

WATCHING BRIEF DURING  
EXCAVATION OF  
REPLACEMENT TREE-PITS,  
HIGH STREET,  
WORCESTER

WCM 101927



**Mike Napthan Archaeology**  
3 Hamilton Road, Worcester, WR5 1AG [mikenapthanarchaeology@o2.co.uk](mailto:mikenapthanarchaeology@o2.co.uk)

# Watching brief during excavation of replacement tree-pits, High Street, Worcester WCM 101927

23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012  
Mike Napthan MIFA

## 1 **Summary**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during excavation and re-excavation of seven tree-pits for replacement trees in the southern part of Worcester High Street. The watching brief was part of a scheme to replace semi-mature trees planted in the early 1980s with smaller specimens*

*Whilst the planned tree-pits were of sufficient dimensions for there to be potential archaeological implications in the event logistical considerations (the presence of services and reinforced concrete highway substructure) prevented the enlargement of the original tree-pits. The presence of the stumps and roots of the original trees (which had almost entirely filled the original holes cut in the former carriageway) greatly frustrated excavation of the new tree-pits despite repeated use of a stump-grinder.*

*Very little was seen of the archaeological deposits known to survive beneath the modern street make-up, but it would appear probable that within the former carriageway archaeological deposits are generally only present at depths 500-600mm below current surface levels. The deepest of the present tree-pits was excavated to a maximum of 750mm, and although soil deposits were present beneath the 19<sup>th</sup> C and later carriageway make-up they could not be characterised from a very limited exposure.*

## 2 **Introduction**

- 2.1 An archaeological watching brief (WCM 101927) was undertaken during groundworks associated with the replacement of trees in the southern part of High Street, Worcester (SO851 547; Fig 1). The report was compiled at to meet the requirements of a verbal Brief issued by James Dinn, Archaeological Officer of Worcester City Council The site is in the Historic core of the Roman and medieval city Archaeologically Sensitive Area and the Historic City Conservation Area.

## 3 **Methodology**

- 3.1 Site visits were made during the groundworks which occurred in two stages over the period 6<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011 to 9<sup>th</sup> March 2012. All groundbreaking activity was observed, the November works consisted of tree-felling and initial grinding of stumps. In March the tree-pits were reopened and re-ground. The remnants of the stumps were then scraped out using a 360° mini-digger. The exposed deposits and uprisings were observed and recorded both in a note form on

a sketch plan and as digital photographs (see Photo Archive on CDROM and Figs 1-3). In the absence of any archaeologically significant deposits no detailed record was made.

- 3.2 The High St area has been subject of numerous archaeological interventions. The most relevant works within the High Street carriageway were a programme of archaeological recording during repaving (Napthan M, Jacobs A, Pearson, E and Warman S, 2006, *Archaeological watching brief during re-pavement works, Worcester High Street 2004-5 WCM 101275* Mike Napthan Archaeology Report) which identified the presence of medieval deposits at high level beneath both carriageway and pavements, including a sequence of earlier road surfaces. The nearest intervention was the recording of boreholes (in the area between Tree-pits 5 and 7) Napthan M, 2002, *Archive report: monitoring of boreholes, Lychgate Centre, High Street, Worcester WCM 100880* Mike Napthan Archaeology Report.

#### 4 **Results**

- 4.1 The deposits encountered in the upper part of each of the excavated tree-pits were broadly similar, consisting of concrete slabs and/or pavements over a thin bed of sand overlying the tarmac surface of the former carriageway. In several tree-pits the tarmac overlay a concrete slab, which elsewhere in the High Street has been found to be a reinforced slab laid in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C. These horizons generally account for the upper 0.5m of deposits.
- 4.2 Tree-pits 1 and 2 were too small for deposits beneath the concrete to be observed, the horizons around the periphery being mixed with the tree planting soil placed around the original trees.
- 4.3 Tree-pits 3 and 4 had a 200mm deep layer of tree-planting soil mixed with a clayey horizon beneath the concrete. On the eastern side of TP 4 there was a cast iron service pipe and on the western side a small diameter pipe (possibly a cable duct).
- 4.4 Tree-pit 5 exposed the end of a possible length of tram rail in disturbed deposits beneath the concrete, which had been partly replaced with roadstone, indicating a possible service trench.
- 4.5 Tree-pit 6 exposed the deepest and clearest sequence of deposits. The concrete here had been replaced with a mixture of roadstone and sand overlying a deposit of finely sifted ashy clinkers at 700-750mm deep.
- 4.6 Tree-pit 7 appeared to have a similar sequence of deposits to that in TP 6, but was less clearly defined with more intermixing of the tree-planting soil with the adjacent deposits.

#### 5 **Discussion and Conclusions**

- 5.1 The observations were extremely restricted in scale, and deposits within the tree-pits heavily disturbed by the excavation of the original tree-pits (which averaged 1.1m square) subsequent root growth and grinding out of the roots also served to restrict the observation of in situ deposits.
- 5.2 From the present limited observations it would appear that deposits in this area of the High Street are likely to be very comparable with those previously observed (to a much greater extent) by the present author (Napthan et al 2006) in the northern half of the street.
- 5.3 Replacing the trees on the identical locations proved to be technically difficult, but has the distinct advantage that no additional disturbance to archaeologically significant horizons occurred, as the present tree-pits are very little different in size to their precursors, in fact probably less deep.

## 6 **Acknowledgements**

The project was completed with the assistance of the following; James Dinn and Geoff Poole of Worcester City Council, Particular thanks are also due to the contractors Bernhards Landscapes and Adrian Hope Tree Services.

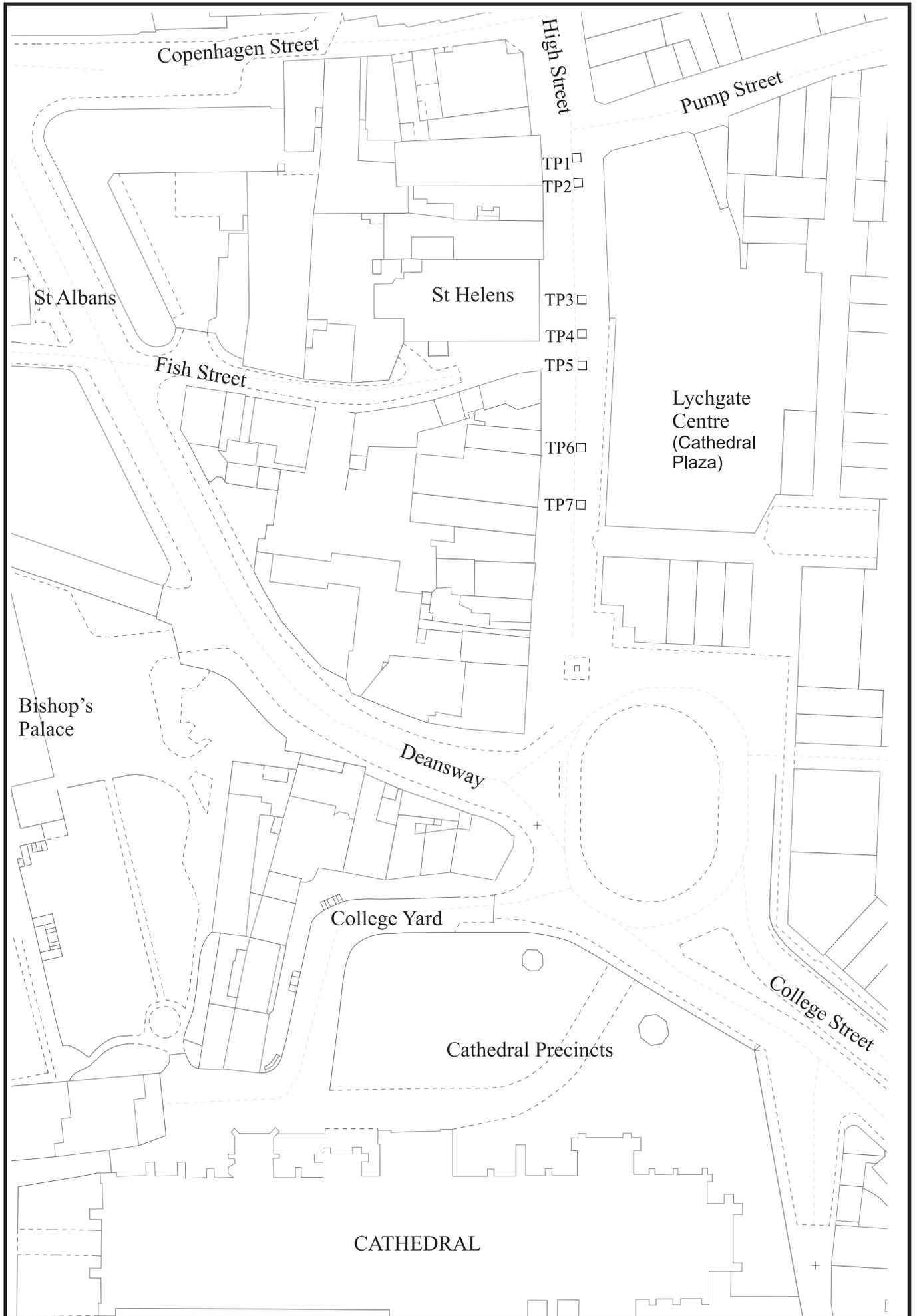


Figure 1: Site Location - High Street, Worcester

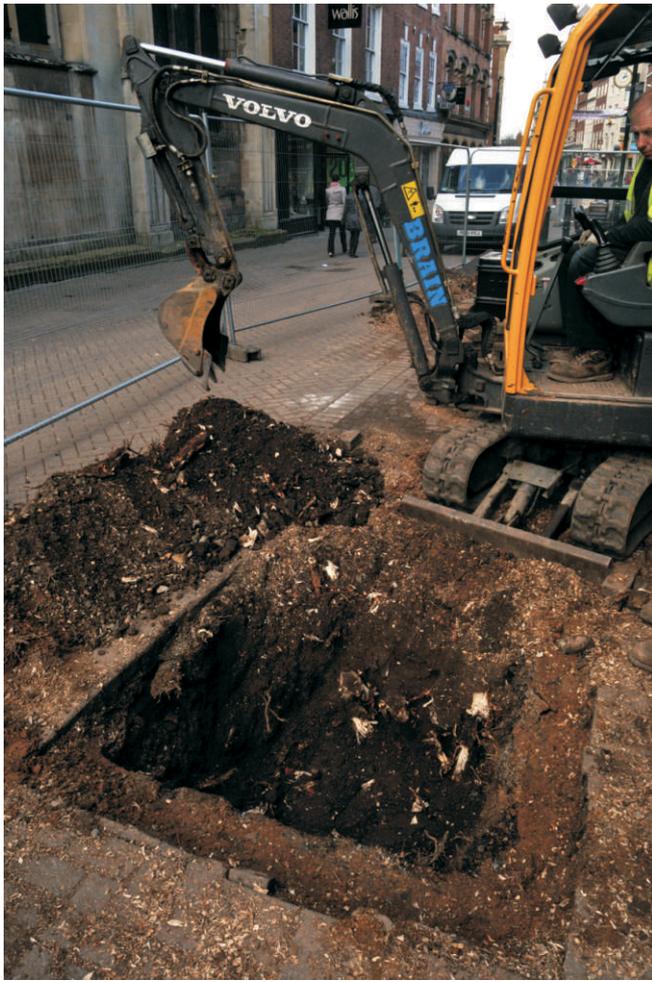


General view facing south during clearance of original trees



Tree-pit 1 view facing north-east

Figure 2: Site photographs



Trench 4 under excavation, view facing north



Sequence of deposits on eastern side of TP6

Figure 3: Site photographs