

*An Archaeological Evaluation at
St James Works, Bridgnorth,
Shropshire, 2011*

by
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**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT
ST JAMES WORKS, BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE, 2011**

by

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A Report for

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SUMMARY

There is currently a proposal to redevelop the former St James Works, Stourbridge Road, Bridgnorth for housing. The St James Works occupies part of the site of the medieval lepers' hospital of St James, and it was considered that archaeological remains relating to the medieval hospital might survive within the site. Because of its potential historical and archaeological significance, an archaeological evaluation of the site was required prior to the planning application being determined. The Archaeology Service carried out this evaluation in November 2011. Trial excavations on the site revealed buried soils containing a small quantity of medieval pottery of 13th – 14th century date. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered. It is recommended that the proposed development be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work in order to record the archaeological deposits that will be disturbed by the development.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bridgnorth is situated in southeast Shropshire, about 28.5km southeast of Shrewsbury. The town is at a bridging point of the River Severn; the High Town on the west bank stands on a sandstone promontory overlooking the river and the Low Town on the east bank.

1.2 There is a proposal to redevelop for housing a former industrial site at St James Works, Stourbridge Road, Bridgnorth (NGR SO 7224 9256). The proposed development site (the study area) lies on the edge of the historic medieval and post-medieval core of the town of Bridgnorth. The proposed development site currently comprises a former farmstead dating from the late 18th century, with surviving buildings including a Grade II Listed sandstone barn (No. 254557, HER 11693), cart and livestock sheds, and a poultery. The site was used in WWII as a munitions factory and more recently as a precision engineering works.

1.3 The development site was occupied in the medieval period by the documented site of the medieval lepers' hospital of St James (Shropshire Council Historic Environment Record [HER] no. 00390). Fragments of the probable medieval hospital chapel are incorporated into a house which lies a little to the southwest of the study area. The main hospital buildings are thought to lie to the north of the chapel, and therefore evidence of these and other associated features – including a burial ground - may lie within the proposed development site. The study area lies within the area covered the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey's assessment of Bridgnorth (Buteux, 1996).

1.4 It is considered that archaeological remains relating to the medieval hospital might survive within the proposed development site, and that there is a possibility that archaeological remains might be encountered during the groundworks for the proposed development. Any such below ground archaeological remains would be affected adversely by the proposed development.

1.5 Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it has been considered necessary that a programme of archaeological work be carried out prior to the determination of the planning application. This archaeological work is to comprise a field evaluation of the eastern part of the development area (Phase 1).

1.6 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, has been commissioned by DKM Homes Ltd. to carry out this programme of archaeological work to a scheme of investigation agreed by Shropshire Council's Historic Environment Team.

2 AIMS

2.1 The aim of this archaeological evaluation is to provide information that will enable an informed and reasonable decision to be taken regarding the archaeological provision for the eastern part of the proposed development at St James Works, Bridgnorth. The results of the Phase 1 evaluation will also be used to inform the archaeological provision for the remaining part of the proposed development (Phase 2).

2.2 The objectives of this evaluation are:

- a) To locate any known archaeological features and deposits within the Phase 1 study area.
- b) To assess the likely survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures.
- c) To identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary.

2.3 The methodology for this assessment is based on requirements set out in a specification prepared by the Archaeology Service and agreed by the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

3 THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric activity and early medieval settlement

No evidence of human occupation of the prehistoric, Roman or early Saxon periods has been recorded within the study area or its immediate vicinity. However, there is a ford across the Severn at Quatford which may have been in use since prehistoric times. A Danish army over-wintered in the area around *Brycge* or *Cwatbryge* in 895-6AD, and in 912 Aethelflaeda of the Mercians established a burgh at *Bricge*. There has been a bridge (*_antbricg*) across the River Severn near Bridgnorth possibly since 910, when another Danish army crossed the Severn here. The location of *Brycge*, *Bricge*, or *Cwatbryge* has been disputed, with some authorities favouring modern Bridgnorth, others Quatford; the latest research suggests that the early bridge (possibly HER 00406) and Saxon burgh were located at Quatford (Horowitz, 2010).

3.2 The medieval town

Bridgnorth is not listed as a separate settlement in the Domesday survey of 1086, but formed one of the 18 berewicks of the manor of *Membrefelde* (Morville). Before 1066 the manor was held by Edward the Confessor; in 1086 it was held by Earl Roger of Shrewsbury and the site of Bridgnorth may have formed part of his demesne lands in the manor (Thorn 1986, 4.1.5). Earl Roger's son, Robert de Belleme built a castle at Bridgnorth and moved the collegiate church of St Mary here from the settlement at Quatford. The castle was besieged and captured in 1102 by Henry I and again in 1155 by Henry II. From then on, the castle served as a fortress, gaol, and royal residence until the 17th century. (Buteux, 1996, p2.)

The town at Bridgnorth is thought to have grown up in the outer bailey of the castle. The settlement gradually superseded in importance both Morville and Quatford, no doubt because of its economically and militarily strategic location. The town's status as a borough was confirmed in 1157 by a charter of Henry II, which also granted a weekly market and an annual fair on St Mary Magdalene's day. Further fairs were allowed in 1226 and 1359 (Buteux, 1996, p2). The town rapidly outgrew its original boundaries, extending beyond the limits of the castle outer bailey, and between 1216 and 1223 new defences of turf and timber were built, with an external ditch as well on the north and northwest sides of the town. These turf and timber defences were later replaced in stone, probably in the 1260s. (Phillpotts, 1995, pp5-6.)

The town expanded further in the later middle ages, with a settlement in Low Town, on the east bank of the river, and some un-planned extra-mural development outside the Whitburn Gate and the North Gate on the north and west sides of the town (Phillpotts, 1995, p6; Buteux, 1996, p2).

A Franciscan friary was founded at Bridgnorth on the west bank of the Severn some time between 1224 and 1244. By the Dissolution the friary had declined and was described as "all...fallyng downe" (Ferris, 1996; Buteux, 1996). The town had two documented medieval hospitals: St John or Holy Trinity (HER 00383) to the north of Mill Street, founded between 1179 and 1195 for the relief of travellers, and St James (HER 00390), off Stourbridge Road.

3.3 The Post-medieval Period

During the Civil War the town and castle were an important royalist stronghold. On 31st March 1646 the town was attacked by parliamentary forces; the royalist forces retreated to

the castle, firing St Leonard's Church and parts of the town; they held out for three months before the castle was taken and slighted.

Despite economic decline in the 16th century, Bridgnorth maintained its manufacturing industries; however, its economy in the 17th and early 18th centuries was heavily dependant on the river trade. In the late 18th/early 19th centuries two new industries, iron founding and carpet manufacturing, were established in Bridgnorth. The latter became the town's most important industry in the 19th century. (Buteux, 1995, p3.)

3.4 St James' Hospital

St James' Hospital (HER 00390) was probably founded in the early 13th century. Although the date of the foundation of the hospital is not known, it is mentioned in a deed considered to be early 13th century in date. The hospital was accorded grants and privileges when Henry III visited the town on 22nd September 1224: the king granted "to the Leprous Brethren of the Hospital of St. James at Bruges, that they may...collect any stumps and dead wood for their fire" (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, p50). There is practically no further record of the history of the hospital in the medieval period until the Valuation of 1535, although a number of the Wardens or heads of the house are known (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, pp51-2). The hospital was still functioning in 1544 at the time of the Dissolution (Buteux, 1996, p8) but in 1557 it was granted by Henry VIII to Sir John Perrott for £184 15s 0d, who in turn granted it to Roger Smyth of Morville. The St James' property passed successively to the Dovey, Kinnersley, Nevitt, Bach, and Stanier families (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, pp56-9).

The hospital is shown on a map of the borough of 1610 as a building with a tower (probably a representation of the hospital's chapel) in a walled enclosure, and a number of adjacent fields belonging to the property. Pee's mid 17th-century map of the town (see Figure 3a) shows three buildings on the hospital site: the hospital chapel or Church of St James, the Priory to its south, and the "Maladerie", presumably the sick-house, to the east of the chapel. Again, all these buildings are shown to lie within a rectangular, walled enclosure.

One of the hospital buildings, the Priory, was destroyed by fire in the 18th century (Mr P Cox, *pers. comm.*), and a new building, Priory House, was erected on the site (HER 17162).

A century later, John Wood's plan of Bridgnorth (Wood, 1835) shows several buildings adjacent to the study area. One of these lies approximately on the site of Priory House, another approximately on the site of the chapel as shown by Pee. A third building is shown on the Stourbridge Road frontage immediately to the east of the study area. This area is still occupied by a red sandstone barn - dated 1777 - (HER 11693). A fourth building is shown lying parallel to the barn, possibly on the site of the "Maladerie" building of Pee's plan, a site now occupied by the south side of the modern engineering works. Wood's plan also shows a road or trackway leading into the hospital grounds from the Stourbridge road across the eastern edge of the study area.

The 1880 OS 1:500 town plan and 1901 OS 25" plan (Figure 3b) show the same layout of buildings as Wood's plan. The building on the site of the present St James' Priory house is shown and annotated "Chapel (Remains of)"; the site of the "Maladrerie" is shown as being about 17m to the north of the remains of the chapel, and the original St. James's

Priory house is shown to the south (OS 1884, LVIII.12.8 & 12.13)

By the 18th century the development site was occupied by a farmstead. Several of the farm buildings survive, including the Grade II Listed sandstone barn (HER 11693), cart and livestock sheds, and a poultigery. The site was used in WWII as a munitions factory and more recently as a precision engineering works, and some of the 20th century buildings have incorporated parts of the earlier sandstone buildings.

3.5 Previous archaeological work

There has been no previous archaeological work on the Phase 1 development site itself. The 18th-century Grade II listed Priory House was demolished c. 1960; the house was recorded prior to its demolition by the Royal Commission (HER 17162). It was also noted that the building to the north, on the site of the hospital chapel, contained medieval masonry (HER 20399). This building was remodelled into a dwelling from its former use as a barn and stables c. 1960, and has been further altered more recently. Burials have also been found in the vicinity of this latter building (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, p59, and Mr P Cox, *pers. comm.*).

In 1997 an archaeological evaluation was carried out on the property immediately to the west of the proposed development area. This evaluation located a cobble yard surface of late medieval or early post-medieval date 1m below the existing ground surface. (Hannaford, 1997).

4 THE FIELD EVALUATION

4.1 Two trenches 5m long by 1.5m wide were excavated using a mechanical mini-digger on the line of the proposed housing in the eastern part of the study area (see Figure 2). The trenches were excavated by machine to the top of significant archaeological deposits, which were then cleaned by hand and recorded.

4.2 Trench A Trench A was located at right angles to the line of Stourbridge Road, 7.5m south of the edge of the road. The natural subsoil consisted of gravel, pebbles and cobbles in a reddish brown sand (Figure 4a, 6) and was seen at the base of the trench at a depth of 1.15m below the ground surface at the southern end of the trench, though it dropped down to the north. The natural subsoil lay beneath a layer of light clean brown silty sand (5) up to 0.25m thick which produced 5 small sherds of medieval pottery of 13th-14th century date. This in turn lay below a deposit of brown sandy loam (4), probably a buried soil, up to 0.4m thick which produced three small sherds of pottery, two of 13th-14th century date and one from an early 17th century mug. This layer was sealed by a deposit of dark greyish brown sandy loam (3), probably a buried topsoil, which contained some 19th and 20th century pottery (not kept). This in turn lay below the sand and rubble hardcore (2) and chippings (1) of the former car park surface.

4.3 Trench B Trench B was located 5.5m to the south of trench A, parallel to the Stourbridge Road. The natural subsoil of gravel, pebbles and cobbles in reddish brown sand (Figure 4b 6) was seen at a depth of between 0.6m below the ground surface at the eastern end of the trench, dropping to 0.54m at the western end, following the natural slope of the ground. The natural subsoil was cut by a slight circular hollow (12) about 0.4m in diameter by 0.15m deep; this feature was filled with clean light brown sandy silt (11). Its purpose was not determined, but it may have been a natural feature within the gravel. It was sealed by a layer of brown sandy silt (10) similar to the lower deposits seen in trench A (4 & 5). It in turn lay beneath a deposit of dark greyish brown sandy loam (9) probably a buried top soil, similar to that (3) seen in trench A. A thin layer of cinders (8) lay on the surface of this buried soil, in turn covered by a very dark grey loam (7) with pebbles and cinders, probably a former yard soil. This lay below the chippings (1) of the former car park surface.

4.4 Other than the buried soil deposits (4 & 5) producing a small quantity of medieval pottery which were seen in trench A, no significant archaeological features or deposits were located or recorded in either of the evaluation trenches.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

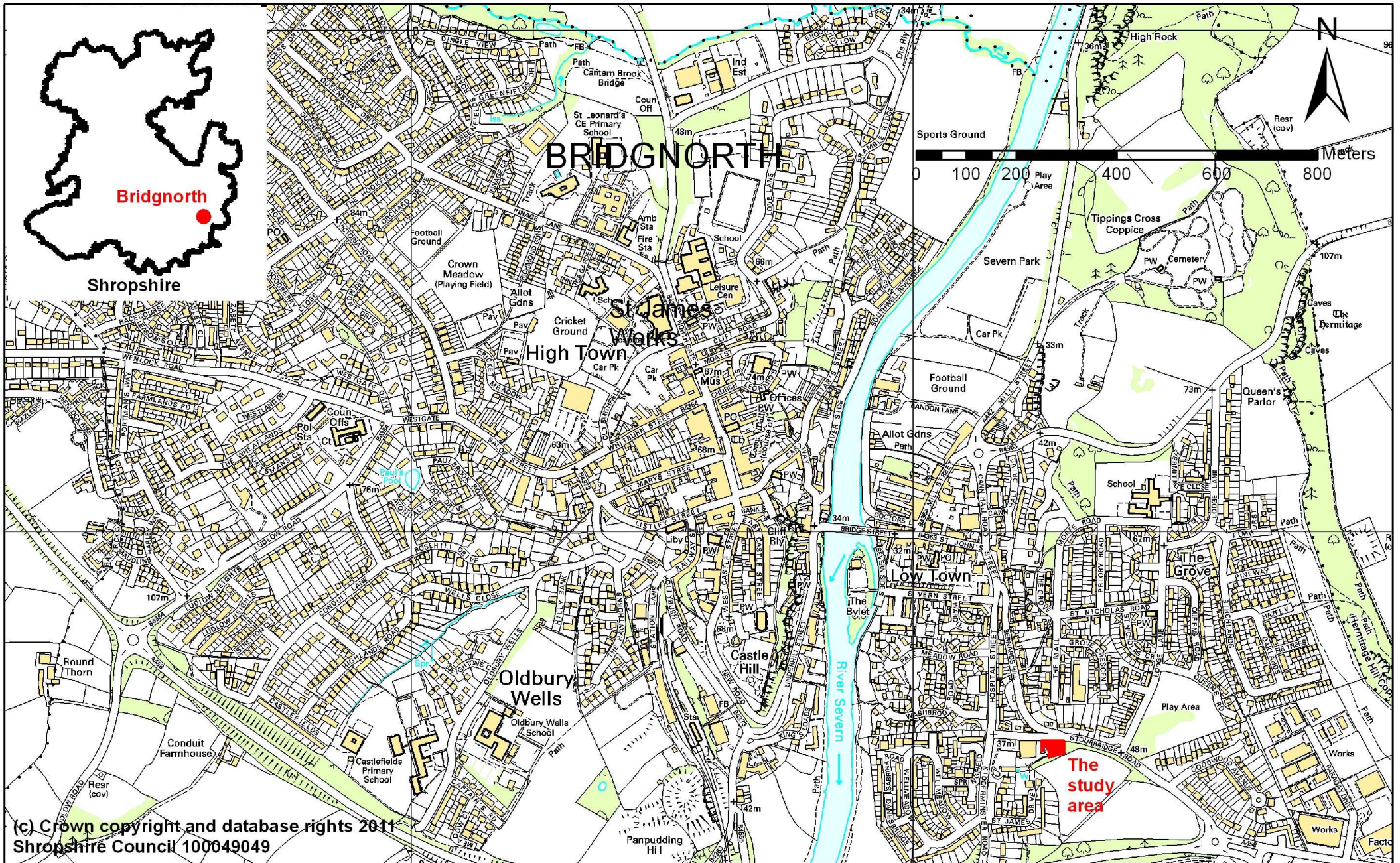
5.1 In the light of this evaluation, it is recommended that a programme of archaeological work should accompany the proposed development at the St James Works. This programme of archaeological work might comprise the archaeological monitoring of destructive groundworks (the excavation of foundation and service trenches) associated with the development. Provision of time and resources should be made for the recording and sampling of any archaeological features revealed during such groundworks. It is considered that this would provide an adequate mitigation strategy for the development.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
HER	County Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
NGR	National Grid Reference
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society



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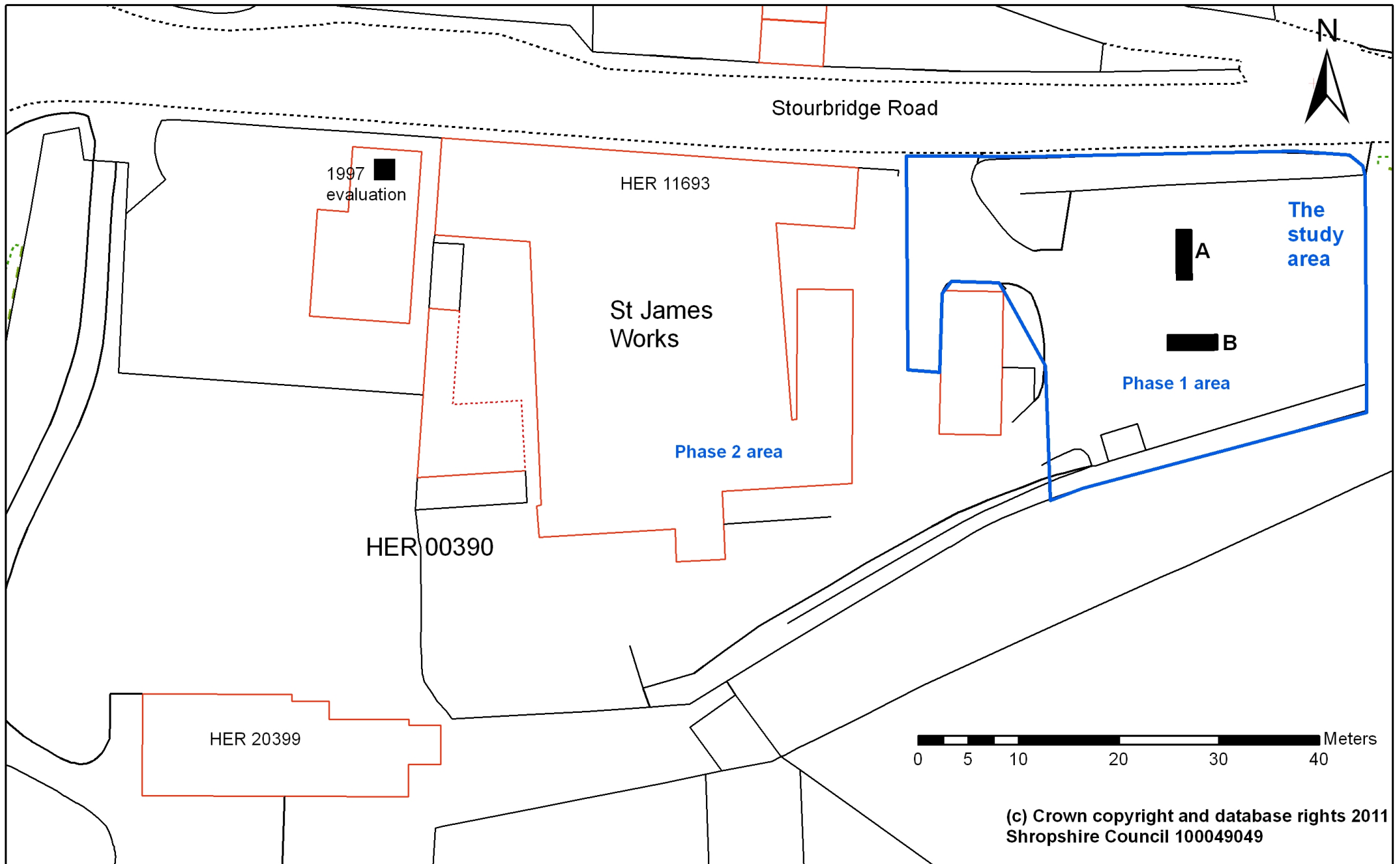
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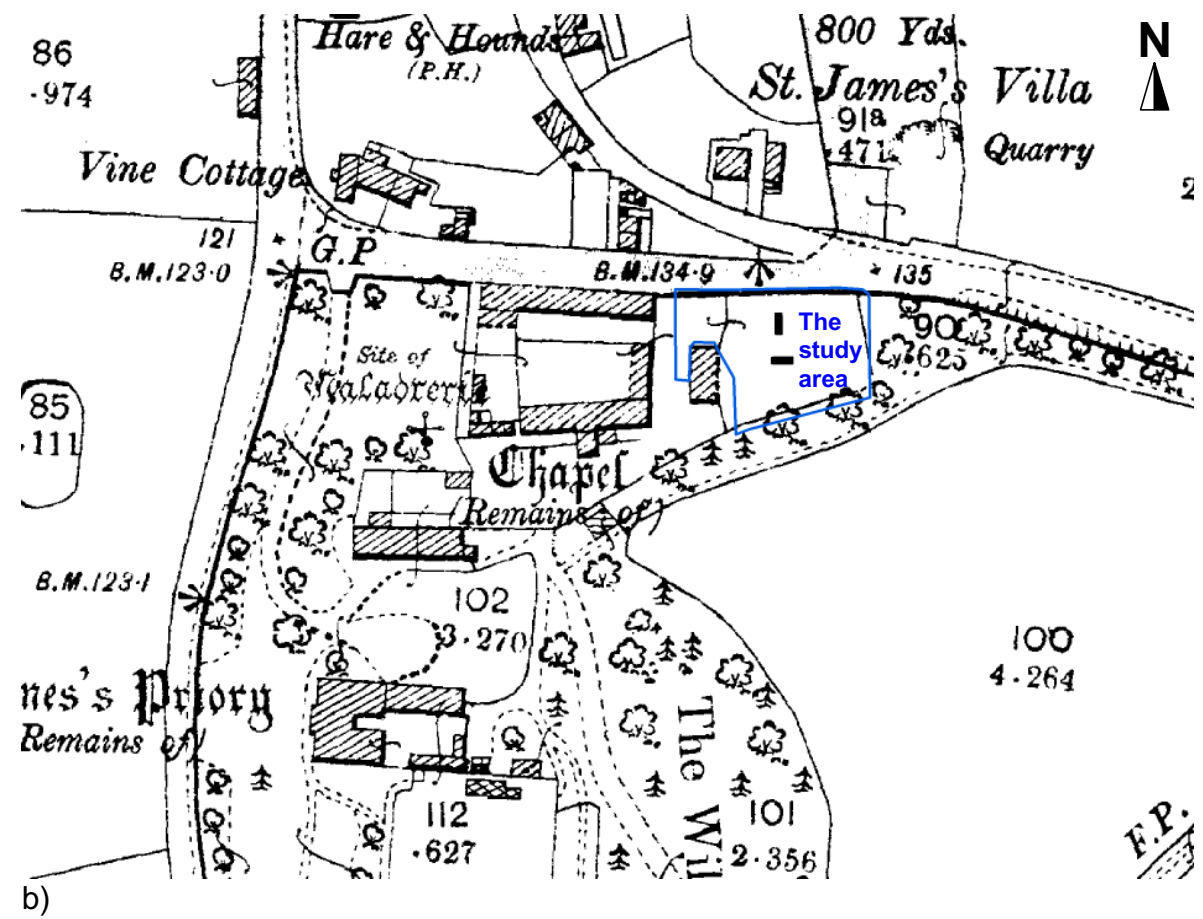
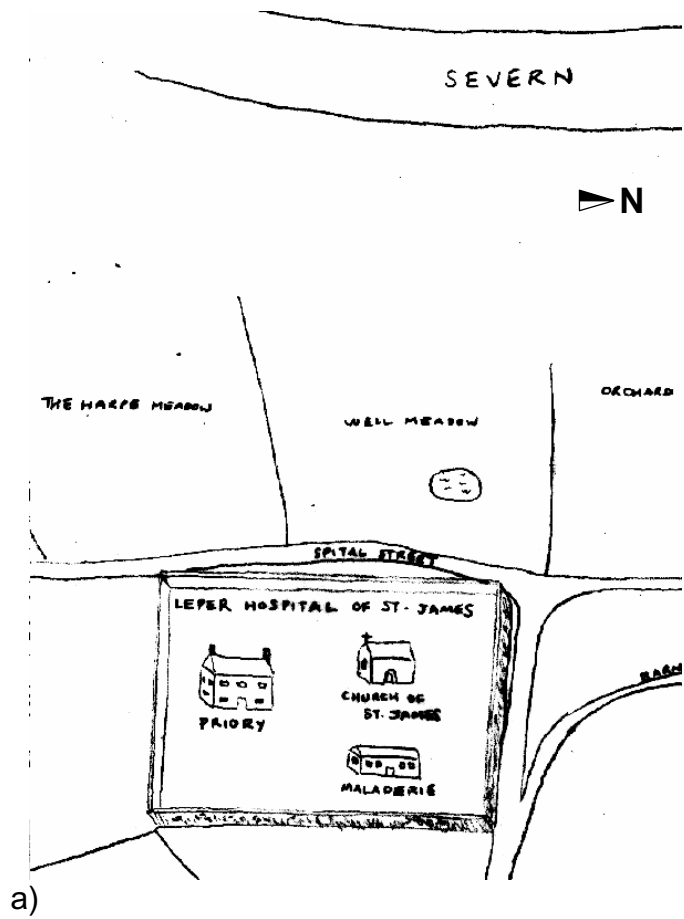
Figure 1: Location of the study area

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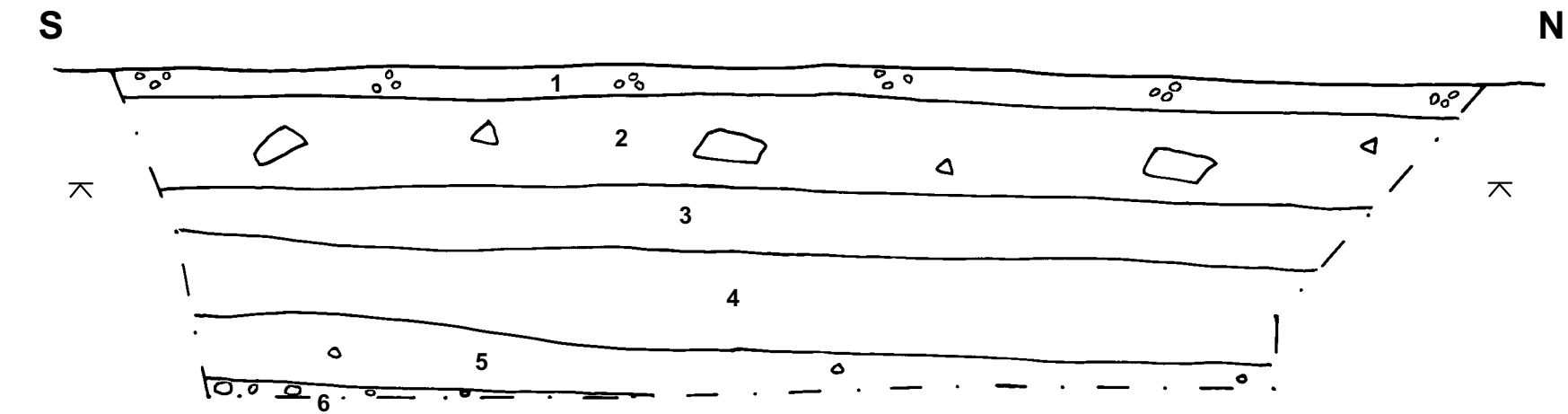
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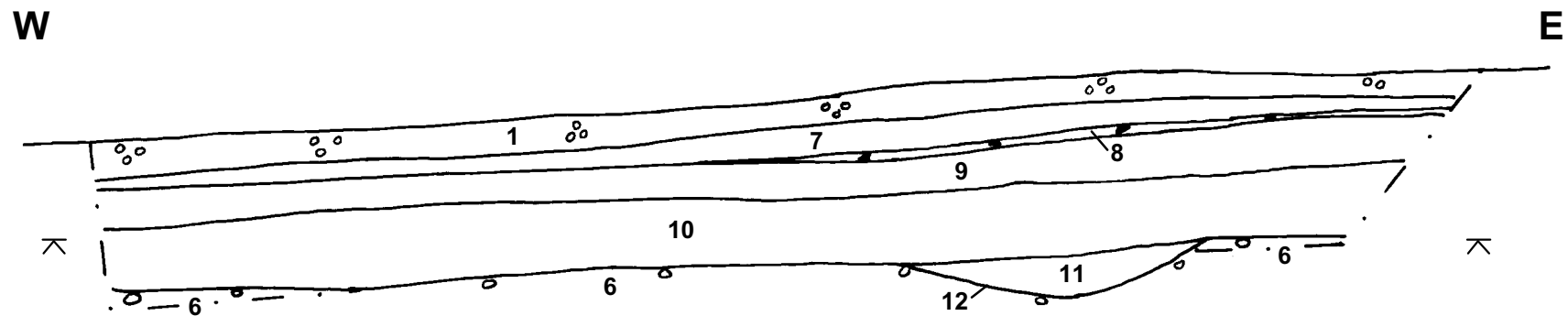


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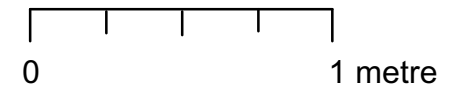
Figure 3: a) A tracing of part of Pee's map of Bridgnorth (mid 17th century); b) Extract from the OS 25" plan Sheet LVIII.12, 2nd Edition, c. 1901, showing the location of the study area; (not to scale)



a)



b)



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Figure 4: a) Trench A, east-facing section; b) trench B, south-facing section; 1:25 scale



Photo 1: The Phase 1 study area, looking southeast



Photo 2: Trench A, looking northwest



Photo 3: Trench B, looking northeast