

Archaeological assessment of Ellesmere, Shropshire

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with contributions by Derek Hurst, Richard Morriss, Elizabeth Pearson and Paul Stamper

Summary

The historic town of Ellesmere was surveyed during the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, a desk-based study of 64 smaller historic towns in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Archaeological and documentary evidence relating to the historic core of Ellesmere was carefully analysed, comprising topographic data, published and unpublished archaeological reports, museum collections, primary and secondary historical sources, historical maps, and field data recorded by the project team.

Detailed evidence is provided on the character and layout of the settlement in the medieval and post-medieval period. For each period the available information is analysed and mapped in detail, and a model of the development of the town is proposed. In addition, the evidence for pre-urban occupation is considered, together with evidence of 19th century occupation. All archaeologically-relevant information has been recorded as part of the county Sites and Monuments Record. Specialist assessments of artefacts, ecofacts, standing buildings and documentary sources are included. A detailed archaeological research framework has been developed for Ellesmere, which will inform future archaeological investigations as well as management decisions.

The historic core of Ellesmere contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. It is probable that extensive waterlogged deposits occur, which are rare in the region. The post-medieval historic buildings constitute a complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have high potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are very extensive and have been little studied in recent years; consequently the potential for further study is high.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and landuse

The urban area of Ellesmere is located at NGR SJ 400 348 in North Shropshire District. The modern settlement of Ellesmere comprises a small town, centred on the historic core close to the Mere, with modern housing and industrial development along roads to the northeast and along the west side of the town.

1.2 Topography, geology and soils

Ellesmere lies at a height of between 90m and 120m OD. The castle and town are sited on a glacial moraine with the town stretching down the slopes of the hill and into a shallow valley to the northwest. The soils of the Ellerbeck association are generally well drained

typical brown earths (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ragg *et al* 1984) overlying Triassic Tarporley Siltstone (British Geological Survey 1:250,000, sheet 52°N-O.4°W). To the east of the town lies the Mere, after which the town is named. This is the largest of about three dozen meres and pools of glacial origin in the area (Rowley 1986).

1.3 Chronological outline

The manor of Ellesmere was held by Roger of Montgomery at Domesday (Thorn and Thorn 1986). The Domesday Survey mentions villagers and two priests, and Eyton suggested that Ellesmere contained a collegiate church in the Anglo-Saxon period. This arrangement may have continued into the 13th century (Eyton 1860, 246). The location of the Anglo-Saxon church and any associated settlement is not known, but the discovery of a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon cross close to St Mary's Church in the 19th century (SA 3726) suggests that the pre-conquest and post-conquest churches may have been on the same site.

Roger of Montgomery built a motte and bailey castle at Ellesmere soon after 1086, and became the head of a marcher lordship. After the rebellion of Roger's son in the early 12th century his lands were confiscated by the King, and in *c* 1138 Ellesmere became a royal castle. The castle is mentioned in 1171-2 and frequently in Pipe Rolls between 1203-8 (Eyton 1869; Renn 1973). Ellesmere was granted to Welsh princes from time to time and was only marginally in Shropshire in the 13th century (Thorn and Thorn 1986). It is not clear when the castle ceased to function as a military stronghold, but it seems to have been garrisoned until at least the end of the 13th century (Hamlin 1986) and was still maintained into the 14th century (Eyton 1860, 244).

Sometime between 1216 and 1237 Ellesmere was granted a borough charter with the customs of Breteuil by Joan of Wales (Beresford and Finberg 1973). The town of Ellesmere was mentioned in 1212 (Eyton 1860, 237) and a weekly market granted to the manor in 1221. In 1258 a murage grant was given (Eyton 1860, 240). In the extent of the borough in 1280 fifty nine burgages are recorded and a variety of trades may be reflected by the personal names mercer, skelker, cobbler, smith, baker, glover, pelter and brewer. The rent of the tenants in burgage amounted to £3 2s 6½d per annum (Eyton 1860, 243). Two chaplains and a nun are also recorded as holding burgages (Boyd 1899). In the medieval period Ellesmere became a considerable market town with fairs and a great church (Sylvester 1969, 310). Fishing in the Mere was also an important part of the economy.

In 1529 Ellesmere became part of Shropshire. Ellesmere may have declined in the later middle ages; in the 16th century Leland noted that whilst Ellesmere had four "reasonably built" streets and was permitted to hold two fairs, it had "no public market at present" (Chandler 1993, 394).

Ellesmere was never permanently garrisoned by either side during the Civil War and was consequently never besieged (Hopkins 1957-60, 309). In the late 18th century the Ellesmere Canal was built, and the early 19th century was a time of prosperity for Ellesmere (Hadfield 1950). There is some conflicting evidence as the size of the town in this period. Sylvester (1969) comments that the population of the town grew from 5909 in 1801 to 7080 in 1841 (Sylvester 1969), but Wood (1835) noted that in 1831 the population of Ellesmere was 2314. With the coming of the railways, Ellesmere's importance as a market centre declined. In 1967 Ellesmere ceased to be an urban district and became absorbed into North Shropshire District (Sylvester 1969, 142).

1.4 Placename studies

Ellesmere is referred to as *Ellesmeles* in the Domesday Book, *Ellesmera* in 1172, and *Ellesmere* in 1200. The name means Elli's lake (Gelling 1990, 123).

1.5 Syntheses of documentary and archaeological data

The documentary evidence relating to medieval Ellesmere has been summarised by Eyton (1860), but no synthesis of the archaeological data has been undertaken. The present assessment was carried out by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in 1993. The text was revised in March 1995 to incorporate the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Survey (see section 1.7). No information published after December 1994 has been incorporated into this assessment.

1.6 Cartographic sources

Roque's map (1752), Baugh's map (1808), Wood's map (1835), and the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:2500 maps (*Shropshire sheet XIII.2 and 3* (1893)), have been used to aid in the identification of remains and the definition of components.

1.7 Archaeological excavations and surveys

There have been no recorded archaeological excavations or watching briefs in the town of Ellesmere. The only available archaeological evidence comes from the observation of deep deposits of peat during construction of the Old Town Hall in the early 19th century (SA 5238; Hamlin 1986) and from chance finds recorded over the last century. Two Roman coins have been found (SA879 and SA 5223), and a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon stone cross was supposedly used as hardcore at the Old Vicarage to the south of the church (SA 3726). In the late 19th or early 20th century a deposit of medieval objects and a large quantity of soil was recovered from a cavity in the belfry of St Mary's church (SA 880; Tower 1904). An earthwork survey of the castle has been undertaken (VCH 1908).

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. This identified remains, investigated and revised the extent of components, and recorded 18th and 19th century cellarge and modern developments in the urban area.

1.8 Acknowledgments and personnel

Survey fieldwork was undertaken by Victoria Buteux and Nigel Topping. Analysis and report writing were undertaken by Victoria Buteux, and the report was edited by Hal Dalwood.

2 Pre-urban evidence

The Bronze Age axe found just outside the study area (SA1570) and the two Roman coins from the town are some indication of human activity prior to the medieval period, but lack of fieldwork means that little is known of early occupation in this area. The two priests mentioned in the Domesday Survey may indicate the presence of a collegiate church (Eyton 1860, 246). Any settlement associated with the church is likely to have been situated on the raised ground, possibly on or near the site of the castle. With the exception of the Anglo-Saxon cross fragment there is no archaeological evidence for this period.

3 Medieval archaeological evidence

3.1 Medieval remains and buildings

The motte and bailey castle, although damaged by quarrying on the south and east sides, is still a substantial earthwork with large banks and ditches. There are no visible traces of building platforms or other features within the castle defences. No medieval secular buildings survive in Ellesmere, but the church of St Mary has been described and the sequence of construction interpreted (Crannage 1903; SA 880).

3.2 Medieval urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above and of cartographic and documentary sources indicated the existence of 16 urban components. The characteristics of these urban components are summarised below.

Churchyard (SA 5244). The church may have its origins in an Anglo-Saxon collegiate foundation and Eyton (1860, 246) suggests that the collegiate church continued into the 13th century. The churchyard lies just to the west of the castle on the slope of the glacial moraine. The rectangular block of high land framed by Church Hill, Church Street, Pinfold Lane and St John's Hill probably marks the extent of the medieval churchyard and indeed the majority of this area was church land into this century. This area may also have formed the precinct of the Anglo-Saxon church. This suggestion is strengthened by the presence of cross dated to *c* 750-850 which once stood in the vicarage garden (SA 3726). The present church of St Mary was largely rebuilt and restored in 1849 but still contains traces of 12th century building (Crannage 1903).

Castle (SA 1004). The earthworks of the castle form a readily identifiable monument. The date of construction is not known but the castle is usually ascribed to Roger of Montgomery and was probably built not long after 1086. The castle was definitely in existence by 1138 (Renn 1973). Repairs or building works were undertaken in *c* 1203, 1204, 1242 and 1257 (Eyton 1860, 235-239), and in 1274 it is noted that timber which was to be used in the building or re-building within the castle had been appropriated (Eyton 1860, 242). A "Kings House" is noted in 1257 (Eyton 1860, 239) but nothing else is known of the internal features of the castle. The exact limits of the fortifications are also not known due to quarrying in the post-medieval period. It was thought that the castle had an inner and outer bailey but fieldwork has indicated that the "outer bailey" earthworks are 19th century garden features (SA 5224, SA 5225). The castle was garrisoned in the 13th century and still maintained in 1309 (Eyton 1860, 244). In the mid-16th century Leland visited Ellesmere where "there used to be a castle" (Chandler 1993, 394).

Market place (SA 5243). The town of Ellesmere is mentioned in 1212 but the first record of a weekly market dates to 1221 (Eyton 1860, 237). The location of this market place is not documented but it is probably in the same area as that shown on the 19th century maps of the town at the south end of Cross Street (Chandler 1993, 394).

Town defences (SA 5297). In 1258 Peter de Montfort was empowered to raise money to enable him to wall the town of Ellesmere (Eyton 1860, 240). At present there is no documentary or archaeological evidence that the defences were built. If they were in fact constructed, their location and the date at which they went out of use remains to be demonstrated. It has been suggested that in the mid-13th century Ellesmere was restricted to an area to the west of the church and that Watergate Street represents the line of the town defences (Anon 1957-60, 3). The town was quite small at this time, with only 59 burgages recorded in 1280 (Sylvester 1969, 310), but even so this seems too large a settlement to have been protected by defences on the high ground above Watergate Street and Birch Road. For the purposes of this assessment a defensive circuit following Church Street, Willow Street, and running behind St John's Street, is suggested. This is provisional, based on topographical and cartographic evidence, and should be tested archaeologically.

Street system (SA 5294). The street system of Ellesmere reflects the natural topography and the gradual development of the town. There is no archaeological evidence to date the street system but, with the exception of the A528 and Sands Lane, all the streets shown on Baugh's 1808 map are bounded by medieval components or

provide access to the castle or church, and are probably medieval in date. If Church Street, Talbot Street and Willow Street do mark the line of the town defences (see above) then they are likely to post-date them.

Tenement plots (SA 5245, SA 5246, SA 5247, SA 5248, SA 5250, SA 5288, SA 5290, SA 5292, SA 5293). Components SA 5245 and SA 5292 are cut into the slopes of the hill beneath the church and castle, and it is possible that this area may be the earliest part of the town, perhaps originally within an outer bailey of the castle. The slope of the hill has resulted in short, irregular plots in this area.

In the lower part of the town, the size and shape of the medieval tenement plots has also been affected by topography. Component SA 5246 fills out the valley floor and may originally have consisted of two sets of plots both backing onto the stream which ran down the valley into the Mere. The irregular shape of this component is probably due to its position on the stream and the affect of the high ground to the east, but it may be an early unplanned element of the town.

Component SA 5293, to the north of Church Street and Talbot Street, represents a planned area of medieval burgage plots whose boundaries have survived into the 20th century. However 19th century maps (Wood 1835; Ordnance Survey map 1893) give some clue to the location of the other planned elements of the medieval borough. These are SA 5247 to the west of the market place, SA 5248 along Trimpley Street and SA 5288 along Scotland Street. The blocks of land to the west and east of what is now called Victoria Street (SA 5290, SA 5250) are probably part of the medieval town but the evidence is less clear.

The medieval town of Ellesmere seems to have developed over a period of time but the chronology of that development is not understood. If town walls were constructed (seen above) these would have had an effect on the expansion of the town. Industries and craft activities are known to have flourished in the town and probably took place in the back of tenement plots. The western edge of SA 5293 next to a watercourse would be a suitable place for tanneries or other water-using industries, but there is no archaeological or documentary evidence for this at present.

Bridging points (SA 5239, SA 5240). In the medieval period a watercourse (SA 5249) ran down the shallow valley to the west of the castle, through the town and into the Mere. This watercourse crosses the present High Street and this may have been the site of a ford or bridge in the medieval period (SA 5240). Sparbridge marks the site of a bridge over the same watercourse to the north of the town (SA 5239).

3.3 Medieval urban form

Definition and classification. The medieval urban form (SA 5304) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components and in particular the street pattern and tenement plot boundaries. The available evidence indicates that the medieval urban form of Ellesmere can be classified as a medium sized medieval market town (English Heritage 1992).

Survival. The builders of the motte and bailey castle utilised the natural slope of the hill but the man-made earthworks are substantial and represent deep archaeological deposits. The motte, for example, is 3.5m high and *c* 20.0m in width and the outer bank 1.5m high and 13.0m wide. In the rest of the town the survival of buried archaeological deposits has not been demonstrated but the size of the settlement and its continuous occupation from the medieval period suggest that they would be relatively substantial and at some depth. Medieval deposits will have been damaged by post-medieval activity. Peat is known to underlie the lowest areas of the town (SA 5238) and it is possible that waterlogged remains survive in this area.

The only medieval building still standing in the town is the church (SA 880) but the boundaries of the medieval town including the streets and burgage plots can still be observed and the medieval form is moderately well preserved in the present settlement.

4 Post-medieval archaeological evidence

4.1 Post-medieval remains and buildings

There have been no recorded observations of buried deposits of post-medieval date from Ellesmere. No 16th century buildings are known from the town but there are 23 17th century and eight 18th century listed buildings within the area of the post-medieval town. Very few of these buildings have been studied in detail.

4.2 Post-medieval urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above and of cartographic and documentary sources indicated the existence of 18 urban components. The characteristics of these urban components are summarised below.

Churchyard (SA 5301). The post-medieval churchyard occupies the area directly around St Mary's in the northeast corner of the medieval precinct. The extent of the churchyard has been defined using Wood's map (Wood 1835).

Market place (SA 5243). In the mid-16th century the antiquarian Leland noted that Ellesmere had "no public market at present" (Chandler 1993, 394), and the town seems to have been in an economic decline at this time. The market did resume at some time in the post-medieval period, however, and occupied the small triangular area at the south end of Cross Street. The High Street with Market Street (called Swine Market Street in 1835) were probably extensions of the market area in the post-medieval period or earlier.

Street system (SA 5295). Circumstantial evidence (see section 3.2) suggests that the post-medieval street system as shown on Baugh's map of 1808 was, with some minor changes, developed in the medieval period. Sandy Bank may be a later road as it appears to run through part of the defences of the castle. Wharf Road was constructed, at the end of the 18th century, to join the town to the canal wharf.

Bridging points (SA 5239, SA 5240). The watercourse running south to north through Ellesmere was still partially open in the early 19th century, and Wood's map shows a bridge at Sparbridge (Wood 1835). To the south of the town the stream was culverted by the early 19th century, and a bridge or ford on the High Street was no longer necessary. It is not known at what time during the medieval or post-medieval period this culvert was constructed.

Tenement plots (SA 5245, SA 5246, SA 5247, SA 5248, SA 5250, SA 5288, SA 5290, SA 5292, SA 5293, SA 5299, SA 5300, SA 5302). The medieval tenement plots continued to be occupied throughout the post-medieval period. Due to Ellesmere's economic decline in the early post-medieval period, there does not seem to have been much expansion outside the limits of the medieval town. It is possible that there was some encroachment into the southwest corner of the medieval churchyard (SA 5299) in the post-medieval period, although this may have occurred by the later middle ages. In the area next to the castle (SA 5300) and to the south of the church (SA 5302) some small-scale encroachment had occurred by the 17th century.

Canal wharf (SA 5303). The Ellesmere canal was intended to "greatly promote and facilitate the intercourse of trade and commerce" and was strongly promoted by the inhabitants of Ellesmere (Hadfield 1950). The canal was originally intended to link the Severn at Shrewsbury with the River Mersey and River Dee, but eventually ran from near Nantwich to Llanymynech. Work started in 1795 and the canal was linked with the Chester Canal in 1805 (Hadfield 1950). The area to the west of the canal was occupied by a gasworks and iron foundry in the 19th century, but its original purpose is not clear. The eastern wharf at Ellesmere still survives.

4.3 Post-medieval urban form

Definition and classification. The post-medieval urban form (SA 5305) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. The available evidence indicates that the post-medieval urban form of Ellesmere can be classified as a medium post-medieval market town (English Heritage 1992).

Survival. The lack of fieldwork has meant that the survival of buried archaeological deposits dating to the post-medieval period has not been demonstrated in Ellesmere. The large number of standing buildings dating to the 17th and 18th centuries suggest that substantial areas of the deposits associated with them may have survived, however. The town's decline from the mid-19th century and the consequent reduction in development in this period may have protected earlier deposits but these often lie close to the present ground surface and are easily damaged. Peat is known to underlie the lowest areas of the town (SA 5238) and it is possible that waterlogged remains of post-medieval date survive in this area.

The components of the urban form comprising churchyard, tenement plots, market, street system and canal wharf can be readily identified. The survival of all these components in the present town is good.

5 Post-1800 archaeological evidence

The remit of the present study has not allowed for a detailed survey and assessment of the archaeological evidence relating to Ellesmere in the period from 1800. Further work is required before such an assessment can be carried out. Major archaeological remains have been identified, however, including the railway station and goods yard (SA 5232), cattle market (SA 5234), and industrial sites such as the 19th century gasworks and iron foundry (SA 5230, SA 5229). There are sixty eight listed buildings dated to the 19th century.

6 Specialist assessments

6.1 Assessment of artefactual evidence J D Hurst

Little artefactual evidence is available for Ellesmere. The earliest artefacts are Roman coins (SA 879, SA 5223). Later artefacts comprise a range of finds from a possible pilgrim hoard (SA 880) found *in situ* in the tower of St Mary's Church.

6.2 Assessment of environmental evidence E A Pearson

No environmental archaeological remains have been recovered from Ellesmere to date, although deep peat deposits were observed during the construction of the Town Hall in the early 19th century.

6.3 Assessment of documentary sources P A Stamper

The records of the Bridgewater estates, deposited in the Shropshire Record Office by Lord

Brownlow, make Ellesmere one of the best documented towns in Shropshire from the 16th century onwards. There are also quite respectable numbers of medieval records relating to the town, notably those of the various courts which exercised a jurisdiction over it. Their origins and purviews are explored briefly in the introduction to the SRO catalogue of the Bridgewater collection. The town has been little studied by modern historians, and would appear to offer great potential to the researcher. Principal groups of primary sources are listed in section 9.

The main secondary sources consulted during the assessment include Eyton (1860), Boyd (1899) and Hopkins (1957-60). Secondary sources identified but not consulted during this assessment include Peake (nd) and Hopkins (1958).

6.4 Assessment of buildings R Morriss

Ellesmere is a mainly brick-faced town of early 19th century appearance. Most of the houses are quite humble usually of two storeys and occasionally with a lower third storey. Full height third storeys are very much the exception to the rule, and there are only a handful of houses that could claim to be of high status.

Behind many of the early 19th century brick fronts are 17th century timber-frames. Some framing is still exposed, particularly on Talbot Street. Talbot Street and Church Street, into which it continues, has most of the town's timber-framed buildings, suggesting that it was a well-developed street in the early 17th century. The quality of the surviving timber-framed buildings in the town varies, for example the White Hart in Birch Road (SA 12444) has some pretensions to grandeur with its diamond pattern struts and jettied facade but stands close to quite humble rows of one and two storey cottages of similar date. Most of the timber-framed buildings, however, are of relatively humble status.

Most of the timber-framed buildings are sited close to the centre, on the High Street and the adjacent parts of St John's Hill, Birch Road and Market Street, or along the Talbot Street/Church Street route. There is something of an architectural gap between the 17th and late 18th centuries. In the late 18th century, and more particularly the early 19th century, the town seems to have been comprehensively remodelled, possibly as a result of the building of the Ellesmere Canal system. This resulted in many new brick houses being built, although still of relatively humble status, with other buildings being retained and re-fronted.

Three quite large late 18th century houses seem to have been the work of a single developer, as they are virtually identical. These are 15 and 25 Church Street (SA 12450, SA 12452) and The Mount (SA 12465), off the churchyard (incorporating part of an older structure). Other new buildings or facades seem to have been the work of a number of different developers and architects. These houses suggest a degree of gentrification of the area close to the church at this time. The style of buildings indicates a 'provincial' architecture, with overhanging wooden eaves cornices and windows almost flush with the face of the brickwork long after such things had ceased to be fashionable.

The lack of surviving pre-18th century buildings in areas such as Trimpley Street, the east side of Willow Street and Cross Street may reflect the lack of prosperity in the 16th and 17th centuries although it may suggest that these areas were not part of the medieval and early post-medieval town.

Survey and analysis. There appears to have been little survey and no analysis of the town's architecture to date.

Assessment of the listing. The list was drawn up in 1982 and for the most part is comprehensive and competent. There are a few quibbles with dates, particularly for the mid and late Georgian buildings. For example the three late Georgian buildings of similar design mentioned above are almost certainly by the same hand but one has a rain-water

head of 1793 or 1795 to date it; another is dated 'circa 1800', and the third is 'early C19'. A couple of buildings are misleadingly described. For example, 12-14 Church Street (SA 16691) is described as early 19th century with one of its wings incorporating earlier timber-framing. In fact, the brickwork simply faces a virtually intact timber-framed structure.

Three late Georgian artisan terraces deserve to be considered for inclusion in the list, Charlotte Row off Talbot Street, a terrace on the north side of Market Street, and one on the west side of St John's Street.

7 Archaeological research framework

7.1 Model of urban development

A model of the medieval and post-medieval town of Ellesmere has been produced which is predictive and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. This model has both chronological and spatial (landuse) dimensions (see sections 2 to 5) and is based on an analysis of documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources. The model is derived from the current academic understanding of urban development in Britain, and forms one element of a developing regional research framework. The model is provisional and will be subject to confirmation or revision in the future as new information becomes available, or new studies lead to changing understandings of towns in the region.

7.2 Chronological framework

The available documentary evidence indicates that urban occupation commenced in the 13th century but possibly developed from the nucleus of a pre-Conquest medieval rural settlement and church. It is possible that this early settlement was situated on the hill now occupied by the Norman church and castle. The town of Ellesmere has been continuously occupied until the present but documentary and standing building evidence suggests that there was a period of economic decline from the late medieval to the late 18th century when the canal wharf was constructed. The broad outlines of this chronological framework are provisional and require testing through further documentary study and archaeological investigation. In particular the chronology of the expansion of the town in the medieval period is not understood and while cartographic evidence may suggest a model for growth this cannot be confirmed or dated without archaeological investigation.

7.3 Urban landuse

The medieval and post-medieval components identified here (sections 3.2 and 4.2) have been mapped and constitute a model of urban landuse for each period. These landuse models are partial and provisional and capable of testing through archaeological investigation.

None of the medieval and post-medieval urban components of Ellesmere have been archaeologically investigated and there is potential for recovering evidence relating to the nature and extent of occupation in the various parts of the town. Of particular interest would be a greater understanding of the expansion and possible contraction of the occupied area caused by the towns fluctuating economic fortunes and the location of industries, both documented and undocumented. Further archaeological and documentary work would be very informative.

7.4 Potential for survival of buried remains

The earthworks of the castle comprise deposits up to 3.5m deep and may overly earlier ground surfaces, including possibly the remains of the pre-conquest settlement. No archaeological information is available on the depth of archaeological deposits in the rest

of Ellesmere, but the continuous occupation of the centre of the town from at least the 13th century means that stratified deposits are likely to exist. The potential of these deposits is very great. Datable artefactual and environmental assemblages from stratified deposits would not only provide information on town life but, by providing evidence of trade and industry, would improve understanding of Ellesmere's changing significance within the region. Of particular importance is the low-lying area north of the High Street where waterlogged deposits may have survived.

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. The extent of 18th and 19th century cellarage was mapped, together with the extent of 20th century development (new buildings and major landscaping work). This showed that there was moderate observable cellarage along the main streets and moderate modern redevelopment within the historic core. It is likely that evidence for more extensive cellarage has been obscured by modern refurbishment of frontages and pavements.

7.5 Potential for artefactual studies J D Hurst

No archaeological excavation has been undertaken in Ellesmere, and so the extent of surviving artefactual evidence in buried deposits cannot yet be assessed in any detail. There is evidence, however, that waterlogging occurs in the lower part of the town, and so artefactual evidence in this area may be exceptionally well preserved. It is also possible that contexts that have not been sampled to date (ie the castle ditches) could contain significant artefact assemblages as they may include waterlogged finds. Similar conditions may also apply in the case of fishponds (SA 5236).

Ellesmere is important for artefactual studies as the area of the town has been continuously occupied from at least the late 11th century, and possibly earlier. This coupled with the probable presence of waterlogged deposits in parts of the town means that artefactual survival may be exceptional.

Period discussion. So few artefacts have so far been discovered in Ellesmere that any assessment of the range of periods represented and their significance cannot be undertaken. Ceramic evidence is poor as the only pottery from the town was discovered in the early 1900s (SA 880).

7.6 Potential for environmental remains E A Pearson

No biological remains have been recovered from the town, and therefore the potential for the recovery of environmental remains and for research is largely unknown. The soils are well-drained and would not usually be expected to provide good conditions for the preservation of organic material by waterlogging. However, peat layers have been observed in low-lying deposits beneath the town, and some organic remains may survive in ditches associated with castle and town defences, and in areas near the watercourse and the Mere. This material may provide information relating to the surrounding environment (in some circumstances) and to dumped occupational rubbish, particularly where tenement plots are close to the watercourse or Mere. The soils are acid and would not be expected to provide good conditions for the preservation of faunal remains such as animal bone and molluscs.

Environmental remains providing information on the occupation of the town may be recovered from the tenement plots, and if buried soils are sealed beneath the earthworks of the castle, it may be possible to investigate the previous use of the land (for example, whether the land was under cultivation or pasture) using soil micromorphology and pollen analysis. In some cases there may be little other archaeological evidence for the use of the land.

As no environmental remains have been recovered in Ellesmere, any environmental material would be of interest. This could provide information on the past environment,

diet, living conditions and agricultural or industrial economy. Future excavation should include a policy of sampling and wet-sieving deposits in order to recover plant, insect, molluscs and small animal remains in conjunction with hand-collection of larger items. Where appropriate, specialist sampling for soil and pollen analysis may be required.

7.7 Potential for the study of standing buildings R Morriss

Ellesmere has a sufficiently large stock of historic buildings to warrant a more in-depth architectural survey or at least an enhanced list. In particular a study of the architectural effects of the regeneration of the town after the arrival of the canal at the end of the 18th century would be very important.

7.8 Summary of research potential

The historic core of Ellesmere contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. It is probable that extensive waterlogged deposits occur, which are rare in the region. The post-medieval historic buildings constitute a complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have high potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are very extensive and have been little studied in recent years; consequently the potential for further study is high.

8 Management framework

8.1 Urban archaeological area

The mapped extent of the medieval and post-medieval urban forms defined above indicated the extent of the urban area (Ellesmere Urban Archaeological Area). The significance of the urban archaeological area is assessed above.

8.2 Existing protection measures

The archaeological urban area of Ellesmere has been defined above. The different parts of the urban area are afforded different measures of protection through legislation and the planning process. Directly relevant measures are outlined below.

Scheduled ancient monument. There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in Ellesmere, the castle (Shropshire no 163). It is possible that following the current Monument Protection programme English Heritage may modify the scheduled area or add other monuments in Ellesmere to the schedule.

Listed buildings. There are a total of 95 buildings listed as of historical or architectural importance within the urban area. Although unlisted, some other buildings are of considerable historic importance. The management of all historic buildings requires special care and attention, while the management of Listed Buildings is especially important. Listed Buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and unauthorised alteration is a serious offence. This protection is also likely to preserve archaeological remains under and around such buildings and it is important that archaeological and historic building matters are considered together.

In North Shropshire District, specialist advice on the management of historic buildings is provided by the District Council with support from the County Council. Some grant aid is available for the repair of historic buildings and information and advice is available from the District Council Conservation Officer.

Conservation area A Conservation Area has been defined which almost entirely encompasses the archaeological area (North Shropshire Local Plan: deposit draft (1993).

8.3 Management approach

The archaeological urban area of Ellesmere contains earthworks and buried remains relating to medieval and post-medieval occupation, associated with contemporary buildings. The buried remains may vary in complexity and depth, and will contain significant archaeological information. It is desirable that any proposed development within the urban area that has a potential impact on earthworks or buried remains should be assessed by the appropriate archaeological body.

The course of action recommended will depend upon the nature of the development and current planning legislation and frameworks. The archaeological response will be based on both the archaeological information summarised in this document and any subsequent archaeological information recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

9 Principal groups of documentary sources compiled by P Stamper

(SRO: Shropshire Record Office)

SRO 212, 261 and SRO 479	Manor of Ellesmere town. Court rolls and books survive in large numbers from 1375 until the mid-19th century
SRO 212	Manor of Ellesmere. Court books, bailiffs' accounts and rentals survive in large numbers from 1545 to the mid-19th century
SRO 479, 611	Court rolls, court books and other records of the manor of St John of Jerusalem, from 1349 until the later 18th century
SRO 212	Extensive records of Ellesmere hundred, 1344-1577
SRO 611	Papers of the town court from 1694
SRO 212	The Bridgewater Collection. A good modern catalogue to this collection is available. The collection is mainly the rewards of the administration of the estates of the earls of Bridgewater in Ellesmere and Whitchurch. As well as the court and other records noted separately there are large numbers of deeds and leases relating to property in Wem
SRO 212	Surveys: 1561, 1602, and 1637
SRO	Parish records, including registers 1654-92 and from 1706, and churchwardens' accounts from 1685 onwards.
SRO 212	Map of 1650; Map of c 1765
SRO 3372	Tithe map and apportionment

Clwyd Record Office (Hawarden)

DD/BK	About 500 deeds and other items
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11 Mapping

The illustrations for this report comprise CAD plots of the urban components for each period and a location plot of archaeological remains combined with OS digital map data (1995) at 1:5000. These plots are current at the date of the completion of this report (March 1995). After this date new information will be held by the Shropshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

- * Historic buildings (listed and other recorded buildings) and urban area
- * Archaeological remains and urban area
- * Medieval urban form and components
- * Post-medieval urban form and components
- * Urban area and scheduled ancient monuments