

***Archaeological Investigations on the
Shrewsbury Business Park, Phase 2 Extension
at Weeping Cross, Shrewsbury, 2013***

by
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Archaeology Service



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON THE
SHREWSBURY BUSINESS PARK, PHASE 2 EXTENSION
AT WEEPING CROSS, SHREWSBURY, 2013**

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A Report for the

**Business and Enterprise Team,
Shropshire Council**

CONTENTS

	Page No
SUMMARY	1
1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	3
3 THE WATCHING BRIEF	5
4 REFERENCES	6

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: The location of the study area

Figure 2: The location of the strip, map and sample area

Figure 3: Plan of excavated area showing the location of mapped and sampled features;
1:200 scale

Figure 4: Sections through features; 1:20 scale

Photo 1: The site, looking NW

Photo 2: The site, looking S, scale bars 2m & 1m

Photo3: Features 10, 12 & 8, looking NW, scale bar 1m

Photo 4: Feature 14, looking N, scale bars 1m & 0.5m

Photo 5: Feature 16, looking E, scale bars 1m & 0.5m

Photo 6: Feature 18, looking E, scale bar 2m

SUMMARY

In December 2013 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a strip, map and sample exercise at Weeping Cross, Shrewsbury. The investigations accompanied initial groundworks for the Shrewsbury Business Park, Phase 2 Extension, and were intended to investigate the site of a cropmark ring ditch (HER PRN 04162). A number of shallow features of probable agricultural origin were recorded, but no trace of the cropmark ring ditch was seen.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Shrewsbury Business Park is situated in Emstrey on the west bank of the River Severn some 3.5km southeast of the centre of Shrewsbury. Emstrey now straddles the modern Civil Parishes of Shrewsbury and Atcham, but historically it lay entirely within Atcham Parish. Shrewsbury Business Park occupies a plot of former agricultural land bordered by Thieves' Lane (part of the former Shrewsbury Ring Road) to the south and Wenlock Road and London Road to the west and east respectively, and by modern housing to the north.

1.2 Work began on the construction of Phase 1 of the business park in August 1999 at Emstrey. Enabling work for the development of Phase 2 of the Business Park began in autumn 2013.

1.3 The area around the development site is rich in early settlement remains, and aerial photographic evidence suggested that there was a strong possibility that archaeological remains existed on the site itself. In view of the potential archaeological significance of the proposed development site an archaeological evaluation of the site (the study area) was undertaken by the Archaeology Service, Shropshire County Council, in 1999 (Hannaford, 1999a & 1999b).

1.4 The 1999 desk-based assessment and field evaluation found that remains possibly associated with a cropmark ring ditch (Shropshire Historic Environment [HER] Record No. 04162) were located at the western side of the Phase 2 area of the Business Park. The cropmark ring ditch was thought to represent the remains of a funerary and ritual site of the late Neolithic or Bronze Age periods.

1.5 The 1999 evaluation recommended that if the area around the ring ditch were to be affected by the Phase 2 development of the site, then it should be subject to a programme of further archaeological work. It was subsequently made a condition (Condition 8) of the planning consent for the Phase 2 site (ref. 11/05798/OUT) that a programme of archaeological work should be undertaken to provide for archaeological mitigation for the Bronze Age ring ditch (HER PRN 04162) adjacent to the western site boundary. This programme of archaeological work was to comprise a 'strip, map and sample' exercise (Hey & Lacey, 2001).

1.6 The Archaeology Service was commissioned by Shropshire Council's Business and Enterprise Team to carry out the programme of archaeological work. The work was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) approved by the Principal Archaeologist, Shropshire Council, who also monitored the project. The strip, map and sample exercise was undertaken by the Archaeology Service in the first two weeks of December 2013.

1.7 The aim of the archaeological investigation was to locate and record by excavation archaeological features and deposits associated with the cropmark enclosure site (HER PRN 04162). This report documents the results of these investigations.

2 THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Evidence for human activity of all periods from the Neolithic period to the Roman period has been recorded in the immediate vicinity of the study area. In the mid to late 1960s, rescue excavations were carried out on a number of sites in advance of and during large scale housing developments at Sutton on the west side of the Wenlock Road. These excavations revealed Neolithic ditches, a cemetery and ditches of Bronze Age date, middle Bronze Age barrows, late Bronze Age and/or early Iron Age field ditches, an Iron Age enclosure, and Romano-British occupation (Barker et al., 1991, Sharpstones Hill A-D, HER 00085, 00084, 00086 & 00087). Excavations were carried out in the early 1990s on cropmark ring ditches (HER 02208) during the construction of the Meole Brace Retail Park (Hughes & Woodward, 1995; Barfield & Hughes, 1998). A further cropmark ring ditch (HER 04483) has been located c. 650m southeast of the study area. A cropmark "banjo" enclosure (HER 00017) 300m to the north of the study area possibly representing an enclosed Iron Age farmstead and access track, was destroyed without record in the 1970s by housing developments. A late Iron Age and early Romano-British double-ditched farmstead enclosure (HER 00015) was excavated in the late 1960s and in the 2000s on the site of the new Shrewsbury Town football ground at Meole Brace (Barker et al, 1991; Bain & Evan, 2011).

2.2 Prehistoric activity within the study area itself was hinted at by cropmarks visible on aerial photographs. Probably the earliest of these cropmarks is a ring ditch (HER 04162) which is situated in the western part of the study area adjacent to the Wenlock Road, centred on SJ 5124 1053. Ring ditches usually represent the remains of ploughed down burial mounds of early Bronze Age date (c. 2300 - 1400 BC); the circular cropmarks are formed by the in-filled quarry ditch surrounding the ploughed-down burial mound, which produces marks in ripening crops that are visible from the air. The burial mound may have covered one or more primary burials, and there are often a number of secondary or satellite burials within or immediately outside the circuit of the ring ditch. The ring ditch in the study area (HER 04162) is said to be shown on a 1965 aerial photograph and to consist of two concentric rings with an outer diameter of c. 20m (Jenks, 1968). (It has not been possible to locate this particular photograph and so it cannot be verified.) The ring ditch is also shown on an aerial photograph of 1972 (NMR no.: JAP 1116 Frame 16), on which a circular feature is shown immediately adjacent to the Wenlock Road at the western edge of the study area.

2.3 In 1999 an archaeological evaluation was carried out of the Shrewsbury Business Park Phase 2 site (Hannaford, 1999). This evaluation comprised a desk-based assessment and a field evaluation. A trial trench was excavated across the site of the cropmark ring ditch HER 04162. A number of shallow linear features were found running west to east. However, although some of them did correspond approximately in location to the plot of the cropmark none of these features could be positively identified as the ring ditch. The regular spacing and broad, flat bottomed profile of the features suggested that they were more likely to represent the filled-in furrows of ridge and furrow ploughing of medieval or post-medieval date.

3 THE STRIP, MAP AND SAMPLE EXERCISE

3.1 The topsoil was stripped from an area 40m long by 20m wide parallel to the eastern edge of Wenlock Road with a 360° mechanical excavator down to the surface of the natural gravel subsoil. The width of the strip was restricted to the east by the presence of a water main and to the west by possible services along the site boundary.

3.2 A number of linear features were revealed mainly running west to east across the stripped area cut into the surface of the subsoil. A number of smaller discrete features were also noted. There was no sign of a feature or features that might correspond to the cropmark ring ditch. A number of transects were then marked out and cleaned by hand across the stripped area to define some of the identified features more clearly and to check the negative evidence for the ring ditch. The linear and discrete features exposed were then sampled by hand.

3.3 All but one of the features sampled proved to be shallow hollows, at most 0.1m in depth. Most of the linear features were aligned west-east (Fig. 3; 8, 10, 16, 18 & 25) although one (Fig. 3; 6) was aligned north-south. One of the discrete features (Figs. 3 & 4; 14) was a pit c. 0.7m in diameter by 0.4m deep. The pit was filled with a brown sandy loam (13), which produced no finds. The remaining discrete features (Figs. 3 & 4; 4, 12, & 24) all proved to be shallow scoops/ less than 0.1m deep. Only one (4) produced any finds, and these comprised two small fragments of a 19th-century clay roof tile.

No	Type	Context	Description	Finds
1	Topsoil	1001	Very dark greyish brown sandy loam, up to 0.4m deep	
2	Cleaning layer	1002	Dark greyish brown sandy loam 0.05m deep	Roman, medieval, and post-medieval pottery
3	Fill of 1004	1003	Dark greyish brown sandy silty loam	18 th /19 th C roof tile
4	Hollow	1004		
5	Fill of 1006	1005	Dark yellowish brown sandy loam with 5% gravel	
6	Linear feature	1006	8m x 1.4m x 0.1m deep	
7	Fill of 1008	1007	Dark yellowish brown sandy loam with 15% gravel	
8	Linear feature	1008	4m x 1.1m x 0.08m deep	
9	Fill of 1010	1009	Dark yellowish brown sandy loam with 15% gravel	
10	Linear feature	1010	5m x 0.8m x 0.09m deep	
11	Fill of 1012	1011	Brown sandy loam with 15% gravel	
12	Shallow pit	1012	1.4m diameter x 0.1m deep	
13	Fill of 1014	1013	Brown sandy loam with 1% gravel	
14	Pit	1014	1m diameter x 0.38m deep	
15	Fill of 1016	1015	Brown sandy loam with 10% gravel	
16	Linear feature	1016	6.5m x 1.2m x 0.08m deep	
17	Fill of 1018	1017	Dark brown sandy loam with 10% gravel	
18	Linear feature	1018	12.5m x 2.8m x 0.15m deep	
19	Fill of 1020	1019	Dark greyish brown, sandy loam	
20	Linear feature	1020	(Remains of 1999 evaluation trench)	
21	Natural subsoil	1021	Gravel subsoil in a brown sandy loam matrix	
22	Fill of 1023	1022	Dark yellowish brown, sandy loam	
23	Shallow pit	1023	0.3m diameter x 0.05m deep	
24	Fill of 1024	1024	Dark yellowish brown sandy loam	
25	Linear feature	1025	7m x 1.6m	
26	Natural subsoil	1026	Dark yellowish brown silt subsoil	

Table 1: Context summary

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 The only archaeological feature of any depth recorded in the strip map and sample exercise was the pit (Fig. 3; 14) in the centre of the sampled area. This feature, a small pit of c. 1m diameter, produced no finds. The remaining features were all shallow and of presumed agricultural origin. This conforms with the findings of the 1999 field evaluation.

4.2 No features corresponding to the cropmark ring ditch shown on the 1972 aerial photograph were located, suggesting a probable non-archaeological cause for the appearance of this feature.

5 REFERENCES

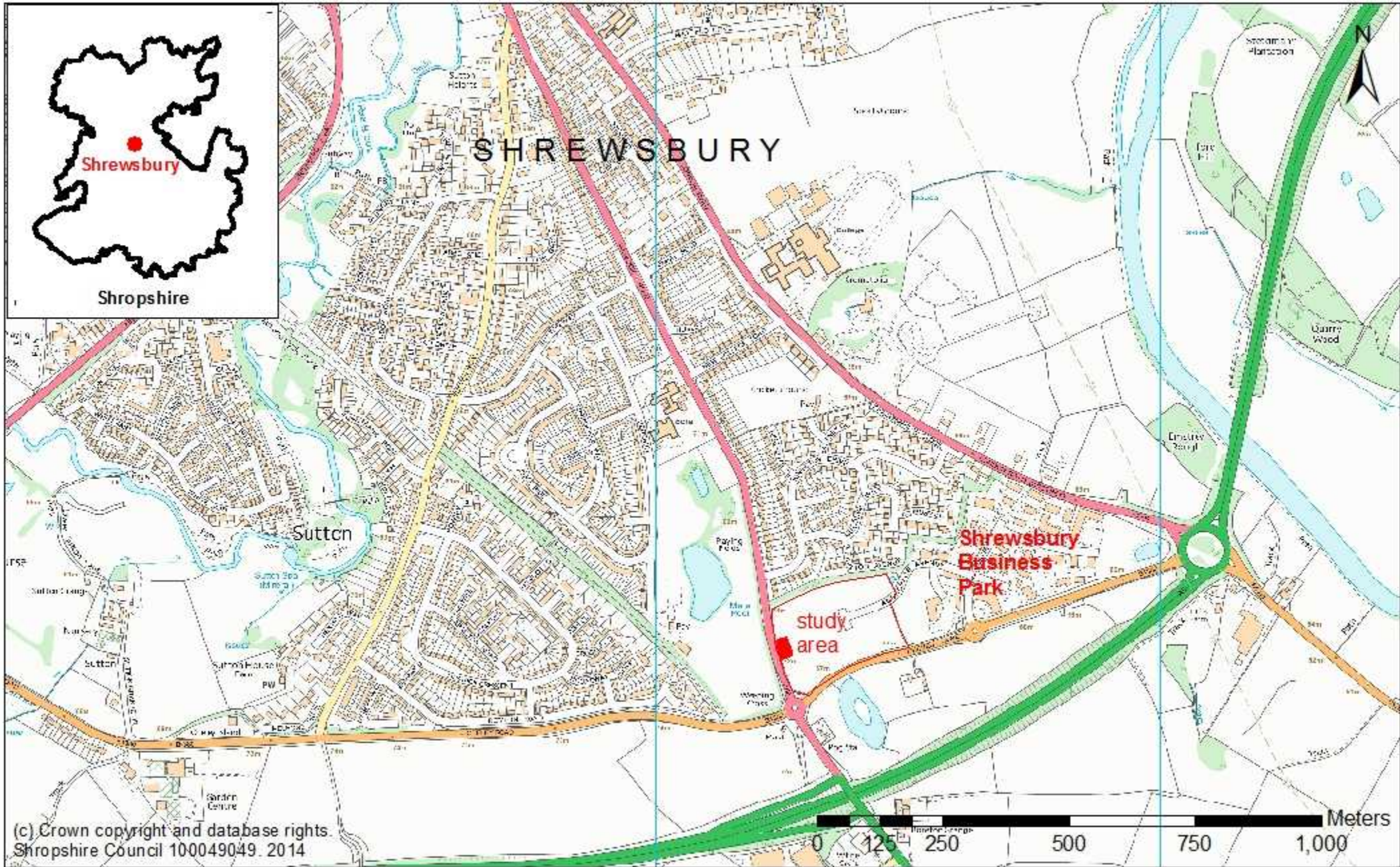
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ABBREVIATIONS

- 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

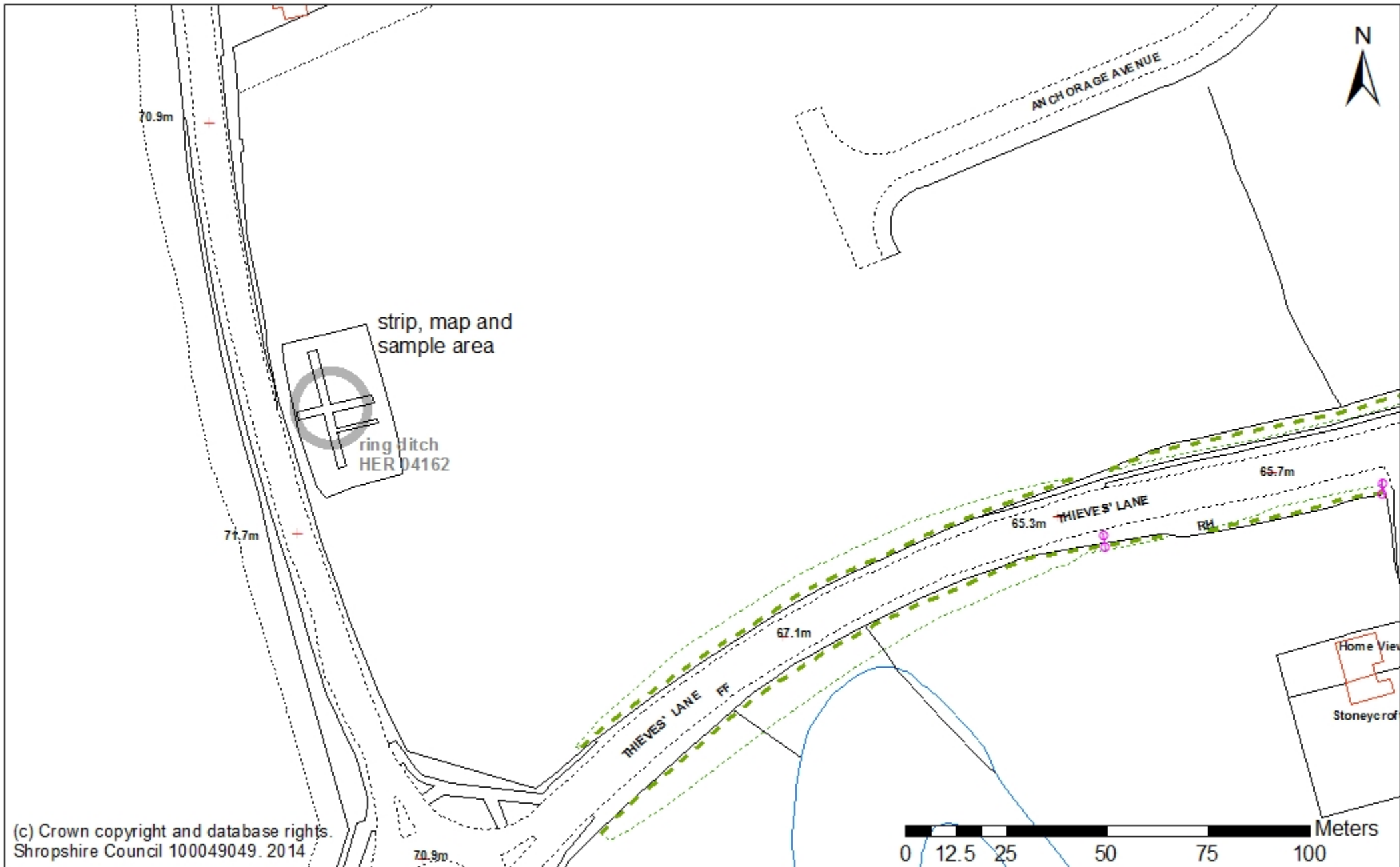
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figure 1: The location of the study area



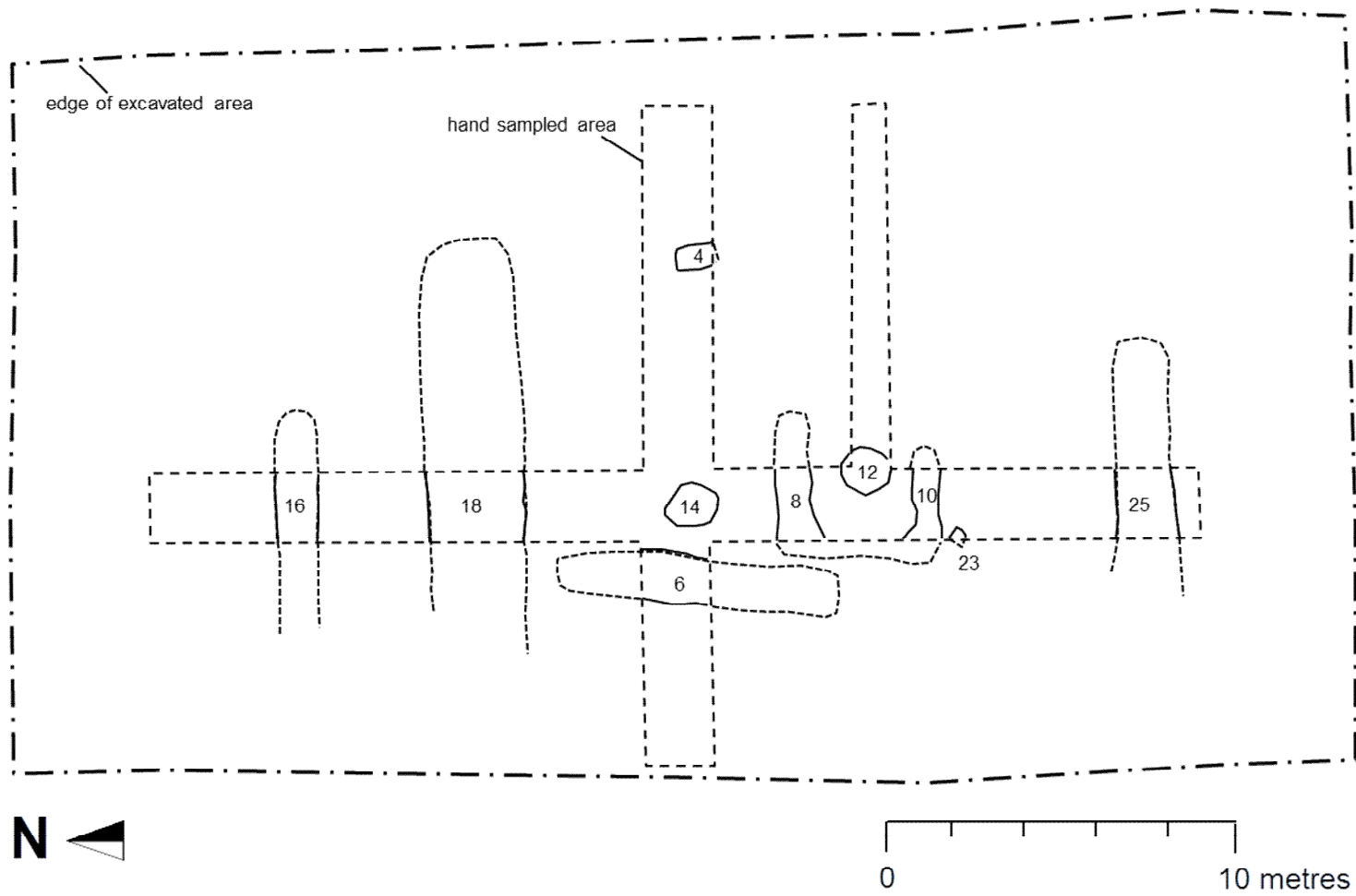
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Figure 2: The location of the strip, map and sample area

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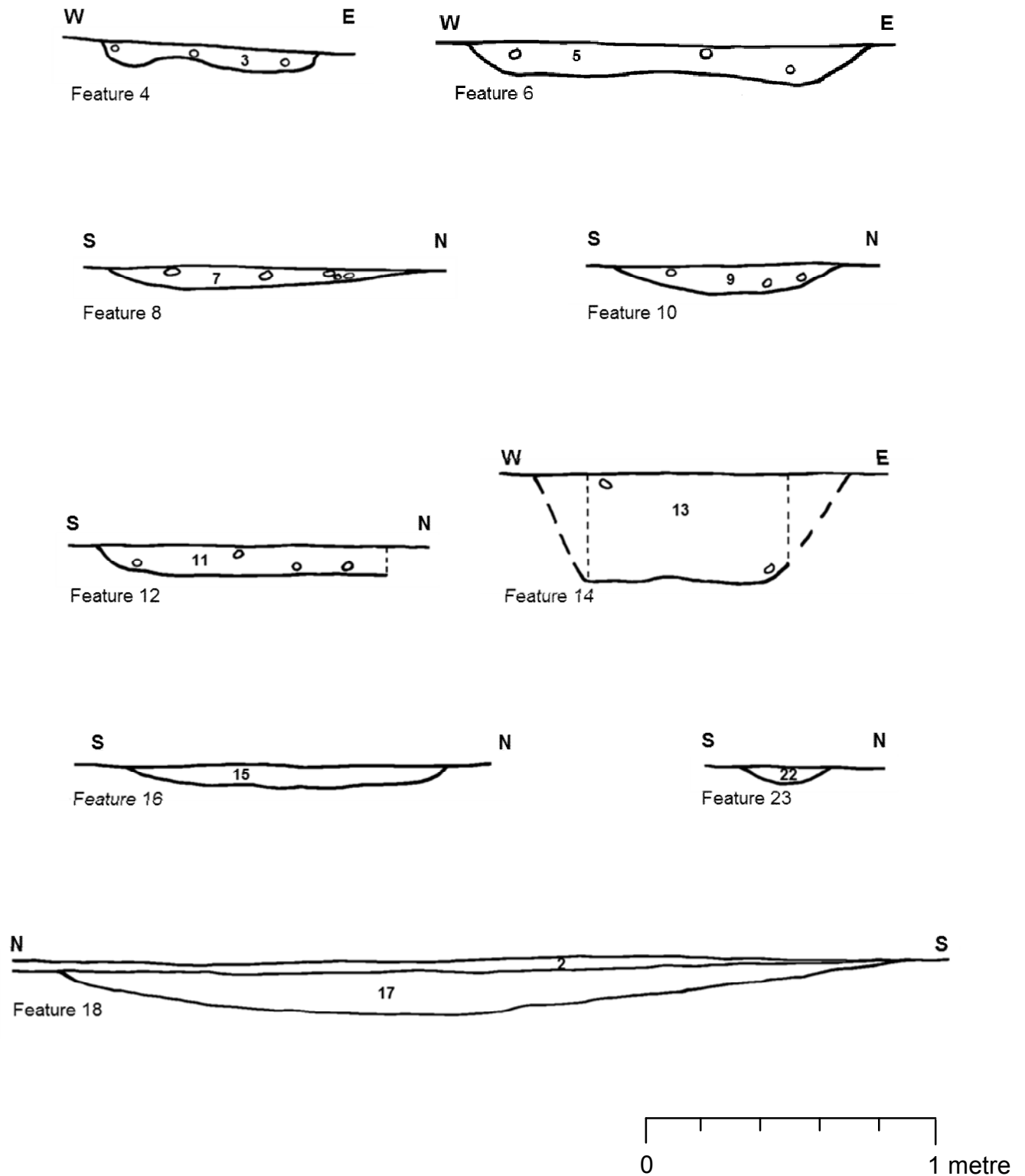
Shropshire Council
Historic Environment Team, Business Growth & Prosperity,
Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 8ND

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Figure 3: Plan of excavated area showing the location of mapped and sampled features; 1:200 scale



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Figure 4: Sections through features; 1:20 scale

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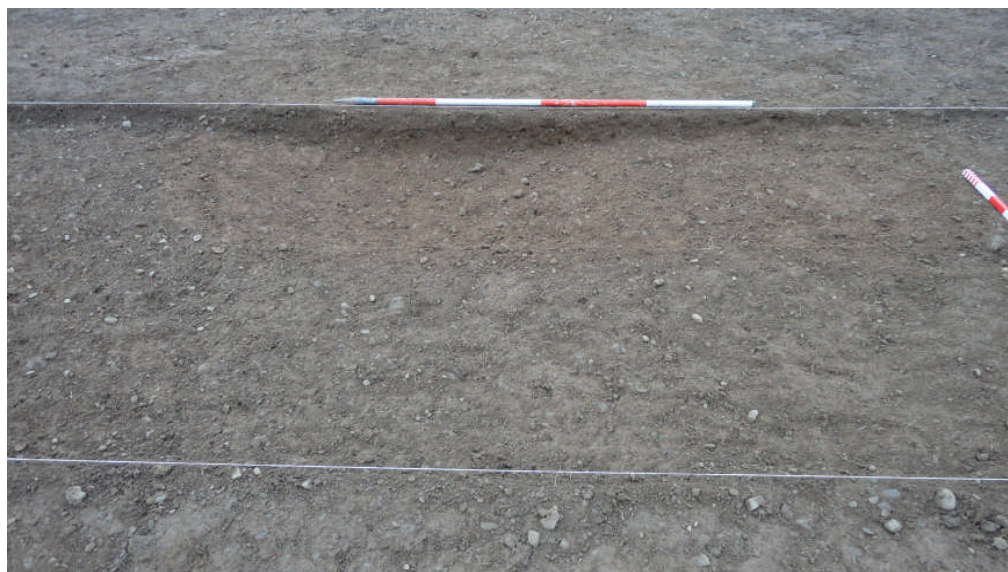


Photo 6: Feature 18, looking E, scale bar 2m