

A Watching Brief at Victoria Avenue, Shrewsbury, 2015

by
H R Hannaford



Archaeology Service



**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
VICTORIA AVENUE, SHREWSBURY, 2015**

by

H R HANNAFORD MCIFA

A report for

WESTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION plc

Archaeology Service Report Number 377
© Shropshire Council
November 2015

Archaeology Service,

Shropshire Council, Historic Environment Team,
Business Support & Regulatory Services,
Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury SY2 6ND

Tel: 01743 252575 email: archaeology@shropshire.gov.uk

CONTENTS

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

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: The location of the study area

Figure 2: The location of the cable trench on Victoria Avenue

Figure 3: The location of the cable trench and main features recorded by the watching brief

Figure 4: Southeast-facing sections showing principal features and deposits mentioned in the text

Figure 5: A selection of 18th-century views of the study area

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1: Victoria Avenue, looking E

Photo 2: Wall 5, looking E; scale bars 1m & 0.5m

Photo 3: The remains of the west tower of the New Work (wall 16), looking W; scale bars 1m & 0.5m

SUMMARY

In October 2015 excavations for a new electricity cable along Victoria Avenue, Shrewsbury uncovered the remains of a late 13th-century defensive tower that once stood at the west end of the "New Work", an outlier of the town's medieval defences. The remains comprised part of the northern arc of the tower and lay at a depth of 0.5m below the road surface. The remains of the east and west walls of an early post-medieval house that abutted the tower were also exposed in the cable trench.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In October 2015 Western Power Distribution Ltd carried out cabling works to the electricity supply within the road carriageway along Victoria Avenue, Shrewsbury, Shropshire (NGR SJ 487 126).

1.2 Victoria Avenue is situated on the northwest side of the historic core of medieval Shrewsbury. The road lies on the southeast bank of the River Severn which creates a loop around the historic town centre. A ford across the river is thought to have run from the Victoria Avenue area across to Frankwell on the northwest bank. In the late 13th century the town's defences were strengthened by the addition of a wall, the "New Work" (Shropshire Historic Environment Record [HER] No. 01459), an outlying stretch of wall along what is now Victoria Avenue defending this ford. The wall was about 100m long with a round tower at either end. The line of the wall is now marked by the boundary of the Shrewsbury Sixth Form College along Victoria Avenue. The standing sandstone wall is of modern construction and there are no above ground remains of the towers at either end of the wall, though the medieval wall may survive below ground. The land to the south of the New Work was occupied by an Augustinian Friary (HER 01466).

1.3 The below ground remains of the northern half of the tower at the western end of the "New Work" are a Scheduled Ancient Monument (NHLE 1003714, "Remains of tower in Victoria Avenue"), and lie partly under the highway, owned by Shropshire Council. The approximate location of the tower has been marked by two sets of stone setts placed in the tarmac of the road, although neither set corresponds exactly with the Scheduled area (or the actual location of the monument – see below). The standing wall belongs to the Sixth Form College and is curtilage listed as part of The Priory, a Grade II Listed Building (NHLE 1059005 Shrewsbury Sixth Form College, The Priory, St Austin's Friars).

1.4 Because of the potential significance of the archaeological resource Historic England and Shropshire Council's Historic Environment Team were consulted to ensure that adequate archaeological provision was in place for these works. As a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent for the works, and in line with the Shrewsbury Town Walls Conservation Management Plan (CMP) Management Policy (5.6) for managing roadworks, it was considered appropriate that these groundworks should be accompanied by a programme of archaeological work to comprise an archaeological watching brief.

1.5 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.

1.6 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was commissioned by Western Power Distribution plc. to carry out the programme of archaeological work.

2 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Following the capture of Shrewsbury and the burning of its suburbs in 1215 by the Welsh under Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, Henry III in 1218 ordered the town's burgesses to build a wall to protect the town. Construction work had begun by 1220 and is thought to have been largely complete by 1242. Outside the wall for most of its circuit was a defensive ditch, excavated as close as possible to the wall. The final circuit of the medieval town wall was about 2.2km in length, excluding the earlier castle and cross-peninsular defences and later outworks. (Baker, 2010, p130).

2.2 The "New Work" was an outlying stretch of the town defences that were constructed in the late 13th century to defend a ford across the River Severn in the vicinity of the Augustinian Friary. The line of the wall is now marked by the boundary of the Shrewsbury Sixth Form College along Victoria Avenue. The New Work comprised a stretch of wall some 100m long with a circular tower at each end. In 1337 the Borough granted the Augustinian Friars the New Work, on the condition that they built an "embattled house" there and allowed it to be garrisoned in time of war (Baker, 2010, p146). In 1342 the wall was referred to in inquisitions, which described the wall as being 20 perches long (c. 100m) with two round towers. By 1620 the post-Dissolution owner of the friary, the barrister Roger Pope, had converted one of the round towers of the New Work into a tanning room. The western tower is shown on several 18th-century engravings and paintings with a building adjoining its east side, aligned north-south (see Fig. 5 and front cover). The painting by John Bowen of 1720 also shows boatbuilding on the land to the west of the tower. The tower, by then known as the Round House, was demolished in c. 1790.

2.3 The tower at the west end of the New Work was excavated in 1911 when Victoria Avenue was widened from a footpath to its present extent. The Scheduling description for the tower notes that "when originally discovered the wall of the circular tower was found to measure approximately 0.9m thick, stood 1.9m high and the tower had a diameter of 5.7m". The tower at the east end of the New Work is referred to in a document of 1565 as being 14 yards from the 'spouthole', later the site of a culvert, and originally probably the point at which the town ditch entered the river. A 1997 evaluation trench on the south frontage of Victoria Avenue on the line of the New Work wall encountered deep post-medieval deposits sloping sharply down to the north, towards the river. The wall may, however, have survived at a lower level (Hannaford, 1997). A 2011 evaluation on the western end of the defences (Dodd, 2011) and a 2012 watching brief on the central portion (Frost, 2012) likewise found no trace of the wall within the depth investigated.

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 The watching brief on the excavation of the new cable trench along Victoria Avenue west from its junction with St Austin's Friars was carried out in October 2015. The trench was cut by machine along the south side of the road to a depth of 0.6m (600mm) and a width of 0.45m.

3.2 The cable trench was cut from east to west, and at the eastern end of Victoria Avenue the tarmac road surface (Figs. 4a-c, 1) was between 0.08m and 0.16m thick with a gravel base (2) 0.1m thick. These road surface deposits lay over a mixed rubble layer over 0.45m thick of a brown sandy loam (3) which contained fragments of brick, sandstone, and tile, and gravel. The brown sandy loam began to thin about 45m west of St Austin's Friars road rising over a deposit of red clay layer (6) which in turn lay over a brown sandy loam (7) with crushed mortar.

3.3 The red clay deposit (Fig. 4a, 6) butted against the east face of a sandstone and brick wall (5) about 2m thick aligned north-south. The top of this wall lay at a depth of 0.3m below the road surface, 48m west of St Austin's Friars road (at SJ 48722 12671).

3.4 On the west side of the brick and sandstone wall (Fig. 4a, 5) was a deposit of reddish brown sandy loam (8) which contained fragments of brick, sandstone, tile, and mortar. This deposit lay over a brick culvert (9) of early 20th century appearance which ran towards the river, presumably a drain from the later post-medieval buildings on Friary site.

3.5 The sandy loam deposit (8) thinned to the west and overlay a deposit of greyish brown crushed mortar (Fig.4b, 10) with brick rubble, tile fragments, and a small quantity of red sandstone fragments. At the base of the trench, below this rubble deposit (10), was a layer of dark greyish brown sandy humic loam (11) with some pebbles, possibly an earlier ground surface. The rubble deposit (10) also overlay the top of a brick wall with an eastern face of red sandstone (13). The top of the wall lay about 0.35m below the road surface 67m west of St Austin's Friars road (at SJ 48705 12666). This wall was 0.9m wide and was aligned north-south. Immediately to the west of this wall a curved sandstone wall (Figs. 4b & 4c, 16) at least 0.6m thick was exposed in the base of the trench at a depth of c. 0.5m below the road surface. This sandstone wall was clearly part of the northern arc of the western tower of the New Work. It was considered that the trench was sufficiently deep here, so that the wall was left in situ and not disturbed further. A deposit of clean grey sand and stone chippings (14) of recent appearance sealed the top of the tower wall and filled the interior of the tower. It is probable that the brick and sandstone walls to the east (walls 5 and 13) belonged to the post-medieval building that abutted round tower. Deposits of red clay (12 & 18), possibly natural subsoil, abutted the east face of wall 5 and the west face of wall 16. A further deposit of brown sandy loam (17) with brick and tile lay over the western clay deposit. Brick foundation remains (19) 0.35m wide had been built into this deposit, partly resting on the edge of the tower wall.

3.6 No other significant archaeological features or deposits were recorded during the watching brief.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 An attempt was made during the excavation of the cable trench to avoid disturbing the remains of the tower by diverting the trench around the stone setts in the road marking the tower, although other services in the road restricted the northward extent of this diversion, and the scheduled area could not be entirely avoided. In the event, the trench cut across and exposed the northern side of the tower at the western end of the New Work.

4.2 The curved red sandstone wall of the tower was seen to lie 68m west from the junction of Victoria Avenue and St Austin's Friars. The remains of the tower lay at a depth of 0.5m below the ground surface (and were left intact by the current work). The tower had previously been rediscovered and excavated in 1911, probably when Victoria Avenue was widened to its present extent. The 1927 OS 25" (3rd Edition) through to the 1964 1:1250 OS maps show the arc of the tower extending out from the face of the college boundary wall. By 1971 these remains appear to have been removed or buried as the arc of the tower is no longer shown and its location is marked as "Tower (site of)" on succeeding OS maps. This would explain both the precision of the Scheduled area around the actual remains of the tower and the recent appearance of the deposit of stone chippings that buried and filled the tower. Whilst only part of the northern half of the tower was seen in the cable trench, the exposed arc suggested an approximate diameter of 7.5m for the tower (see Fig. 2), slightly larger than the 18 feet diameter suggested in 1911. The stone setts in the road do not quite accurately reflect the location of the tower, being placed a little too far to the west, and their arc being of too small a diameter.

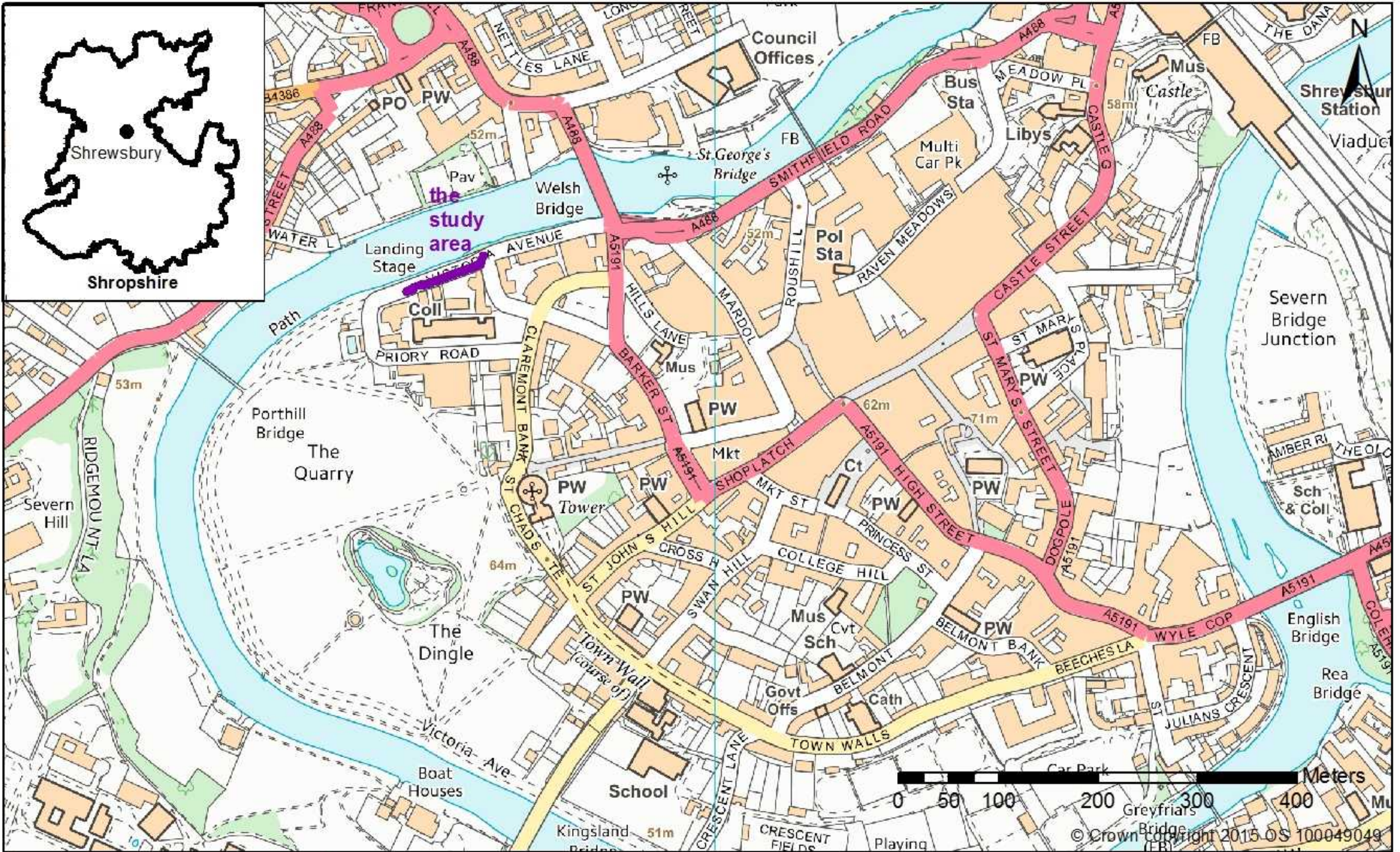
4.3 The foundation remains of the house attached to the tower also appear to survive beneath the road surface. The brick and sandstone construction of these walls suggest an early post-medieval date, which would be consistent with the pictorial evidence. The house would thus have been about 19m long, southwest-northeast, if indeed wall 5 represented the eastern wall of the house, though this would make the building longer than the one depicted in the 18th century illustrations. There was no evidence as to whether these remains were also associated with the late medieval embattled house (if it were ever actually built by the Augustinian Friary).

5 REFERENCES

- Anon**, 1739: *Shrewsbury in the Great Frost* , Shropshire Museums FA/1995/001
- Baker, N J**, 2010: *Shrewsbury, An archaeological assessment of an English border town*, Oxbow Books
- Bowen, J**, c. 1720: *A Prospect of the Town of Shrewsbury taken from the Kingsland Bank*, Shropshire Museums FA/1991/136/2
- Buck, S & N**, 1732: *South west Prospect of Shrewsbury*, Shropshire Museums FA/1991/171/1
- Dodd, LJ**, 2011: *Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: an archaeological evaluation*, Earthworks Archaeology Report E1128
- Frost, P**, 2012: *Creation of new pedestrian access, Victoria Avenue Wall, Shrewsbury Sixth Form College*, Castlery Archaeology Report. 386.
- Hannaford, H R**, 1997: *An archaeological evaluation at Victoria Avenue, Welsh Bridge, Shrewsbury*, SCCAS Report No. 113.
- Hannaford, H R**, 2015: *Shrewsbury Town Walls: A Conservation Management Plan*, SCAS Report No. 368

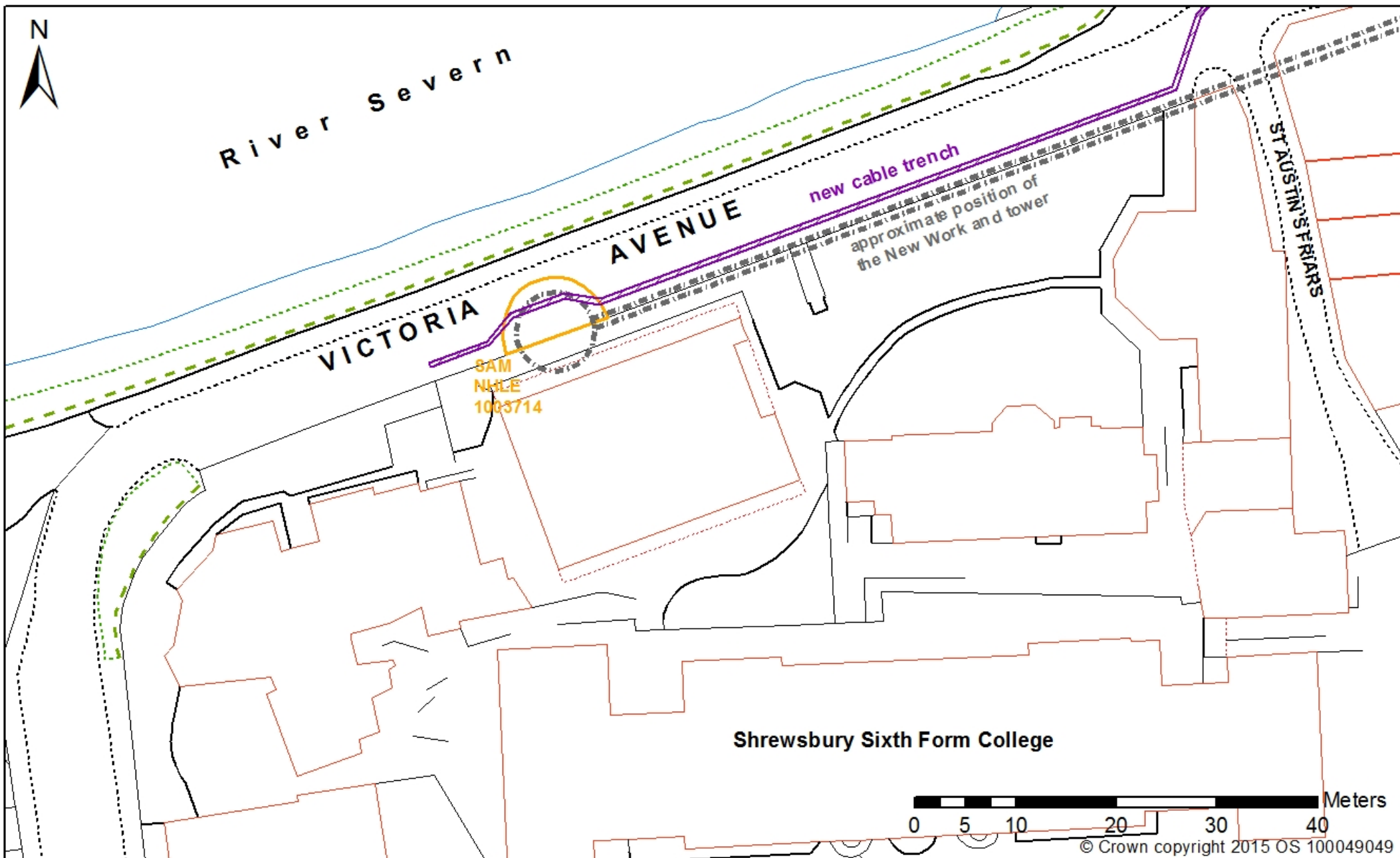
ABBREVIATIONS

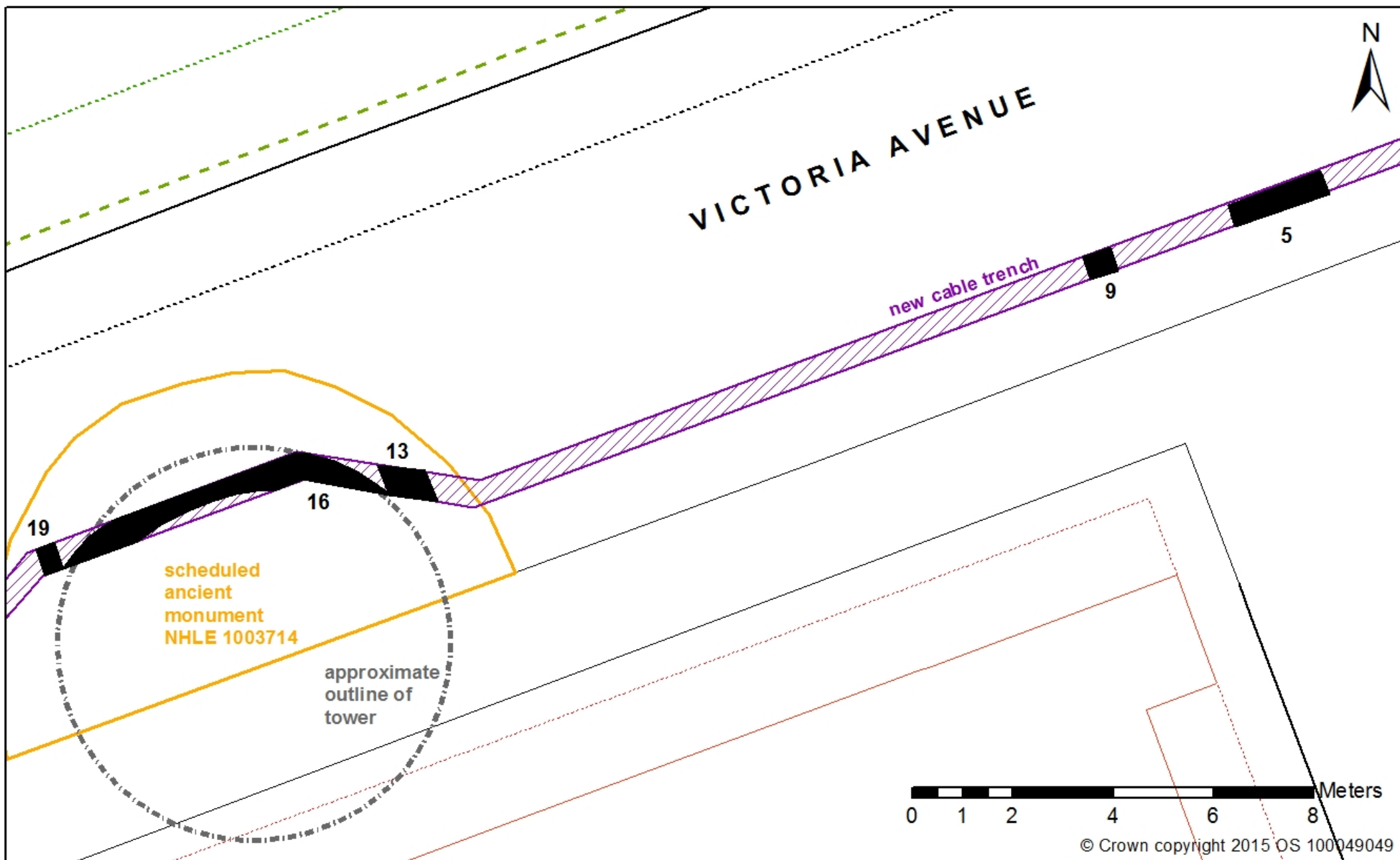
DSH	Discovering Shropshire's History website, http://www.shropshirehistory.org.uk
HER	County Historic Environment Record, Shirehall, Shrewsbury
OS	Ordnance Survey
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
SCAS	Shropshire Council Archaeology Service
SCCAS	Shropshire County Council Archaeology Service
TCSVFC	Transactions of the Caradoc & Severn Valley Field Club
 TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

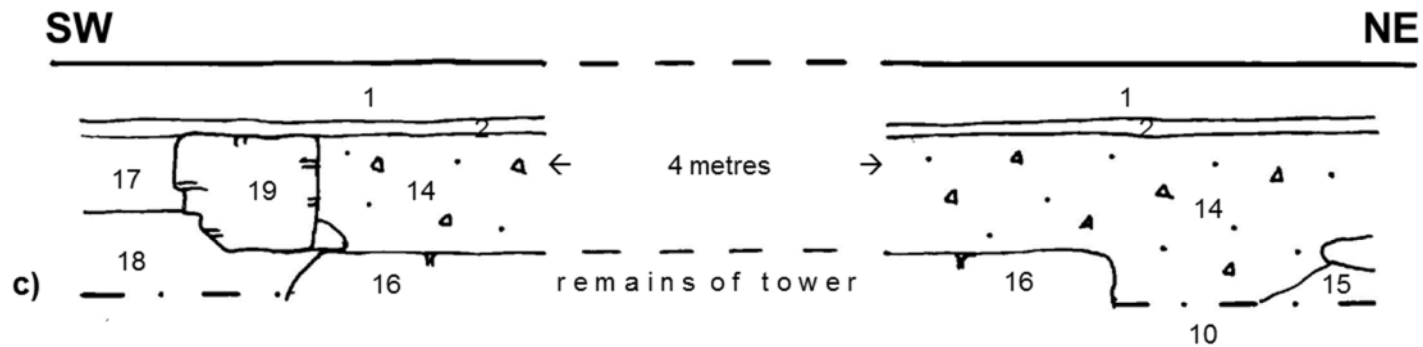
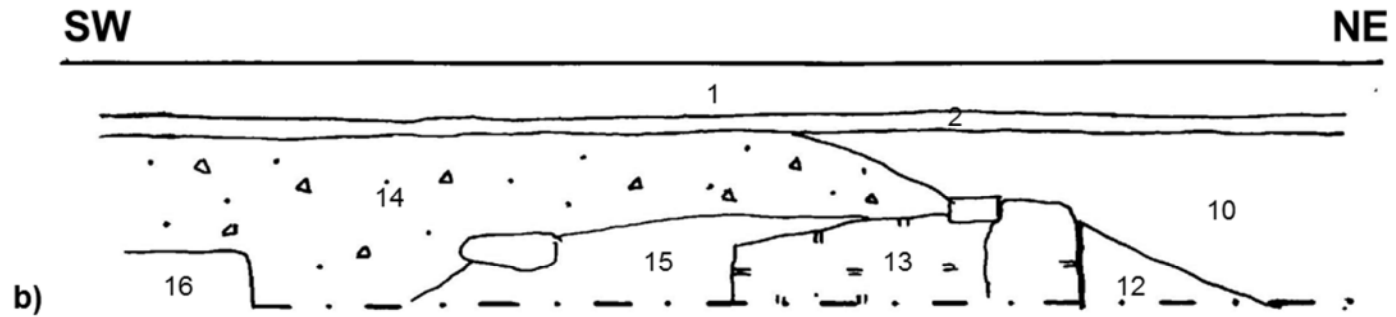
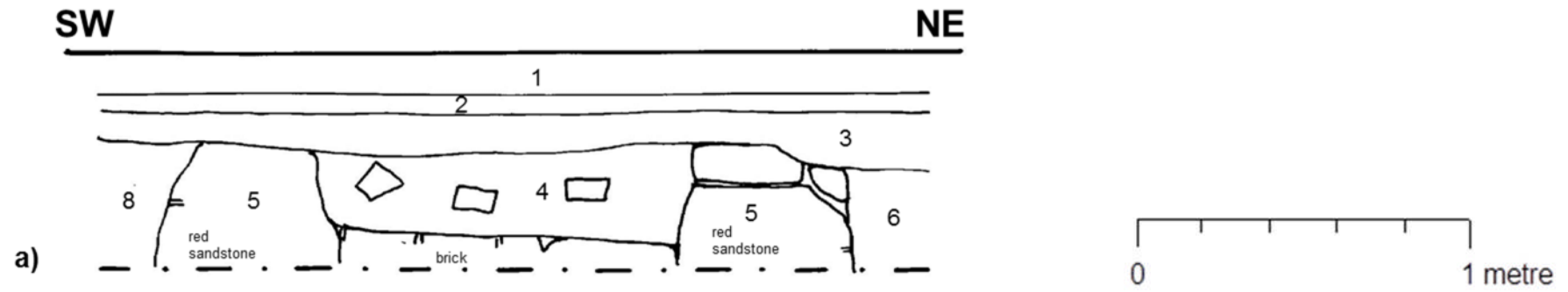


VICTORIA AVENUE, SHREWSBURY 2015

Figure 1: The location of the study area





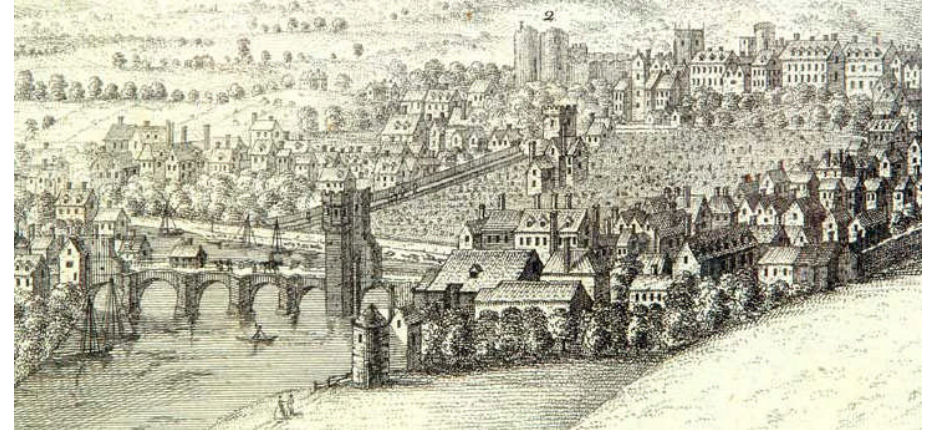


VICTORIA AVENUE, SHREWSBURY 2015

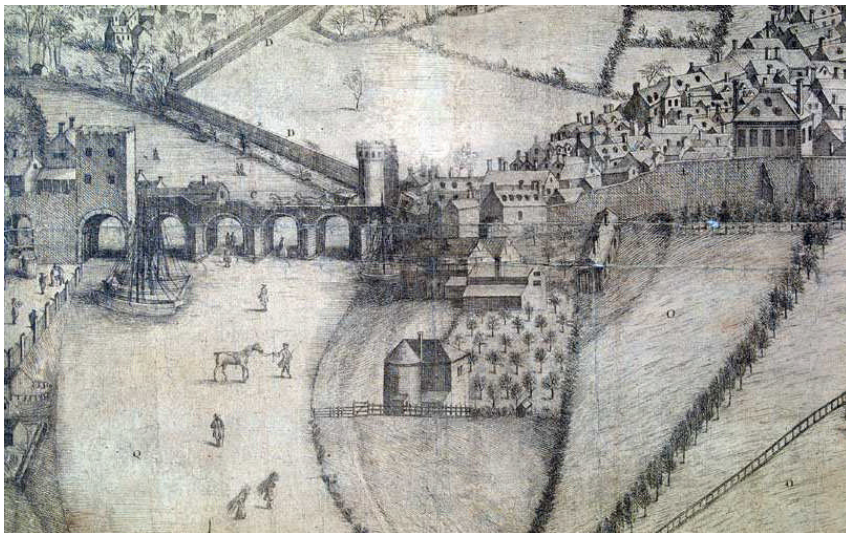
Figure 4: Southeast-facing sections showing principal features and deposits mentioned in the text



An extract from a Prospect of Shrewsbury from Kingsland by John Bowen, c. 1720 (Shropshire Museums SHYMS: FA/1990/12/1)



An extract from S & N Buck *South west Prospect of Shrewsbury*, 1732 showing the Round House (Shropshire Museums FA/1991/171/1)



An extract from *Shrewsbury in the Great Frost*, 1739 (artist unknown), (Shropshire Museums FA/1995/001)



18th century view of the Round House looking southwest

VICTORIA AVENUE, SHREWSBURY 2015
Figure 5: A selection of 18th-century views of the study area

A Watching Brief at Victoria Avenue, Shrewsbury, 2015



Photo 1: Victoria Avenue, looking E



Photo 2: Wall 5, looking E; scale bars 1m & 0.5m



Photo 3: The remains of the west tower of the New Work (wall 16), looking W; scale bars 1m & 0.5m

VICTORIA AVENUE, SHREWSBURY 2015