

***A Watching Brief at
St James Works, Bridgnorth,
Shropshire, 2013***

by
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Archaeology Service



**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
ST JAMES WORKS, BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE, 2013**

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A Report for

DKM Homes Ltd

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 watching brief areas

Figure 3: Plan view of the foundation trenches for Unit 11, showing the location of features 10 & 14, and drawings 4a & 4b; scale 1:100

Figure 4: a) East-facing section through the deposits at the south end of unit 11; b) south-facing section showing wall 10; c) plan view of wall 10; scale 1:20

Photo 1: The 2013 watching brief site, looking SW

Photo 2: The watching brief site looking NE

Photo 3: The sandstone wall (10) looking N, scale 1m

SUMMARY

In October 2013 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council carried out a watching brief on groundworks associated with the second phase of a development at the former St James Works, Stourbridge Road, Bridgnorth, Shropshire. The watching brief recorded the remains of a red sandstone wall, possibly belonging to a post-medieval agricultural building, and a floor and cellar associated with 20th century engineering works. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Bridgnorth is situated in southeast Shropshire, about 28.5km southeast of Shrewsbury. The town is at a bridging point of the River Severn; the High Town on the west bank stands on a sandstone promontory overlooking the river and the Low Town on the east bank.

1.2 In January 2012 work started on a redevelopment for housing of part of the former St James Works, Stourbridge Road, Bridgnorth (NGR SO 7224 9256). The development site (the study area) lies on the edge of the historic medieval and post-medieval core of the town of Bridgnorth (Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 06044) as defined by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey's assessment of Bridgnorth (Buteux, 1996) and occupies part of the site of the medieval lepers' hospital of St James (HER 00390). Prior to its redevelopment, the site comprised a former farmstead dating from the late 18th century, with surviving buildings including a Grade II Listed sandstone barn (No. 254557, HER 11693), cart and livestock sheds, and a poultiggery. The site was used in WWII as a munitions factory and more recently as a precision engineering works.

1.3 Because of its potential historical and archaeological significance, an archaeological evaluation of the site was carried out by the Archaeology Service in November 2011. Trial excavations on the site revealed buried soils containing a small quantity of medieval pottery of 13th – 14th century date. No other significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered (Hannaford, 2011). It was recommended that the development be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work in order to record the archaeological deposits that would be disturbed by the development. An historic buildings assessment was also carried out of the 18th and 19th century agricultural buildings on the site (Hanna, 2012).

1.4 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by DKM Homes Ltd to carry out the programme of archaeological work. The first phase of the development was carried out in January 2012 at the eastern part of the site, and the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the excavation of foundation trenches for new housing (units 1-4). The Archaeology Service subsequently carried out a watching brief on groundworks for the second phase of the development in October 2013, and this report details the results of this work.

2 THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Bridgnorth is not listed as a separate settlement in the Domesday survey of 1086, but formed one of the 18 berewicks of the manor of *Membrefelde* (Morville). In 1086 it was held by Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, and the site of Bridgnorth may have formed part of his demesne lands in the manor (Thorn 1986, 4.1.5). Earl Roger's son, Robert de Belleme built a castle (HER 00371) at Bridgnorth and moved the collegiate church of St Mary (HER 00389) here from the settlement at Quatford (Buteux, 1996, p2.). The town at Bridgnorth is thought to have grown up in the outer bailey of the castle. The settlement gradually superseded in importance both Morville and Quatford, no doubt because of its economically and militarily strategic location. The town's status as a borough was confirmed in 1157 by a charter of Henry II, which also granted a weekly market and an annual fair on St Mary Magdalene's day. The town rapidly outgrew its original boundaries, extending beyond the limits of the castle outer bailey, and between 1216 and 1223 new defences were built on the north and northwest sides of the town. (Phillpotts, 1995, pp5-6.)

2.2 St James' Hospital (HER 00390) was probably founded in the early 13th century in the Low Town suburb on the east bank of the River Severn. Although the date of the foundation of the hospital is not known, it is mentioned in a deed considered to be early 13th century in date. The hospital was accorded grants and privileges when Henry III visited the town on 22nd September 1224: the king granted "to the Leprous Brethren of the Hospital of St. James at Bruges, that they may...collect any stumps and dead wood for their fire" (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, p50). There is practically no further record of the history of the hospital in the medieval period until the Valuation of 1535, although a number of the Wardens or heads of the house are known (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, pp51-2). The hospital was still functioning in 1544 at the time of the Dissolution (Buteux, 1996, p8) but in 1557 it was granted by Henry VIII to Sir John Perrott for £184 15s 0d, who in turn granted it to Roger Smyth of Morville. The St James' property passed successively to the Dovey, Kinnersley, Nevitt, Bach, and Stanier families (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, pp56-9).

2.3 The hospital is shown on a map of 1610 of the borough of Bridgnorth as a building with a tower (probably a representation of the hospital's chapel) in a walled enclosure, and a number of adjacent fields belonging to the property. Pee's mid 17th-century map of the town shows three buildings on the hospital site: the hospital chapel or Church of St James, the Priory to its south, and the "Maladrerie", presumably the sick-house, to the east of the chapel. Again, all these buildings are shown to lie within a rectangular, walled enclosure. One of the hospital buildings, the Priory, was destroyed by fire in the 18th century (Mr P Cox, *pers. comm.*), and a new building, Priory House, was erected on the site (HER 17162).

2.4 A century later, John Wood's plan of Bridgnorth (Wood, 1835) shows several buildings adjacent to the study area. One of these lies approximately on the site of Priory House, another approximately on the site of the chapel as shown by Pee. A third building is shown on the Stourbridge Road frontage immediately to the east of the study area. This area is still occupied by a red sandstone barn - dated 1777 - (HER 11693). A fourth building is shown lying parallel to the barn, possibly on the site of the "Maladrerie" building of Pee's plan, a site now occupied by the south side of the modern engineering works. Wood's plan also shows a road or trackway leading into the hospital grounds from the Stourbridge road across the eastern edge of the study area.

2.5 The 1880 OS 1:500 town plan and 1901 OS 25" plan (Figure 3b) show the same

layout of buildings as Wood's plan. The building on the site of the present St James' Priory house is shown and annotated "Chapel (Remains of)"; the site of the "Maladrerie" is shown as being about 17m to the north of the remains of the chapel, and the original St. James's Priory house is shown to the south (OS 1884, LVIII.12.8 & 12.13)

By the 18th century the development site was occupied by a farmstead. Several of the farm buildings survive, including the Grade II Listed sandstone barn (HER 11693), cart and livestock sheds, and a poultiggery. The site was used in WWII as a munitions factory and more recently as a precision engineering works, and some of the 20th century buildings had incorporated parts of the earlier sandstone buildings.

2.6 Previous archaeological work

There had been no previous archaeological work on the development site itself prior to the current development. The 18th-century Grade II listed Priory House was demolished c. 1960; the house was recorded prior to its demolition by the Royal Commission (HER 17162). It was also noted that the building to the north, on the site of the hospital chapel, contained medieval masonry (HER 20399). This building was remodelled into a dwelling from its former use as a barn and stables c. 1960, and has been further altered more recently. Burials have also been found in the vicinity of this latter building (Clark-Maxwell, 1922, p59, and Mr P Cox, *pers. comm.*).

In 1997 an archaeological evaluation was carried out on the property immediately to the west of the development area. This evaluation located a cobble yard surface of late medieval or early post-medieval date 1m below the existing ground surface. (Hannaford, 1997).

In 2011, as part of the current development, an archaeological evaluation was carried out of the site. Trial excavations revealed buried soils containing a small quantity of medieval pottery of 13th – 14th century date (Hannaford, 2011). An historic buildings assessment was carried out on the 18th and 19th century farm buildings before their conversion (Hanna, 2012). An archaeological watching brief has also accompanied the groundworks associated with this development (Hannaford, 2012 and this report).

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 Phase 1 watching brief

3.1.1 A watching brief was carried out on the first phase of the development in the eastern part of the study area in January 2012. Topsoil and overburden had been removed to level the site prior to the watching brief commencing, with approximately 0.6m being removed at the southern edge of the site to 0.2m at the northern edge. The archaeological deposits noted in the watching brief were as seen in the evaluation of November 2012. At the southern edge of the site, the top of the natural red sandy subsoil was seen at the level of the reduced ground surface. The natural sand dropped down to the north to lie beneath about 0.25m of light brown sandy silt, 0.4m of brown sandy loam, and 0.25m of dark greyish brown sandy loam. No significant archaeological features or deposits were seen. (Hannaford, 2012)

3.2 Phase 2 watching brief

3.2.1 The Phase 2 watching brief was undertaken in October 2013. The foundation trenches for unit 11 (the garage block) of the development were excavated by machine under archaeological supervision. This area had until recently been partly occupied by 20th century engineering workshops.

3.2.2 The red sandstone bedrock (Fig 4a; 9) was seen at a depth of 1.1m below the ground surface at the south end of the area for unit 11. The bedrock lay below a layer of natural clean red sand (8), probably decayed bedrock, a reddish brown pebbly sand (7) and a reddish brown sand (5) possibly representing natural hillwash, all sloping down from the south.

3.2.3 At the northern end of the site the end of a red sandstone wall (Figs. 3, 4b & 4c; 10) bonded in white lime-rich mortar, was seen cut into the natural sand (5). The wall extended only part way across the trench, and may have marked the end of a wall or a buttress belonging to a building immediately to the north of the trench. The wall was 0.65m wide and the top lay 0.75m below ground level. There were no finds associated with the wall to indicate a date for it. The wall may well have belonged to a farm building demolished to make way for the 20th century engineering buildings. The wall had clearly been truncated and the top was sealed by a layer of greyish brown sand with pebbles (4). This layer in turn lay beneath a floor surface of 19th or early 20th century bricks (3) covered with a thin screed of concrete (2), probably belonging to the former 20th century engineering workshops. A deposit 0.4m thick of dark greyish brown loam (1) with brick and sandstone rubble covered this floor and made up the ground surface.

3.2.4 In the central foundation trench, a modern brick lined pit or cellar (Fig. 3; 14) was seen cut into the natural sand (5).

3.2.5 No further archaeological features or deposits were seen during the watching brief.

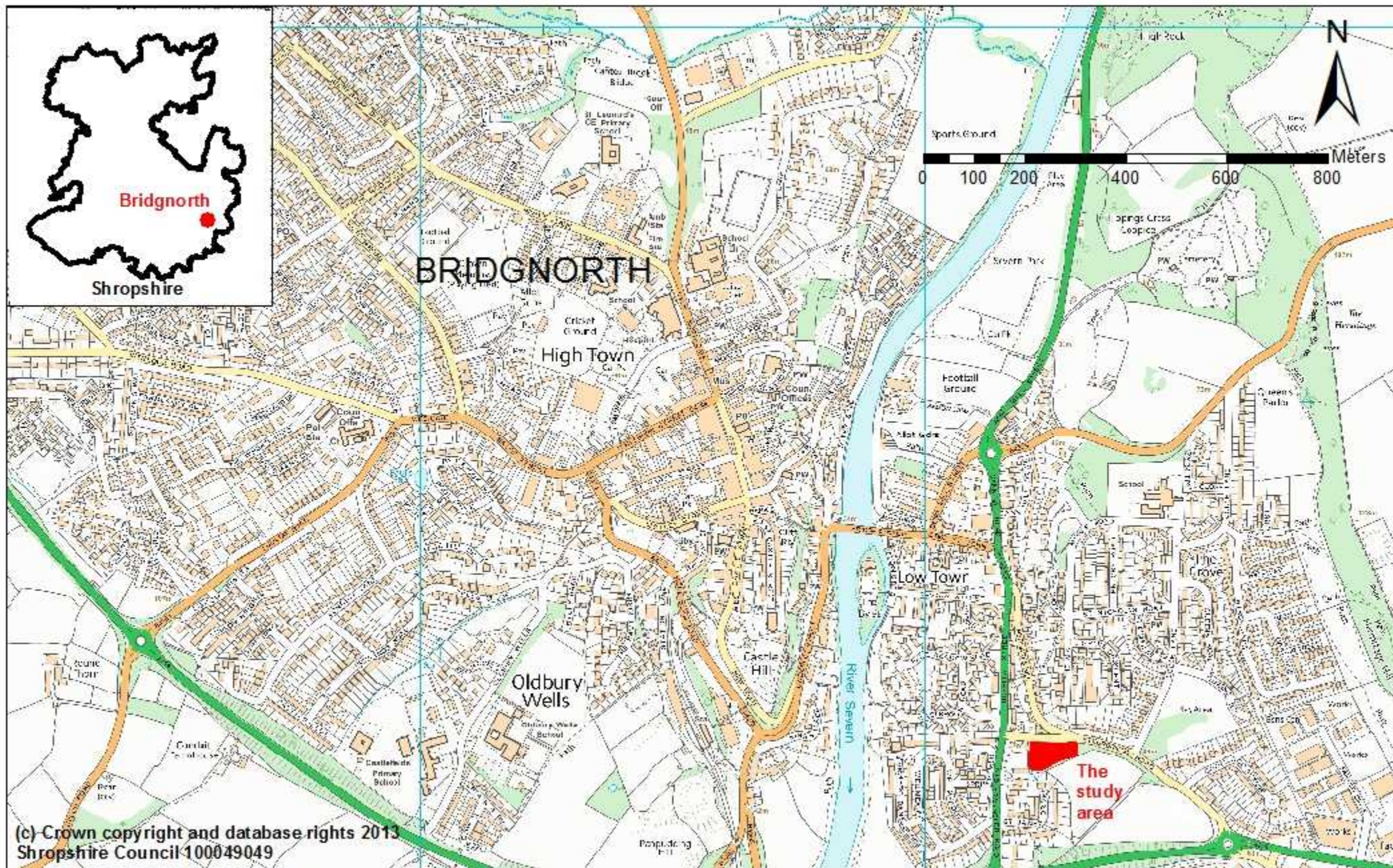
3.2.6 The location of unit 12 was stripped of topsoil prior to the watching brief, exposing the natural deposits of sand and bedrock, and it was agreed with the Senior Archaeological Advisor that a watching brief would not be required on the excavations for foundations in this area.

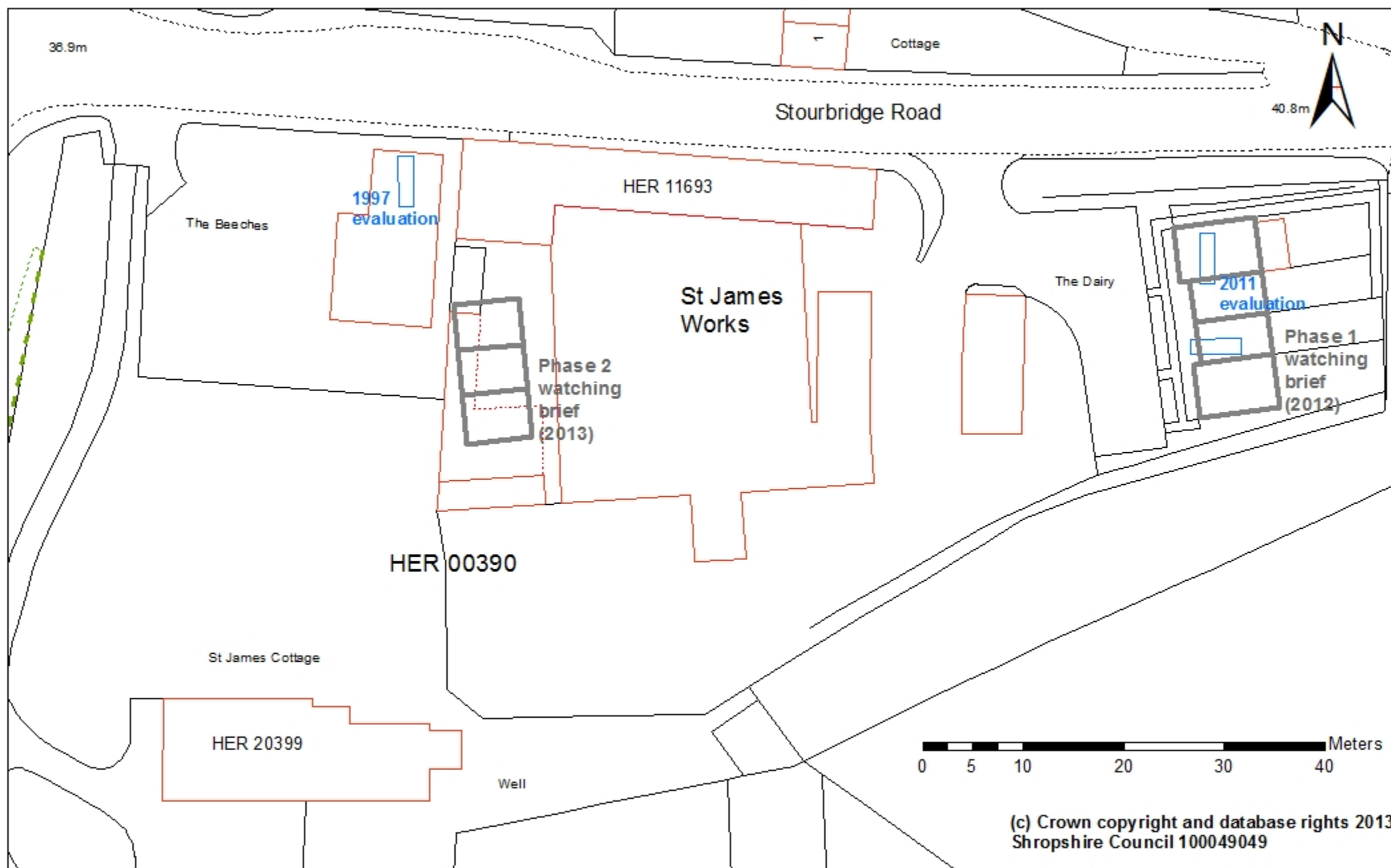
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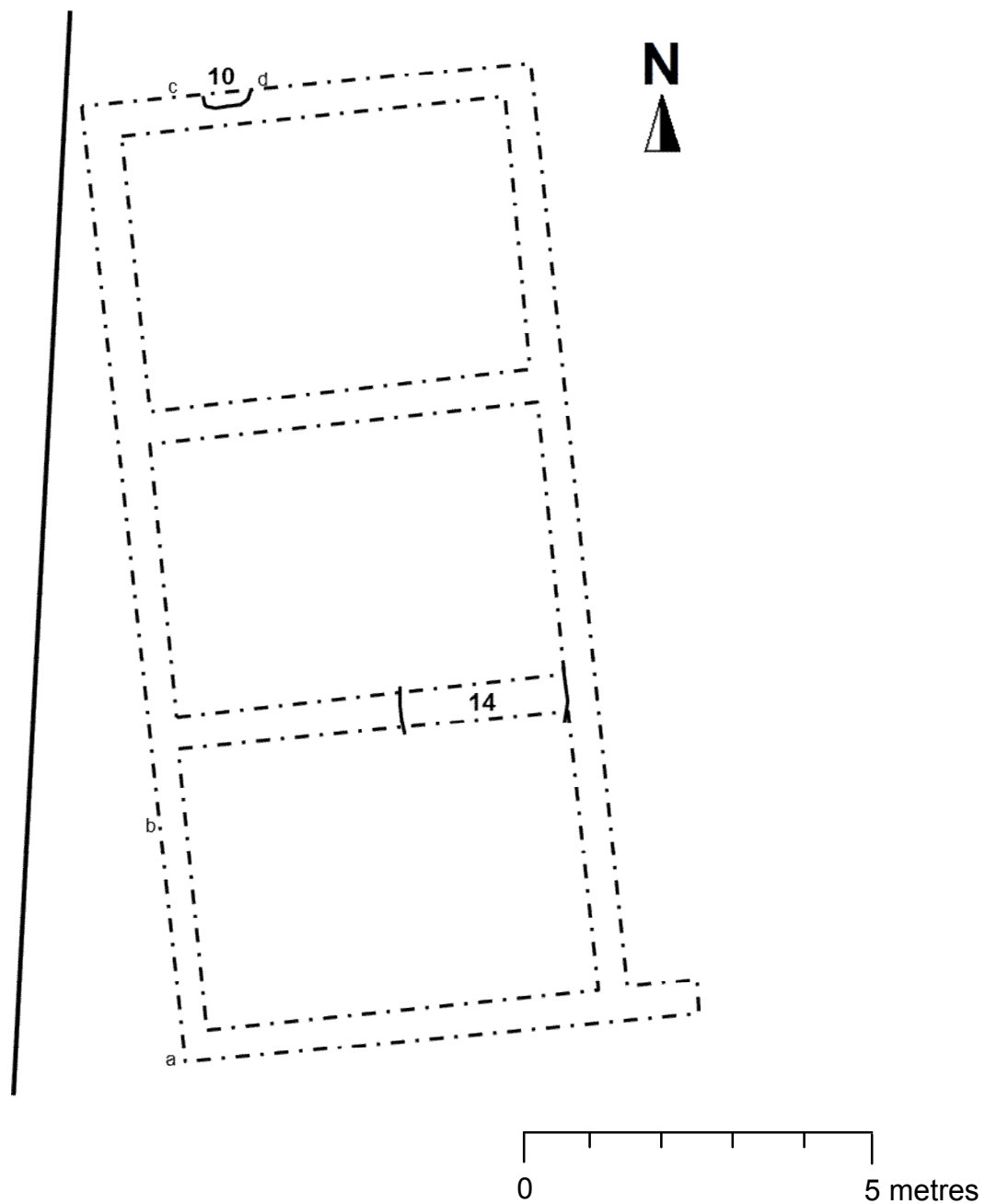
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ABBREVIATIONS

- 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

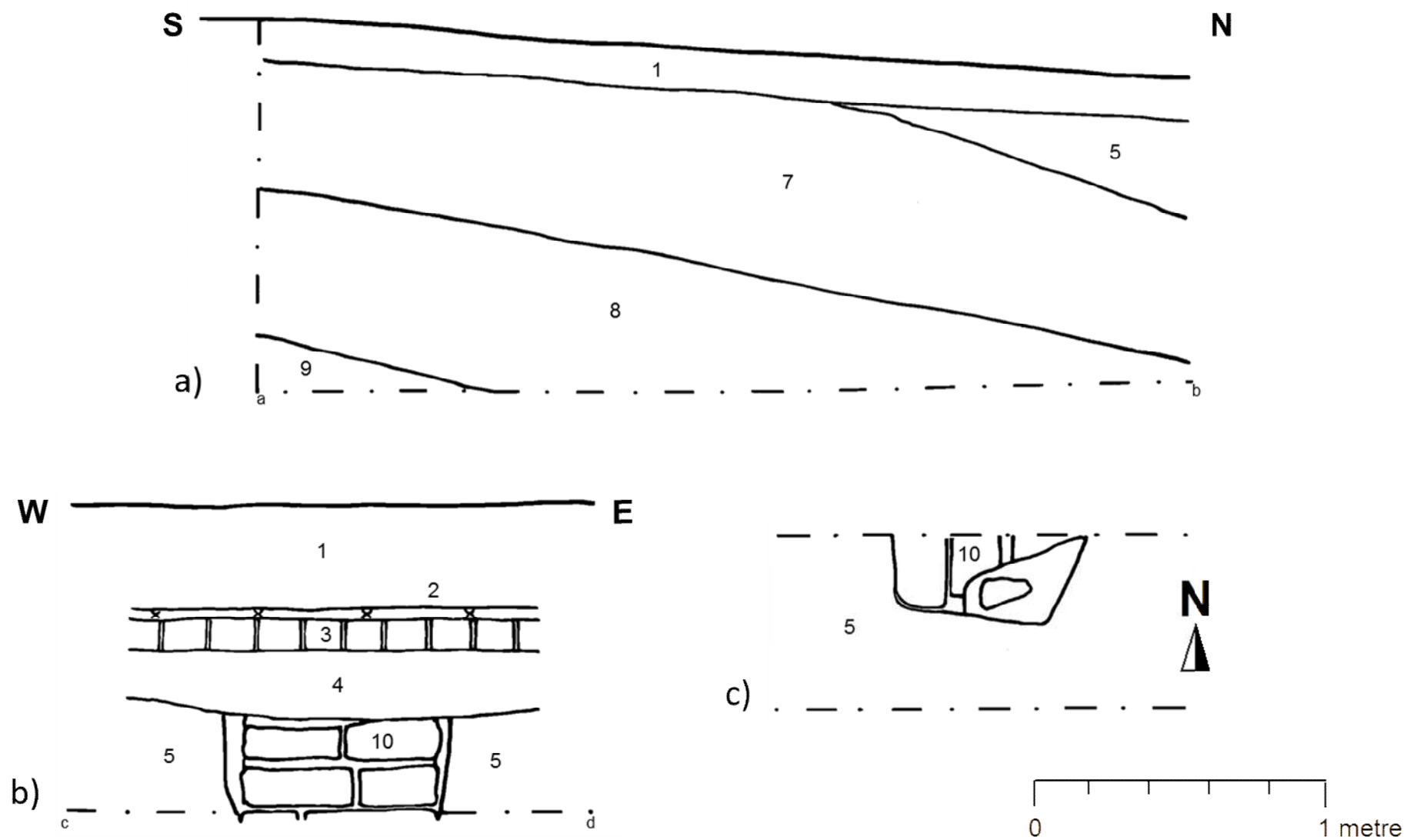






ST JAMES WORKS, BRIDGNORTH 2013

Figure 3: Plan view of the foundation trenches for Unit 11, showing the location of features 10 & 14, and drawings 4a & 4b; scale 1:100



ST JAMES WORKS, BRIDGNORTH 2013

Figure 4: a) East-facing section through the deposits at the south end of unit 11; b) south-facing section showing wall 10; c) plan view of wall 10; scale 1:20



Photo 1: The 2013 watching brief site, looking SW



Photo 2: The watching brief site looking NE



Photo 3: The sandstone wall (10) looking N, scale 1m