

WATCHING BRIEF DURING  
GROUNDWORKS FOR  
SCOOTER STORE,  
WARMSTRY COURT, QUAY STREET,  
WORCESTER

WCM 101910



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# Watching brief during groundworks for scooter store, Warmstry Court, Quay Street, Worcester WCM 101910

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## 1 Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during groundworks relating to the construction of a new mobility scooter store at the sheltered housing complex Warmstry Court, Quay Street, Worcester. The groundworks included the excavation of a short length of pipe trench to facilitate provision of a new water-main. The site lies within the Historic core of the Roman and medieval city Archaeologically Sensitive Area and the Historic City Conservation Area.*

*The deepest point of the excavations was 1m below current surface levels, the watermain trench being slightly more shallow. In both areas of excavation the observed deposits were uniformly of recent date, comprising mainly of construction debris, builders rubbish and some demolition debris from earlier buildings. All of this material appears to have been deposited during the early 1980s prior to the construction of Warmstry Court, which is believed to have opened in 1985.*

*Photographs of the site taken circa 1982-3 show that following demolition of the earlier buildings on the site (which appear from contemporary photographs to have been predominantly of 18<sup>th</sup> Century appearance) the south-western half of the site was cleared down to the street level of the Hood St/South Quay junction, with a progressive rise up to the north-east. The present observations appear to indicate that most of the site within the “courtyard” was subsequently raised above general flood levels using a mixture of demolition material, builder’s debris and roadstone. Whilst these deposits contain occasional fragments of earlier building materials (such as sandstone and 18<sup>th</sup> C brick) they are not archaeologically significant. The archaeologically significant horizons at this point may be anticipated to potentially survive from a depth of circa 1.3-1.5m below current carpark level. The precise total depth of archaeologically significant deposits at this point is unknown, but likely to be several metres. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the exceptional depth of concrete needed for the foundations of the present building was a contributory factor in the original contractors having gone out of business during construction.*

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 An archaeological watching brief (WCM 101910) was undertaken during groundworks associated with the provision of a new mobility scooter store and watermain at Warmstry Court, Quay Street, Worcester (SO 848 547; Fig 1). The project as a whole consists of

proposed erection of a single storey extension to the front elevation and erection of a single storey outbuilding. In addition, proposed internal and external alterations including new entrance canopy over main entrance, new timber decking, new boiler system and relocation of flat 20 to create larger communal area. Planning permission (P11D0259) was granted 16.08.2011. The works were undertaken on behalf of Sanctuary Housing at the instruction of their contractors Thomas Vale Construction Ltd. The report was compiled at to meet the requirements of a verbal Brief issued by James Dinn, Archaeological Officer of Worcester City Council (JD DCC604). The site is in the Historic core of the Roman and medieval city Archaeologically Sensitive Area and the Historic City Conservation Area.

### 3 Aims

- 3.1 The aims of the project were to gather, record and analyse information relating to the former standing structures and buried deposits. The project was intended to address the following research objectives;

*The surface morphology of the gravel terrace (RP1.1)*

*The Roman iron industry (RP3.19-3.23)*

*Anglo-Saxon defensive circuits (RP4.12)*

*Demolition and re-planning of the burh defences (RP4.13)*

### 4 Methodology

- 4.1 Site visits were made during the groundworks which occurred over two days (4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012). All groundbreaking activity was observed. The exposed deposits and uprisings were observed and recorded both in a note form on a sketch plan and as digital photographs (see Photo Archive on CDROM and Figs 1-5). In the absence of any archaeologically significant deposits no detailed record was made.
- 4.2 The area has been subject of a number of archaeological interventions. Immediately to the north of the present site a watching brief was undertaken during construction of the Technical College building in 1969 (WCM 100342). An unpublished section drawing from the “Hounds Lane” sites shows a total stratigraphic sequence of 1.6m, the upper 1m being “modern”. A significant assemblage of Roman and Iron Age material was, however, recovered and Roman and medieval cut features identified (Sandon 1969; WCM 100342). Watching briefs have been undertaken on two occasions at All Saints Church (WCM 100069 and most recently by the present author in 2010 - WCM 101826). A further watching brief on the site of the Quay Street public toilets (now parish offices) in 1985 recorded one human burial (WCM 100070).

### 5 Results

#### 5.1 *Water main trench (Figs 1 and 4)*

- 5.1.1 The new watermain trench lay across part of the car-parking area close to the new boiler room. The trench was nominally 800mm deep and 300mm wide, with local variations, particularly at its southern end where it was necessary to avoid an existing man-hole chamber. The deposits generally consisted of two layers of tarmac overlying roadstone which overlay very mixed rubble and rubbish (including plastic sheeting, modern bricks, concrete kerbstones, metal wheel-barrow frame etc). Moderate amounts of earlier brick and sandstone rubble, including 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> C brick were present together with fragments of guttering etc indicating that they derived from the site clearance of the early 1980s. A former kerb-line was encountered in the trench, but this appears to relate to a fairly recent re-arrangement of the car-parking bays. Two plastic small diameter water service pipes were also encountered, and these appear to have been laid whilst the building rubble was being deposited as there were no clear trench cuts.

#### 5.2 *Mobility Scooter store (Figs 1 and 5)*

- 5.2.1 The new scooter store is located partly in an area of hardstanding, and partially within an area of planting which slopes down into the flood relief void beneath the building. The scooter

store foundation consists of a raft construction independent of the retaining wall of the adjacent walkway. The excavation therefore consisted of a rectangular hole approximately 3mx4m and a maximum of 1m deep. Deposits in this area consisted of tarmac over roadstone over builder's rubble for the hardstanding and shallow turf/topsoil over builder's rubble and rubbish for the planted area. All of the deposits were consistent with deposition in the early 1980s or later, and included plastic sheeting, plastic strapping, milk bottles, soft drinks cans, crisp packets together with modern building materials and some demolition debris.

## **6 Discussion and Conclusions**

- 6.1 Historically the area that is now Warmstry Court was a densely packed cluster of buildings which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C included a corn-merchant's premises (Fig 2). Many of these buildings appear to have been of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> C date, but it is likely that they incorporated parts of earlier structures. By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> C the area had declined to become the base of a scrap metal and rag and bone business. The area, being low lying was particularly vulnerable to periodic flooding from the River Severn, and this led to its eventually being cleared for redevelopment. Photographs of the site taken circa 1982-3 show that following demolition of the earlier buildings on the site the south-western half of the site was cleared down to the street level of the Hood St/South Quay junction, with a progressive rise up to the north-east. The present observations appear to indicate that most of the site within the "courtyard" was subsequently raised above general flood levels using a mixture of demolition material, builder's debris and roadstone. Whilst these deposits contain occasional fragments of earlier building materials (such as sandstone and 18<sup>th</sup> C brick) they are not archaeologically significant. The archaeologically significant horizons at this point may be anticipated to potentially survive from a depth of circa 1.3-1.5m below current carpark level. The precise total depth of archaeologically significant deposits at this point is unknown, but likely to be several metres. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the exceptional depth of concrete needed for the foundations of the present building was a contributory factor in the original contractors having gone out of business during construction (local resident pers comm.).
- 6.2 Whilst the present intervention encountered no archaeological remains there still appears to be considerable potential for archaeologically significant deposits to survive on the site. Areas that were built-up during the early 1980s redevelopment are likely to mask deposits relating to the former wharfage and other riverside activities, and there is also some potential for remains of the City's medieval defences to be present. Within the present carpark area some below ground remains of the buildings cleared in the 1980s are also likely to be present.

## **7 Acknowledgements**

The project was completed with the assistance of the following; James Dinn of Worcester City Council, Richard Madeley, Mick McCormack and Sean Mimmagh of Thomas Vale Construction Ltd. Particular thanks are also due to the groundwork sub-contractors from Shanley Bros. Ltd

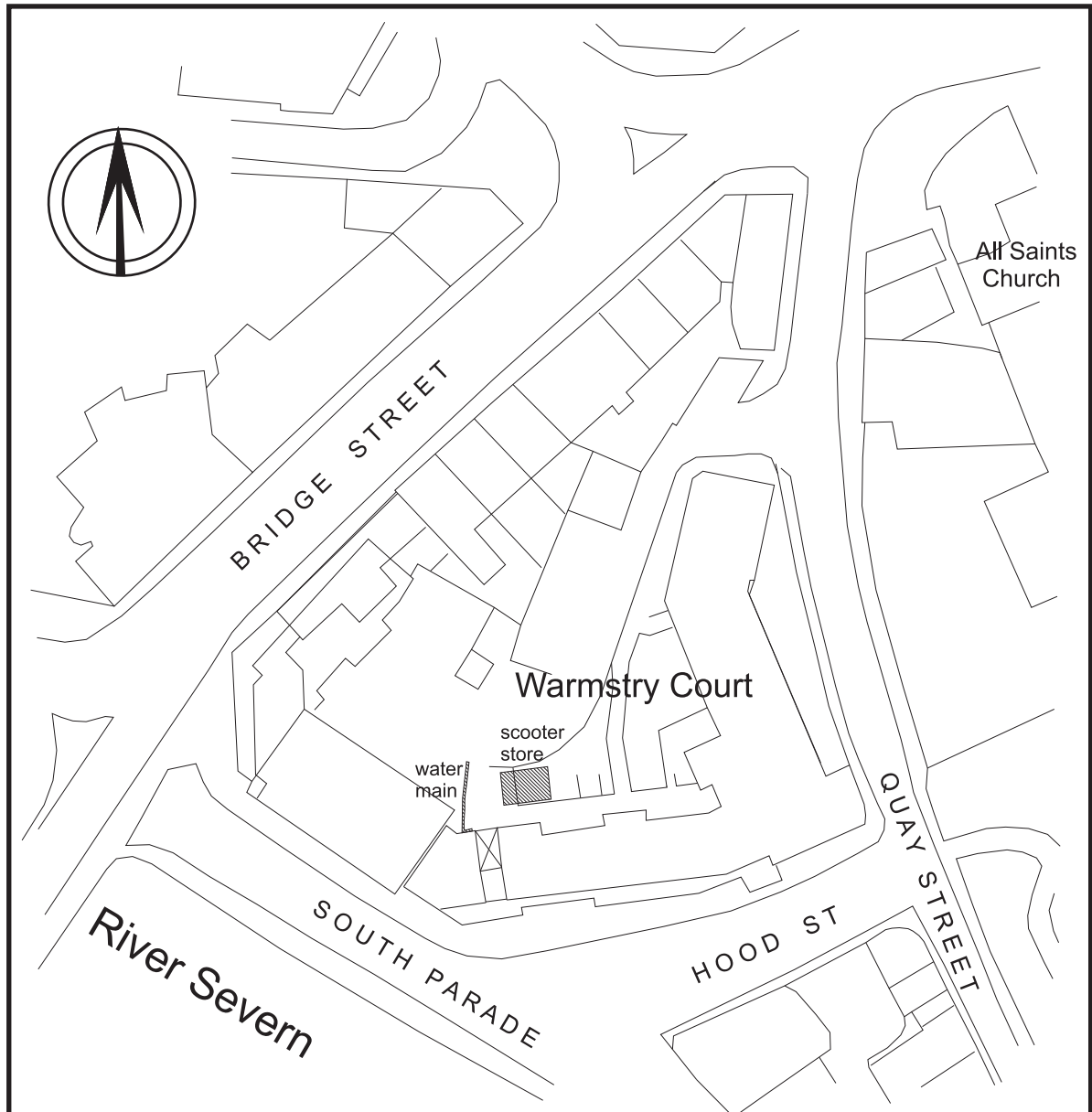


Figure 1: Location of archaeological observations WCM 101910









View facing north-west from Hood St/South Quay junction circa 1982-3 showing future Warmstry Court site reduced to South Quay street level



View north-east across present Warmstry Court site during site clearance in circa 1982-3 showing the site surface cleared to below the level of South Parade (roadway in foreground)

Figure 3: Photographs of the Warmstry Court site prior to the construction of the present sheltered housing scheme (Source: MNA reference collection - photographer unknown)





View facing south



View facing north-east - no significant deposits were encountered as the trench did not penetrate beneath the horizon of 1980s construction debris and site make-up. Trench depth was 800-900mm

Figure 4: Excavation of new water-main trench





Excavating area of new mobility scooter store - all observed deposits contained recent building debris and rubbish mixed with some demolition debris and roadstone



View of scooter store excavation facing west

Figure 5: Groundworks for mobility scooter store