

***A Watching Brief at
Norton Farm, Wroxeter,
Shropshire, 2013***

by
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Archaeology Service



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A Report for

Arbor Vitae Environment Ltd

on behalf of

Mr J Walker

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SUMMARY

In May 2013 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a watching brief at Norton Farm, Wroxeter, Shropshire, on the excavation of a water pipe trench along the line of part of the northern defences of the Roman city. The trench cut through topsoil and a buried ploughsoil, which lay over re-deposited sand, possibly representing rampart material. A number of features were seen in the base of the pipe trench. A small quantity of Roman and post-medieval pottery was recovered from the buried ploughsoil deposit. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Norton Farm, Wroxeter, is situated in central Shropshire about 7.5km east of Shrewsbury town centre. The farm lies just to the south of the B5061 Shrewsbury to Wellington road (before 1991 part of the A5 London to Holyhead Trunk Road).

1.2 Norton Farm lies on the northern edge of the site of the Roman city of *Viroconium Cornoviorum* (Wroxeter), 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").

1.3 In May 2013 land to the west of Norton Farm (land parcel 1536) (centred on NGR SJ 563 094) was reverted from arable cultivation to permanent pasture under a Higher Level Stewardship scheme. The land parcel immediately to the south (land parcel 4228) was reverted to permanent pasture in the 1980s and is now managed under a grazing licence. Work to enable the reversion of parcel 1536 involved fencing work and the laying of a water pipe to supply new drinking troughs.

1.4 The boundary between parcels 1536 and 4228 follows a curved course which runs along the top of the mid-2nd century defences of the Roman city (which are included in the Scheduled Ancient Monument). Parcel 1536 also contains a cropmark complex which includes a Bronze Age ring-ditch, two early temporary Roman forts that are believed to pre-date the establishment of the legionary fortress at Wroxeter in c. 57 AD, and a system of trackways, field boundaries and other features on the periphery of the Roman city. Although not formally designated as a Scheduled Monument, these remains are deemed to be of national significance because of their relation with the Roman city. The proposed arable reversion in parcel 1536 is intended to ensure that no further plough damage occurs to the underlying archaeology.

1.5 Parcel 4228 lies immediately south of the city's defences, within the northern part of the settlement. This area is believed to have been less densely occupied than the land to the south of the Bell Brook, and may have been utilised for market gardening.

1.6 The site of the works was considered to have archaeological potential with any below ground archaeological remains being likely to be affected by ground disturbance associated with the work. It was a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the work that it should be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work carried out in accordance with a brief produced by the Principal Archaeologist, Shropshire Council.

1.7 The programme of archaeological work was to comprise a watching brief on these 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.

1.8 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by Arbor Vitae Environment Ltd on behalf of Mr J Walker 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 PREVIOUS WORK

2.1 The upstanding remains of the Roman city at Wroxeter were described by the early antiquarians and there is a long history of archaeological investigations within and around the Roman city extending back into the 18th century. A summary of this work is provided by White and Barker (1998).

2.2 There have been a number of archaeological investigations and observations recorded within the immediate vicinity of the current work area. A short account of this work has been compiled as part of the brief for the programme of archaeological work (Wigley, 2012) and is summarised below:

2.3 In 1859, the antiquarian Thomas Wright excavated a number of trenches on the eastern side of parcel 4228, adjacent to the B4394 lane which forms the eastern boundary of the work area. A street surface was encountered but no remains of masonry walls. Finds included a number of coins and a brooch. In 1862 Wright also found a single burial and traces of other burials during excavations in the garden of what is now Norton Farm.

2.4 In c. 1970 the amateur archaeologist Dr John Haughton excavated nine small trenches within parcel 1536, in the area south of the field ponds, to investigate some cropmark features identified by Arnold Baker. A cat burial beneath two tegulae was found whilst the other features encountered proved to be rubbish pits. There was also evidence for significant plough disturbance.

2.5 In November 1993 the Archaeology Service at Shropshire Council conducted an archaeological watching brief on drainage work along the south side of the B5061 road, on the northern edge of parcel 1536 (Hannaford, 1995). This identified a number of features within the cut for the new drain and the works easement, some of probable Roman date which corresponded to features visible on aerial photographs. These included a deposit of burnt material at the western end of the easement which may have been associated with industrial activity. The features appeared to survive well and were reburied to achieve preservation in situ.

2.6 In 1999 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit carried out a series of excavations in advance of the relining of the water main between Norton and Wroxeter. Two trenches (Trenches 1 & 2) were excavated within parcel 4228, and one (Trench 19) in parcel 1536, just to the south of Norton Farm. Within the first trench (Trench 1) was a large pit built over by the foundations of a substantial building. A series of cobbled surfaces were found in Trench 2 which were interpreted as a succession of road surfaces. Evidence for a possible cremation was found near the base of Trench 19.

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 The fence and gate posts were in the event all driven into the ground and so were not included in the watching brief. The trench for the new water pipe was cut with a mechanical excavator with a 0.25m bucket to a depth of c. 0.8m. The trench ran from a trough just to the south of the gateway into parcel 4228 from the B4394 road northwest to the boundary between the two land parcels. It then followed the southern edge of parcel 1536, approximately along the line of the top of the rampart of the Roman city, for some 440m, before running northwest again for 20m to the site of a new trough. The total length of the trench was some 472m.

3.2 The upper deposits encountered were consistent throughout the length of the trench, and comprised a recent ploughsoil c.0.35m deep of a very dark brown sandy loam (1) over an impoverished topsoil up to 0.4m deep of a dark brown sandy loam (Figs. 3 & 4; 2). The lower of these two deposits produced a number of finds of pottery and brick and tile of Roman date (and some of post-medieval date), mostly from the first 100m west from the B4394 lane (see Table 1 below, contexts 1002/1-5). These lay over a deposit of light orange brown sand (Figs. 3 & 4; 3), seen in the base of the trench in the eastern 50m of the trench, but rising to the west, as the upper two topsoil deposits thinned somewhat. This sandy deposit produced no finds.

3.3 Although clean and loose, and containing no finds, this sandy deposit (3) had more the appearance of re-deposited natural than undisturbed natural subsoil, and this was confirmed when at about 75m west from the roadline, the sandy deposit was seen to lie over a deposit of dark greyish brown silty sand (Fig. 3a; 4) at the base of the trench. This deposit was seen to be 2.6m wide from east to west, but was only seen in the base of the trench and produced no finds. About 150m from the road, the sandy deposit (3) had dropped away again to 0.75m depth, and at 180m from the road a thin deposit of very dark grey sooty silty sand (Fig. 3b; 5) 1m wide was seen on the surface of the sand deposit (3).

3.4 At 249m from the road, a large boulder (6) was seen in and partially covered by the sand deposit (3). The top of the boulder lay 0.6m below the ground surface and it was decided to leave it in place. At 252m from the road, a further deposit of very dark grey sooty silty sand (Fig. 4a; 7) 0.1m thick and 1m wide, was seen between the lower topsoil layer (2) and the sandy deposit (3).

3.5 At 380m from the road, a deposit of very dark grey sooty silty sand (Fig. 4b; 8) with small lumps of red clay was seen beneath the sand deposit (3) at the base of the trench. This deposit was at least 0.1m thick and was seen in the base of the trench for a length of 6m.

3.6 No other archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief on the excavation of the water pipe trench.

4 THE FINDS

The finds were all recovered from the buried ploughsoil layer (2) (site context 1002, /1 – 0m-100m W of lane, /2 - 100m-200m W of lane, /3 - 200m-300m W of lane, /4 - 300m-400m W of lane, & /5 - 400m-450m W of lane). No finds were recovered from the deposits (4, 5, 7 & 8) associated with the features seen in the base of the trench or the re-deposited sand layer (3). Small pottery sherds were visible in some quantity in the surface of the topsoil (1) in the vicinity of the work, but were not collected.

The fineware included a fragment of a foot-ring from an early to mid 2nd-century Samian dish (type 18/31), and a fragment of a Samian bowl with leaf decoration, possibly of Knorr type 1919 Td.7 – OF COTOI IIUST (Webster, 1983, 31), with a lead rivet (both from 1002/1).

The bulk of the coarseware comprised Severn Valley ware (from 1002/1 & /4) and a small amount of grey wares, including a fragment of BB2 rim (from 1002/4). A quantity of mortarium fragments and part of an amphora handle (with stamp) were recovered from the eastern end of the trench (1002/1).

Roman tile and brick included roof tile (from 1002/1 & /2), hypocaust brick (1002/2) and a piece of box flue tile (1002/5).

A small quantity of post medieval pottery and glass was also recovered from the buried ploughsoil.

Table 1: The finds from the watching brief

Site Context	Period	Material	Type	Count (sherds)	Weight (gms)
1002/1	Roman	Pottery	Fineware	6	120
	Roman	Pottery	Coarseware	14	252
	Roman	Pottery	Mortaria	6	211
	Roman	Pottery	Amphora	1	460
	Roman	Brick & tile		5	428
	Post Medieval	Pottery		3	84
		Bone - animal		1	95
1002/2	Roman	Pottery	Fineware	2	16
	Roman	Pottery	Coarseware	1	4
	Roman	Brick & tile		2	659
1002/3	Roman	Pottery	Fineware	1	3
	Post Medieval	Brick & tile		1	20
1002/4	Roman	Pottery	Coarseware	4	54
	Roman	Brick & tile		5	101
	Post Medieval	Glass		1	67
1002/5	Roman	Brick & tile		1	60

5 REFERENCES

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ABBREVIATIONS

AOD Above Ordnance Datum

BUFAU Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

EP-NS English Place-Name Society

HER County Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury

OS Ordnance Survey

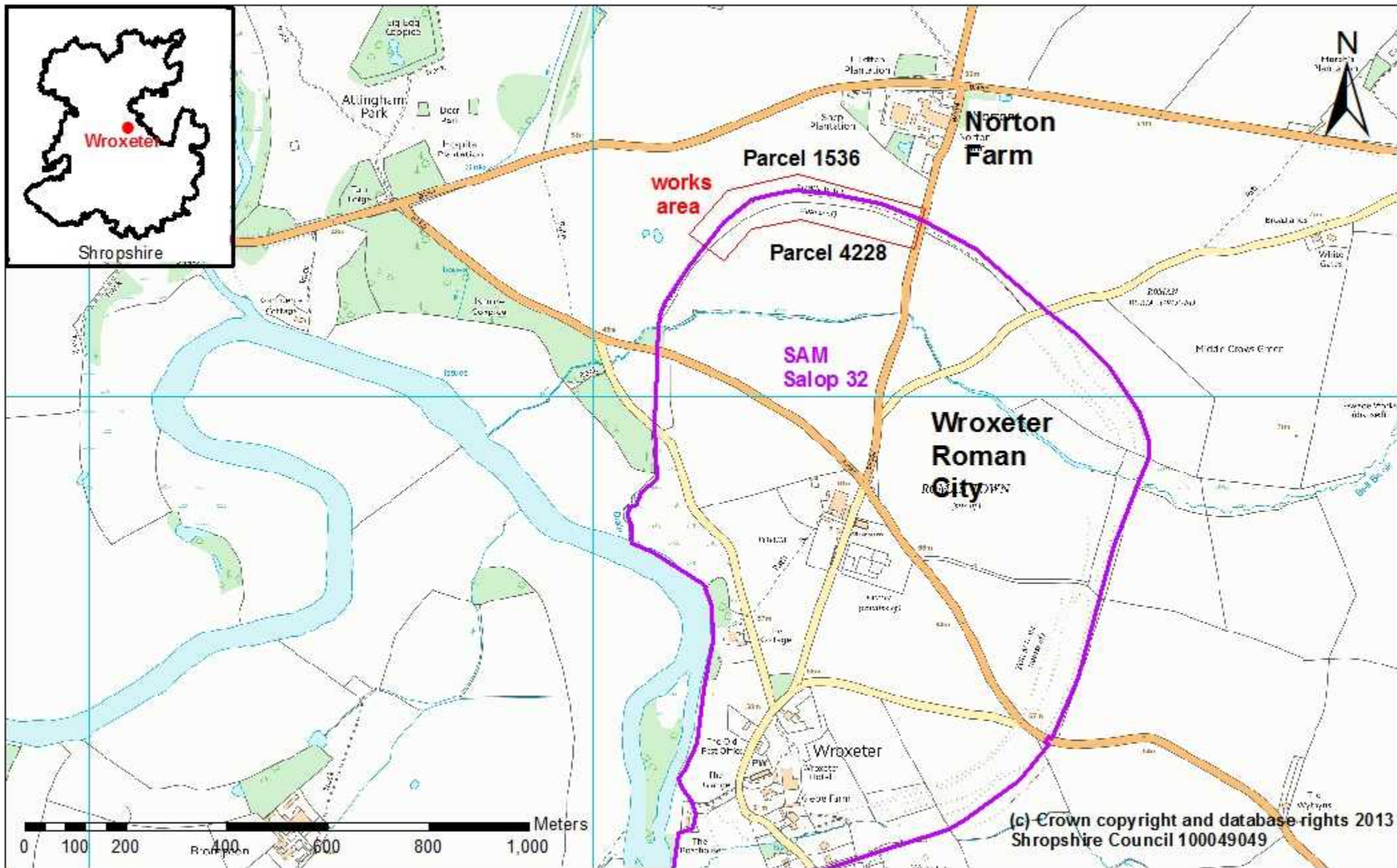
SA Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury

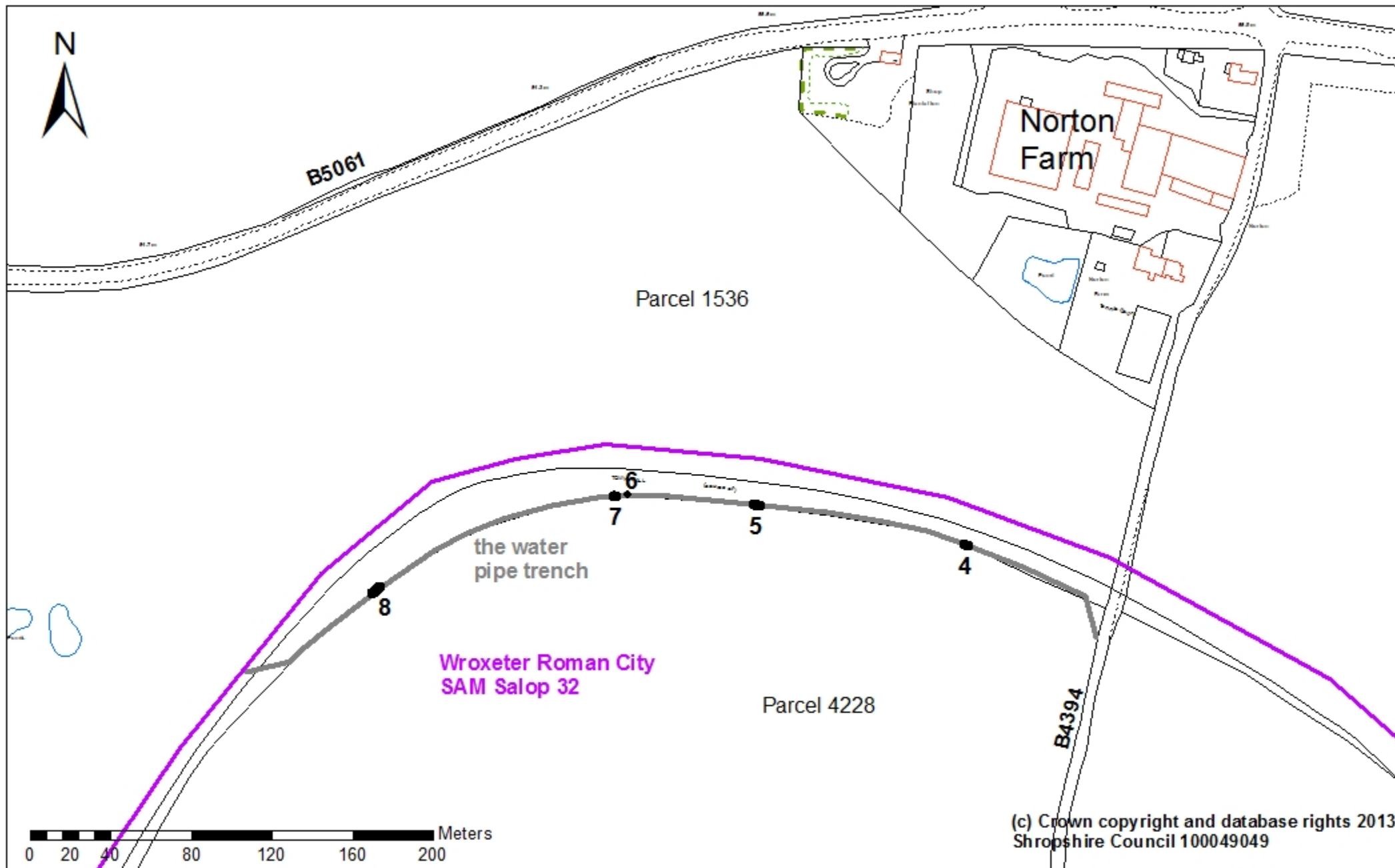
SCAS Shropshire Council Archaeology Service

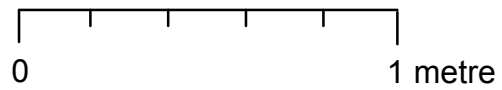
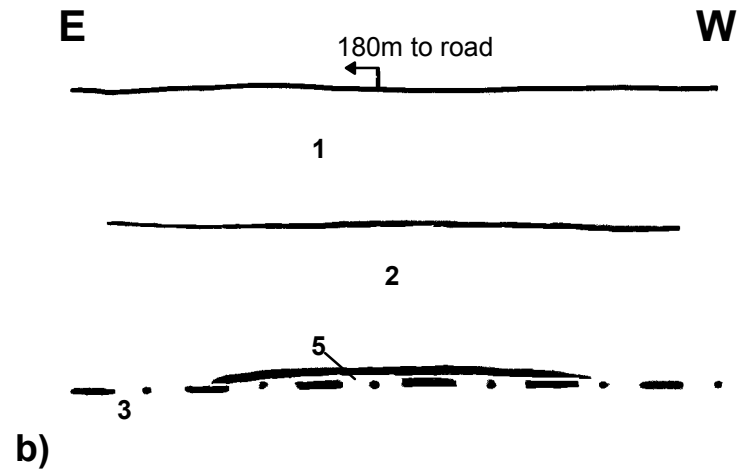
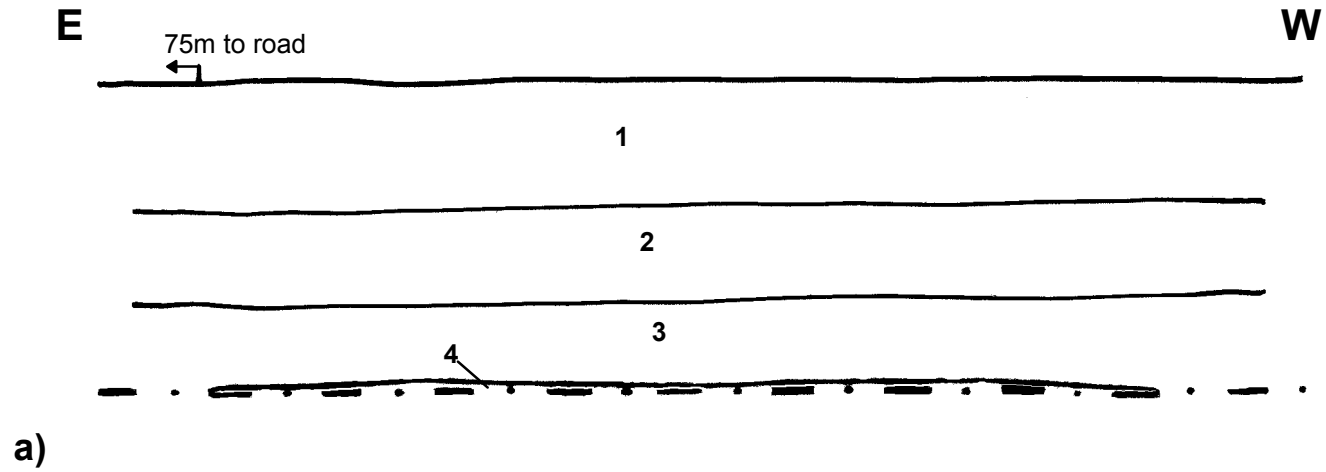
SCCAS Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service

TSAHS Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society

TSAS Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

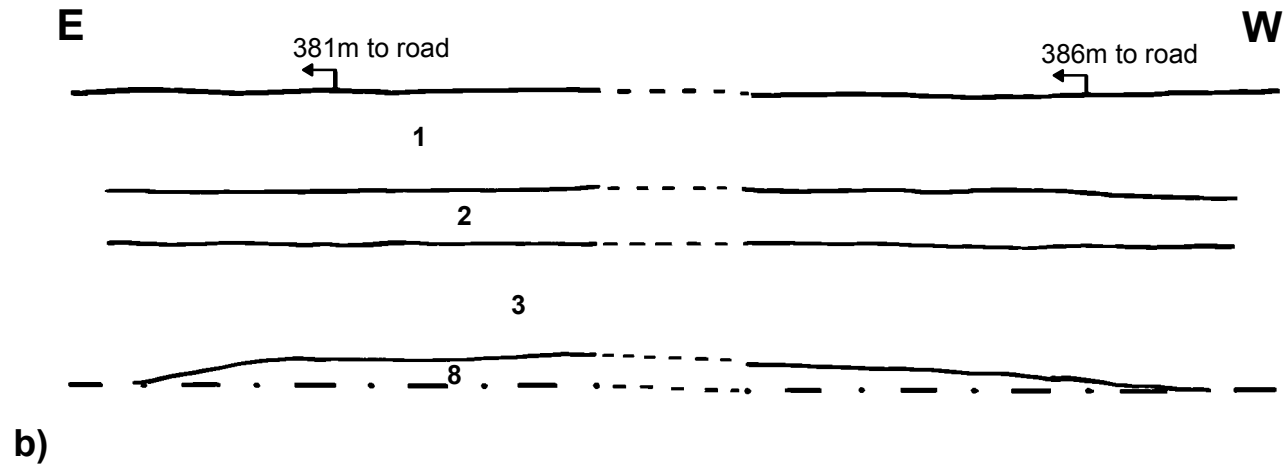
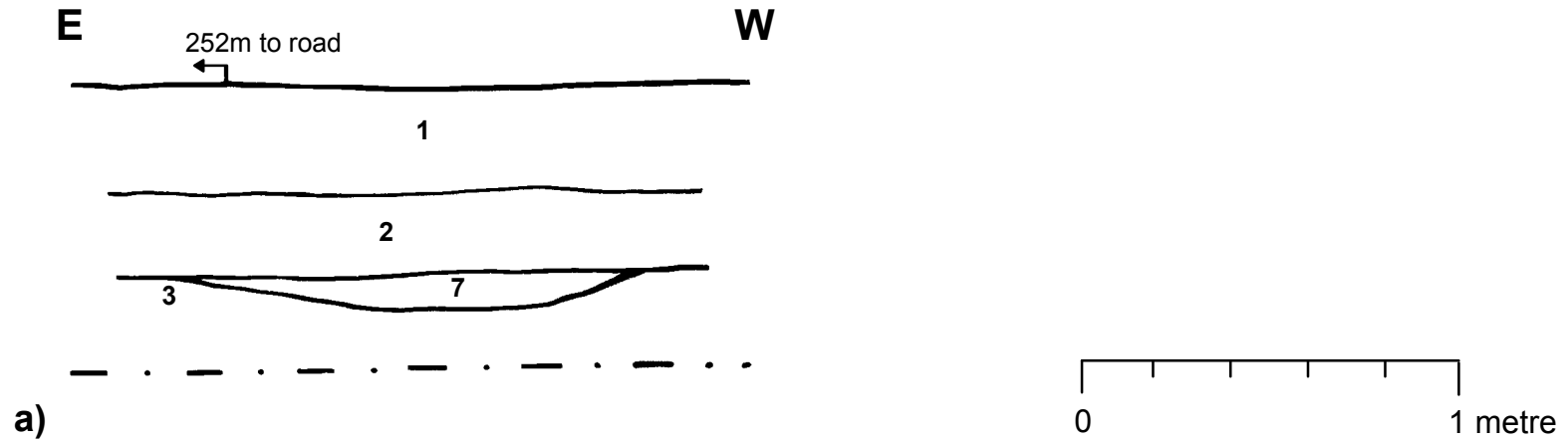






NORTON FARM, WROXETER 2013

Figure 3: The water pipe trench, north-facing sections, showing (a) context 4 and (b) context 5; 1:20 scale



NORTON FARM, WROXETER 2013

Figure 4: The water pipe trench, north-facing sections, showing (a) context 7 and (b) context 8; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The line of the water pipe trench before excavation, looking W



Photo 2: Context 4, looking W (scale bar 1m)



Photo 3: Context 5, looking S (scale bar 1m)