

## A WATCHING BRIEF AT SHREWSBURY CASTLE 2015

by  
H R HANNAFORD MifA



## **1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1** In summer 2015 the Archaeology Service carried out a watching brief on the installation of a monument at Shrewsbury Castle, Shrewsbury Shropshire (NGR SJ 494 128). The monument, a stone eagle brought back after World War II from Cologne to the Copthorne Barracks, Shrewsbury, was to be installed at a location on the bank on the east side of the castle bailey 24m southeast from the castle's main hall (see Fig. 1).

**1.2** Shrewsbury Castle was probably built shortly after the Norman Conquest, possibly as early as 1067. It was strategically located at the northern end of the town immediately above the neck in the river loop which surrounded the early town. Orderic Vitalis mentions the presence of a castle or royal stronghold (*praesidium regis*) at Shrewsbury shortly after the Conquest, describing how in 1069 the Welsh, aided by the men of Chester, native citizens, and Edric the Wild besieged the castle and burnt the town, retiring before reinforcements could be sent from King William's army. The castle originally comprised a large motte with an inner bailey to the northwest and an outer bailey to the southwest. The Domesday Survey of 1086 also records how the construction of the castle had taken over 51 dwellings in the town (Thorn & Thorn, 1986, C14).

**1.3** In 2000 a geophysical survey was carried out at Shrewsbury Castle using a resistivity meter and ground probing radar. The banks on the east and west side of the bailey were identified as made up ground, up to 1.9m deep with the original ground surface beneath.

**1.4** Shrewsbury Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (National List Entry No. 1003706). It was a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the installation of the monument that the groundworks should be carried out under archaeological supervision. The aim of the watching brief was to allow for the preservation by record of any archaeological remains that might be encountered during the groundworks. The Archaeology Service was commissioned to carry out this watching brief.

## **2 THE WATCHING BRIEF**

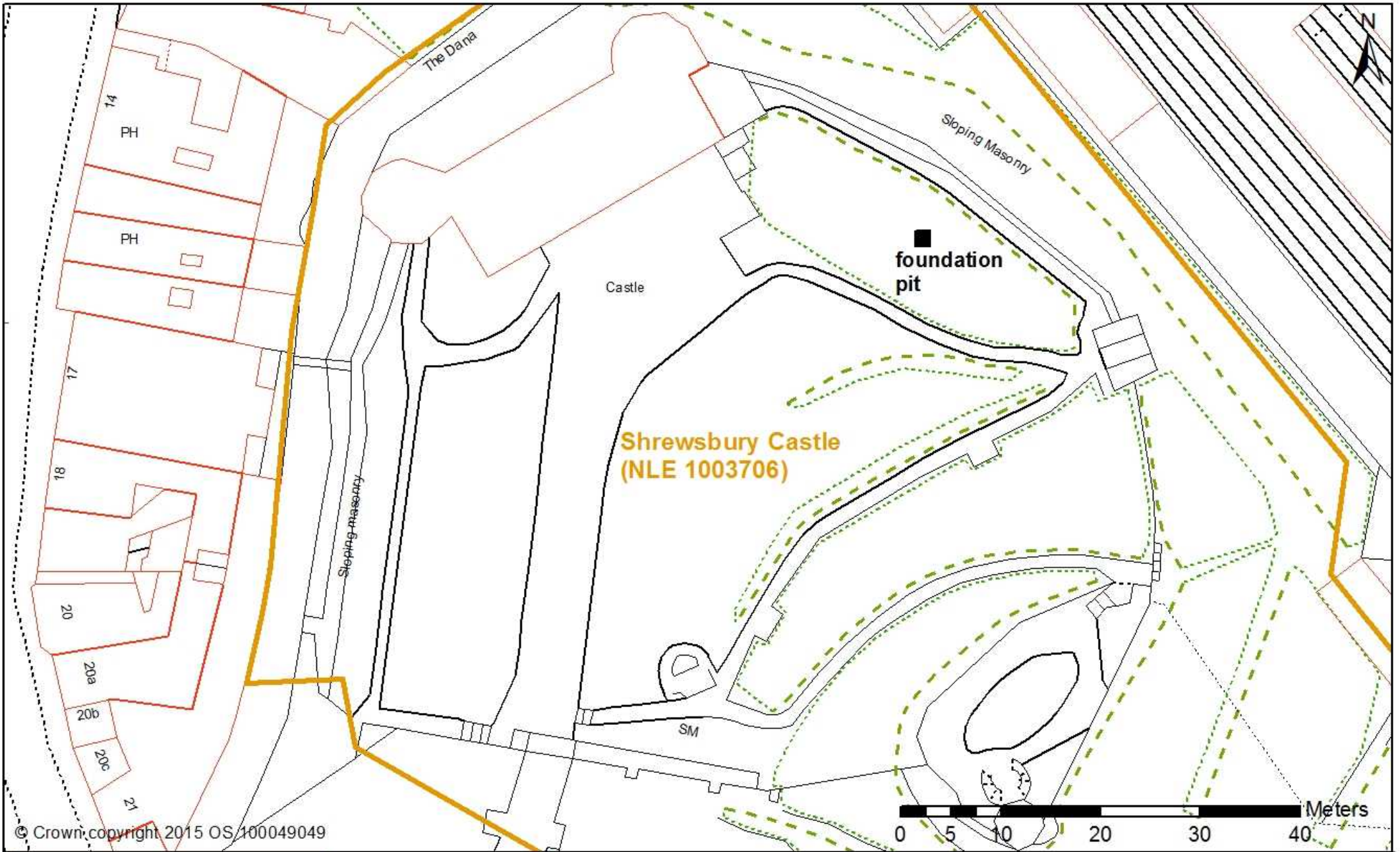
**2.1** A test-pit was excavated on 8<sup>th</sup> June, with the main excavation on the 14<sup>th</sup> July. The pit for the foundation for the monument was located some 24m southeast of the eastern corner of the main hall of the castle, in an area of sloping ground running down from the bailey curtain wall. The pit was dug by hand about 1.5m square to a depth of about 0.65m at its lower (southwestern) corner and 1m on its upper (northeastern) corner.

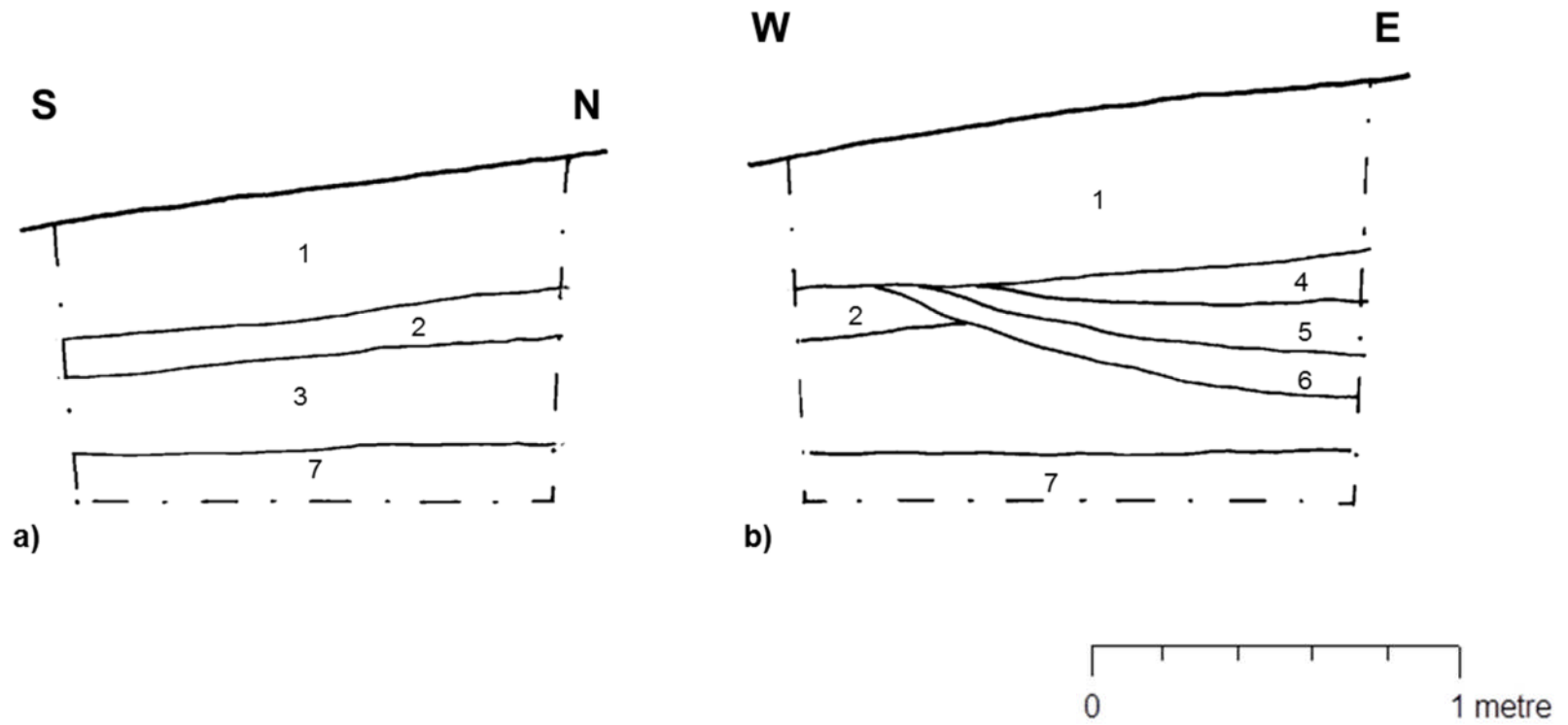
**2.2** The topsoil was seen to consist of a depth of between 0.3m of a dark grey brown sandy humic loam (Fig. 2; 1). Three tip layers of alternating clay loam and loam (4, 5 & 6) were seen in the northern corner of the pit. The topsoil and these tip layers lay over a deposit of dark brown sandy loam 0.1m thick (2), with flecks of mortar and charcoal, pebbles, and which produced a fragment of flower pot (during the excavation of the test pit). This soil represented a buried garden or yard soil. It in turn lay over a deposit of a

slightly lighter brown and more compact sandy silty loam (3) up to 0.3m thick; this deposit produced no finds apart from a small number of fragments of animal bone (cow or horse). This layer lay on a deposit of compact reddish brown sandy clay loam (7). About 0.1m depth of this deposit was removed. Again, the only finds were a few fragments of large animal bone.

**2.3** No other significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the excavation of the pit.

**2.4** The deposits encountered in the excavations were “made ground” – i.e. man-made deposits – and their presence accords with the 2000 geophysical survey by Stratascan. No dating evidence was recovered however apart from the single sherd of flower pot from near the top of the sequence of deposits.





SHREWSBURY CASTLE 2015

Figure 2: The foundation pit; a) east-facing section; b) south-facing section; 1:20 scale



Photo 1: The location of the foundation pit (centre right), looking NE across the castle inner bailey.



Photo 2: The south-facing section of the foundation pit, looking N; scale bar 1m



Photo 3: The east-facing section of the foundation pit, looking W; scale bar 1m