

# **Watching brief of works associated with the mending of a water pipe, Victoria Street, Hereford.**



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**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Historic Environment Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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**Summary:**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of a trench required for the purpose of mending a leaking water main. This was located at the northern end of Victoria Street, within the verge, next to the Tesco superstore.*

*The location is next to the historic line of the medieval city wall and next to the city ditch. The city wall at this point had been completely re-built and considerable groundworks had been undertaken during the construction of the ring-road during the late 1960's and the construction of the superstore during the early 1980's. An archaeological watching brief was required due to the unknown size of the trench, which was dependent upon the location, depth and nature of the leak, and its proximity to the scheduled city defences. The location is also within the Area of Archaeological Importance.*

*A 2 metre long by 1.3m wide trench was excavated by mini-digger within the narrow verge to a maximum depth of 1.3m. Only deposits relating to the construction of the ring-road and the new length of wall were observed. The trench did not go into the Scheduled Area.*

**Disclaimer:** It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

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## **Introduction**

This report (EHE 80195), provides an account of small scale watching brief carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology. A water main was found to be leaking within the verge on the eastern side of Victoria Street, next to the wall of the Tesco superstore. The watching brief was required in order to provide archaeological information regarding the possibility of the survival and nature of significant archaeological deposits associated with the medieval city defences at the northern end of Victoria Street. Victoria Street is located within the Hereford Area of Archaeological Importance as designated by the 1979 Scheduled Ancient Monuments Act.

Archaeological recording was necessary in order to record the location, extent and significance of any archaeological deposits or features encountered during the works. The fieldwork comprised the excavation of a single trench located within the verge between the Victoria street carriageway and the mock city wall at Tesco. The location of this trench is just inside the line of medieval city wall and in close proximity to one of the towers or bastions (Bastion 7).

The aim of the archaeological fieldwork was to provide information regarding the depth, nature and survival of any significant archaeological deposits encountered which were associated with the Medieval defences. Due to the unknown size and extent of the trench required in order to mend the water leak, its proximity to a Scheduled Ancient Monument and its location within the Hereford City Area of Archaeological Importance; it was agreed between Welsh Water, Historic England and Herefordshire Council that an archaeological watching brief was required.

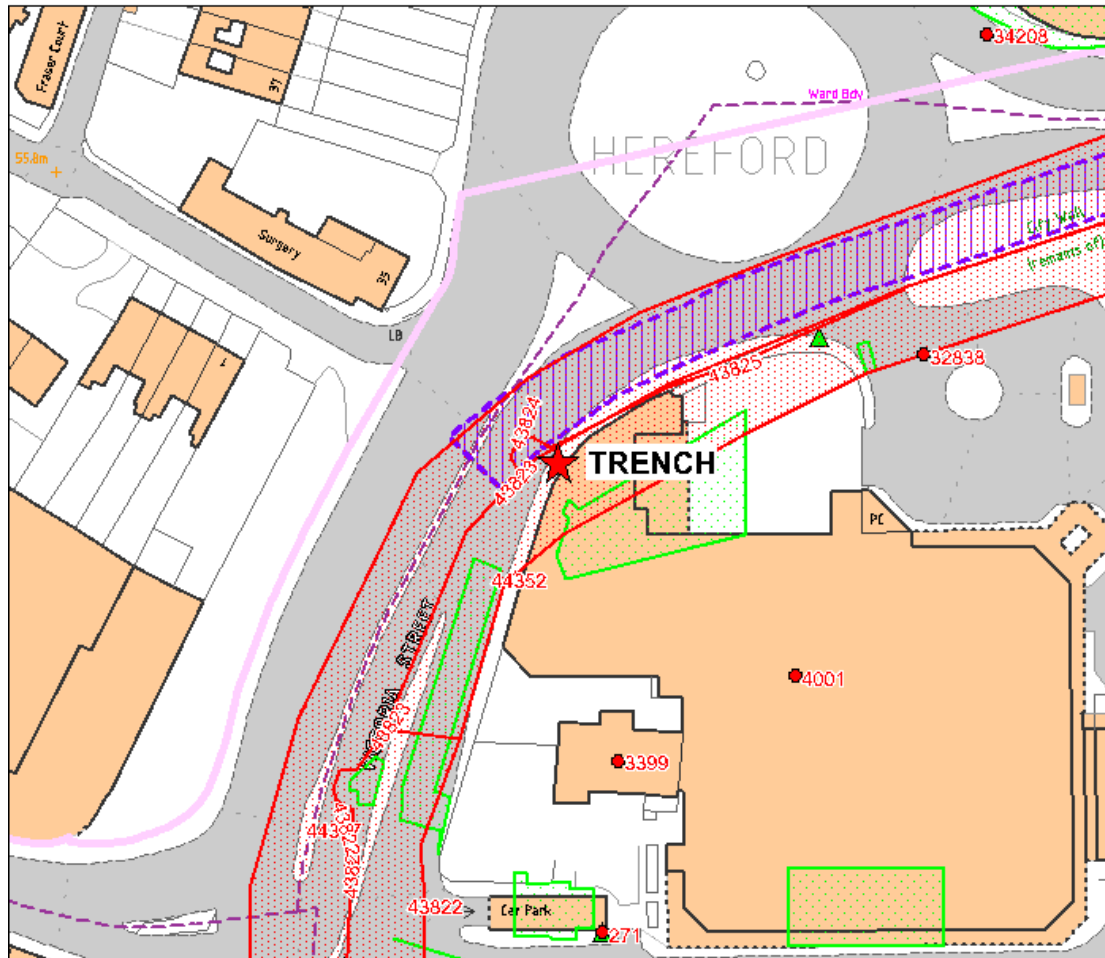


Figure 1: location of the trench in relation to the surrounding streetscape and showing information from the Historic Environment Record. Purple being Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Red being anticipated extent of monuments, Green being location and size of fieldwork and pink being the boundary of the Area of Archaeological Importance.

## Background history

The medieval cathedral city of Hereford has been surrounded by its stone walls for about eight centuries, though it has been fortified for even longer. Militarily obsolete since the end of the Civil War, the gates were all demolished in the 1790s and, with the growth of the Victorian city, stretches of the walls were demolished or concealed behind new buildings.

By the eve of the Second World War the city was facing a growing problem as the steadily increasing volume of through-traffic, still following its medieval route through High Town, Broad Street and across the old Wye Bridge, was causing accidents, congestion, pollution and damage to historic buildings. The strategic solution arrived at by central government was to bypass the city to the west, widening Victoria Street and building a new bridge over the river. The city's response was that a circulatory boulevard should be linked to such a scheme, carrying traffic

around the north side of the city to take further pressure off the ancient central streets.



Figure 2: Extract from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1886-7

In 1949, George Cadbury, a member of the West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning, wrote a pamphlet suggesting that this offered an unprecedented opportunity to 'open up the city walls for their historical interest, and at the same time make Hereford a *Precinct City* [with a pedestrianised centre] by using the old surrounding moat and Sally Walk as a by-pass'. The Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club, representing the county's historical and archaeological interests, offered their view that:

'These ancient remains are an integral part of the history of the city and a heritage which any city should be proud to possess and preserve with loving care. The opportunity now available of demarcating, exposing and preserving the remains of the walls and the site of the ditches throughout the whole circuit of the defences, would give to the city of Hereford a feature which we believe to be unparalleled in this country'.

They argued that there was scope for recreating the tree-lined walk that had surrounded the city in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the edge of the ditch had been marked by willows, giving it the name 'Sally Walk' (a common corruption of *Salix*, the Latin

species name for willow), the name still attached to Bath Street well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They further suggested that the walls, thus revealed, should be restored by specialist masons and the former ditch laid out as gardens or even, in places, re-excavated and refilled with water. This ran counter to one proposal from Whitehall (the Ministry of War Transport), which had suggested that the new road could itself be placed in the re-excavated ditch (see figure 4).

It was to be another twenty years before work on the A49 improvements and the inner relief road was completed, construction work having finally commenced in 1965. Many aspects of the post-war vision for the city walls were realised in the process. The best-preserved sections of the western wall facing Victoria Street were cleared of super-incumbent buildings, restored by specially-trained masons and opened up to public view; further sections on Blue School Street and Bath Street were accorded similar treatment.

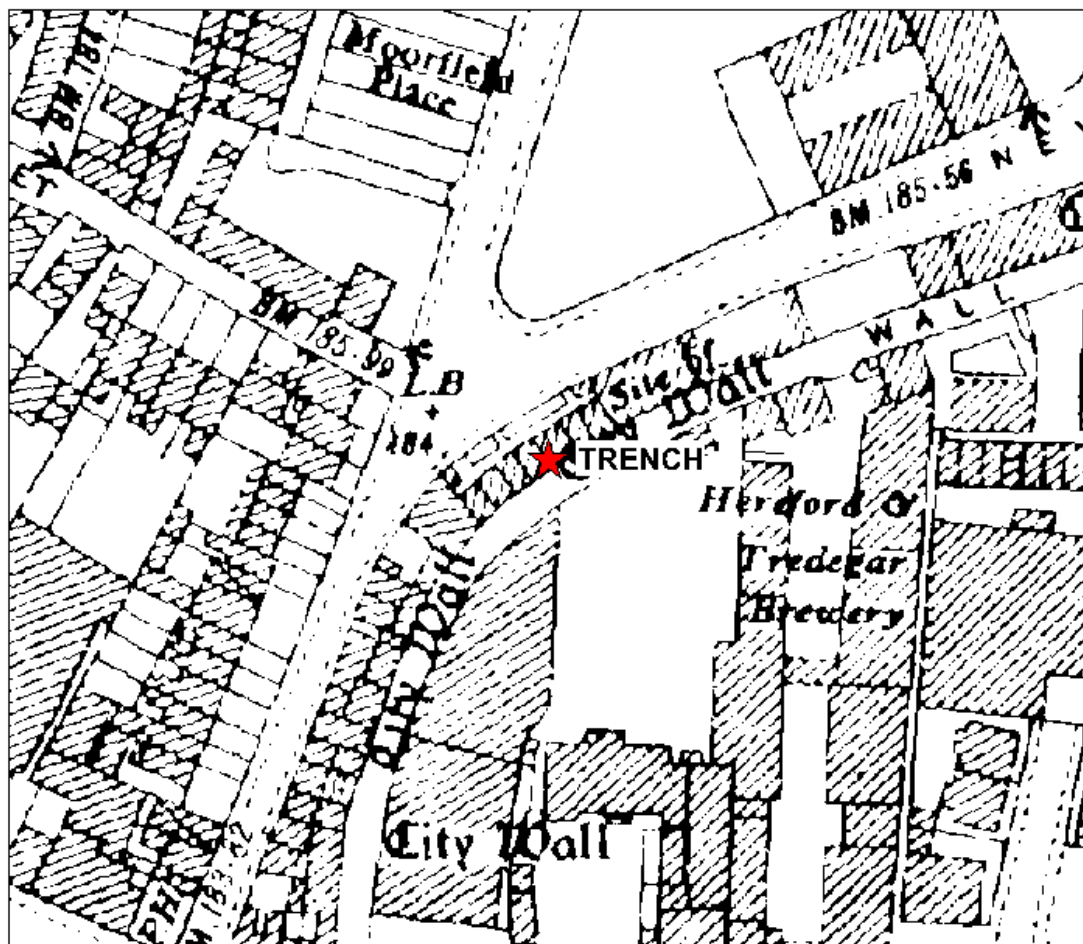


Figure 3: Extract from the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1926

But, by 1968 traffic volumes had already increased to such an extent that the recreation of the tree-lined Sally Walks of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was scarcely an option. Moreover, the demands of traffic engineering and modern retailing had overtaken the conservation imperative to the extent that the line of the north-western corner of the walls was built over by a roundabout and there were losses of standing as well as buried fabric along the new inner relief road, on New Market Street and Blue

School Street. The visual loss (if not the archaeological loss) was partly mitigated a few years later, (in the early 1980's), when a new stone wall was built on a modern alignment at the north-west corner, (around the Tesco development), that deliberately and carefully imitated the fabric of the wall's primary construction phase.

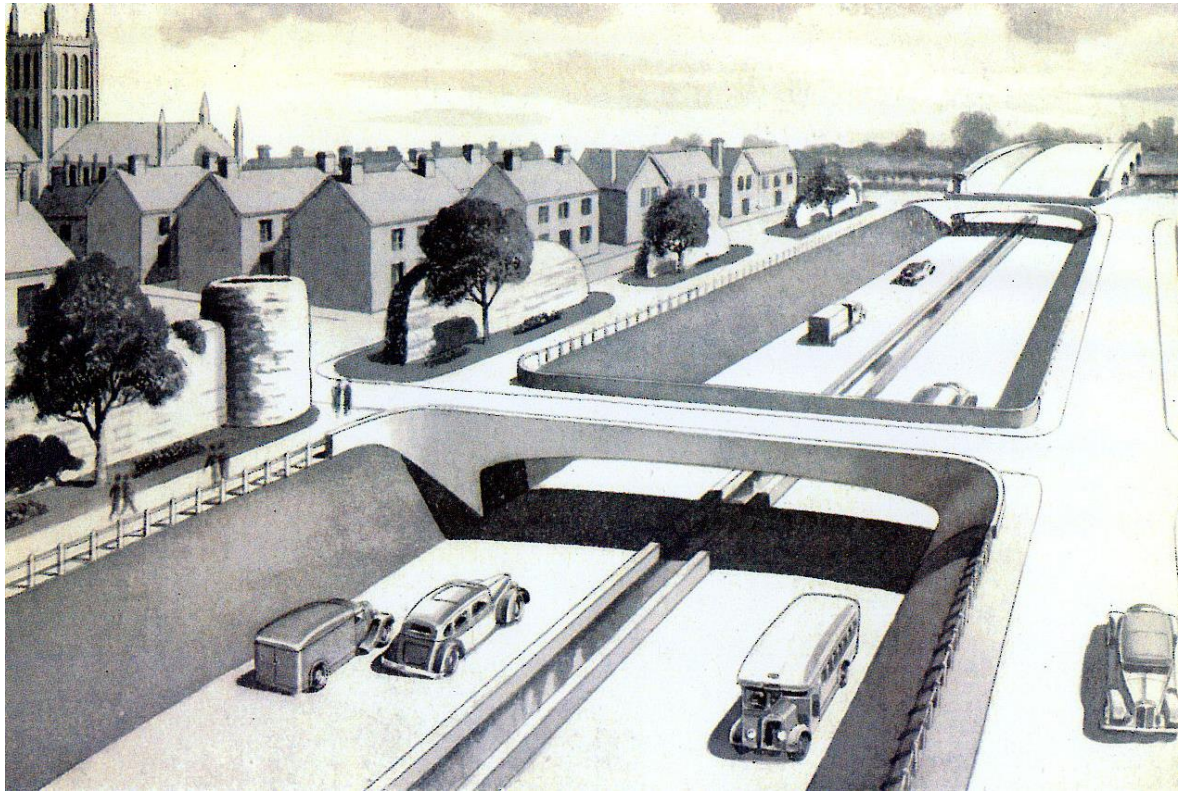


Figure 4: The Ministry of War Transport's vision for Hereford. The improved A49 trunk road, upgraded to a dual carriageway, running in the re-excavated city ditch past the remains of the city wall towards the proposed new bridge. The latter was eventually built as shown here (Greyfriars Bridge) though the A49 (Victoria Street), though widened, remained at surface level.

#### **Previous archaeological work (Figure 5)**

The 1968 Brewery site excavation (event 44353 which is now under the Tesco superstore), revealed features relating to occupation pre-dating the defences sealed by the stage 5 (late 12th-century) gravel rampart. This was composed of numerous tip-lines, either related to a single phase of construction or to a longer drawn out process by which material derived from regular scouring of the ditch was added to the rampart (Baker, 2011). In 1974, a few metres to the north-east, just within the wall, the Bewell House excavation (event 44354) found occupation of the 11th and 12th century underlying the tail of the late 12th-century rampart and extending across the site. Cut into the top of the rampart were the post-holes and cess-pits of a substantial timber building possibly, the excavator thought, a watch-tower positioned half-way between Eign Gate and Widemarsh Gate (Baker, 2011). The



excavation provides a useful sample of the archaeology underlying the reproduction wall, and a reminder of the importance and potential complexity of timber-built components of the defences. Two further small-scale excavations took place in the area of the bus/lorry entrance in 1980 and 1981. The first (event 3398) found rubble that probably overlay the city wall, which was not itself contacted. The second (event 44357) found a sequence identical to the Bewell House excavation nearby, with pre-defences occupation (pits) and the late 12th-century rampart sealed by a build-up of soil and cut by further pits. Bastion 6 lay about 30m north of the Eign Gate. A small excavation suggested that it had been built into the side of an earlier ditch, probably simultaneously with the city wall. It was c.6.7m external diameter with walls about 1.2m thick, with 'a chamfer around the outside edge' (chamfered plinth courses). It is assumed that bastion 7 (approximately 3m to the north west of the Welsh Water trench described within this report), was very similar in size and appearance.

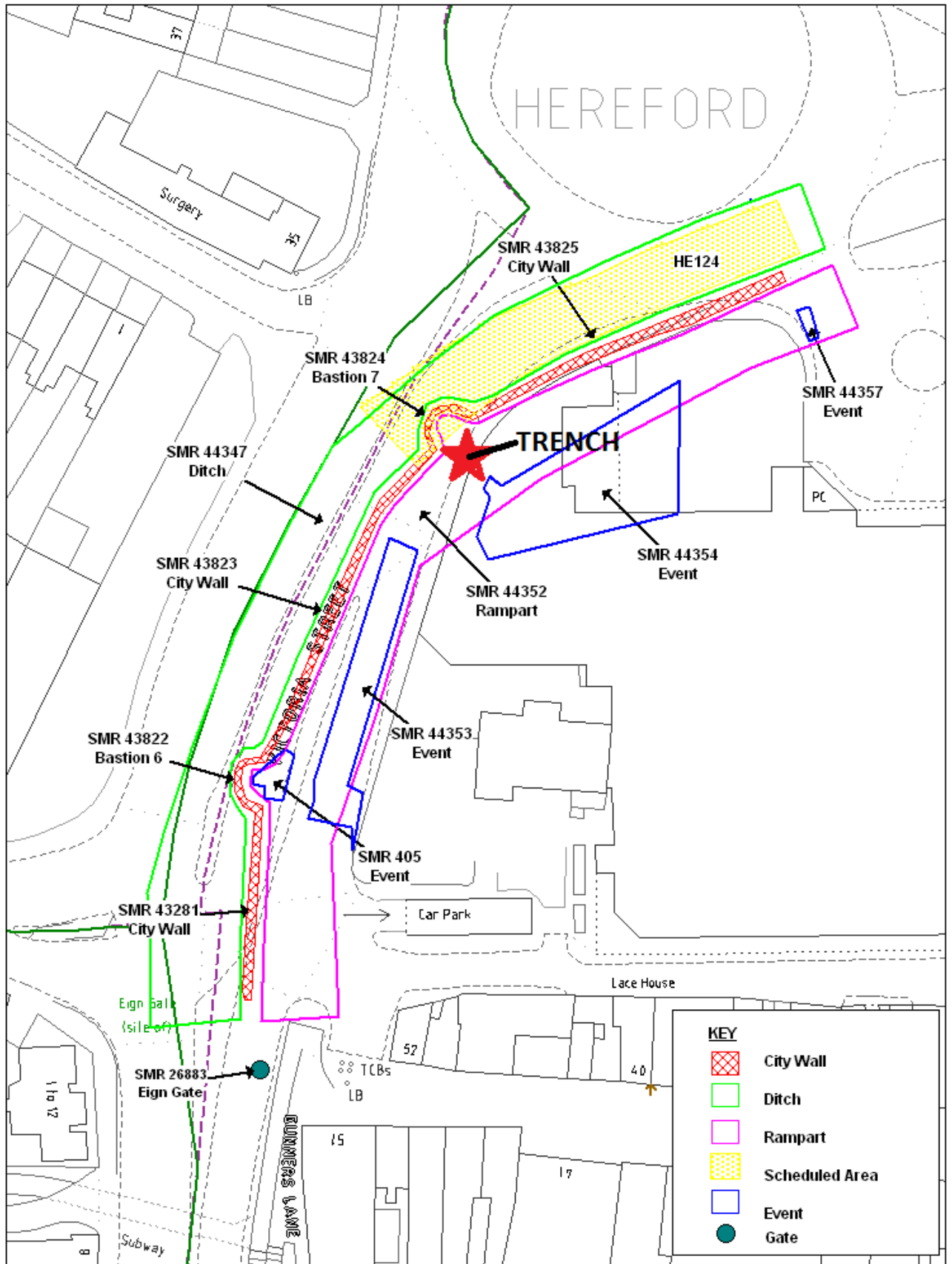


Figure 5: Location of trench in relation to known archaeological features and past interventions.

## Fieldwork in 2016

Site work was undertaken on the morning of Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January. The works were carried out by machine excavation using a mini digger under close archaeological supervision. Immediately below the turf was a 0.35m thick layer of red sand and stone. This is directly associated with the construction of the wall during 1983-4. Immediately below this was a 0.25m thick layer of scalplings. Below this deposit was dark earth with brick and concrete fragments representing material associated with the construction of the ring-road. This deposit included a single, well cut, square, masonry block which would have originated from the medieval city wall. This was clearly out of context and overlay an offcut of steel reinforcing wire.



Plate 1: Location of pipe leak (blue marker paint) within the verge and in relation to other services.

The north-eastern corner of the trench contained the edge of a brick built inspection chamber, (see plate 3). It would appear that the inspection chamber had compromised the integrity of the water pipe at this location and this had, over time, caused the leak. The material associated with the ring-road construction was not bottomed and the excavation terminated at a maximum depth of 1.25m. No archaeologically significant deposits were encountered. It is clear that a large number of services run through this location. This, together with the considerable disturbance caused by the construction of the ring-road, suggests that little of archaeological significance survives at this location at this depth. It is likely that some deeper deposits do survive here below the construction horizon of the ring-road.



Plate 2: Trench during excavation clearly showing a top deposit of red sand associated with the construction of the wall.



Plate 3: Trench "in plan". The squared corner represents the south-western corner of an inspection chamber.



Plate 4: Trench at finished depth showing a well mixed, modern layer of disturbance containing concrete, walling stone, brick and off cuts of reinforcing wire.

## Conclusions

The watching brief has confirmed that no archaeologically significant features or deposits survive in this location between the present ground level and 1.35m deep. Significant modern disturbance has occurred as a result of the installation of services within this part of Victoria Street in addition to major disturbance caused by the construction of the ring-road during the 1960's.

## Site Archive

12 digital photographs  
1 site notebook entry  
This document

## **Acknowledgements**

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to thank, Jonathan Houston and Anthony Howells, Welsh Water Engineering Delivery Team.

## **Bibliography**

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