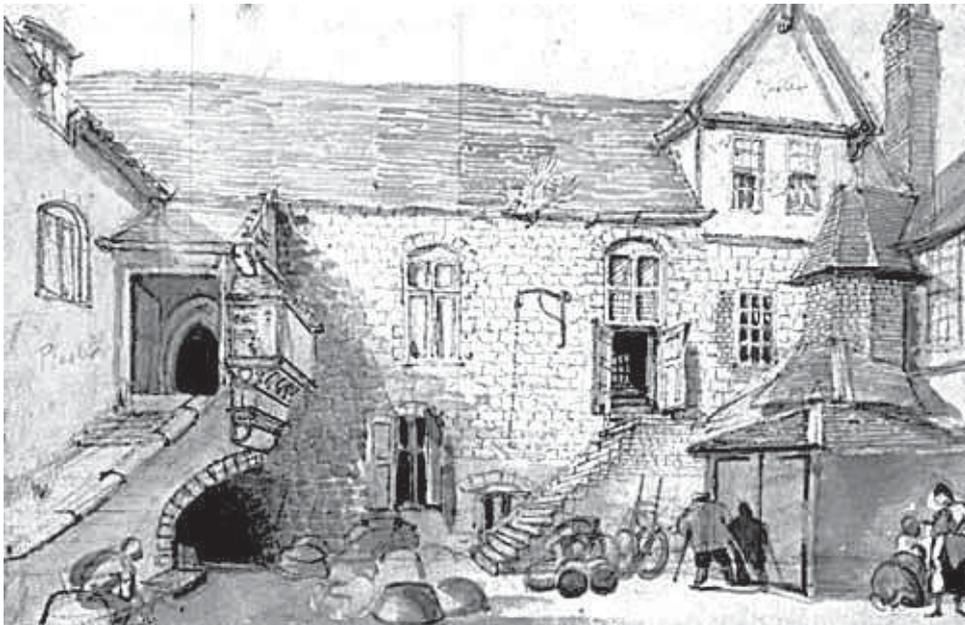


***An Archaeological Watching Brief at
The Music Hall
Shrewsbury, 2009***

by
H R Hannaford



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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
THE MUSIC HALL
SHREWSBURY, 2009**

by
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A Report for
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SUMMARY

Between August 2009 and January 2010, the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a watching brief on groundworks associated with the redevelopment of The Music Hall, Shrewsbury as a museum and art gallery, a Tourist Information Centre, and café. The Music Hall site incorporates structural remains of Vaughan's Mansion, a medieval stone-built Hall dating to c1300.

The watching brief monitored groundworks in the courtyards. It was seen that the ground level in the courtyards had been reduced in the modern periods down to the natural sandy subsoil. In places there was significant later 20th-century disturbance. A post-medieval or early modern pit cut into the natural sand was partially exposed in the central courtyard. No other significant deposits or features were seen in the course of the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In summer 2009 work commenced on the redevelopment of the Music Hall, Shrewsbury. The redevelopment was to facilitate the incorporation of the Shrewsbury Museums collection, art gallery, Tourist Information Centre, café and public toilets into the site. The redevelopment was envisaged as offering a connection between visitor information, museum collections and historic interpretation.

1.2 The Music Hall site lies within the historic medieval core of Shrewsbury. It occupies a site known to have been in existence since at least the 13th century. Encapsulated within the existing Music Hall complex of buildings are extensive well preserved structural remains of Vaughan's Mansion, a medieval stone built Hall dating to c. 1300 (Shropshire Council Historic Environment Record (HER) No 62426). The building is also a Grade II* Listed Building (no. 653-1/15/670).

1.3 In view of the archaeological potential of the site it was made a condition of planning permission that a programme of archaeological work be undertaken to accompany the groundworks associated with the development. A brief for the programme of archaeological work was produced by the Historic Environment Officer, Shropshire Council.

1.4 The Archaeology Service was commissioned by the Shropshire Council Museum Service to carry out the programme of archaeological work.

1.6 The aim of the programme of archaeological work was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the groundworks associated with the development.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Music Hall and Vaughan's Mansion. The Music Hall is comprised of a complex of buildings including the remaining section of the medieval Vaughan's Mansion and the purpose built, public-funded Greek Revival style Public Rooms. Technically the Music Hall only relates to the main auditorium and the whole complex built in 1840 to the designs of Edward Haycock was originally the public rooms. Although the site was cleared of all buildings including two large timber-framed houses fronting the Square, the design still had to accommodate the remaining section of Vaughan's mansion, the line of Coffee House passage and the angled access through the first floor of the building between the Square and the yard used by the Salop Fire Office. The Music Hall's ground floor and all the floors facing the Square have been radically altered on all levels so although the original layout can be identified, it no longer exists. (HER No.10575)

The hall of the former Vaughan's Mansion is also incorporated in the Music Hall complex. Vaughan's mansion is one of four known 13th and 14th century stone hall houses surviving or recorded in Shrewsbury. Like the other three, it had a substantial stone undercroft, over which the hall was set, but there is no evidence of stone vaulting. The undercroft at Vaughan's Mansion was partly below ground level, as the building was set on a gradient, and appears to have been consisted of a single large space (about 152m²), with access from the exterior (from the courtyard to the north of the house). Vaughan's Mansion was constructed around 1300 for William Vaughan, one of the most important wool dealers of his time. A large part of this former house was demolished in the mid 1790s and a further section in 1838 to make way for the Public Rooms section of the Music Hall. The surviving building is a medieval first-floor hall type building, terraced into the gradient between Market Street/The Square, and College Hill, known from the surviving remains of the hall (incorporated in the 19th-C Music Hall building), early descriptions, and early drawings. It was one of the largest halls of the medieval town. The principal accommodation, an open hall, survives. (HER No 62426)

2.2 Previous work

An archaeological and architectural analysis of the site was carried out in 2000 (Morriss, 2000). This comprised a desk-based assessment and architectural analysis. The analysis demonstrated that The Music Hall comprised of a complex of buildings including the remaining section of the medieval Vaughan's Mansion and the purpose-built Greek Revival style Public Rooms. The most unusual feature of the surviving section of the hall were the cross-mullioned windows which seemed to be much later in form than the suggested date of the hall, although their mouldings were medieval and structurally they appeared to be of the same date as the walls. Remaining sections of the building had begun to be used as a warehouse by the 18th century. The building was also damaged by fire in 1917. (HER No. 62426)

In 2006 an archaeological evaluation and building assessment was undertaken as part of a conservation management plan. This included the excavation of a series of trial trenches (Matthews, 2006). The evaluation revealed evidence of a wall constructed in Tudor bricks and red sandstone blocks which may have been associated with the medieval hall but may also have been constructed from reclaimed material from the 19th century demolition of parts of the hall. The evaluation also revealed a slate lined pit, brick walls and a brick-built soakaway. These features were probably associated with the 19th century music hall. The southern wall of Vaughan's Mansion, where it was constructed from rough hewn sandstone blocks was exposed as part of the building assessment. A timber beam was revealed within the wall fronting College Hill, and areas of The Music Hall's 19th century brick walls were also seen. (HER No. 62426)

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief was carried out on groundworks in the western yard and the central courtyard of the complex over a period of several months between August 2009 and January 2010.

The western yard

The first phase of groundworks comprised the excavation of trenches for the underpinning of the west and north walls of a late 19th century brick structure (Fig. 2). The trenches for the underpinning revealed that the natural silty sand subsoil (Fig. 3a; 5) lay at a depth of just 0.24m below the surface of the existing yard surface. A pebble and cobble yard surface (4) lay directly on the natural and beneath the modern yard. A trench for service connections from the street (Swan Hill) to this room was cut across the southern side of the western yard. This trench revealed the foundation remains of a 19th-century brick and sandstone outbuilding cut into the natural subsoil. These remains comprised the west (Fig. 4; 21) and east (16) walls of the structure, set 4.6m apart. Both walls were of purple, red, and buff sandstone rubble and red brick bonded in a hard pink mortar. The east wall was seen in the north-facing section only. However in the south-facing section of the trench a third wall (20), also of sandstone rubble and brick, was seen cut into the natural sand. The area between the walls had been cut by a large pit (19) filled with a grey-brown sand with brick and stone rubble (18). A number of 20th century service trenches cut across this area, and at the western boundary of the site was a 20th century brick inspection chamber for drains. One of the 2006 trial trenches was located in this yard and its back-fill was cut through by the service trench.

The central courtyard

A second service trench ran north along the west face of building N turning east to run into the central courtyard (Fig. 2). This again showed, at its western end, that the natural subsoil lay close beneath the modern yard surface. To the east, a deepening deposit of recently disturbed ground (Fig. 3b; 47) was exposed beneath the modern surface. This modern disturbed ground reached a depth of 1.1m in the centre of the courtyard. The natural sandy subsoil lay beneath this disturbed ground. In the centre of the courtyard two rectangular pits were excavated for service connections and access. The southern of these two revealed modern disturbed ground to a depth of 0.9m below the existing yard surface, overlying the natural sandy subsoil (57). This sequence continued north into the second pit, where a large 19th century brick inspection chamber (50 & 51) was exposed. This inspection chamber had itself cut into the only significant archaeological deposits seen during the watching brief. The north wall (51) of the inspection chamber had cut into these deposits, which comprised the fills of a large post-medieval pit; the lower fill (55), a dark grey sandy silty loam, contained a number of Harnage stone roof slates; the upper fill (54) was a deposit of cinders. These fills, and the inspection chamber, all lay beneath modern disturbed deposits (47 & 48).

While the watching brief was in progress, some masonry repairs were being undertaken to the Vaughan's Mansion hall on the south side of the courtyard. A door on the northeast corner of the building giving onto the southeast corner of the courtyard had its modern brick framing removed. This revealed that the doorway had been inserted into an existing medieval window. The opportunity was taken to record this feature (Fig. 5). The window frame was of Grinshill sandstone. Only the western side of the medieval window survived, including part of the sill and the first stone of the arch. Holes for the saddlebars of the ferramenta had been cut into the side of the frame at spaces of 20cms centres. The side of the frame had a plane chamfer, with no other ornamentation.

4 Discussion

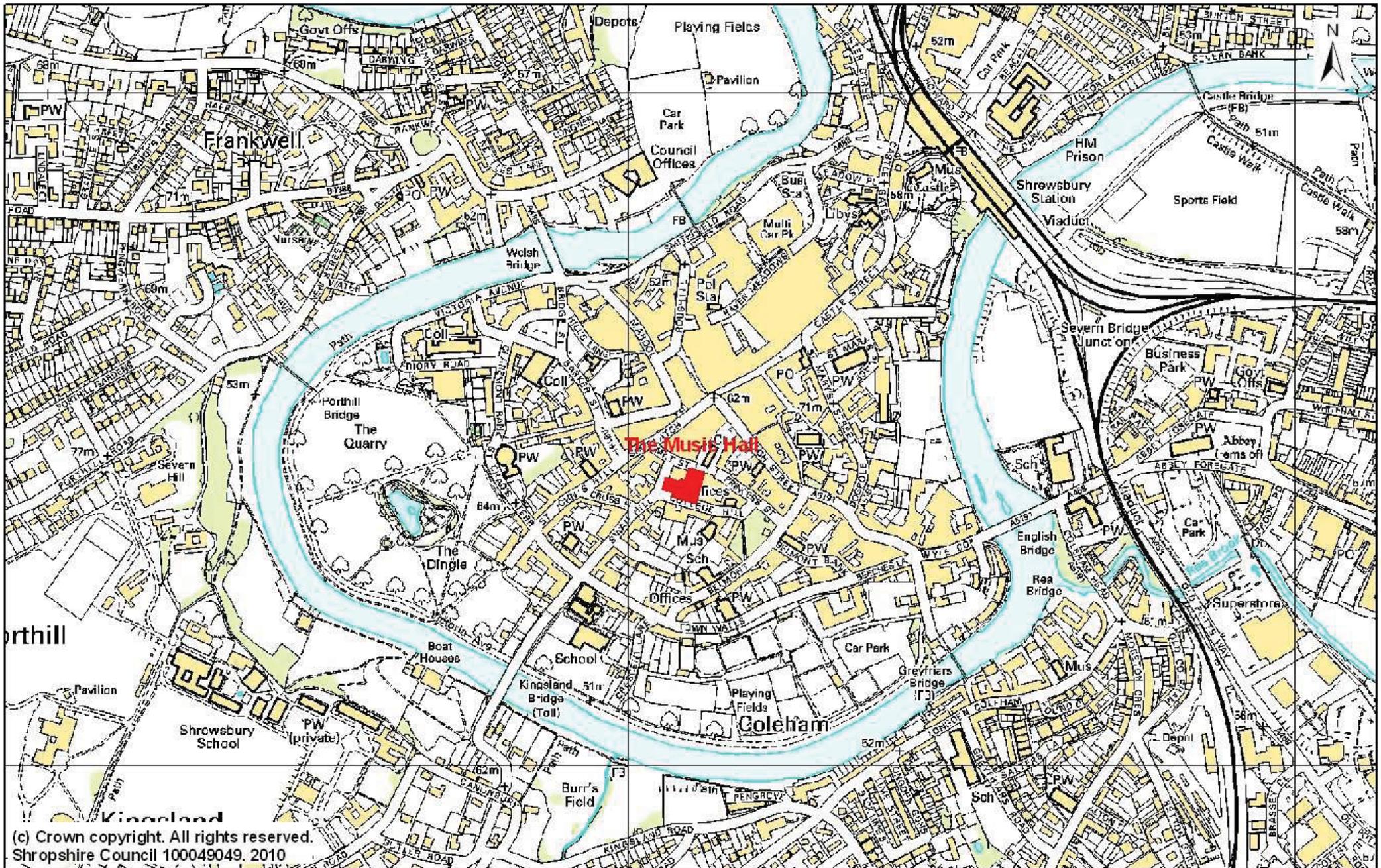
The watching brief has demonstrated that the western yard and central courtyard of The Music Hall complex have been subject to drastic and archaeologically unrecorded intervention in the 20th century. In particular, the area of the central courtyard has seen significant disturbance in the late 20th century which appears to have removed any archaeological deposits that might have survived across all but the northernmost edge of the courtyard. Even here the only feature that was seen to survive was a post-medieval pit, and the top of this feature had also been truncated and lay beneath a layer of late 20th century disturbed deposits. In the western courtyard, the ground level appear to have been reduced in the late 19th or early 20th century – the footings of an outbuilding and a pebble and cobble yard of this period survived immediately beneath the modern yard surface. The great archaeological potential of the site lies in the surviving elements of the medieval Vaughan's Mansion and the early 19th century Music Hall.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASSC	Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRO	Public Record Office
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

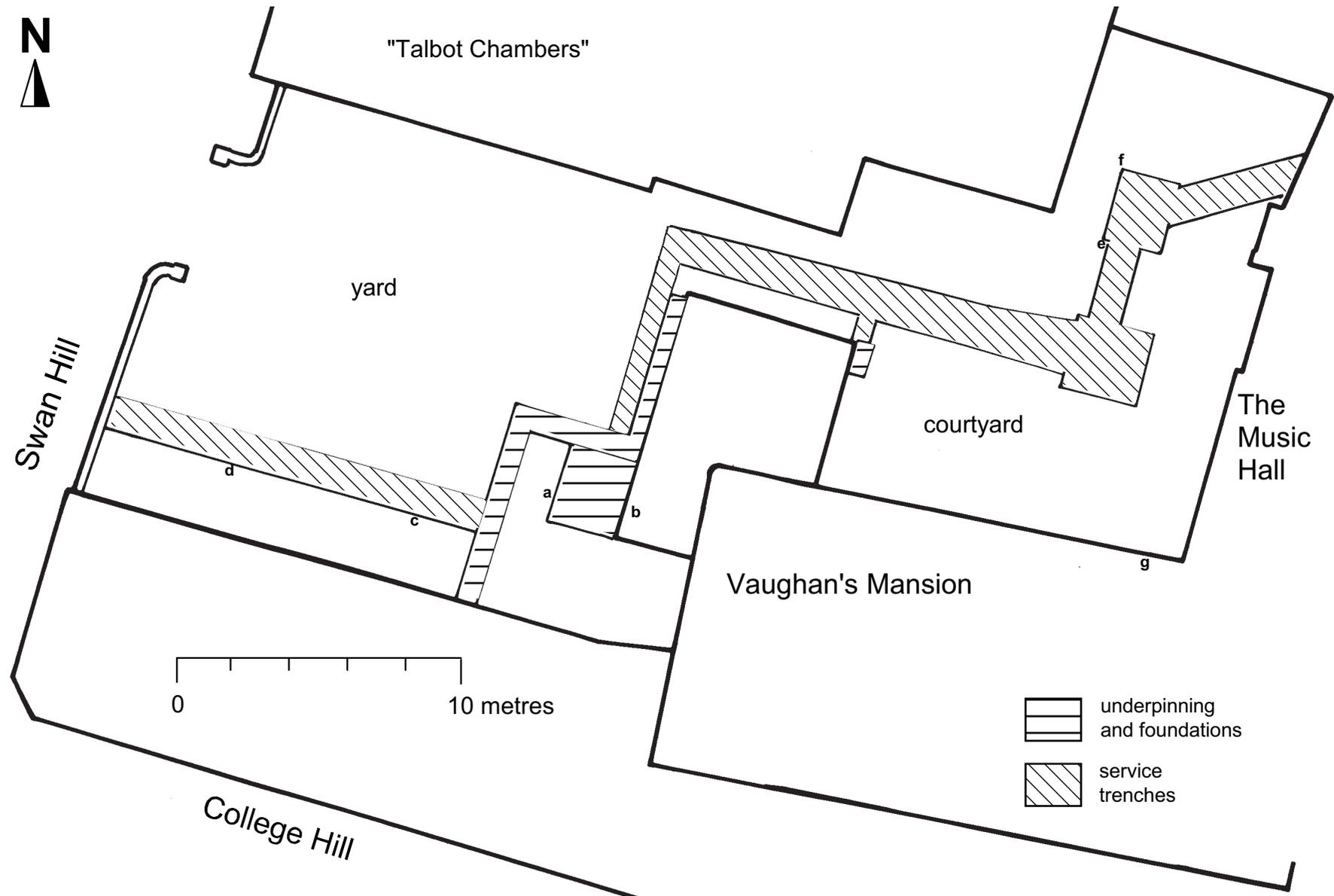


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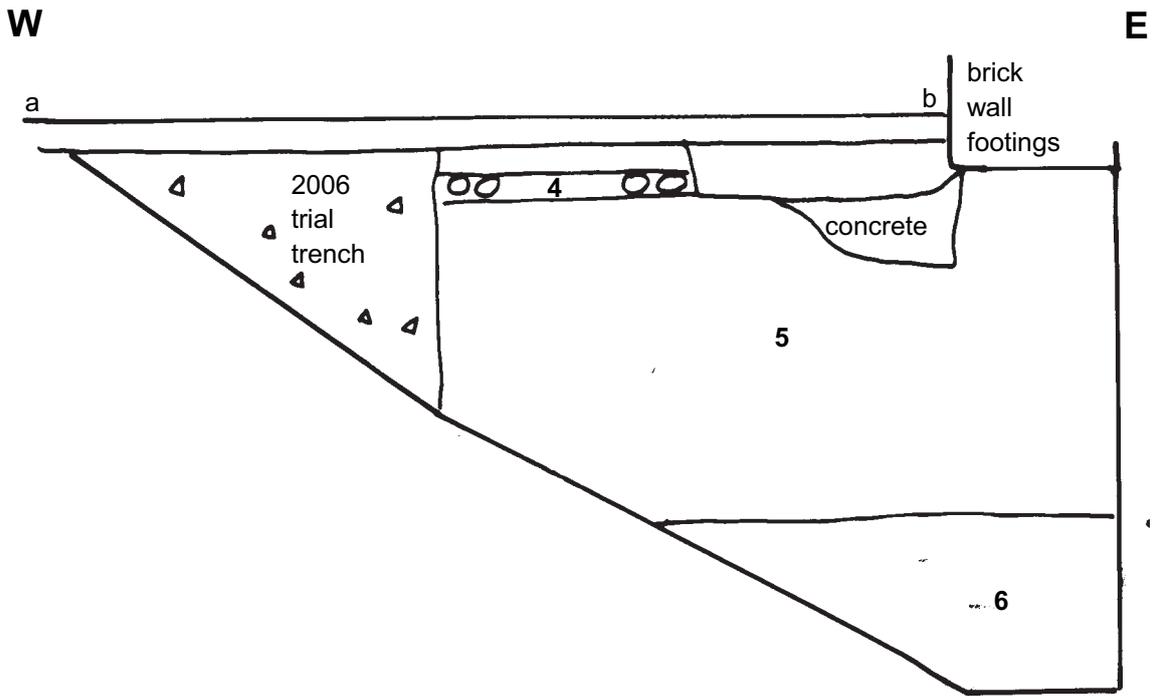


The Music Hall, Shrewsbury 2009
Figure 1: Location of the study area

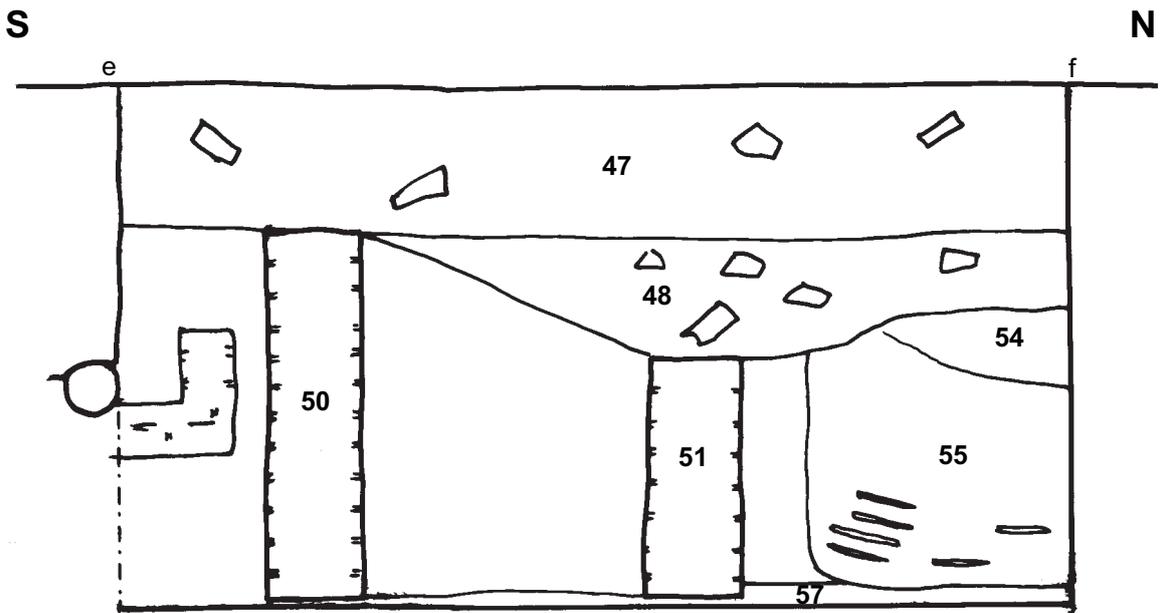
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Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2AQ
Scale: 1:7,500



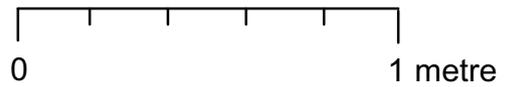
THE MUSIC HALL, SHREWSBURY 2009
 Figure 2: Site plan; scale 1:200



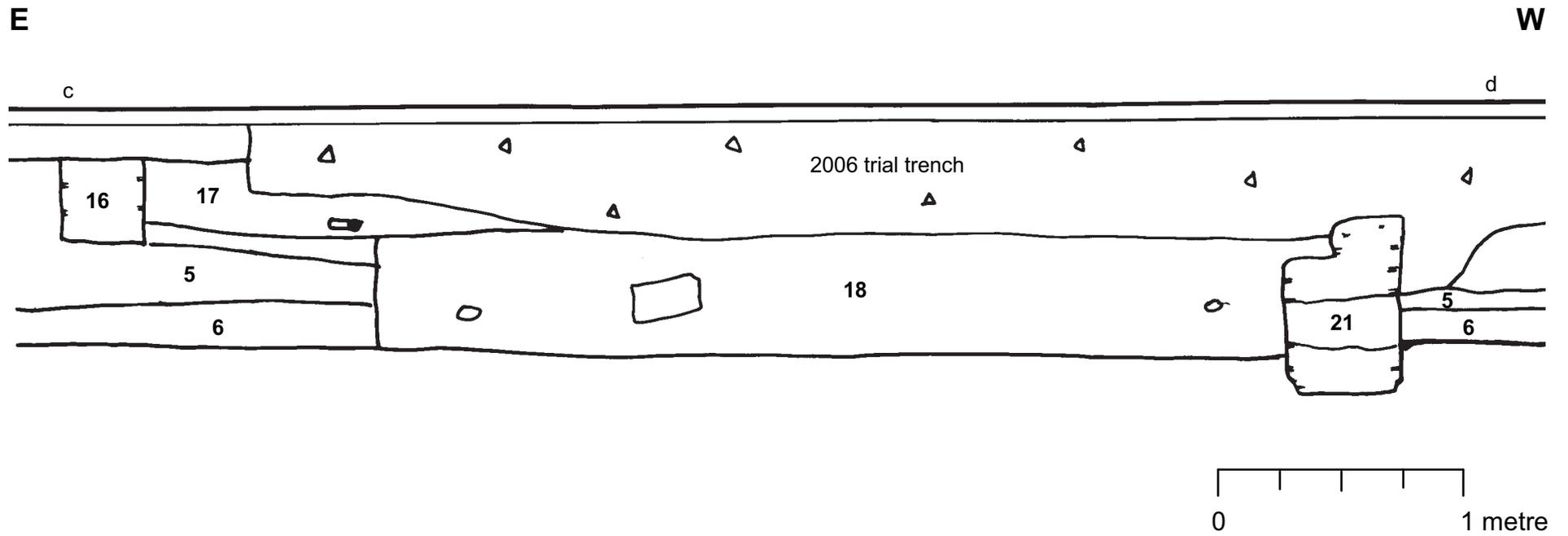
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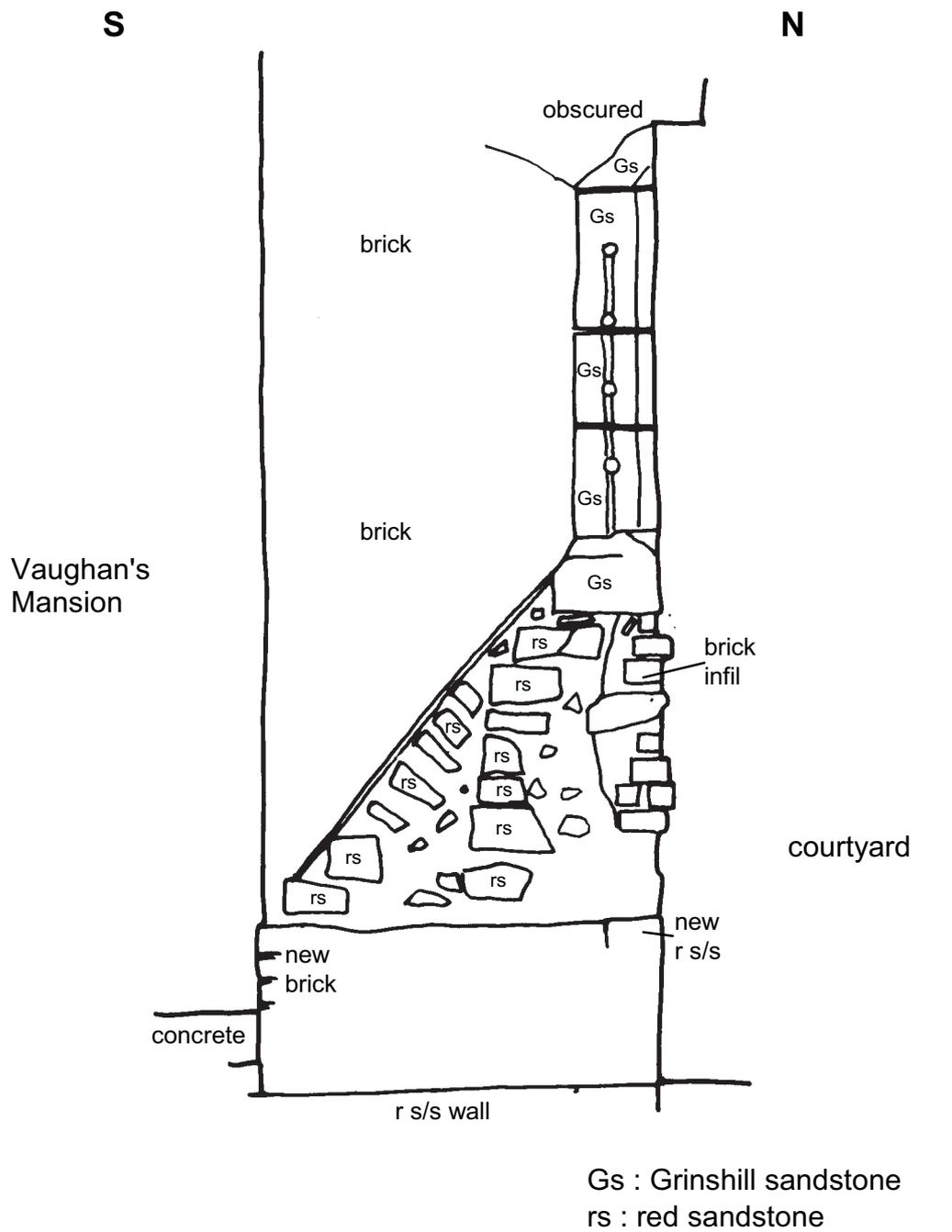
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THE MUSIC HALL, SHREWSBURY 2009
 Figure 3: a) Section a-b; b) section e-f; (for locations see Fig. 2); scale 1:20



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Figure 4: Section c-d; (for location see Fig. 2); scale 1:25



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Figure 5: a) Section through doorway in courtyard; (for location see Fig. 2 g); scale 1:20

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Photo 1: The western yard



Photo 2: underpinning work in the western yard



Photo 3: Vaughan's Mansion and the central courtyard



Photo 4: Service connection trench in the central courtyard