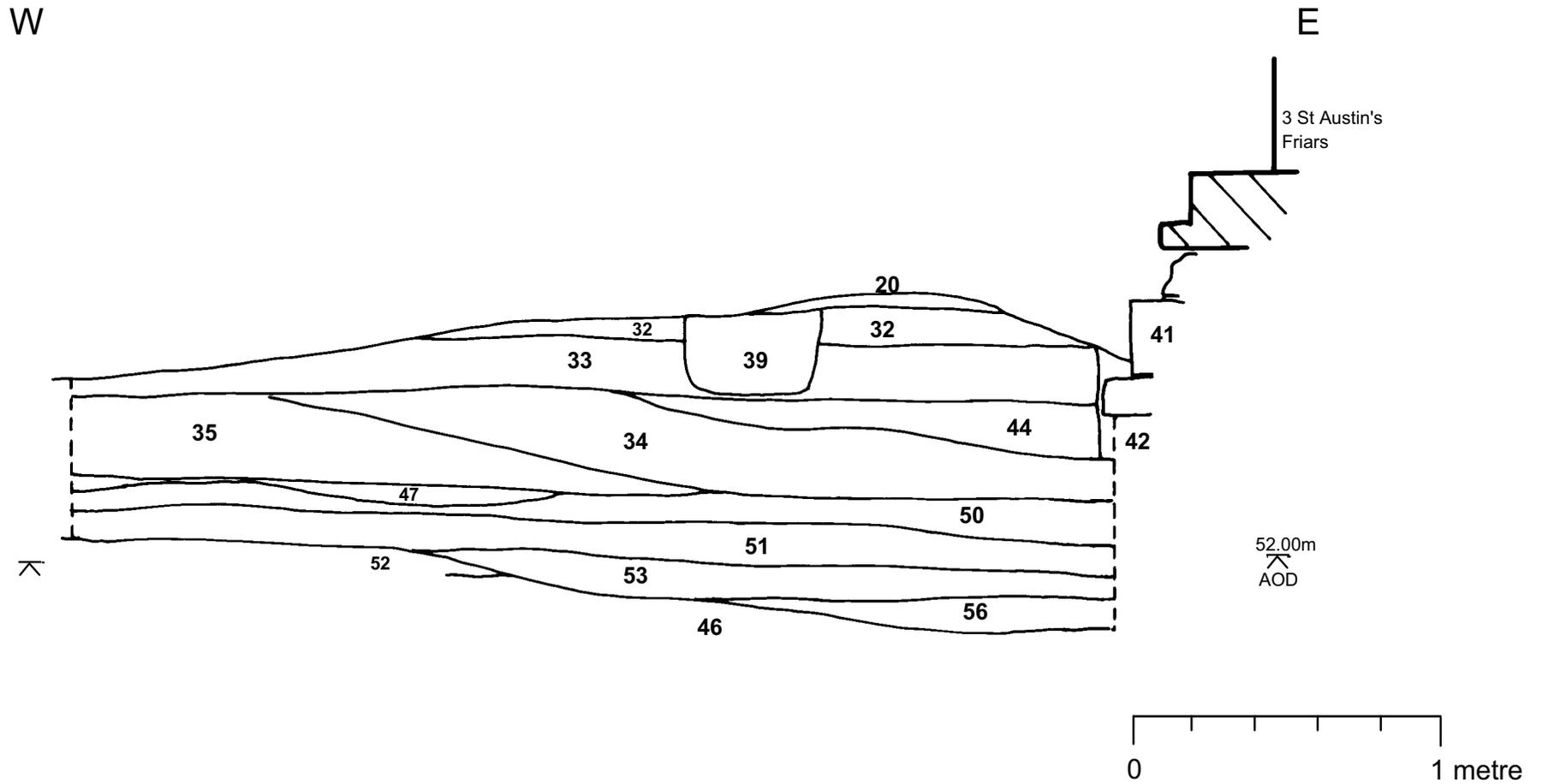
a



b

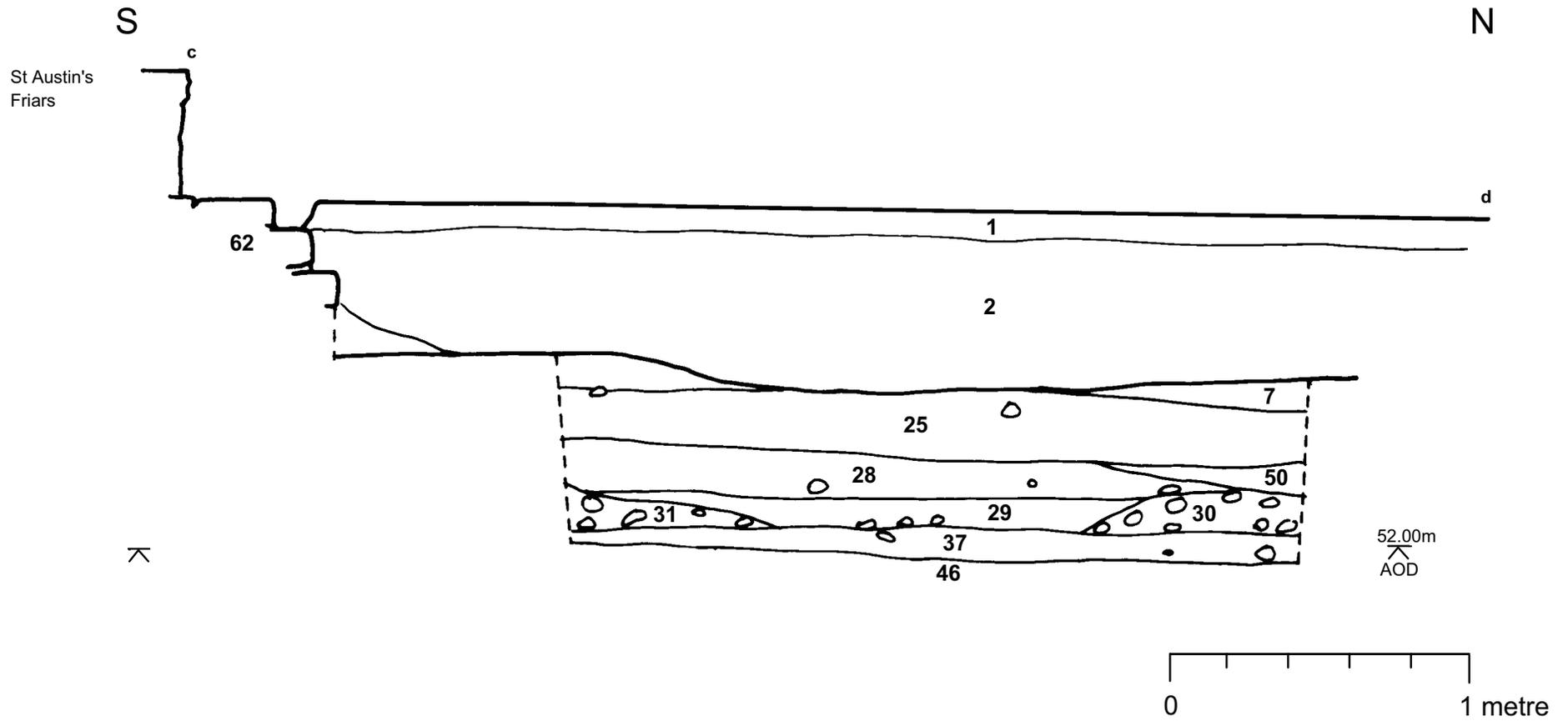


ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007
 Figure 5: St Austin's Friars, a) showing the later medieval road (21); b) showing the remains of the White House and other post-medieval features. 1:100 scale

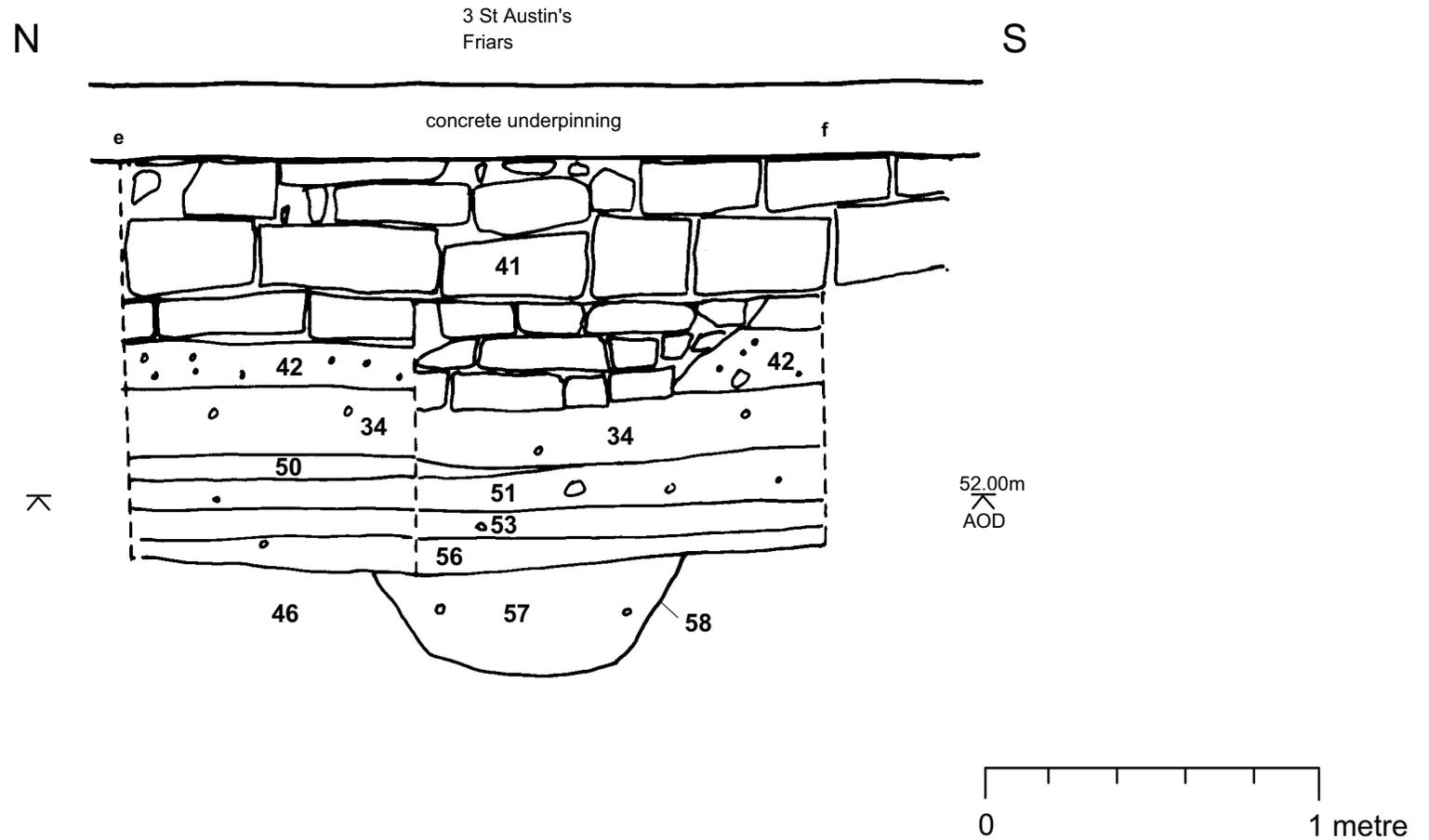


ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007

Figure 6: St Austin's Friars, east end of the south-facing section through the excavated area (see Fig. 4 a-b); 1:20 scale



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007
 Figure 7: St Austin's Friars, east-facing section (see Fig. 4, c-d); 1:20 scale



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007

Figure 8: St Austin's Friars, west-facing section through the excavated area (see Fig. 4 e-f); 1:20 scale

3.2 Bridge Street

On the Bridge Street site, a phased approach to the investigations was undertaken. Phase One consisted of an archaeological field evaluation whose aim was to provide information that would enable an informed and reasonable decision to be taken regarding the Phase Two archaeological provision for the required programme of archaeological work. The objectives of the evaluation were firstly to locate archaeological features and deposits within the study area, and secondly to assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any such archaeological features, deposits and structures. In the light of the trial excavation it was decided that Phase Two should comprise an archaeological watching brief.

The Trial Excavation

The excavation was carried out in May 2007. A trench 10 metres long by 2 metres wide was excavated at right angles to the existing rear (south) wall of the Morris Properties offices on Bridge Street (Fig. 3 b). The trench was excavated by mechanical mini-excavator until the top of undisturbed archaeological deposits were encountered. After the removal of modern surfaces and archaeologically sterile overburden the trench was cleaned by hand and examined for archaeological features and deposits.

In the southern half of the trench the natural subsoil was seen to lie immediately beneath modern disturbance for drains and pipes associated with the 19th and 20th century occupation of the study area. This natural subsoil (Figs. 9 & 10) consisted of a thin layer of buff-light grey clay with gravel and pebbles over banded sands and grit; it was encountered at a depth of 0.84m below the ground surface (i.e. at 51.86m AOD) at the southern end of the trench sloping down towards the north.

In the centre of the trench, the natural was cut by a large oval pit (21) whose greenish-grey silty fills (20 & 25) produced a quantity of 12th-14th century pottery and was suggestive of a cess-pit. The pit appeared to be sealed by a thin layer of greenish-grey silty clay which produced medieval pottery of a similar date. (The top of this layer lay at 51.50m AOD)

Three further pits of probable 18th century date were seen in the north end of the trench. Two (Fig. 9a; 10 & 14) were roughly circular, the third (26) rectangular; all were lined with deposits of red clay (Fig. 9b; 23, 24, & 17), possibly to retain liquid, and it is possible that they may have been tanning pits associated with one of the tanneries documented elsewhere in the area in the 18th and 19th centuries. (The top of these features lay at 51.60m AOD.)

These features were in turn sealed by a layer of dark grey sandy silt typical of yard deposits containing brick and tile and pottery of 18th-19th century date, which had been much cut about by later foundations, drains and other services, and partially sealed by the concrete floors of 20th century structures. These in turn were sealed by recent demolition debris.

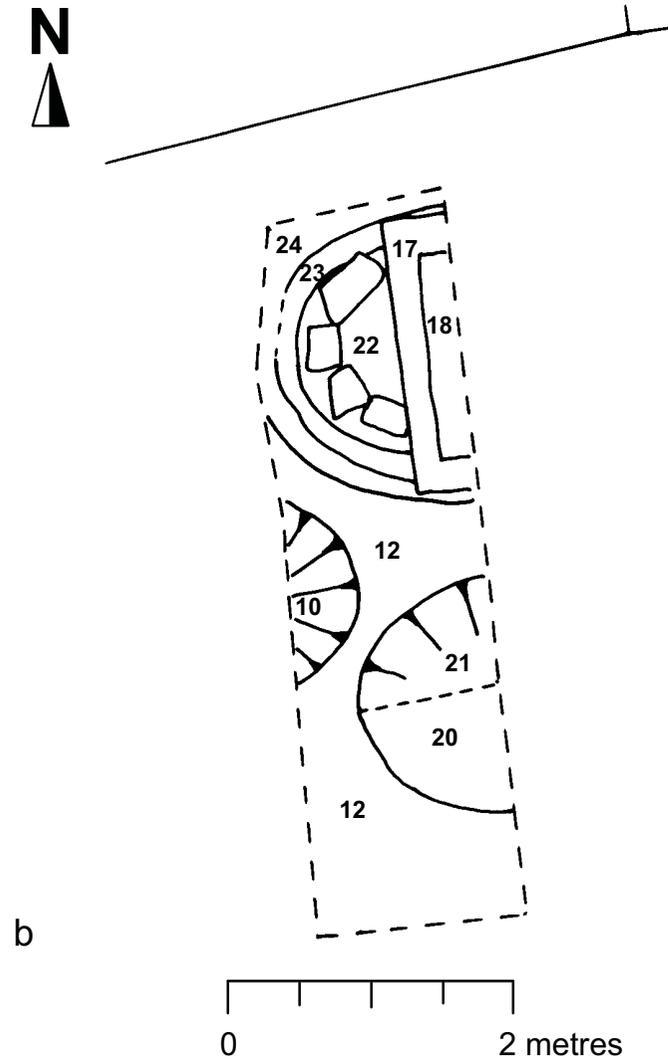
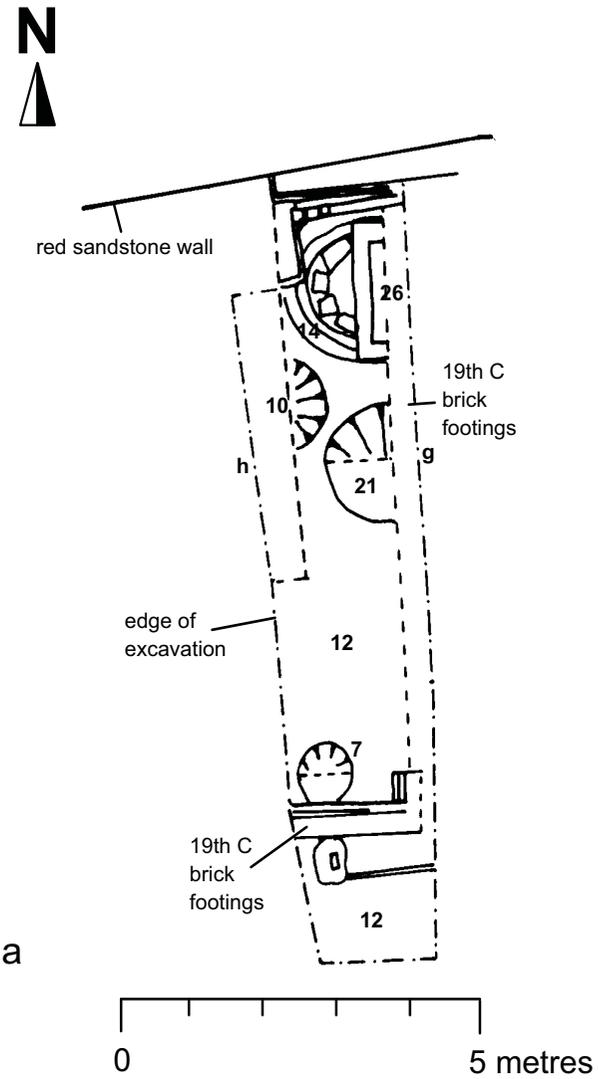
The lower courses of the rear (south) wall of the existing office complex incorporate a section of red sandstone wall. The line of this wall is within about 4m of the projected line of the town wall. The sandstone blocks in this wall are of similar proportions to those seen elsewhere in the town wall, although the visible mortar was of 18th-century or later type, this may well be re-pointing. As no sign of the town wall, or terracing for the town wall was seen in the evaluation trench, there is a strong possibility that some at least of this

sandstone masonry is a surviving section of the medieval town wall.

The evaluation here concluded that groundworks that exceeded 0.8m depth associated with the preparations for piling work for the new build should be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief, with provision for the recording of any archaeological features or deposits revealed.

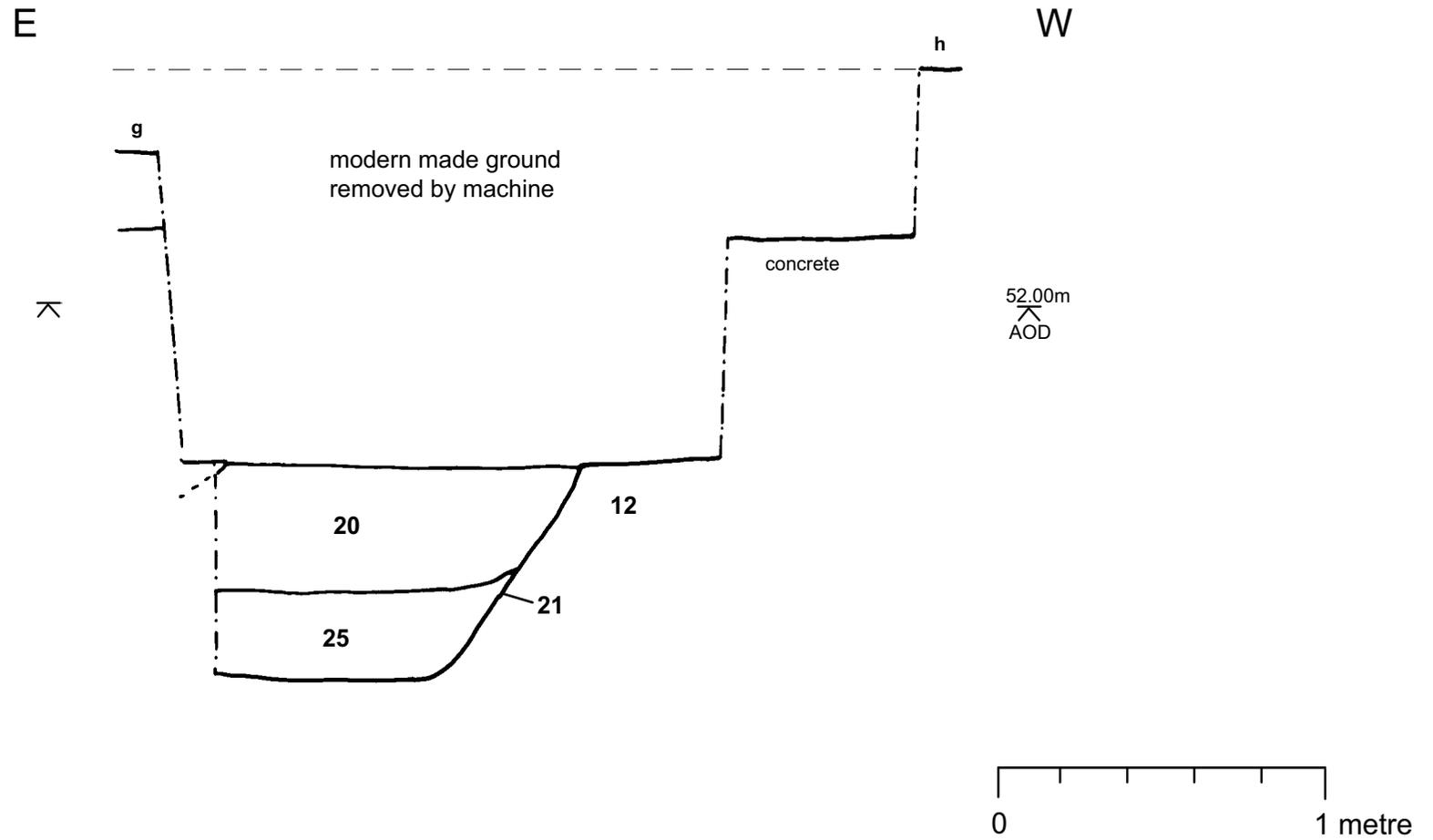
The Watching Brief

During the watching brief on the Bridge Street site, a well was uncovered on the western edge of the site (see Fig. 3b). The well was constructed of buff Grinshill ashlar sandstone, and had an internal diameter of 0.8m. The well was open to a depth of about 5m; the top of the well about 0.75m below the street level on Lower Claremont Bank/Bridge Street and had been covered with a concrete slab. As the well lay between pile locations it was decided to fill it and leave it in situ.



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007

Figure 9: Bridge Street a) the trial trench; 1:100 scale, b) medieval and post-medieval pits at the northern end of the trench 1:50 scale



ST AUSTIN'S FRIARS AND BRIDGE STREET, SHREWSBURY 2007
 Figure 10: Bridge Street, north-facing section across the trial trench and pit 21 (see Fig. 9a, g-h); 1:20 scale

4 CONCLUSIONS

On the Bridge Street site the only potential remains of the town wall seen in the evaluation was the section of red sandstone wall incorporated into the lower courses of the rear (south) wall of the existing Morris headquarters building. The alignment of the town wall here would still be consistent with the section seen a little to the west in the 1997 investigations. There was no sign of the town defences elsewhere in the Bridge Street evaluation trench – indeed the level of the natural subsoil was consistent with the wall lying along the northern boundary of the study area. Medieval occupation of the area was attested by a single cess pit containing 12th- to 14th-century pottery. Later occupation was evidenced by a number of post-medieval (18th-century) clay-lined pits possibly associated with one of the tanning industries that operated in this area. A fine sandstone-lined well was also revealed on the western edge of the site. The study area was redeveloped in 19th- century as part of the St Chad's School. The remains of the school house and a 20th-century public toilet block comprised a number of wall foundations and drains which penetrated down to and into the top of the natural subsoil

On the St Austin's Friars site there was nothing to distinguish occupation on the site as belonging to a religious house. The earliest evidence for occupation was a truncated gully of unknown function cut into the natural subsoil and a pit – probably a cess pit - containing 12th- to 13th-century pottery. These features were sealed by yard surfaces and stratified soil deposits containing a significant assemblage of pottery dating from the 12th to 14th centuries. A thin pebble layer along the southern side of these deposits may mark the edge of a roadway on the same alignment – though slightly to the north - as the modern street (St Austin's Friars).

These deposits were sealed by a layer containing crushed red sandstone. The lack of mortar within this deposit suggests it is more likely to represent construction rather than demolition debris, although this is not conclusive, and in any case this deposit was not connected to any structural feature within the study area. A red sandstone wall of probable late medieval or early post-medieval date was seen to underlie the foundations of the 18th-century cottage 3 St Austin's Friars.

The sandstone remains of the foundations of the wall along the street frontage appeared to be of post-medieval date (although they did incorporate a block of masonry which may have been slightly earlier). The deposits behind this wall which might have assisted with its dating had been removed during previous works on the site in the 20th century.

Most of the post-medieval and later deposits on the site had been removed by these landscaping operations in the 1970s or 1990s. However, along the northern edge of the site were the brick and sandstone footings of the White House, and at the northeastern corner, the steps down into its cellar. The cellar was seen to have been filled with brick and timber rubble, (probably as left on the demolition of the White House in 1978). The watching brief on preparatory work for piling demonstrated that the cellar walls were of red sandstone. This is consistent with other properties of 16th-17th century date in the town centre, where timber framed and early brick structures have cellars lined with red sandstone.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AOD** Above Ordnance Datum
- ASD** Above Site Datum
- DoE** Department of the Environment
- OS** Ordnance Survey
- SA** Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
- SMR** County Sites and Monuments Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
- TC&SVFC** Transactions of the Caradoc & Severn V
- TSAHS** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
- TSAS** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

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St Austin's Friars: medieval features cut into the natural subsoil



St Austin's Friars: medieval cess-pit and later sandstone wall underlying 3 St Austin's Friars



St Austin's Friars: medieval roadway and post-medieval wall along street frontage



St Austin's Friars: the remains of the White House



Bridge Street: medieval and post-medieval pits at the northern end of the trial trench



Bridge Street: the well on the western edge of the site