

***A Watching Brief at
5 College Hill,
Shrewsbury, 2011***

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Archaeology Service



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**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
5 COLLEGE HILL, SHREWSBURY, 2011**

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A report for
Moss Co, Architects

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SUMMARY

In June and July 2011 groundworks were carried out for an extension to 5 College Hill, Shrewsbury. The study area lay within the historic core of the medieval town in an area known to have been occupied since the Saxon period. The site lies close to the Saxon and medieval collegiate church of Old St Chad's and may have formed part of the precinct of the Saxon minster church. It was thus considered possible that archaeological remains, including human remains, might be encountered during the groundworks for the development. A watching brief on the development was carried out by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the course of the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 College Hill is a street within the medieval core of the town of Shrewsbury, Shropshire (Figure 1). In June 2011 work began on the construction of a summer room and balcony to the rear of 5 College Hill.

1.2 The area around College Hill is known to have been occupied since Saxon times. 5 College Hill lies at the east end of the College Hill south tenement block (Historic Environment Record no. [HER] 62600) immediately to the rear of a late 18th century, Grade II Listed town house (Listed Building No. 653-1/15/217; HER 10200). The site lies close to that of the Saxon and medieval Old St Chad's church and adjacent to the medieval College of St Chad, and it has been suggested that College Hill may represent a planned ecclesiastical development within the Middle Saxon collegiate church precinct (Baker 2010, p94).

1.3 The construction of the new summer room followed the demolition of an existing kitchen extension and conservatory at the rear of the premises. The new development involved the excavation of the area of the extension by 350mm with a toe along the west and south sides of 450mm, and the excavation of a rainwater drain and soakaway pit.

1.4 Due to its location within the core of the historic Middle Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval town, it was considered that there was a possibility that archaeological remains might be encountered during the groundworks for the development.

1.5 Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it was considered necessary that the groundworks associated with the development be accompanied by the implementation of a programme of archaeological work. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by Moss Co., Architects, on behalf of their client, to undertake the programme of archaeological work in accordance with a scheme of investigation approved by the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

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.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The historic core of the medieval town of Shrewsbury lies within a loop of the River Severn, with its “neck” to the northeast. The loop contains a low hill, with two summits occupying the northern and southern sides of the loop. The hill is comprised of sands and clay/silts of glacial deposition overlying bedrock of Keele beds sandstone. College Hill is a street in the centre of the historic core of the town on the southern of the two hills.

The study area falls within the area covered by the Shrewsbury Urban Archaeological Database and Assessment (Baker, 2010), the most recent comprehensive archaeological study of the medieval town. College Hill lies within the Assessment’s Deposit Zone XIX “The southern plateau”, which is characterized by land sloping down from Old St Chad’s to new St Chad’s churches. In 1854 observations in the area of new St Chad’s churchyard, which before 1793 comprised gardens and back-plots, noted dark soil of between 1.2m and 1.5m thickness overlying the natural sand and gravel. In 1995 a watching brief to the rear of 13 College Hill recorded a depth of 1.6m of garden soils. (Baker, 2010, p51)

The area around College Hill is known to have been occupied since Saxon times. 5 College Hill lies at the east end of the street, close to the Saxon and medieval church of Old St Chad, and adjacent to the medieval College of St Chad. There is some evidence that one of the canon’s houses, part of the endowment of the Tailors’ and Skinners’ chantry, stood on College Hill (13 College Hill, Historic Environment Record no. [HER] 62606, Tailors Hall). This, the topography of the street, and the lay-out of its properties have led to the suggestion that College Hill was a planned, ecclesiastical development within the Middle Saxon collegiate church precinct for the 16 canon’s houses occupied by burgesses mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 (Baker 2010, p94-5).

5 College Hill lies at the east end of the College Hill south tenement block (HER 62600) immediately to the rear of a late 18th century, Grade II Listed town house (Listed Building No. 653-1/15/217; HER 10200). It has been suggested that some of the c. 1800 brick buildings on the south side of College Hill may encapsulate the remains of earlier timber-framed buildings.

2.2 There has been no previous archaeological work on the development site itself, although a sandstone-lined well over 15m deep, believed at the time to be associated with the medieval college of St Chads, was uncovered in the garden of this property in 1910 (HER 01517). There have been a few more recent interventions in the surrounding area, notably on the Talbot Chambers site in 1985-6 (Baker, 1989) and The Music Hall/Vaughan’s Mansion site (Matthews, 2006, and Hannaford, 2010) on the north side of College Hill. Human remains were reported in 1997 to have been encountered in an excavation some time previously (HER 60337) at the rear of the Music Hall. At the west end of the street a sandstone wall parallel with the street frontage was seen in a service trench in front of no.13 College Hill 0.3m below the ground surface (HER 60331) in a watching brief in 1995 (Hannaford, 1995).

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 The initial ground reduction took place in May 2011 and involved the removal of the existing reinforced concrete floor for the previous kitchen extension (see Figure 2). The reduction of the development area to its finished level and the excavation of the foundation trenches and soakaway pit were carried out at the end of June / beginning of July 2011. The trenches were dug by machine to a width of 0.6m and a depth 0.8m under archaeological supervision.

3.2 The natural subsoil was seen to consist of gravel in a light brown sand matrix (Figure 3a; 18) and was seen at a depth of 0.8m below the ground surface of the lawn at the south edge of the development area in the base of the foundation trench on this side. Above the natural was a deposit of dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (16) with some gravel; a similar deposit (Figure 3b; 12) was seen in a small area on the western side of the site. In the southern foundation trench, the natural gravel was cut by a pit (Figure 3a; 15) whose dark grey loam fill (14) contained fragments of ceramic, welsh slate, and Harnage stone roof tile, and clearly represented a rubbish pit relating to re-roofing of (probably) no. 5 College Hill, probably in the 19th century. In the southwest corner of the site the natural gravel (12 & 16) had been cut away and replaced with a deposit of dark reddish brown sandy silty loam (13). This in turn was cut in the west foundation trench by a pit (Figure 3b; 9), probably a rubbish pit, filled with loam and sand deposits (6-8) containing fragments of post-medieval ceramic tile and sandstone. In the northeast corner of the area, the natural gravel (12) lay beneath a deposit of greyish brown silt loam and gravel (11) and a dark grey brown sandy silty loam and gravel (10), both of which appeared to dip down to the north or northwest (probably following the original natural slope of the hillside). The eastern half of the study area had been heavily disturbed by a number of late 19th- and 20th-century foundation walls, floor, drains, and service trenches for the previous kitchen extension.

3.3 A soakaway pit was excavated in the garden some 12m to the south of the house. The pit was excavated under archaeological supervision to a depth of 0.8m to the top of the natural gravel subsoil (18). The natural gravel lay below a deposit of dark grey loam (17) 0.5m deep, containing fragments of buff Grinshill and red sandstone, cobbles, and mortar, and this in turn lay beneath the garden topsoil and turf (5) of 0.3m depth (Photo 3).

3.4 No other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.

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ABBREVIATIONS

HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
OS	Ordnance Survey
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society

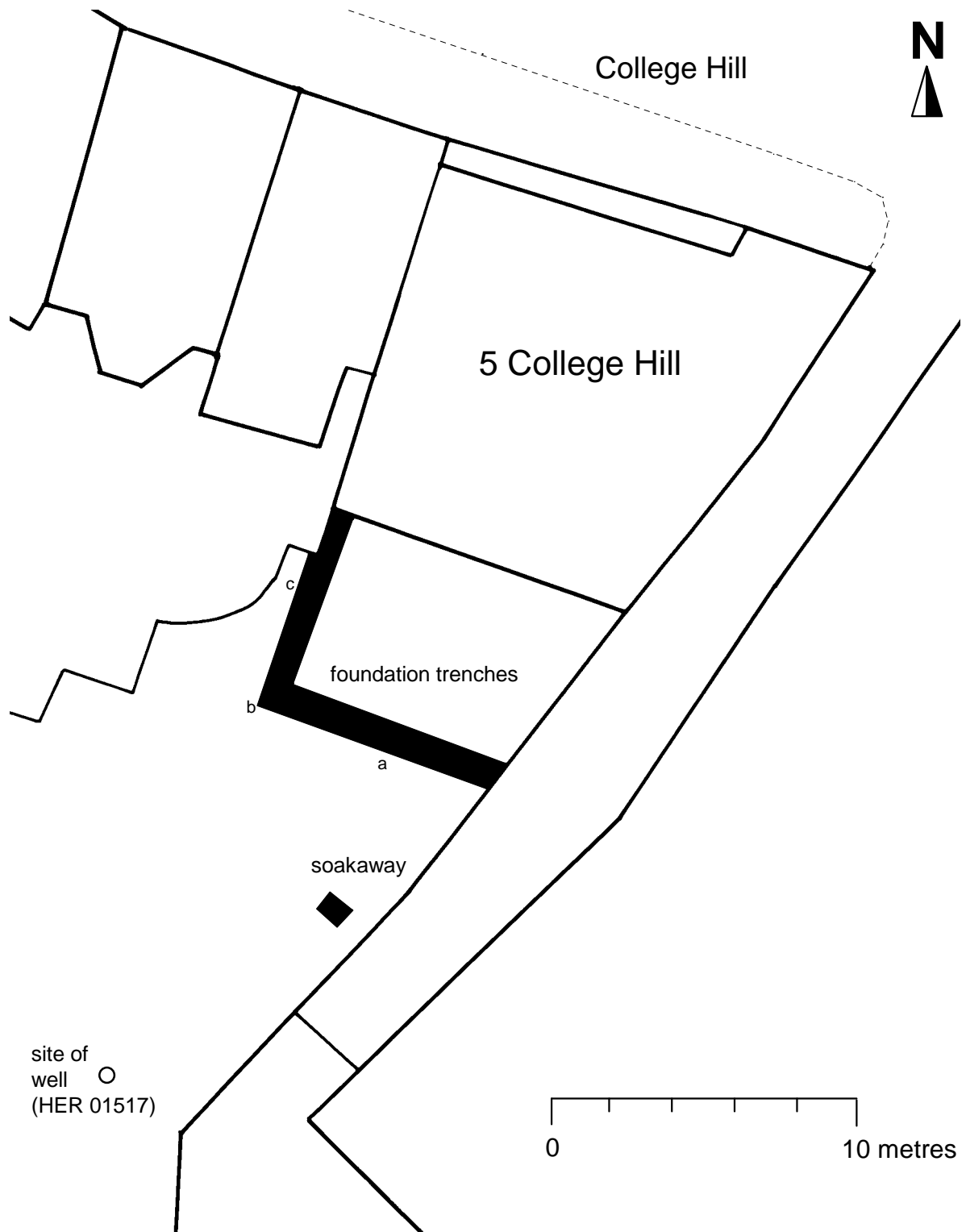


5 College Hill, Shrewsbury 2011
 Figure 1: Location of the study area



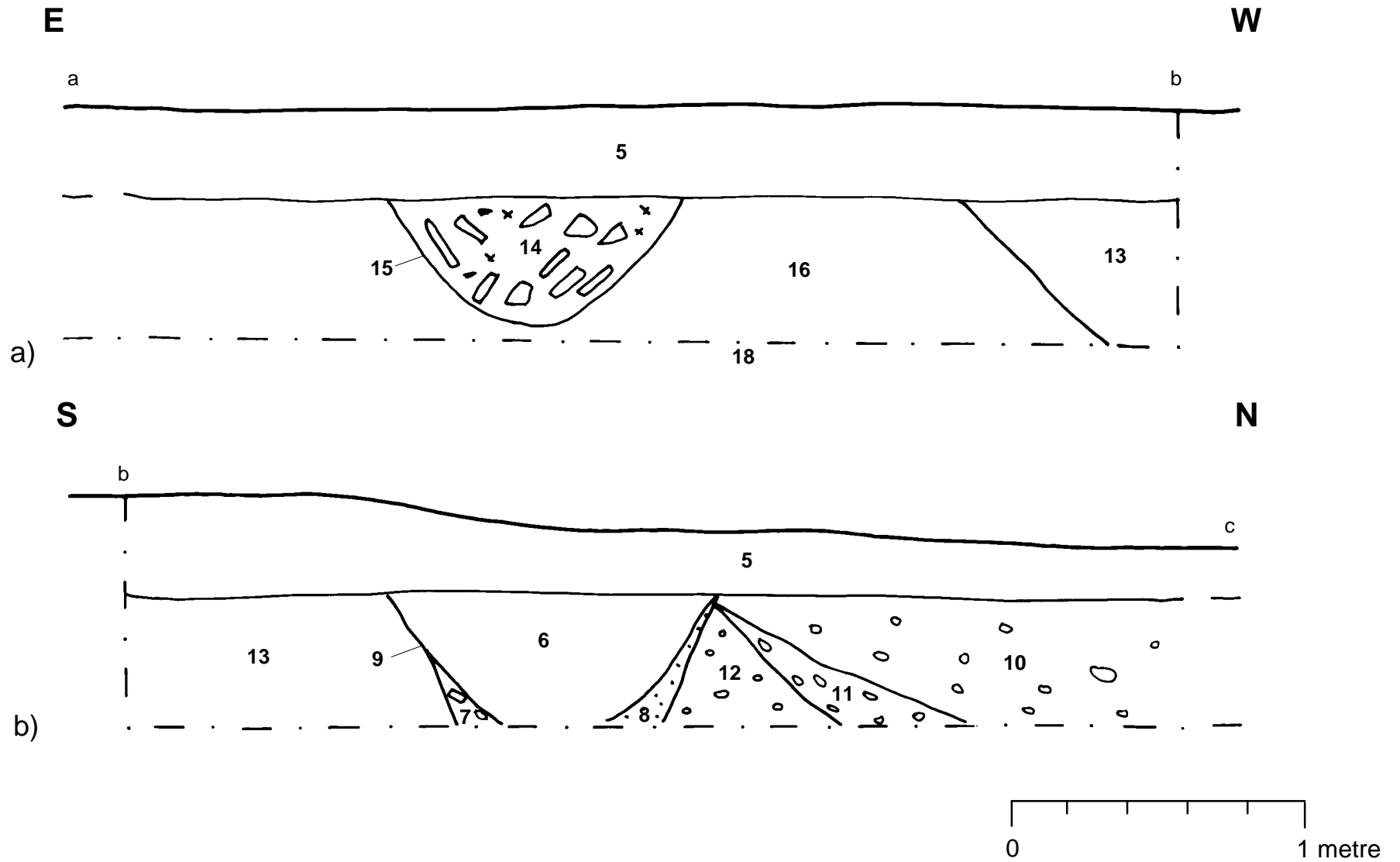
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5 COLLEGE HILL, SHREWSBURY 2011

Figure 2: The study area and sections a-b and b-c (Figure 3); 1:200 scale



5 COLLEGE HILL, SHREWSBURY 2011

Figure 3: Foundation trenches, a) north-facing section & b) east-facing section; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The study area, looking southwest



Photo 2: The study area, looking south



Photo 3: The soakaway, looking north