

***A Watching Brief at  
Woodbury, Barrow Street, Much Wenlock,  
Shropshire, 2012***

by  
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Archaeology Service



**A WATCHING BRIEF AT  
WOODBURY, BARROW STREET,  
MUCH WENLOCK, SHROPSHIRE 2012**

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A Report for

**Mr P Ryan**

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1:20 scale

Photo 1: The study area, looking SW

Photo 2: The deposits in the foundation trenches, looking SE; scale bar 1m

Photo 3: The foundation trenches, looking N

## **SUMMARY**

*In March 2012 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a watching brief at Woodbury, Barrow Street, Much Wenlock, Shropshire. The study area lay within the historic core of the medieval town of Much Wenlock, and it was considered possible that archaeological remains might be encountered during the groundworks for the development. However, no significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** Much Wenlock is a small Shropshire town, situated about 18km southeast of Shrewsbury, on the A458 Shrewsbury to Bridgnorth road. In March 2012, work began at Woodbury, Barrow Street, Much Wenlock (Fig. 1), on groundworks for the conversion and extension of a detached garage to provide a self-contained annexe.

**1.2** The town of Much Wenlock is known to have been occupied since Roman times. A monastery was founded in the town in c. 654AD and was re-founded in 1080 as a Benedictine monastery. In the medieval period the town was a centre for cloth manufacturing. In the post-medieval period, a clay pipe manufacturing industry developed, as did quarrying for limestone on Wenlock Edge just outside the town. The development site at 5 High Street lay in the middle of the historic town centre.

**1.3** The development site lay within the footprint of the Saxon town (Shropshire Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 05028), the Saxon abbey and minster precinct (HER No. 05001) and the medieval town (HER No. 05029). It also lay within a tenement block of medieval and post-medieval date (HER No. 05012).

**1.4** It was considered possible therefore that archaeological remains relating to the development of the town from the Roman through to the post-medieval periods might survive within the study area. 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.

**1.5** The programme of archaeological work was to comprise a watching brief on groundworks. 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 works.

**1.6** The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by the developer to carry out the archaeological watching brief in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) approved by the Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**2.1** The town of Much Wenlock is known to have been occupied since Roman times. Evidence for a Roman settlement has come from a number of chance finds from the town and it has been suggested that the town was the centre of a pagan water-cult. A late Roman or early Saxon cemetery within the modern town was discovered in 1983-4, when three burials (Historic Environment Record [HER] no. 03768) were found beneath 23 Barrow Street, and subsequently provided radio-carbon dates ranging from the 3rd to 7th centuries AD. (Buteux, 1996, 2-4; Staelens 1985 & 1995; HER 03768)

**2.2** A monastery at Wenlock was founded some time after 654AD (HER 00307). Anglo-Saxon settlement remains in the form of timber lined pits and Stafford-ware pottery were identified during salvage recording in The Square in 1988 (HER 05013).

**2.3** In c. 1080, the abbey was (again) re-founded as a Benedictine monastery. The religious house and settlement at Much Wenlock were recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 (Thorn and Thorn, 1986). A weekly market was established by 1224, and by the mid 13th century the settlement was calling itself a borough (Buteux, 1996,

2). The monastery was dissolved in 1540, and most of the abbey buildings were allowed to decay.

**2.4** Cloth manufacture was the town's principal industry in the medieval period, and continued to be so through the earlier post-medieval period. The manufacture of clay tobacco pipes had become the town's chief industry by the early 18th century. A period of growth in the early 19th century resulted from increased limestone quarrying and lime burning. Although some limestone quarrying continues on Wenlock Edge just outside the town, lime-burning in the area had ceased by the early 20th century (Buteux, 1996, 2).

**2.5** The study area lies within a block of tenements on the northeast side of Barrow Street (HER No. 05012). This part of the town is thought to have lain within the precinct of the Saxon abbey and minster (HER No. 05001). The tenement plot system on Barrow Street is thought to date to c. 1200AD, but it is uncertain how much of the plot unit was occupied by houses in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

**2.6** An archaeological evaluation in 1994 of the adjoining plot on the northwest side of Woodbury found no evidence for occupation of the site in either the medieval or post-medieval periods (Horton, 1994).

### **3 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

**3.1** The new foundation trenches (Fig. 2) were excavated by machine to a depth of between 1.4m (at the northeastern end of the new building) to 1m. A test pit was also excavated on the northeast side of the main house in the angle between the house and an existing extension.

**3.2** In the foundation trenches for the new build on the northeast side of the garage, the natural subsoil, consisting of a brown clay (Fig. 3; 9), was seen at a depth of 1.2m below the ground surface. In the southwestern part of the trenches, this was covered with a thin layer of a more plastic light grey to yellowish grey clay (4) up to 0.2m thick, also probably natural subsoil. Cut into the top of the natural clay was a shallow pit (8) filled with an organic very dark grey silty loam (7) mottled with brown clay. This was sealed by a layer up to 0.6m thick of very dark greyish brown silty clay loam (3), and at the northeastern end of the trenches a grey silty clay (10). These lay beneath a deposit of dark greyish brown silty clay loam (2) 0.2m thick, and a topsoil of dark greyish brown loam (1) also 0.2m thick. No significant archaeological deposits were seen in these foundation trenches.

**3.3** The test pit against the house encountered a deposit 2m deep of very dark grey sandy loam with soot, ash, and brick fragments. No significant archaeological deposits were seen in the test pit.

### **4 DISCUSSION**

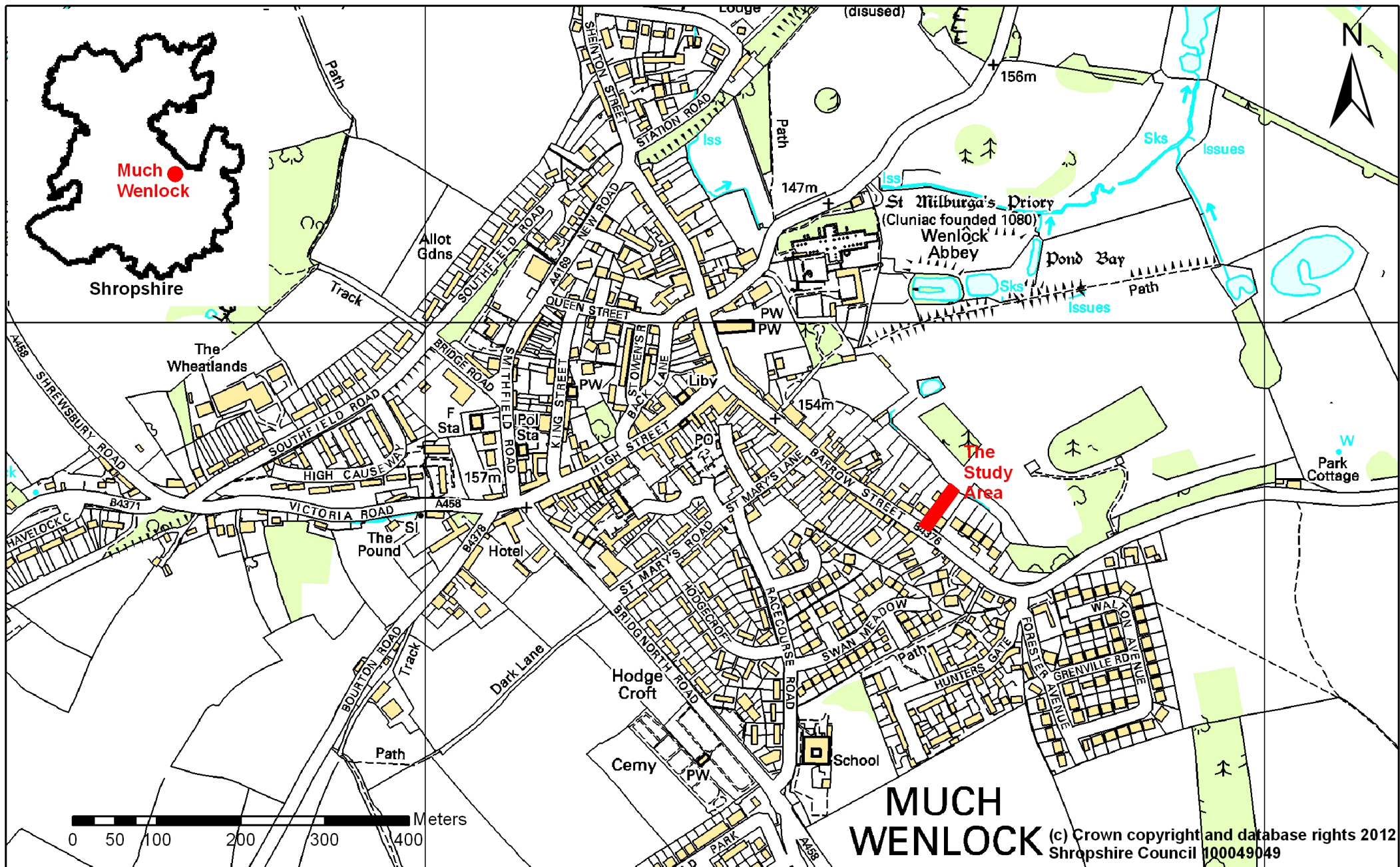
**4.1** No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief at Woodbury, Barrow Street, Much Wenlock. Although it is possible that remains of occupation dating to the medieval and/or post-medieval periods may survive along the street frontage, the results of both the current watching brief and the 1994 evaluation of the adjoining site suggest that they do not occur in the lower lying ground at the rear of the properties on this part of the northeast side of Barrow Street.

## 5 REFERENCES

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## ABBREVIATIONS

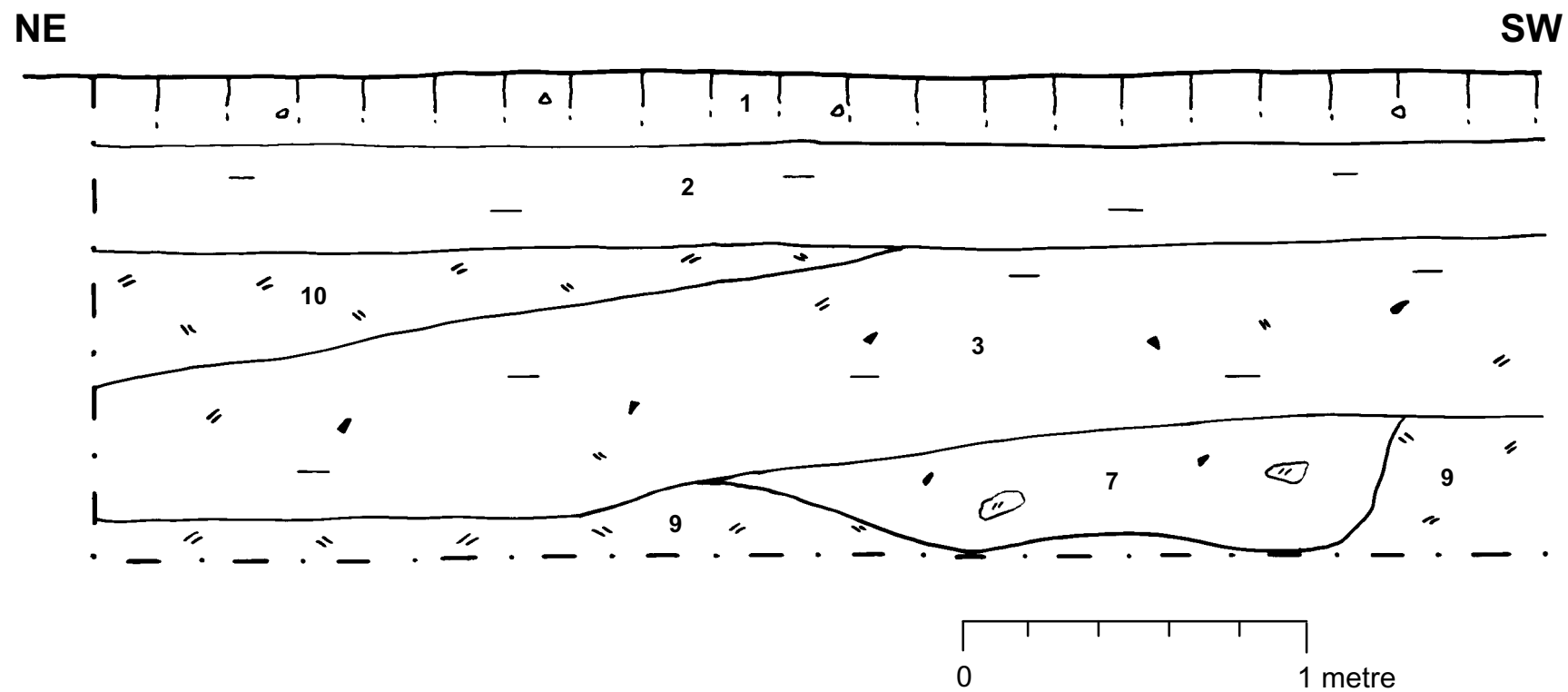
<b>HER</b>	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
<b>OS</b>	Ordnance Survey
<b>SA</b>	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
<b>TSAS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society
<b>TSAHS</b>	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society





1:250





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Figure 3: The northeastern end of the foundation trenches, northwest-facing section ; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The study area, looking SW



Photo 2: The deposits in the foundation trenches, looking SE; scale bar 1m



Photo 3: The foundation trenches, looking N