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**A WATCHING BRIEF ON THE INSTALLATION OF
A FINGERPOST AT ABBEY FOREGATE,
SHREWSBURY, SHROPSHIRE**

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A report for
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Photo 3: The new fingerpost, looking SE across Abbey Foregate

SUMMARY

In March 2012 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the installation of a fingerpost adjacent to Shrewsbury Abbey on Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury. The hole for the post was excavated by hand to a depth of 0.9m. No significant archaeological deposits or features were observed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Abbey Foregate is a suburb on the eastern side of Shrewsbury, Shropshire, separated from the historic town centre by the River Severn. The main approach to the town from the east runs through the suburb along Abbey Foregate road. At the western end of the suburb is the Abbey Church, the remains of the former Benedictine Shrewsbury Abbey, founded in 1080.

1.2 On 26th March 2012 a new fingerpost was installed on Abbey Foregate adjacent to the Abbey church to mark the amended route of the Shropshire Way. The fingerpost lay within the area of the former abbey precinct, immediately to east of the line of the former south transept of the church (Fig. 1). There was thus a possibility that archaeological remains might be encountered during the excavation of the posthole for the fingerpost.

1.3 The main part of the former abbey precinct is scheduled as an Ancient Monument (County No. Salop 359 "Shrewsbury Abbey (including pulpit)". The location for the new fingerpost lay within the area of the scheduled Ancient Monument. Scheduled Monument Consent had been obtained from English Heritage for the installation of the fingerpost.

1.4 Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource it was made a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the works that the installation of the fingerpost be accompanied by an archaeological watching brief. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned to undertake the watching brief.

1.5 The aim of the watching brief was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that were encountered during the groundworks.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A small quantity of Roman pottery and roof tile recovered from medieval contexts in excavations on the south side of Abbey Foregate in the mid 1980s hint at some form of Roman occupation in the Abbey Foregate area (Baker, 2002, p89). Abbey Foregate is known to have been occupied since Saxon times, and the Domesday Book records a prosperous manor and parish here (Thorn & Thorn, 1986, 3b 1 and notes). Roger of Montgomery chose this site as the location for the Benedictine monastery of SS Peter and Paul which he founded in 1080. The abbey was situated on a gravel spur bounded by the Rea Brook and its confluence with the River Severn to the south, and marshy ground to the north, and it effectively controlled the eastern approach to the town. The monastic precinct itself was small by comparison with other urban monasteries, and probably cramped. However, the surrounding land on the east bank of the Severn formed part of the abbey's endowment, and the settlement that developed in Abbey Foregate belonged to the abbey.

A number of medieval timber-framed buildings still stand on the north side of Abbey Foregate opposite the abbey church. Many of the monastic buildings on the south side of the abbey survived the Dissolution only to fall victim to the creation of the present Abbey Foregate road by Thomas Telford in c1836 and a major redevelopment of the land to the south in the third quarter of the 19th century. The only monastic buildings to survive these developments were the so-called "Old Infirmary" building and the refectory pulpit. Nevertheless, observations made during roadworks over the last hundred years or so in this area suggest that significant remains do survive beneath Telford's road (HER Nos. 60360, 60362, 60363, 60367, 60377, 60389, & 60400).

Extensive excavations were carried out in the mid 1980s by Birmingham University Archaeological Field Unit (BUFAU) to the rear of 193 Abbey Foregate (currently occupied by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust) and on the site of the former post medieval Abbey Mill (Baker, 2002). These excavations revealed a sequence of precinct walls on this southwestern corner of the Abbey precinct, and a previously undocumented late medieval kitchen block, built out from the edge of the precinct into wet marshy ground of what had been the Rea Brook valley. Remains of a post-medieval tannery, and of the post medieval and 19th-century Abbey Mills were also recorded.

In 1992 a watching brief on the laying of a telephone cable duct through the pavement on the south side of the Abbey church found that the ground beneath the pavement had been disturbed by an earlier cable trench. The remains of the 19th-century churchyard wall were seen in the northern edge of the trench at a depth of 0.25m below the ground surface. (Watson, 1992)

A watching brief was carried out in 1999 on the installation of a new water main along the southern side of Abbey Foregate. Although the new main was laid within the back-fill of a wider trench cut for earlier gas and water mains, significant archaeological deposits were seen in three places within the former abbey precinct. These consisted of an internal wall of part of the former north range of the Old Infirmary building, the north wall of narrow building running east of the Old Infirmary towards the Abbey church, and the east wall of the dormitory building on west side of main claustral range. The watching brief confirmed that significant archaeological remains survived at as little as 350mm below the current road level. (Hannaford, 1999)

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF.

A hole for the new fingerpost was excavated by hand in the grass 1.25m from the edge of the pavement on the north side of Abbey Foregate and 11.5m south of the Abbey church, just to the east of the line of the former south transept. The post hole was dug 0.35m square by 0.9m deep. The hole was cut through a topsoil 0.4m thick of very dark greyish brown sandy humic loam over a deposit at least 0.5m deep of very dark greyish brown sandy loam with mortar flecks and small chippings of red sandstone. A single sherd of post-medieval slipware pottery was recovered from this lower deposit. No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

4 REFERENCES

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- Hannaford, H R**, 1999: *An Archaeological Watching Brief on the Shrewsbury South Central (Phase 1) Water Main Renewal*, Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service Report No. 171
- Watson, M D**, 1992: *Archaeological Supervision of Groundworks at Shrewsbury Abbey, Shrewsbury, Shropshire*, Shropshire County Council Archaeology Unit Report No. 13

ABBREVIATIONS

HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
NGR	National Grid Reference
OS	Ordnance Survey
CBA	Council for British Archaeology

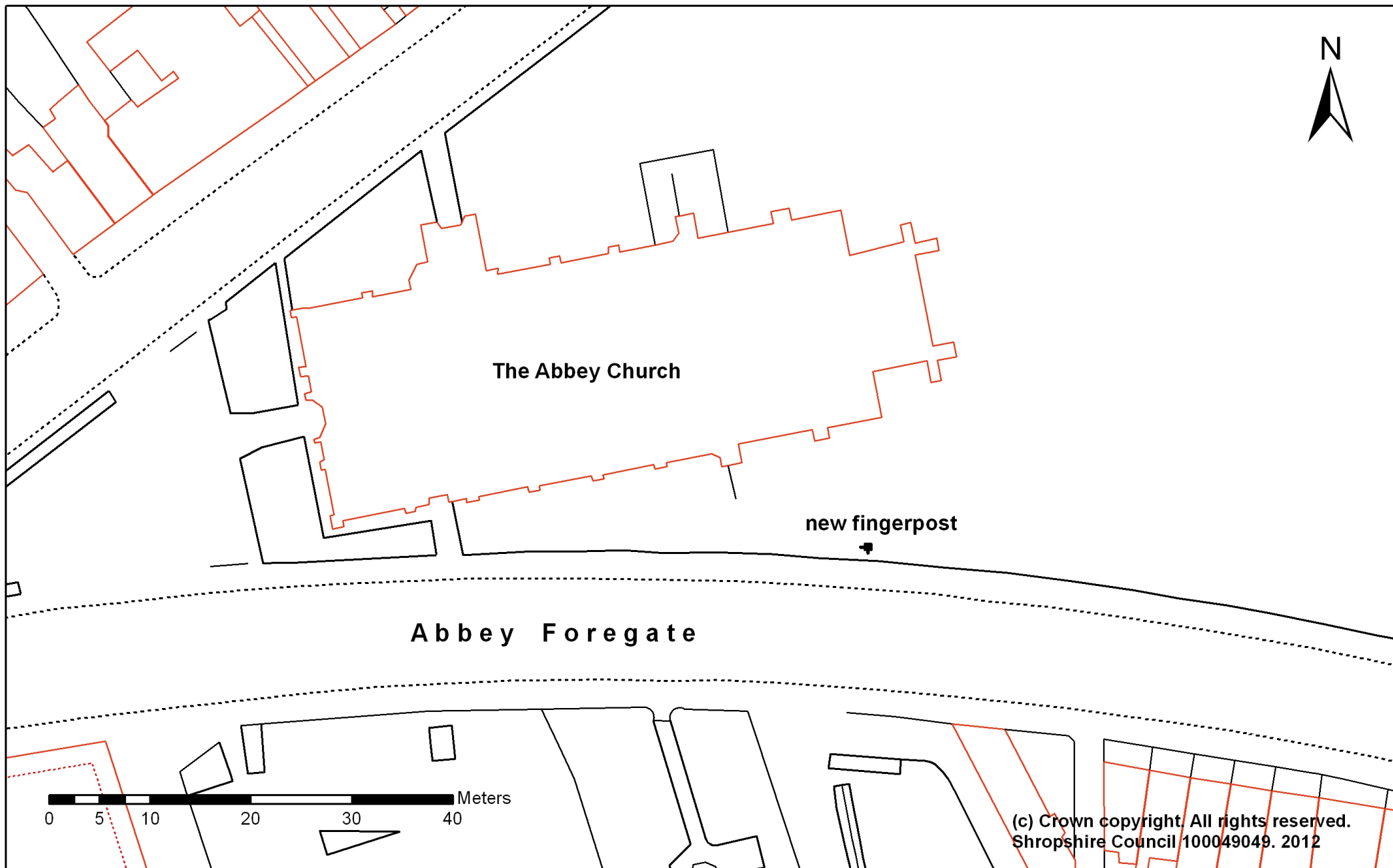




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