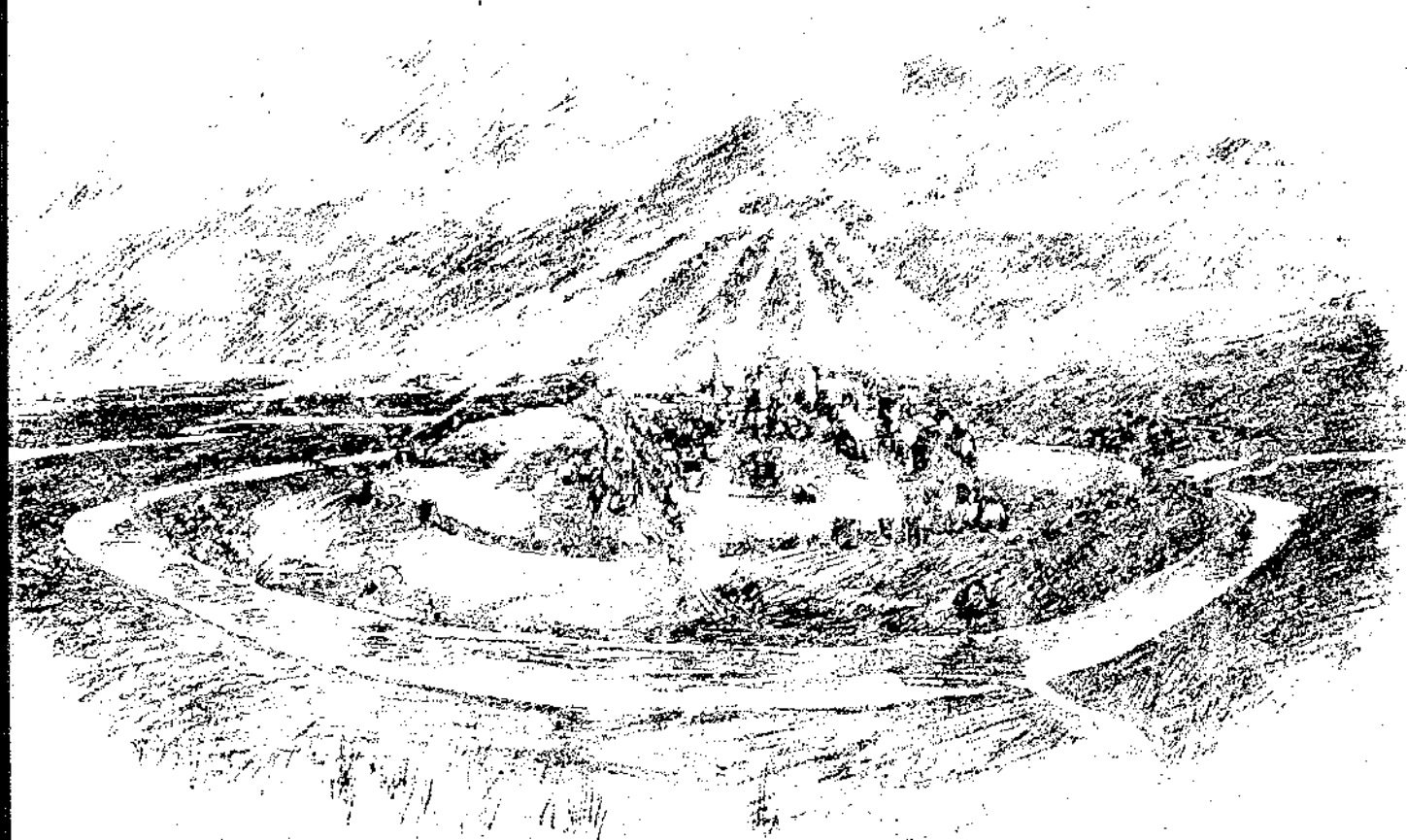


SHREWSBURY HERITAGE PROJECT

1 9 8 5



"High the vane of Shrewsbury gleam islanded in Severn stream;
The bridges from the steeped crest cross the water east and west"

A.E. Housman (A Shropshire Lad)

Shrewsbury Heritage Project, 1985

M. O. H. Carver, B.Sc., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.

This report was prepared by :

Elizabeth Hooper, B.U.F.A.U., Publications Officer

and members of the

B.U.F.A.U. Manpower Services Commission

Display and Presentation Team

Further copies available from :

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit,

University of Birmingham

P.O. Box 363,

Edgbaston,

Birmingham B15 2TT

Telephone: 021-472 3025

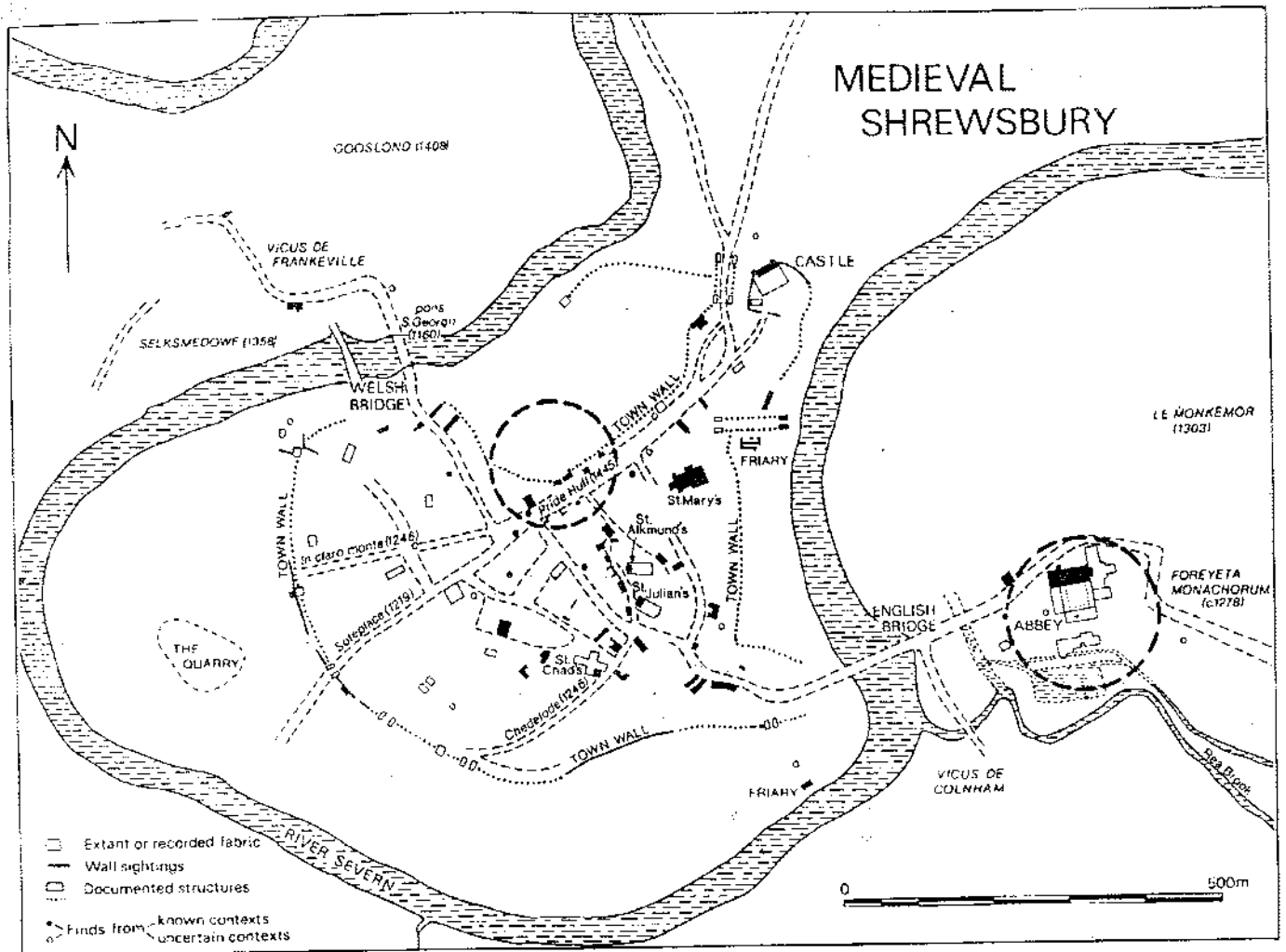


Fig. 1: Medieval Shrewsbury, from the evidence collected to 1975. The three medieval town houses explored and currently on display are Rigg's Hall, now Shrewsbury Library, Pride Hill Chambers, now MacDonaldis and Bennett's Hall, now John Colliers. The areas of the medieval heritage shortly to be exposed are ringed. (Source: M.O.H. Carver 'Early Shrewsbury, an archaeological definition in 1975'. Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society no.59, 1978).

SHREWSBURY - Heritage Project 1985

This HERITAGE PROJECT has been prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on the occasion of two major building developments planned for Shrewsbury in 1985. One of these is within the historic town, on and beside the medieval town wall. The other is on top of the Earl of Shrewsbury's great Abbey. Taken together, the developments present the town with a fine opportunity to examine its ancestors, but the rewards are by no means confined to the field of historical research.

Three motives provide the project with the context and its objectives :-

SALVAGING THE HERITAGE

Archaeological information is offered only once: this is one of its peculiar qualities. It therefore falls to a particular generation to collect particular packets of the past. To ours falls the responsibility for these sites.

Objective: To retrieve the maximum information before its destruction, in close co-operation with the new development.

EXPLORING THE HERITAGE

To know what occurred in Shrewsbury is to add stature to the town, but it also serves a wider aim: to understand the evolution of a border society itself. Shrewsbury's role as unrivalled capital of the Welsh Marches means it has acted as a barometer of affluence and culture for over a thousand years. This situation is unusual in England, where the urban network is generally more complex, more difficult to reach.

Objective: To compare the changing material culture of Abbey and Town and Town and Country for the light it throws on Shropshire Society 901 - 1985 AD.

ENJOYING THE HERITAGE

'England's finest Tudor town', Shrewsbury has been called, - and, says Sir Nicklaus Pevsner, 'We can let that claim stand'. It is also still one of England's finest medieval towns, with its skyline, immortalised by A. E. Housman, with the Castle, Abbey, Churches and stone and timber halls. There is in fact no other town in England where three medieval town houses can be seen skillfully adapted to modern use. The opportunities for archaeological research are also opportunities to promote this aspect of Shrewsbury's diverse character to a wider public.

Objective: To create an imaginatively presented heritage trail, in order to promote tourism and assist the success of the new developments.

We present here a PLAN for the archaeological examination of the TOWN SITE (Raven Meadows) and the ABBEY SITE (Abbey Foregate) and for their incorporation into a longer term heritage asset.

N. J. Baker, B.A.
A. Brooker-Carey, B.A.
M. O. H. Carver, B.Sc., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.
A. Roc, B.A., M.I.F.A.
C. H. Bowker, B.Sc.

THE TOWN SITE

The area for development is shown on the map, Fig.1, and in detail overleaf, Fig.2, and may be divided into three archaeological zones.

On Raven Meadows (Zone 1) no medieval houses are expected and the area is not thought to have been built upon until the 17th century. It is advisable, however, to keep a WATCHING BRIEF in the event of unexpected contact with ancient structures. Amongst these may be boats or rafts, since the chief asset of the area is that it consists of alluvium laid down by the river Severn over several millenia. From the alluvium paleobotanists will read a POLLEN SEQUENCE, which illustrates the trees and plants amongst which the site stood, before and after the foundation of the town.

On Pride Hill (Zone 2) part of the upper town, contained by the town wall will be exposed. The site is however already encumbered by modern buildings. Experience at Rigg's Hill and Pride Hill Chambers suggests that destruction of the medieval houses will here be well advanced. Some architecture will, however, remain and this may be retrieved by a WATCHING BRIEF.

On Roushill Bank (Zone 3), the situation is different. Here the medieval house of Bennett's Hall still stands two stories high. Behind Bennett's Hall, to the north, runs the medieval town wall. The site is therefore a junction between two down slopes (Pride Hill and Roushill) with the town wall forming the third side of the triangle - an ideal situation for the capture of archaeological strata. It was adjacent to this site that a fine group of pottery was recovered in 1959 during the construction of Lloyds' Bank vaults. The site thus has the potential to be deep and rich.

It also happens that the site lies on the junction between the old nucleus of Shrewsbury on the high ground, and the 'new town' of the 13th century, thought to be represented by Mardol and Claremont. The town wall veers north at this point, as though avoiding a pre-existing structure. The site is thus well suited to the solution of several historical problems.

It is here that a controlled ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION would be undertaken.

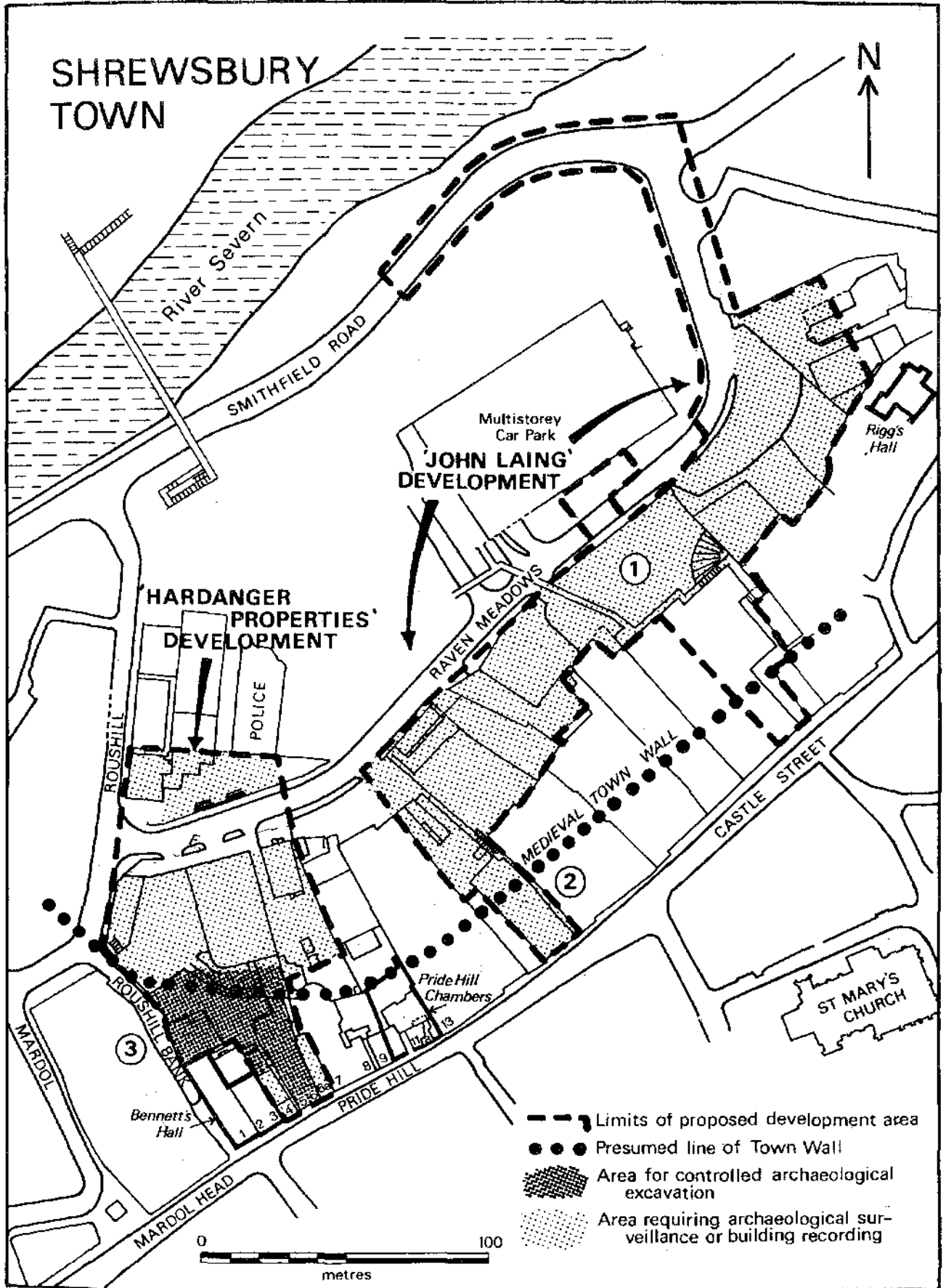
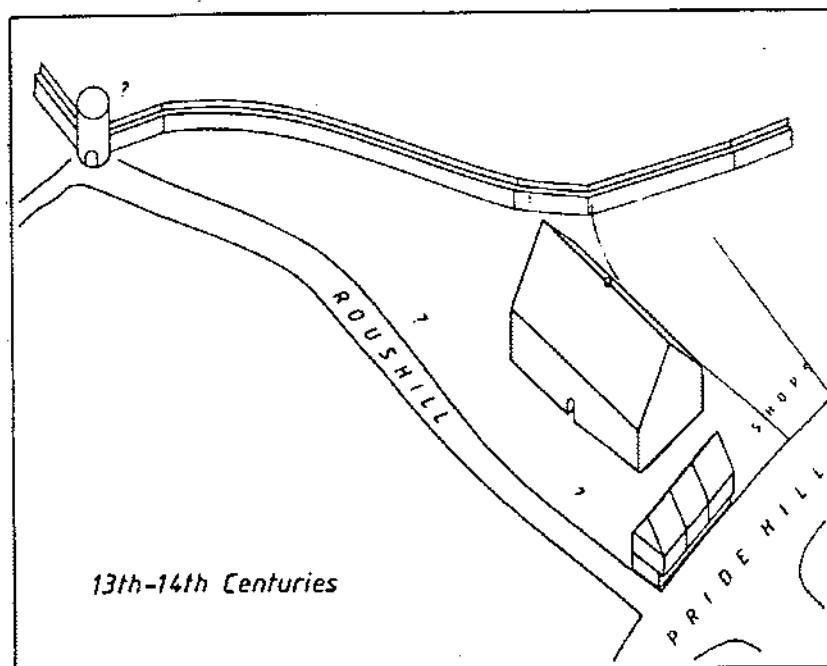


Fig. 2: The Town Site Development Area showing Archaeological Zones 1, 2, and 3.

THE ROUSHILL SITE

A PREDICTED SEQUENCE

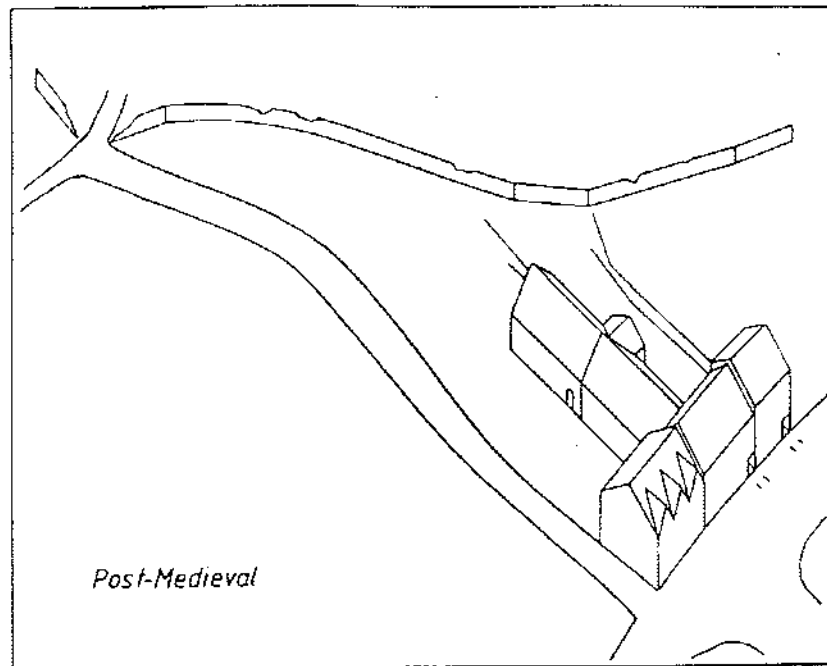
The Pride Hill frontage of the Bennett's Hill site may have been built up as early as the 10th century. The excavations at Pride Hill Chambers (the MacDonald's site), a few properties to the north, uncovered a pit containing late Saxon pottery that had probably been dug in the back yard of a building on the street frontage. Similar finds at Rigg's Hall further to the north (part of the Castle Gates Library), and the Domesday record of houses destroyed for the construction of the castle, are beginning to suggest the possibility of linear settlement along the street in the late Saxon and Norman periods. Like Pride Hill Chambers, the Bennett's Hall site is close to the Anglo-Saxon market area around St. Alkmund's church, an area that has produced further pottery of this date.



Little is known of the condition of the site when the hall was built in the mid-13th century. The town wall had been constructed along the edge of the slope at the back of the site perhaps twenty or more years before (probably between 1220 and 1242), but the state of the frontage is unknown. Was the site completely cleared for the new building, huge by 13th century standards, set back from the street in splendid isolation, or was exploitation of the frontage continuous? Certainly, it was occupied by the late 14th century when three rented shops were there.

There is sporadic documentary evidence for occupation along Roushill from the 13th century onwards, though not specifically (from a brief look at published sources) at the Pride Hill end until the 15th century. The evidence of early maps is confusing. The late

16th century Burghley map shows the town wall only, with what may have been a postern tower, and no housing on the east side of the land. Speed's map of 1610 shows development on both sides of the land within the walls. The gardens shown on the east side of the lane by Rocque's map of 1746 seem to have been built over by the time of Hitchcock's map of 1832.



BENNETT'S HALL

The name itself first appears in the documentary record in the late 14th century, when a property 'formerly called Bennette's hall' is described, at the southern end of Pride Hill, 'exactly opposite to the Heystrete'. The site attracted the attention of antiquarians and early photographers, as parts of a ruined stone building were to be seen incorporated in timber-framed buildings lining Leopard Shut, an alley named after an inn on the street frontage. The remains of the building were usually referred to as 'the Old Mint', a tradition without apparent foundation excepting that similar names were often given to old stone buildings of forgotten origin in other English towns.

Bennett's Hall was first surveyed in the early 1950's by J. T. Smith. His work defined a large two-storey rectangular stone building, gable-on to, and about 10m behind the Pride Hill frontage. The rear half of the west wall stood to a height of about 15 feet (4.6m) above modern ground level, the north gable wall was largely intact, as was the internal cross-wall. Most of the front wall

had been destroyed and the east wall had been removed by the insertion of Leopard Shut. Its foundations were uncovered when the site was redeveloped for the present John Collier's building, in c. 1957-61. A large part of the back wall still survives behind the modern buildings, and the cross-wall is the principal retained feature within Colliers though much less has been retained of the west wall.

The building was obviously of high social status, and functioned as a first-floor hall, with an under-croft at or slightly below the original ground level, possibly only as a storage space, with living areas on the floor above. The cross-wall contains a pair of arched doorways at under-croft level, with a second, smaller pair above. Between the latter is a fine stone fireplace datable on form and details to the mid-13th century, possibly the 1260's. The first floor room, at the frontage end, heated by the fireplace may have been used as a solar or private chamber with a hall beyond. A round-headed doorway was recorded in the west wall immediately to the north of the cross-wall. Smith suggested the possibility of a matching doorway in the east wall with a cross-passage between them. The springings of a pair of arches, probably windows, were discovered near the top of the west wall. Elsewhere, the wall was pierced by several wide segmental arched windows with splayed jambs. These could suggest a sequence similar to that observed at the stone and timber-framed building at Pride Hill Chambers, where original ogee-headed windows were replaced by rectangular windows in the 16th or early 17th century.



Medieval fabric in Bennett's Hall on its rediscovery in 1952.
(Photo by and courtesy of J. T. Smith)



Bennett's Hall as now incorporated into John Colliers (Ph. G. Norrie)

THE EXCAVATION : CONSTRAINTS AND POTENTIAL

While it is possible to assess the potential of the site in historical terms, ground conditions will obviously be the major factor determining the eventual yield of a controlled excavation. Without a programme of test-samples dug within the actual site boundaries, the only indication of stratigraphy likely to be encountered comes from neighbouring sites, historical data and surface indications.

The principal stratigraphic events recorded at the Pride Hill Chambers (MacDonald's) site were terracing operations to increase the exploitable land surface on the edge of the scarp, within the medieval period. Similar events may be anticipated on the Bennett's Hall site where the ground slopes to the north and the west. However, the presence of a major early building followed by the suspected sub-division of the site into smaller units may imply that large scale terracing in the late- or post-medieval period is less likely. Similarly, the area excavated at Pride Hill Chambers within the courtyard area behind the frontage was found to have been levelled, almost to the top of the natural surface. A major archaeologically destructive operation of this type may be less likely, or less frequent, at the Bennett's Hall site where sub-division may have inhibited large-scale post-medieval clearance operations.

If this argument seems rather tenuous, some support may be found in Smith's survey of the hall and in the photographic record of the 1957 redevelopment. Smith recorded a (presumed post-medieval) accumulation of 5 feet (1.5m) of 'earth' within the shell of Bennett's Hall, and photographs of the exposure of the east wall foundations by the builders suggest an accumulation of about 3ft. (0.9m)

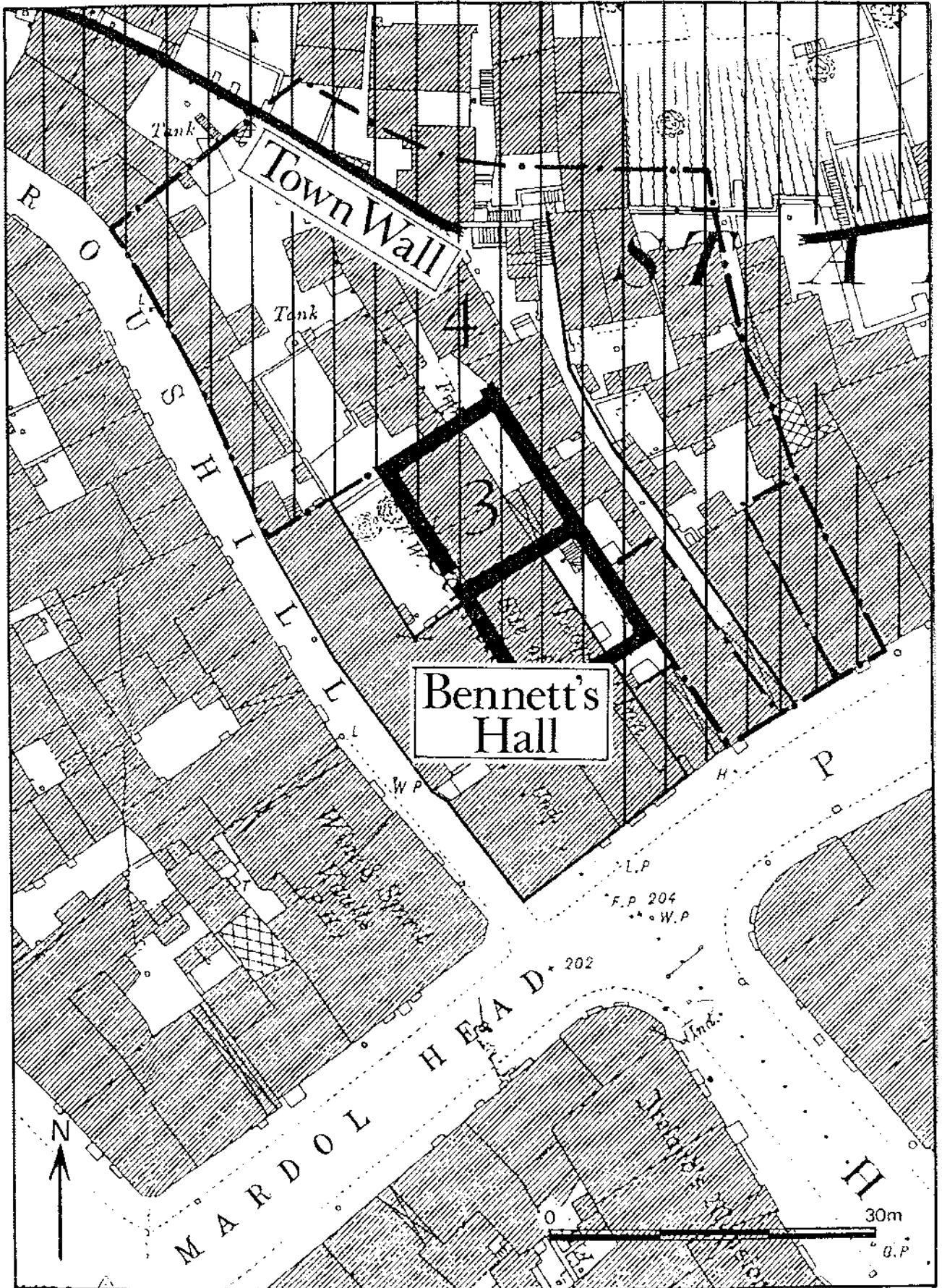


Fig. 3: Archaeological Zone 3 showing Bennett's Hall, the line of the medieval town wall, the Development Area ||| and the excavation areas [].

over the medieval foundations. While these recorded deposits will have been destroyed by the John Collier's building, others to the rear may well have survived. However, the most promising indication that the site behind Bennett's Hall offers a rich medieval sequence is provided by the topography. It lies at the junction of two down-slopes at right angles (Pride Hill and Roushill) and the town wall crossing to the north makes the third side of the triangle. The pocket formed by the triangle provides a "strata trap" in which archaeological layers and wall foundations are likely to have been captured through infilling, rather than destroyed by levelling.

Origins

The proposed area of excavation would be the first in Shrewsbury to span more than one medieval tenement giving the possibility of locating and dating property boundaries and illuminating the process of early land division on the town's principal axial street.

Early features behind the frontage are almost certain to survive, if only where cut into the natural. Pits would be likely to produce further groups of the Saxo-Norman Stafford Ware pottery, with environmental and food remains. Structural features cannot be ruled out.

Early features could survive beneath cellaring on the frontage. These would be likely to be discrete, negative features, recoverable by the proposed watching briefs on the Bennett's Hall area, and on the Top Shop site within the Laing's scheme.

The Town Wall

Town walls in general arouse intense public curiosity when found in excavation or building sites, and the town wall on the Bennett's Hall site could prove a useful focus for attracting public support and interest. On archaeological grounds, the decline of the town wall is probably of more interest than its precise route or the details of its construction. On each of the three previous excavations along its course (Roushill 1958/9, Pride Hill Chambers, Rigg's Hall 1978) it was found to have been colonised by domestic buildings within the medieval period. Further buildings seem likely to be found within the Bennett's Hall site in this situation.

The question of earlier defences along the scarp edge cannot be ignored. Evidence for a 12th century defence at the Pride Hill Chambers site was equivocal, and more light might be shed on this problem by the proposed excavation. Lastly, the possibility of an interval tower within the confines of the site cannot be ruled out. Notice the way the wall turns north-west to loop around the area north of Bennett's Hall, before joining the Welsh Bridge line at Roushill.

Bennett's Hall and its surroundings

At Pride Hill Chambers, evidence was found for the construction and reconstruction of the principal building in the form of working areas used for dressing locally quarried sandstone. Such areas may also survive within the Bennett's Hall site, inside the town wall.

The way in which the building was used is not fully understood, mainly as a result of its partial survival. Smith found no evidence of heating within the undercroft, and though such evidence may well have been destroyed, suggested that the hall may have been served by a detached kitchen to the rear. This hypothesis could be tested, with the possibility of locating other service buildings associated with the hall in its original form.

The disposal of contemporary rubbish within the confines of the site is a virtual certainty, and one pit of late medieval date was found during redevelopment work on the Lloyd's building in the 1930's.

There is a distinct possibility of being able to date the decline of Bennett's Hall and the insertion of the Leopard Shut. Was this major event prefaced by any change in land-use in the yard area to the rear? An investigation of the processes at work here may have interesting implications for the other Shrewsbury shuts (apart from those created as purely private access), where medieval tenements have been sub-divided and penetrated by public alleys.

The Roushill Frontage

The present buildings on this frontage are un-cellared, and there is a reasonable probability that their 18th - 19th century predecessors were also. If this is the case, the probability of finding medieval occupation and structures along the lane is high. This might enable useful social comparisons to be drawn between the exploitation of the principal frontage, Bennett's Hall itself, and the lane frontage to the rear.

The Roushill lane frontage may prove to be a particularly sensitive indicator of local economic conditions, peripheral to the main street, and it would be interesting to investigate the desertion implied by the evidence of maps at the end of, or after, the Middle Ages.

PRESENTATION

The Roushill Bank site offers an excellent opportunity for Shrewsbury's visitors and inhabitants to see an urban excavation in progress. No traffic hazard should be created, since the site is adjacent to a pedestrian precinct and near the multi-storey car park. Visitors will be routed on scaffolding walkways through the site from Roushill Bank to Pride Hill, whence they can be referred to the DISPLAY and further elements of the heritage presentation (see below). Sponsors are fully and publicly acknowledged within the display, as is standard practice.

ESTIMATES

Detailed estimates of time and cost can be made after archaeological site evaluation. A preliminary assessment is that the excavation will take eight months, and cost £50,000 including preparation for full publication. These costs will include consultancy, site direction, site recording, surveying and illustration.

It is assumed that sponsors and landowners would agree to the deposition of finds in Shrewsbury Museum as part of any contract, and that the I.F.A.* Code of Conduct would apply.

* Institute of Field Archaeologists

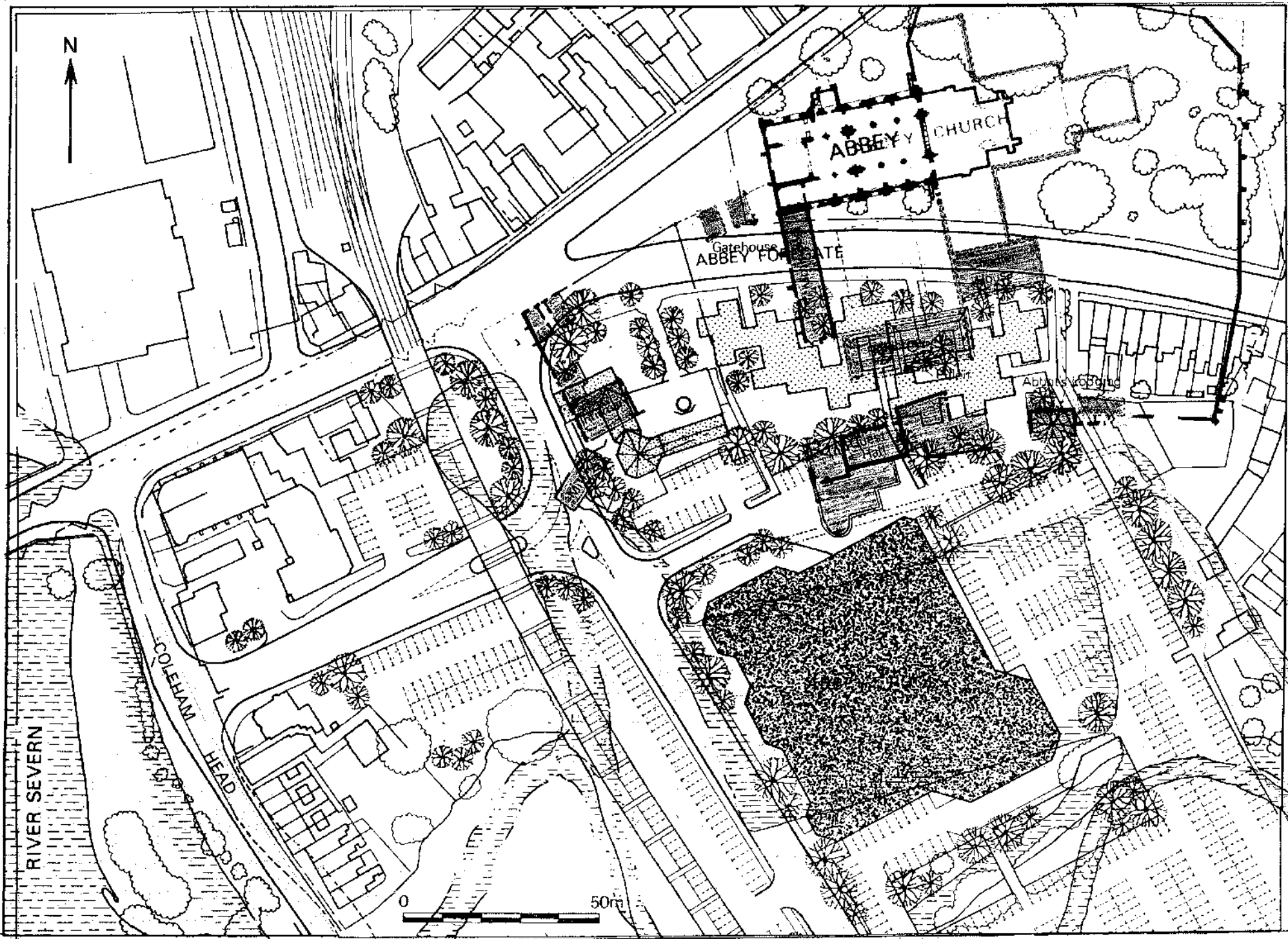


Fig. 1/c: The Abbey Site as surviving in the 19th century. (Plan: Owen and Blakeway)

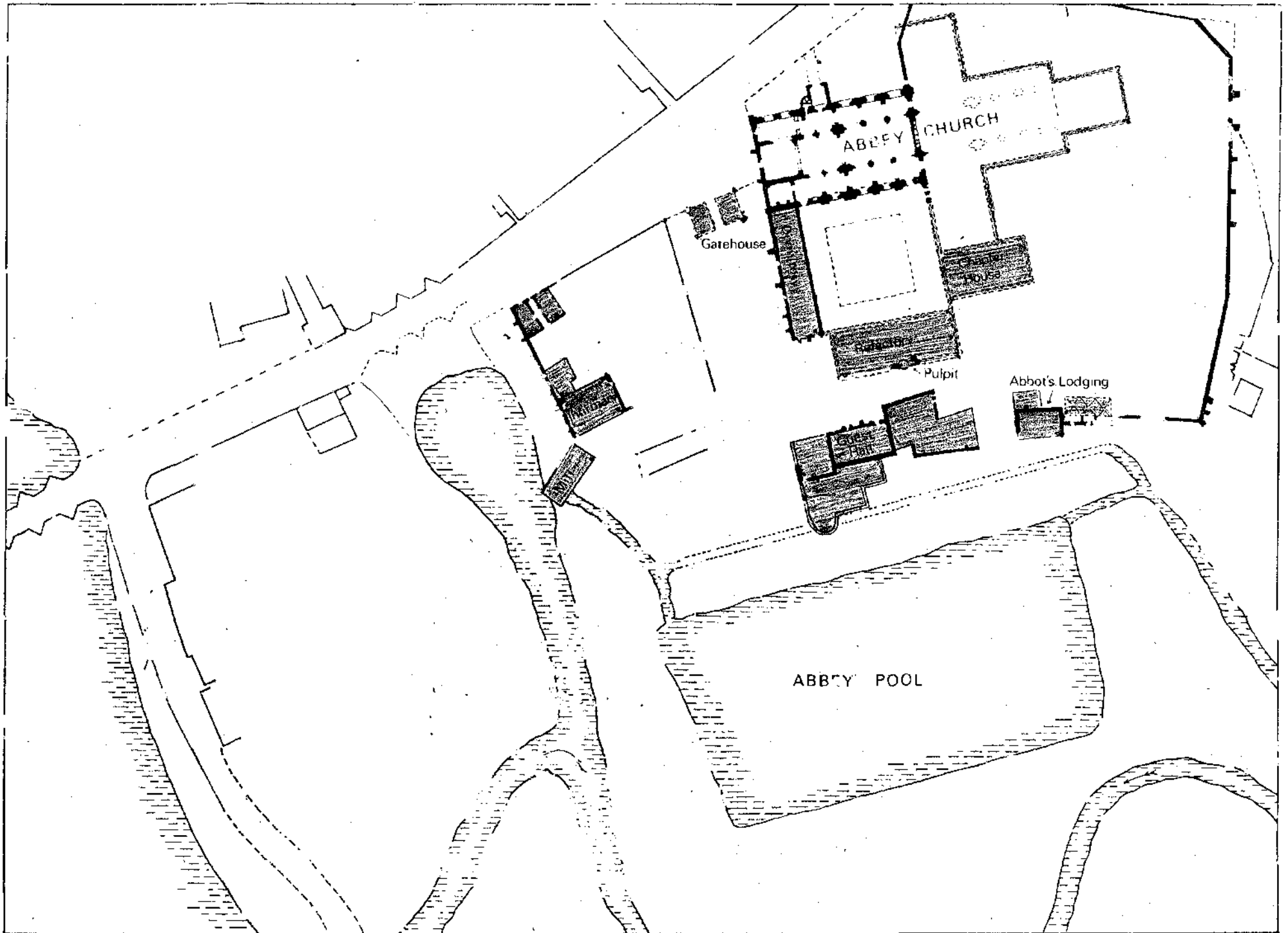


Fig. 4c: The Abbey Site as surviving in the 19th century. (Plan: Owen and Blakeway)

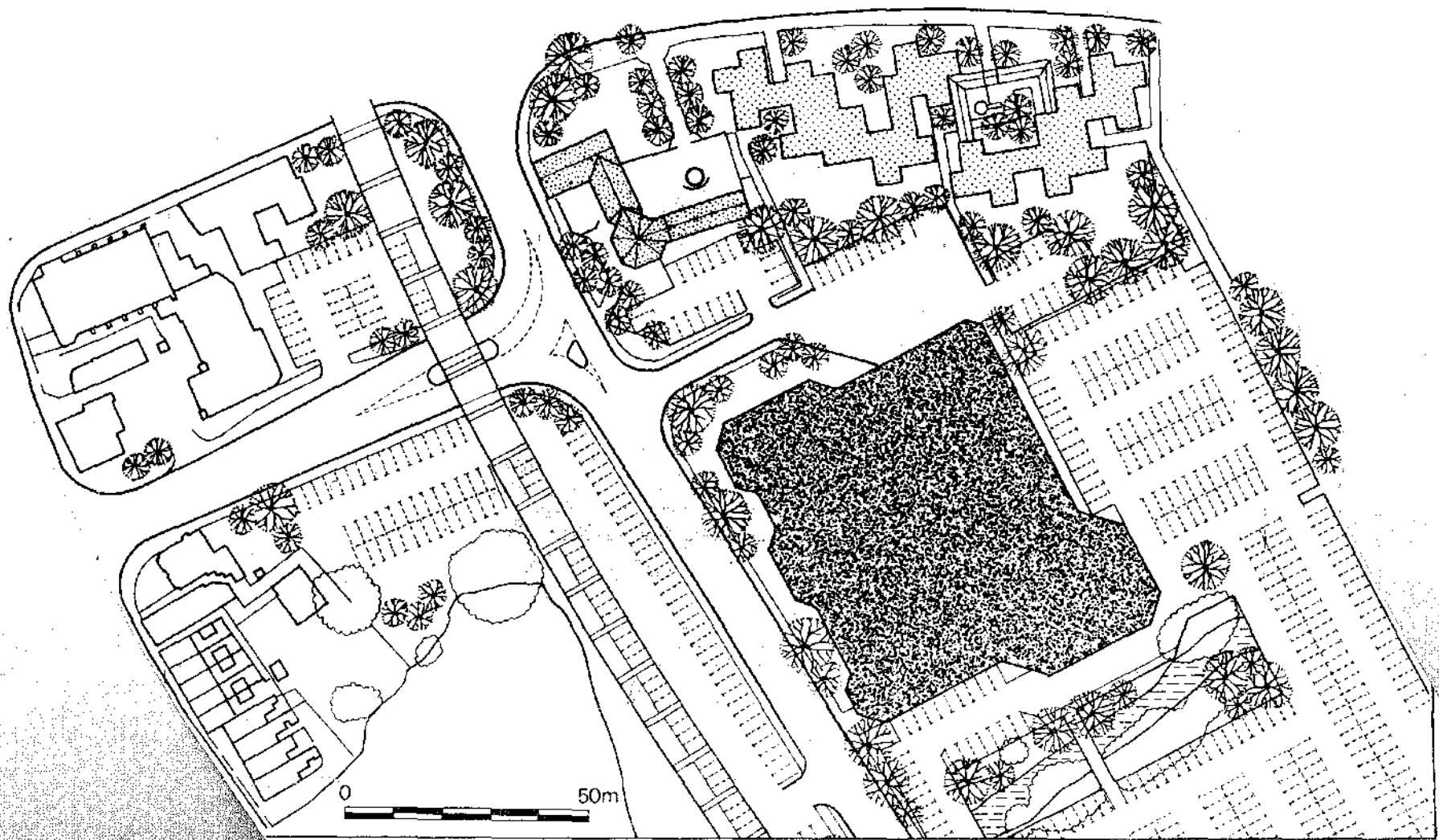


Fig. 4b: The proposed Residential Development and Store.



Fig. 4a: The Abbey Site, prior to development.

THE ABBEY SITE

Shrewsbury Abbey has been described as "the principal architectural monument of before 1100 in the county", but the whole abbey complex, although now largely underground, represents an asset considerably greater than that. Founded by Roger de Montgomery, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury in 1080, it was the centre of monastic - as the town was of civic - wealth and power for its region. With its Guest Hall, Mill, Infirmary and School it was a veritable self-contained palace with an influence which rivalled the King's and the Earl's own property.

Bearing in mind that an abbey precinct contained the working buildings and was in many ways the motor of the whole establishment, it is surprising that none has been examined under modern conditions. A certain amount can be predicted from the documentary record, but that makes the archaeological work more effective rather than redundant. For what cannot be predicted are the industries, the recreations, the entertainment and the nationwide contacts that took place. Much of this is in reach of archaeological method through stratified discarded debris. The ground plan therefore allows predictions of the sites of buildings and the choice of archaeological intervention can pursue specialised research targets. These may be briefly stated as :-

- A. The Guest Hall and its attached outbuildings (of the size and function of a large modern hotel).
- B. The Infirmary Complex and Mill including the hospital and school.
- C. The Abbey Pool containing evidence of the fish that were farmed, and the local plant cover.
- D. Outside the gates of the Abbey and probably in marked contrast, lay the houses of the common people of the Foregate suburb.

The Abbey excavations are expected to produce a large number of finds, including a quantity of monumental masonry. These, together with what is already known about the demolished buildings will allow the whole establishment to be brought definitively alive for the benefit of research and of presentation.

It is worth mentioning that the greater part of the Abbey Church also remains underground and that the Lady Chapel, north and south transepts, and of course Roger de Montgomery's original church of 1080, the form of which is quite unknown, are still accessible. The Abbey project has a long term potential for bringing into the light of modern day the style and form of an entire urban abbey.

STRATEGY

The overlain maps, Figs.4, show where the old and the new are destined to coincide and these points must have the priority.

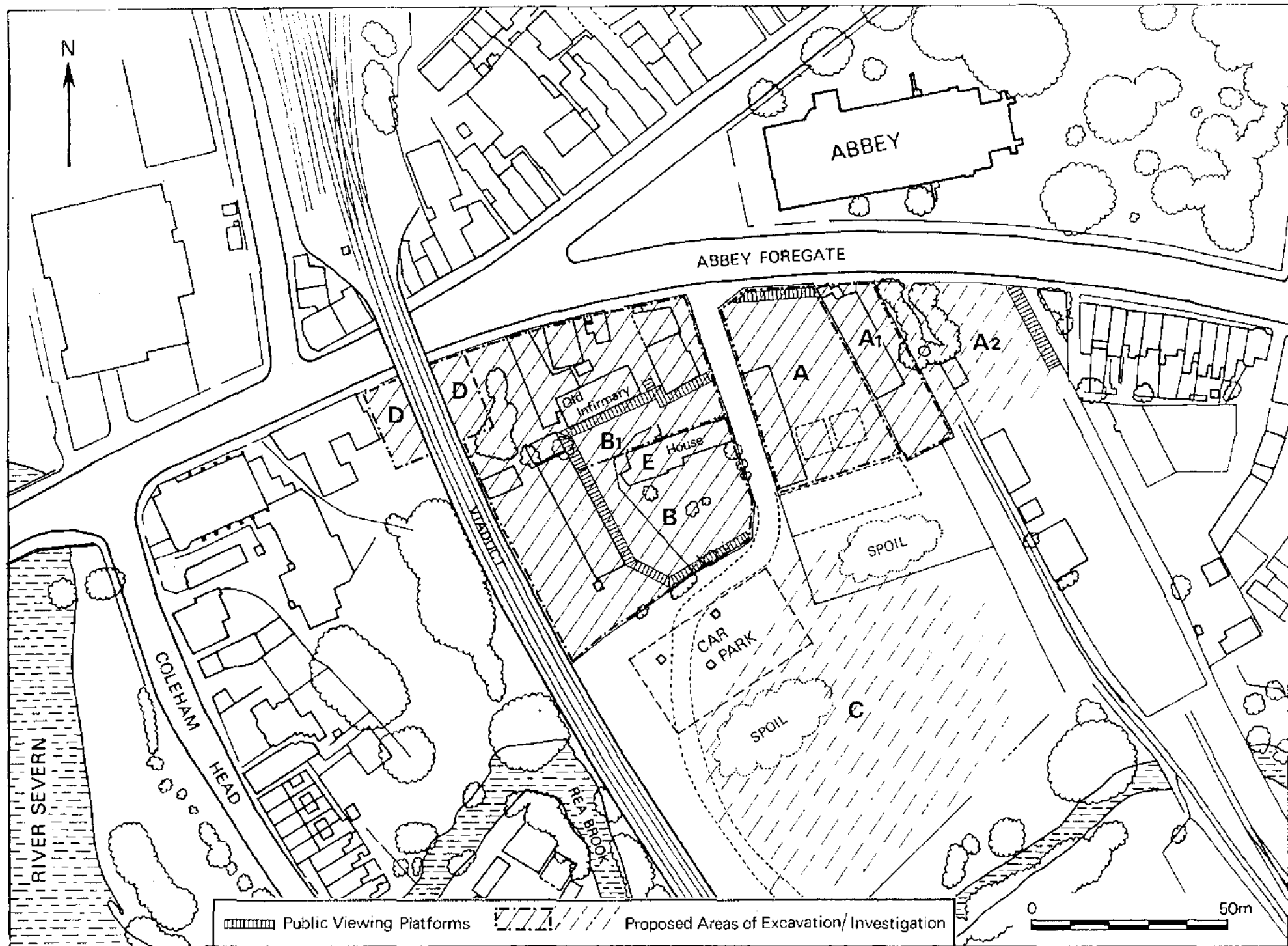


Fig. 5: The Abbey Site: Areas to be excavated.

A, A1, A2. The Housing Development is to be sited on top of the Guest Hall, the monk's dormitory, the refectory and the remains of the cloister. This represents a huge concentration of archaeological information and merits AREA EXCAVATION as access permits. Where access remains impossible, a WATCHING BRIEF and SALVAGE RECORD will still be useful.

This area also has a high potential for PRESENTATION. The refectory pulpit is already to be incorporated into the new housing development, and although the other monastery remains are unlikely to constitute a presentable monument, the memory of their shapes and space can be incorporated also. This may be done by plaques (including a cast map of the precinct), outlining in coloured concrete, and naming the building ranges and access paths and routes.

B & B1. The Infirmary Complex and Mill The potential here for EXCAVATION and PRESENTATION is the highest in the site. The extant architecture of the standing structures will be RECORDED and the archaeological EXCAVATION will tie them in to the rest of the complex below ground. The mill will be destroyed after excavation, since it coincides with the planned gyratory system, but the greater part of the infirmary range can be DISPLAYED at low level in accordance with its condition and incorporated into the gardens or marked in concrete on the car park. Part of the existing house and infirmary building can be adapted for service as a HERITAGE Centre for the enjoyment of the whole abbey area.

C. The Store coincides with the former Abbey Pool. Here the archaeological rewards can be won by small scale SAMPLING for organic remains, and by SALVAGE RECORDING for poolside structures. There is little potential for DISPLAY, although marking the pool perimeter on the car park (in coloured concrete) will again contribute to the impression of space and grandeur owed to the former inhabitants of the site.

D. The opportunity to examine part of the medieval suburb of Abbey Foregate is provided by the redevelopment either side of the existing viaduct. Here EXCAVATION can take place as soon as existing buildings have been cleared. There is little potential for DISPLAY other than during the excavation itself.

The archaeological potential below ground has been tested by evaluations carried out in March, 1985 and was found to endorse the expectations given then (see Appendix 1).

DISPLAY

During excavating provision will be made for safe public viewing. An area to the north will be allocated for public car-parking, and walkways and scaffold-galleries provided, as shown on the plan (fig.5); guided tours will be given at regular intervals.

After excavation a display scheme suggested by the preliminary assessment (above) may be enjoyed by the public in the way suggested on figure 6. The Heritage Walk will begin at the Infirmary, proceed to the Abbey Church and return via the Pulpit to the Infirmary where the detailed display of monastic life will be presented. In this particular case, a full scale model of the Abbey could actually be constructed when the excavation project is complete. If further excavations take place to reveal more of the abbey church on Abbey Green, a visit to them can easily be incorporated in the tour.

The maintenance of this and other display schemes is discussed in part 3 below.

The Sponsors of the Heritage project are fully and properly acknowledged within the display, as is now standard practice.

PROGRAMME

The following schedule attempts to achieve the archaeological objectives with the minimum inconvenience to the development. Order and timing of commencements is obviously for discussion.

- Month 1 - Site Survey and evaluation completed. Abbey Buildings marked on the ground.
 - Recording of extant medieval fabric in infirmary begins.
 - Adaption of 18th century House (marked E) for excavation headquarters
- Month 2 - (In collaboration with contractors' bore-hole programme), edges of pool located and pollen cores taken.
 - Excavation of Area B begins with Abbey main drain. Time required: 8 months.
- Month 6 - (After release of Bertram Edwards Timber Yard and Offices), commencement of excavation of Area B1, mill and infirmary complex. Time required: 8 months.
 - Excavation of Area D begins. Time required: 3 months.
 - Release of area for construction of gyratory system to contractors.
- Month 10 - Release of Area B to contractors, excavation of Area A begins (after release of petrol storage yard). Time required: 6 months.
 - Excavation and salvage recording of Area A1 begins. Time required: 2 months.
 - Consolidation and display plans composed for Infirmary Area.
 - Release of Area D for landscaping.
- Month 12 - Release of Area A1 to contractors.
- Month 14 - Release of Area B1 to contractors.
- Month 16 - Completion of Area A
 - Watching brief and salvage excavation of Area A2. Time required: 1 month.
- Month 17 - Completion of all excavation works and commencement of Display scheme
- Month 18 - Completion of display scheme
 - Publication of illustrated Abbey guide.

ESTIMATES - for archaeological work, excluding materials
and labour for display schemes and publication
costs

<u>Archaeological director and fees, including Headquarters' costs. 24 man months at £20,000 p.a.</u>	40,000
<u>Survey and Building recording 4 man months</u>	2,000
<u>Adaption of House (E) Materials</u>	1,000
<u>Pollen and Botanical Sampling Laboratory costs and fee</u>	4,000
<u>Excavation: Areas B, B1</u>	20,000
<u>Excavation: Areas A, A1, A2</u>	16,000
<u>Post-Excavation Costs and Report preparation</u>	34,000
<u>Graphic Design and Photography</u>	4,000
<u>Computer Analysis</u>	6,000
	<hr/>
	£127,000
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It is assumed that sponsors and landowners will agree to the deposition of finds in Shrewsbury Museum and that the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct will apply.

THE DISPLAY PROJECT

Both the Town Site and the Abbey Site present fine opportunities for the attraction and entertainment of the public while the archaeological work is actually in progress (see figs. 5 & 6)

In the longer term, the archaeological project is designed to provide amenity, and to improve the status and character of the areas to be developed. This may be counted a permanent contribution to the quality of life in Shrewsbury.

It is hoped that the Shrewsbury Borough Museum and the Civic Society will collaborate in the Heritage Project, which is likely to attract attention over a considerable area. A plan for the design of a Medieval trail for Shrewsbury will be considered in co-operation with these bodies, and with the Borough Council. It will hope to include a major display in the Borough Museum, which describes and promotes medieval Shrewsbury in its region.

In every type of publicity, full acknowledgement is made of the contribution made by sponsors, without whom no modern archaeological project can be successfully complete.

The involvement of the media forms a normal part of the presentation of a heritage project. Informal or contractual arrangements will be made with local and national press, radio and television.

Publication will take two forms: for each site an illustrated guide will be prepared to form a permanent complement to the area. A guide to Medieval Shrewsbury will also be prepared, to complement the medieval trail. This will also be illustrated by high quality colour photography.

The archaeological result will be published in the form of a synthesis for each site, and for the town as a whole. Emphasis will be laid on the role of Shrewsbury as a town in its hinterland throughout the last thousand years. The full archaeological record will be deposited in Shrewsbury's Local History Library, while it is planned to commit all the finds not on display to the care of Shrewsbury Museum.

SHREWSBURY ABBEY SA 983

SITE EVALUATION

In February, 1985, a site evaluation was undertaken on the site of the Abbey complex in Shrewsbury. At present, the Abbey church, the infirmary and the refectory pulpit are still standing, but other buildings and the great Abbey pool are underneath car parks, yards and an oil storage depot. With the whole area shortly to be re-developed, there is an excellent opportunity to study the Abbey and its environs.

The aims of the evaluation were :-

- (a) to test for quality and depth of survival of archaeological strata in three trenches within the threatened area.
- (b) to test for survival of environmental evidence in the Abbey pool
- (c) to test the accuracy of existing plans of the Abbey complex, particularly that of Owen and Blakeway (19th century) by sinking trenches in areas where buildings were expected (B) and in blank areas (A), (fig.7).

Results

Trench A was cut in an area where there were no buildings showing on existing plans, although it was hoped to locate the edge of the pool. The two metre wide trench was dug by JCB except where substantial walls were found at the north end.

The trench contained three large sandstone walls which were surviving up to less than 1 metre below the present ground surface and were at least 2 metres high (fig.8). The walls belonged to two water channels both running east-west. The main channel, F14, bounded by walls F1 and F2, was 6.5 metres wide and contained post-medieval backfilling layers over a deep deposit of dark grey silt. This silt contained fragments of medieval, 12th or 13th century, pottery and wood and animal bone which was well preserved in the waterlogged conditions. Samples taken for environmental analysis so far indicate survival of organic remains such as seeds and grain (see page 16). This feature is interpreted as the main subterranean drainage channel servicing the whole Abbey complex.

The other channel, F15, immediately to the north, again using F2 as a boundary wall in conjunction with F11, was similarly constructed of well bonded sandstone ashlar but whereas the other walls were approx. 60cm. wide, this was about 1.5 metres across. For this reason it seems likely that it was incorporated into a larger structure although this could not be proven in the trial trench. The channel, F15, was only 1 metre wide and narrowing towards the west. Again it contained post-medieval backfill over primary silting. Since it can be seen to be running towards the known position of the Abbey mill, it is initially interpreted as the mill-race, but may be a sewer.

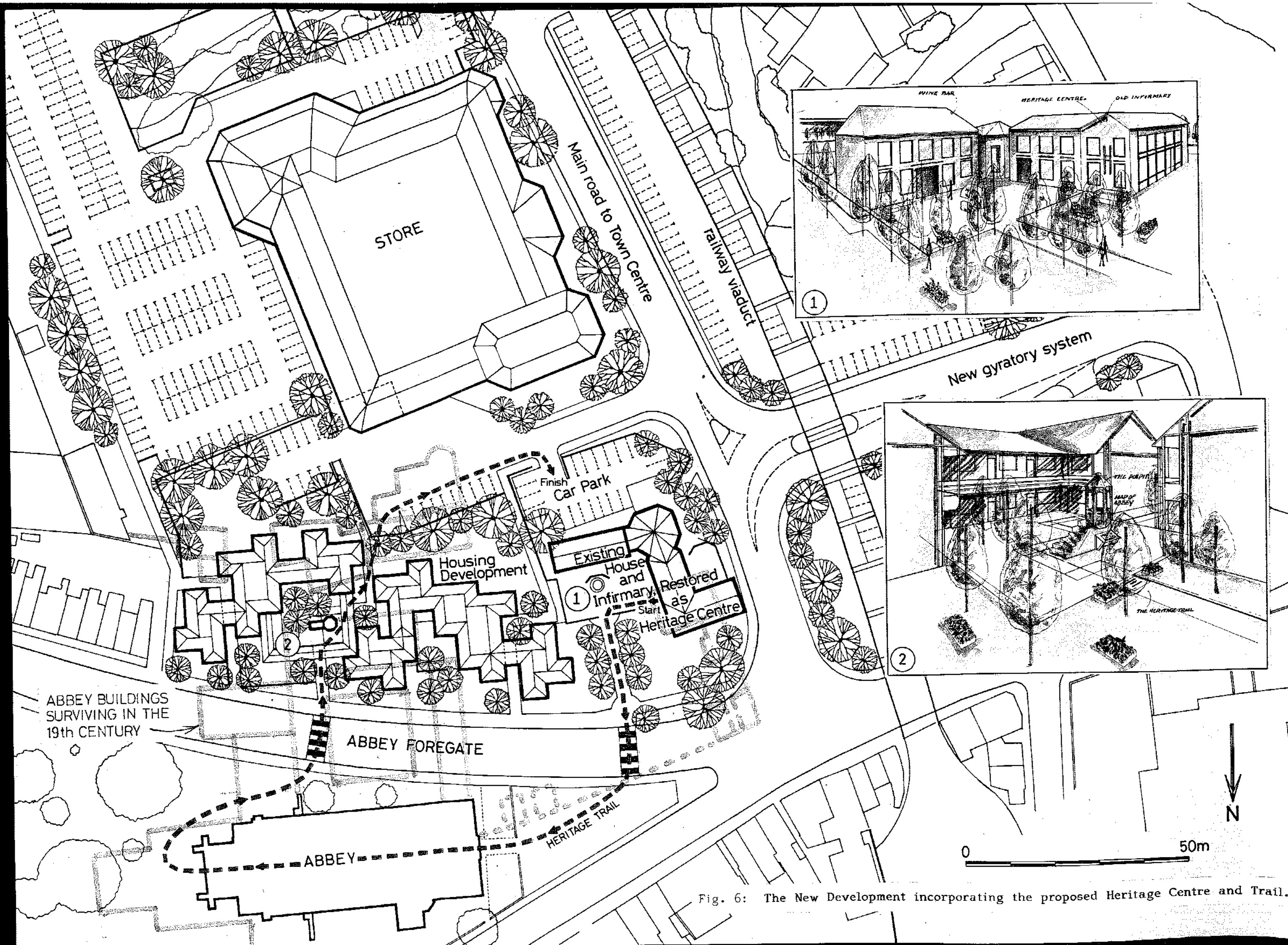


Fig. 6: The New Development incorporating the proposed Heritage Centre and Trail.



FIG. 7. Site Evaluation, February 1985: Location of Trenches A, B and C.

To the north of both channels and abutting wall F11, was a clay and cobble surface overlying approximately 1.5 metres of strata above the natural gravel. This surface is thought to be medieval in date and associated with the Abbey buildings. Trench B was cut through an area seen to contain the Abbot's lodging on the Owen and Blakeway plan and, as with Trench A, was intended to locate the edge of the Abbey pool. This area had until recently been the site of a railway station and excavation showed approximately 2 metres of rubble and clay make up for this.

Owing to harsh weather conditions and the instability of the strata, information from this trench was recovered as if from salvage recording.

In the northern half of the trench two walls were seen in section running east-west and parallel to each other. These were of mortar bonded sandstone with plaster rendering on both sides. They were seen at a depth of 2 metres from the present ground surface and stood at least 1 metre high. Between and either side of them was post-medieval dumping, although dating is not secure, and no associated surface was seen. The alignment and position of these walls coincide with those of the Abbot's lodging on the plan (fig.4

At the southern end of trench B grey waterlogged deposits were seen, assumed to be silting in the pool, but at 4 metres depth it was unsafe to continue machining and the pool edge was not located. The great depth at which archaeological deposits were located in this area is mainly due to the make-up layers for the railway and strata may have been preserved and sealed rather than destroyed by this.

Trench C was intended to test the depth of the foundations of the extant infirmary building and to locate the Abbey mill. At approximately half a metre down, a large brick drain was hit which occupied the greater area of the trench. It was wiser to discontinue operations to avoid creating structural problems, to the infirmary by removal of brickwork.

Summary

The archaeological deposits in trench B were located at too great a depth to be fully investigated safely within a trench although survival of structures and strata was apparent. In Trench A substantial stone features survived close to the ground surface and there appears to be little post-medieval disturbance. The structures excavated are thought to be the main drainage channel for the Abbey, and the mill race. Both contained deposits with good potential for environmental evidence. To the north of these is approximately 1.5 metres of strata between the natural gravel and the modern garden soil.

Shrewsbury Abbey
East-facing section of Trench A

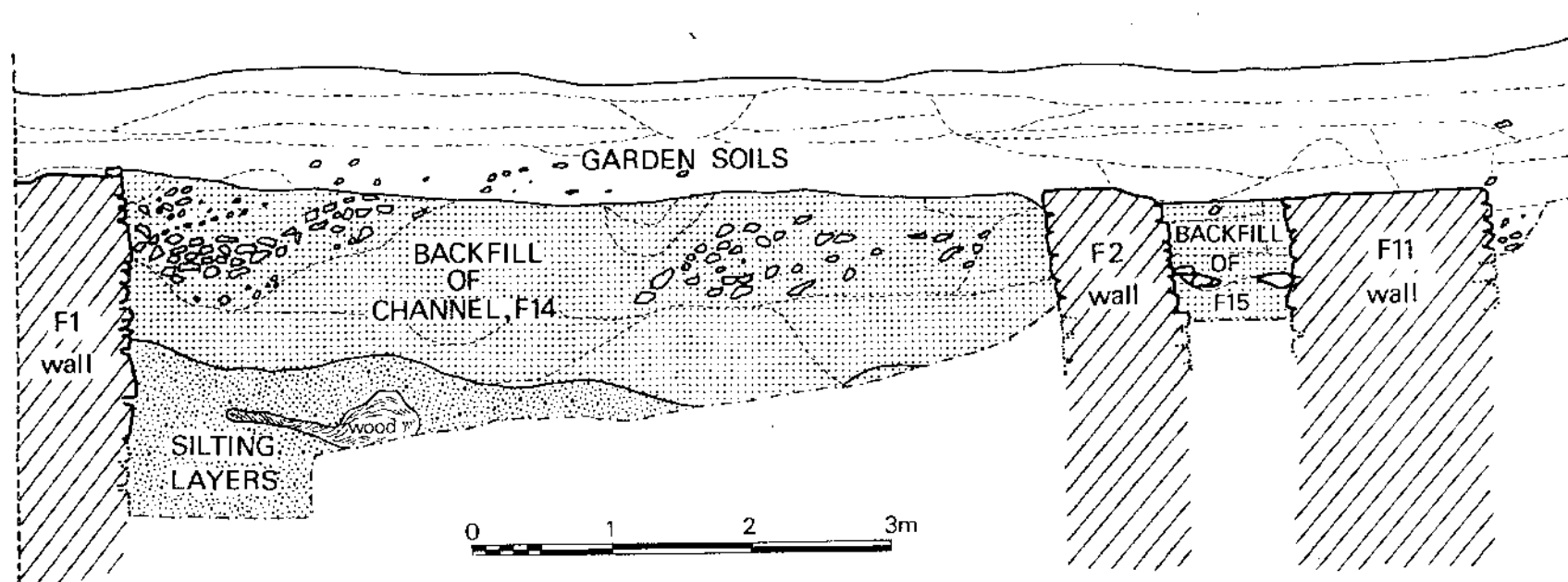


Fig. 8: Drawn section in Trench A showing channels F15 and F14.

Medieval Monastic Gardens at Shrewsbury Abbey

Documentary Evidence

It was in Monte Cassino that St. Benedict wrote the first Monastic Rule, that aside from its spiritual duties, a monastery should extend hospitality, medical help and teaching to the community and should be self contained and self-sufficient. The necessities of its life were, therefore, water, a mill for grain and a garden. These to provide the bread and wine, vegetables, fruit, fish and eggs which Benedict prescribed as the diet for his monks.

Benedictine monks are thus known to have farmed land for grain, dug ponds for fish, kept bees for wax and honey and to have grown fruits, vegetables, vines, herbs for flavouring and healing and plants yielding dyes, inks and incense.

Structural remains

Within the Abbey complex at Shrewsbury the surviving buildings are the Church, the refectory pulpit and the infirmary. Documentary sources indicate the existence of an abbey pool, mill and race, and orchards, but we can assume that other monastic buildings and garden areas also existed within the precinct walls. Excavation may provide evidence of a malt house for example, or a brewery, as beer made from malted barley, often with herbs added to it, was a staple drink in English Monasteries. Barns used to store and thresh grain, kilns for drying grain, stables, kitchens and garden plots may also be found.

Organic remains

On archaeological sites anaerobic, waterlogged sediments provide excellent conditions for the preservation of plant and animal remains. In dry, aerobic deposits plant remains will only survive if they have been charred.

During the trial excavations, waterlogged, organic deposits were found and samples were taken for analysis from the subterranean channel, F.14. Seeds and charred cereal remains were recovered.

The most abundant seed was that of elder, a plant with many possible uses such as wine making, culinary and remedial practices, fabric dyeing and for the tanning of leather. The seeds of blackberries, herbs, and of plants characteristic of wet and marshy ground were also recovered. Many seeds had survived of one particular herb, white horehound, a plant with a long tradition of medicinal uses.

As the water-table has remained at a height sufficient to preserve this organic material, then there is excellent potential for recovering waterlogged organic deposits from the remainder of the Abbey complex. In particular, the extensive area of the Abbey Pool would have been an ideal environment for preserving its fish remains and for catching and preserving the seeds and pollen blown in from the surrounding gardens.

The charred plant remains were very poorly preserved and few in number. Tentative identifications were made of wheat, rye and oats.

A number of activities can result in cereal grains becoming accidentally charred when in close contact with a fire: the drying of grain prior to storage; the drying of germinated grain during the malting process to brew beer; or charring due to incomplete burning of waste or rubbish. Any of these activities could have been undertaken at the monastery and it is possible that large quantities of charred cereal remains may be recovered elsewhere on the site. This would provide valuable information concerning the types of cereals grown and crop processing activities.

The Abbey Site at Shrewsbury, therefore, could provide much additional and fascinating information about daily life within a medieval monastery. Documentary records give us some details of diet and agricultural, horticultural and medicinal practices but there is as yet little tangible evidence.

Excavation, it is hoped, will reveal not only the structures within the Abbey Precinct but also, from environmental and archaeological evidence, what went on inside these buildings and in the surrounding gardens and fields.

We also may be able to glean information on what impact the activities of the monastery had on the local community and environment.

C. H. Bowker