

**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
WROXETER ROMAN FORT,
WROXETER, SHROPSHIRE, 2012**

by
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A report for
Western Power Distribution plc

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SUMMARY

In September 2012 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the replacement of an electricity pole within the northeast corner of a Roman fort just outside the former Roman city of Wroxeter (Viroconium Cornoviorum). The fort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 200, "Wroxeter Roman fort"). No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wroxeter is situated in central Shropshire, about 7.5km southeast of the centre of Shrewsbury. The modern village lies on the northeast bank of the River Severn, just to the south of the B4380 road, formerly the A5 London to Holyhead Trunk Road (now by-passed). The modern village lies within the site of the Roman city of Viroconium Cornoviorum, the fourth largest walled city in the Roman province. The site of the Roman city is a scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 32, "The site of the Roman Town of Wroxeter [Viroconium Cornoviorum] Shropshire).

1.2 In September 2012 work was undertaken to replace an electricity pole supporting a three wire overhead power line within the area of Wroxeter Roman fort (Shropshire Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 00033) just to the south of the modern village and the former Roman city. The existing pole was removed and a new pole replanted in the same hole.

1.3 Wroxeter Roman fort is also a scheduled Ancient Monument (Shropshire County No. 200, "Wroxeter Roman fort"). Scheduled Monument Consent was granted for the pole replacement work, and it was a condition of the consent that the proposed works should be carried out under archaeological supervision.

1.4 The Archaeology Service was commissioned by Western Power Distribution plc to carry out the archaeological supervision of the works. 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 PREVIOUS WORK

2.1 Wroxeter Roman fort (Shropshire Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 00033) lies 350m to the south of the defences of the Roman city on the east bank of the River Severn (Fig. 1). The fort was discovered through aerial photography and was seen to be of about 5 acres, double ditched with a gateway in the centre of the north and south sides. The east and west gates are set slightly off centre. There are crop marks of timber buildings, probably barrack blocks, within the interior, and there are traces immediately to the north of the fort of an annexe. (HER oblique APs SJ5607/A & SJ5607/D-H)

2.2 Excavation by St Joseph in 1947 demonstrated that the ditches are 13ft wide and 7ft deep. The excavations suggested that the site dated to the 1st century. Fieldwalking of the site produced bonding and voussoir tiles. (St Joseph, 1953, pp50-6)

2.3 Further work in 1977 showed that the 'intervallum road' overlay the military ditches and possibly belonged to a later, civilian phase after the rampart was levelled. A 'harbour area' was suggested by an extensive area of black silt infill alongside the river revetted in one area with a clay bank. (Houghton & Wells, 1978, p60-64).

2.4 Aerial photographs held in the HER show that power lines carried by pylons ran across the site just to the south of the existing line in the 1960s. These pylons had been removed by the mid 1990s. A field boundary running north to south and coinciding with the eastern side of the fort was also removed during this time. (HER oblique APs SJ5607/A & SJ5607/D-H)

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF.

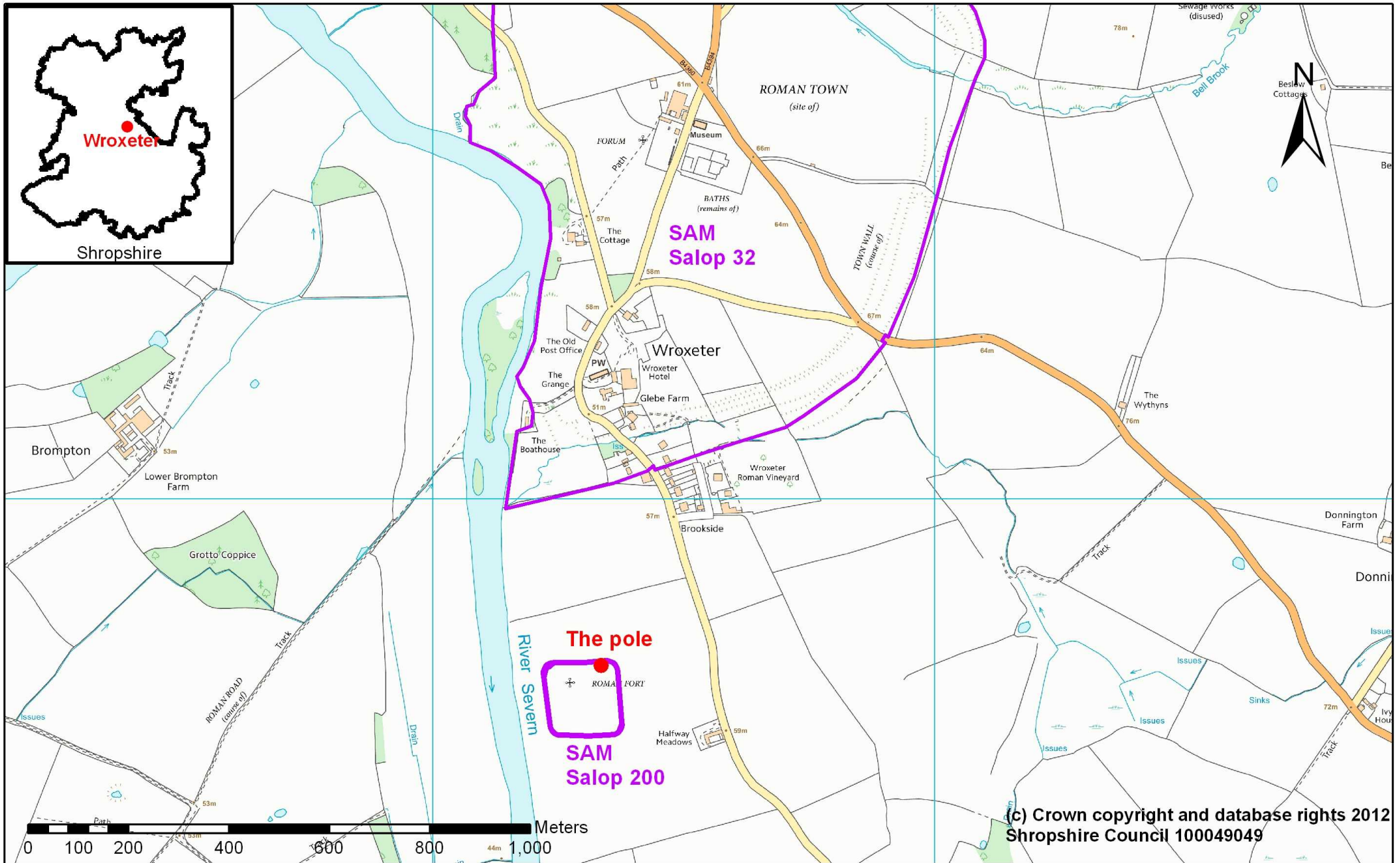
3.1 The replacement of the electricity pole was carried out on the 24th September 2012. The existing pole was withdrawn from its hole (Photo 2), and the hole augured to remove loose spoil from the hole (Photo 3). The hole was then archaeologically recorded. The hole was 0.6m in diameter by 1.8m deep. The natural subsoil, comprising a brown sandy silt was seen at a depth of 0.6m below the ground surface. It was sealed beneath a layer of dark brown sandy silty loam with some gravel 0.35m thick, representing buried ploughsoil, and a turf and topsoil layer of dark greyish brown sandy silty loam 0.25m thick. This topsoil layer produced a single small fragment of brick or tile that might possibly have been Roman in date. The new pole was then placed in the hole and packed with the spoil.

3.2 No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered in these works. With the exception of the single fragment of possible Roman brick or tile from the topsoil, no finds were recovered from the spoil augured from the hole.

4 REFERENCES

Houghton A W J, & Wells E, 1978: *The Auxiliary Fort at Wroxeter*, W Midlands Archaeol News Sheet. Vol 21. p60-4.

St Joseph J K S, 1953: *Roman Forts on Watling St near Penkridge and Wroxeter*, Trans Birmingham Warwickshire Archaeol Soc Vol 69. p50-6



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WROXETER ROMAN FORT 2012
Figure 1: Location of the electricity pole

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Photo 1: The electricity pole to be replaced, looking NW



Photo 2: The hole after withdrawing the old electricity pole



Photo 3: The hole after cleaning with an augur