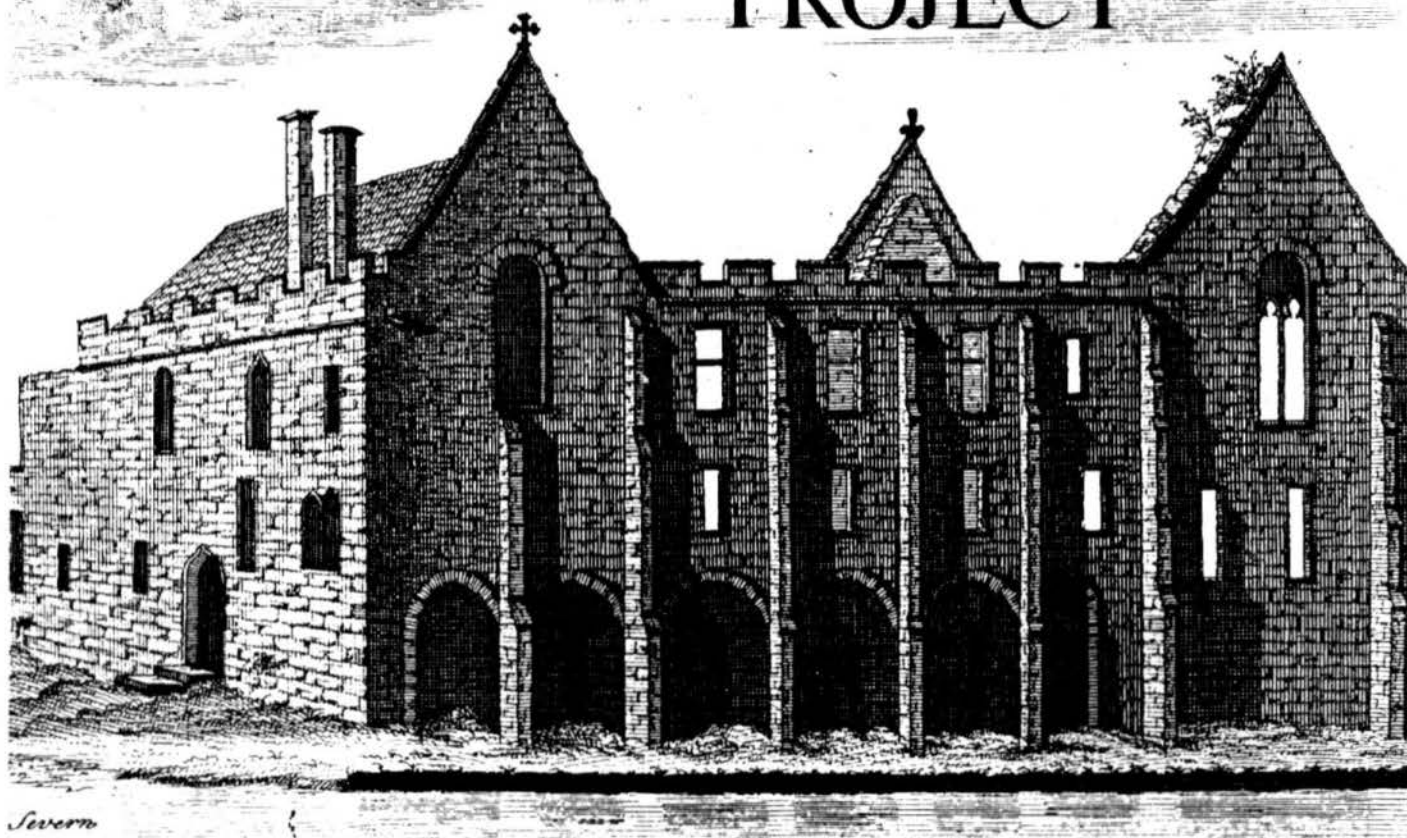


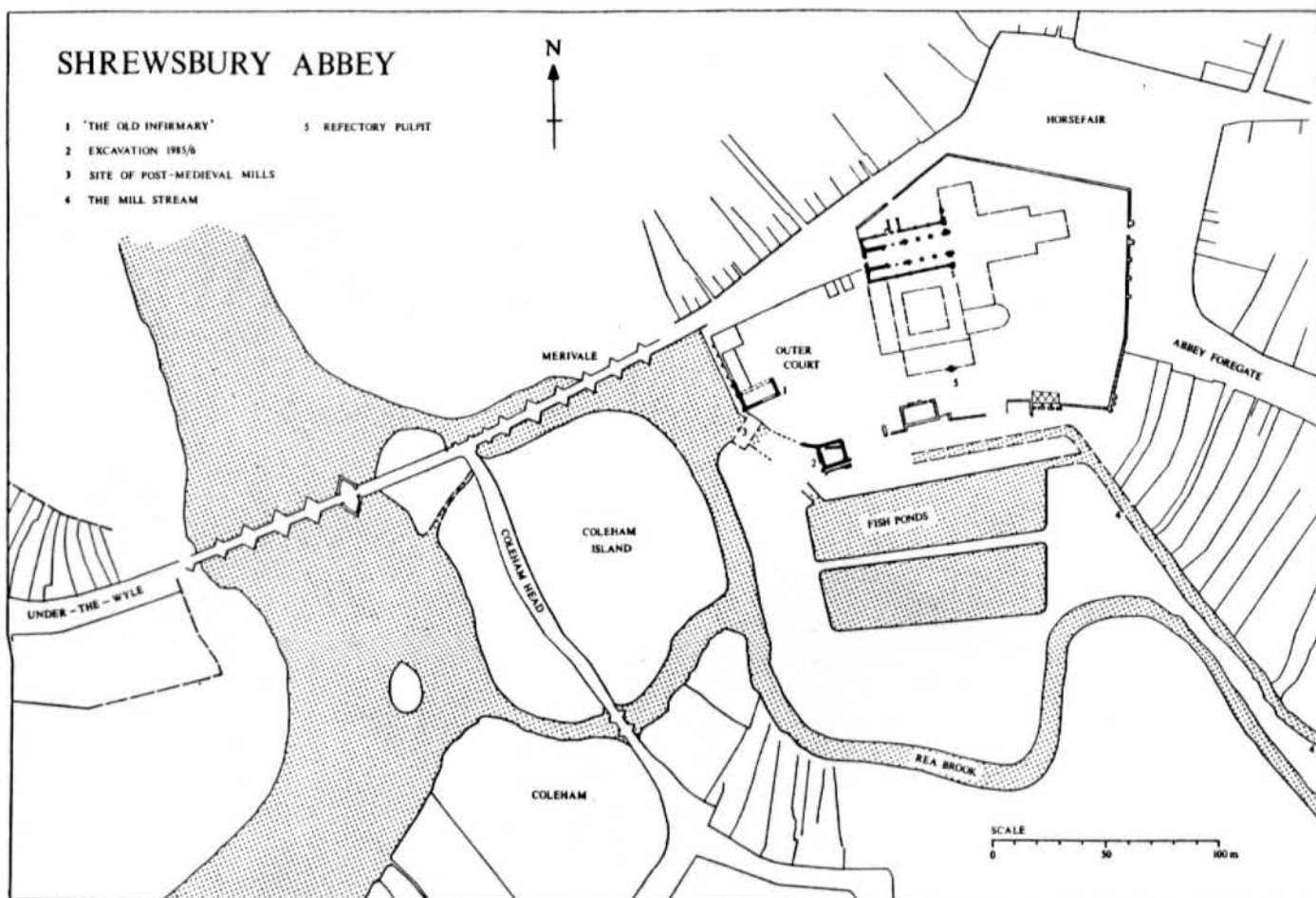
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# SHREWSBURY HERITAGE PROJECT



## Second Interim Report

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT



## Shrewsbury Abbey in the Middle Ages

### THE EXCAVATION AT SHREWSBURY ABBEY

Late in November 1985, excavation began on the south side of Abbey Foregate, in the back garden of the Queen Anne House. Historical maps show that this area was once the south-west corner of the former Abbey precincts, and a trial excavation earlier in the year had revealed sandstone walls of monastic origin. It is now possible, nine months later, to piece together the story of the development of this part of Shrewsbury Abbey.

#### An early precinct wall

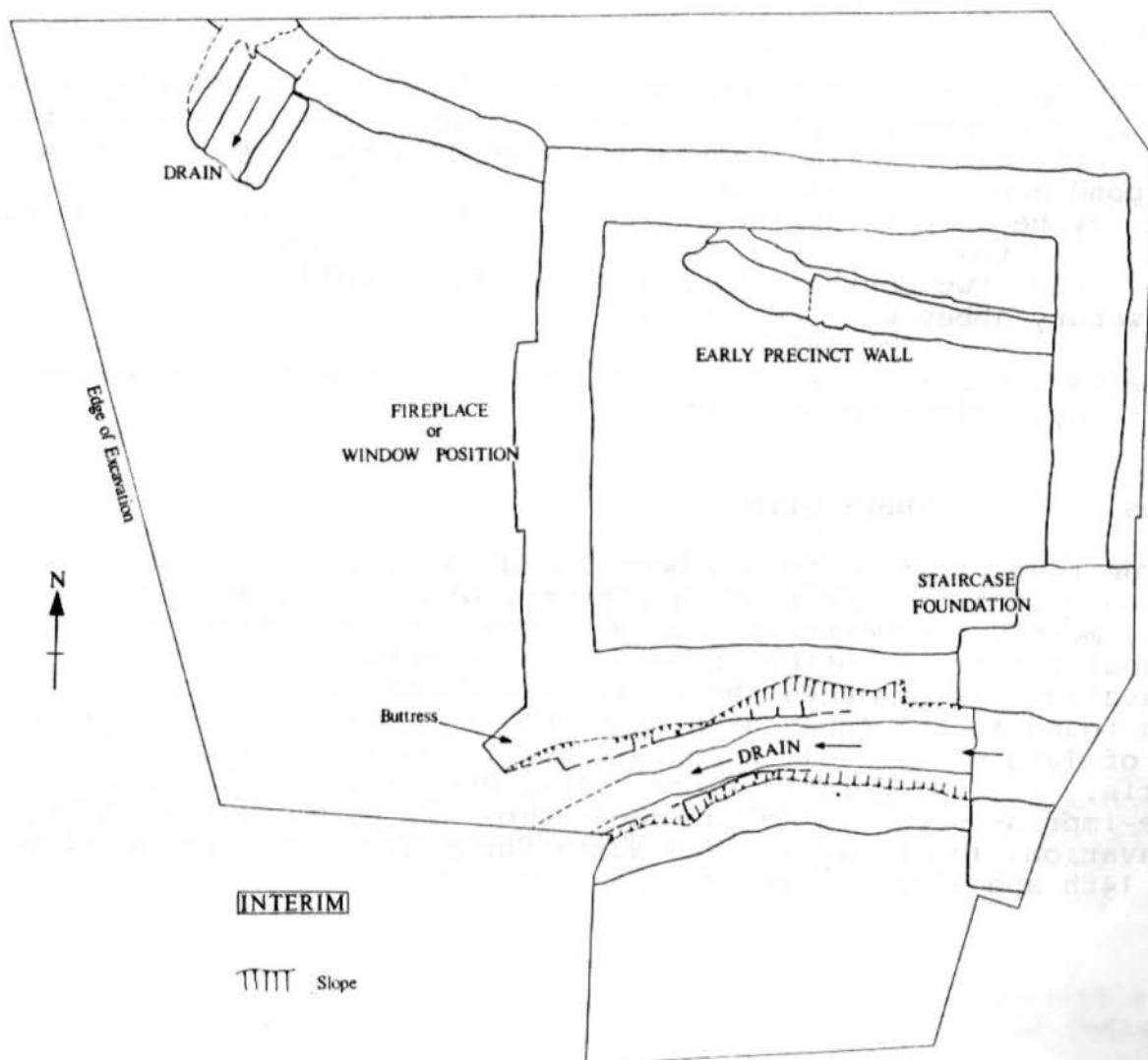
The earliest structure found so far is a sandstone rubble wall, one metre thick, running east-west across the site. This is thought to be part of an early precinct wall, possibly built before c.1300. The wall was built on a thick layer of grey clay, formed by mud accumulating slowly in the bottom of a pond, with thin bands of organic matter within it representing the fall of leaves each Autumn. The construction of the precinct wall on top of this shows that the precinct area was expanding, from the higher dry ground around the Abbey church into the lower, wet area around the Rea Brook and the monastic fish-ponds (now the Abbey Car Park).

## A new building

Later in the Middle Ages, c.14th-15th centuries, the precinct continued to expand and a large stone building was constructed further out into the former pond, superimposed over the remains of the old precinct wall. The new stone walls were built over wooden piles for stability and the floor was raised well above flood level; the new building may have incorporated part of a slightly earlier structure to the south-east, most of which lies outside the excavated area.

To the south, a stone-lined drainage channel flowing from east to west was built. This drain probably served all the buildings along the southern edge of the precinct. To the west of the new building the ground level remained lower, and the wall overlooking this area was built with carefully-finished sandstone masonry.

The function of this building is not certain, the floor surfaces having been removed when it was demolished. It was at least two storeys high (the foundations of a circular staircase were found in one corner), probably heated, probably equipped with a lavatory and generally built to a high standard. Its location in the Abbey's Outer Court (the public/business end of the monastery) suggests that it may have been built as accomodation for important non-monastic guests.



The Abbey Excavation: Site Plan

## The Dissolution and After

Shrewsbury Abbey was dissolved in 1540 and all the buildings that were not immediately useful were stripped and demolished. Detailed accounts survive showing the amount of lead that was salvaged from the monks' part of the Abbey church, the cloisters and the chapter house. The excavated building was demolished to its foundations and the masonry removed. The site was sold into private ownership and, by the early 17th century, the area housed a tanning industry with a number of rectangular stone and clay lined pits used for the preparation of hides, and a clay-lined gully possibly used for the storage of lime. During this phase of the site's history, there were no major changes to the landscape: the low area to the west of the monastic building remained open and a roughly paved surface was laid in the bottom; the drain along the south wall survived, robbed of its stone lining, as an open ditch.

In the early 18th century the Queen Anne House was built. Later in the century the low western area was finally filled up and levelled off, and a formal garden laid out with drystone walls and flower beds. This garden survived, overgrown, until excavation began in 1985.

## The Future

Excavation on the Queen Anne House site is now nearing completion. Work on the interior of the monastic building and in the area to the south has finally reached undisturbed natural gravel below the pond deposits. Excavation along the northern edge of the site may be able to define the edge of the 'pond' and the higher, dry ground that the early core of the monastery was built on. In the next two months, our picture of this small part of Shrewsbury abbey will be complete.

There is a public viewing gallery on the site, open from Monday to Friday. Visitors are welcome.

## FINDS FROM THE ABBEY SITE

A wide range of objects has been found during the excavation. The bulk of this material is pottery, of medieval and later date, mostly fragments of jugs with smaller quantities of more unusual vessels - pottery bottles and dripping pans. The excavation has produced the first Late Saxon pottery to have been found in the Abbey area: a piece of 'Stafford Ware' cooking pot of 10th or early 11th century date, found with much later debris. Several ceramic floor tiles, and many fragments, with line-impressed or two-colour decoration are paralleled on other excavations in Shrewsbury and North Shropshire, and are dated to the 14th and 15th centuries.



The excavated stonework falls into two categories. Firstly, fragments of architectural features from buildings, dating from the 11th century to the 17th century. Secondly, fragments of two stone mortars, used for the preparation of food (grinding meat and spices), and probably of 14th century date.

The excavators found two medieval silver coins, a long cross penny and a farthing, both dating to the later 13th century, and a copper alloy jetton or trading token.

Among the more interesting glass fragments were two personal seals from the necks of wine bottles. These have been identified as the arms of the Langley family, the first resident owners of the site after the Dissolution.

The site is particularly notable for the waterlogged condition of its lower levels. This adds to the difficulties of excavation but has resulted in the preservation of wooden and leather objects that would not normally survive. Leatherwork recovered to date includes a decorated knife-sheath and pieces of belt, though pieces of shoe are the commonest find. Many of the shoes are 'turnshoes': the soles and uppers being sewn together and then turned inside out, leaving the stitching on the inside. Tongue and grooved wooden planks that were found are probably the remains of a wooden partition from a demolished or refitted medieval building. Among the smaller wooden objects were lathe-turned bowls; these are too small to have been used for food, and may have been finger-bowls.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SHREWSBURY ABBEY: AN EXHIBITION

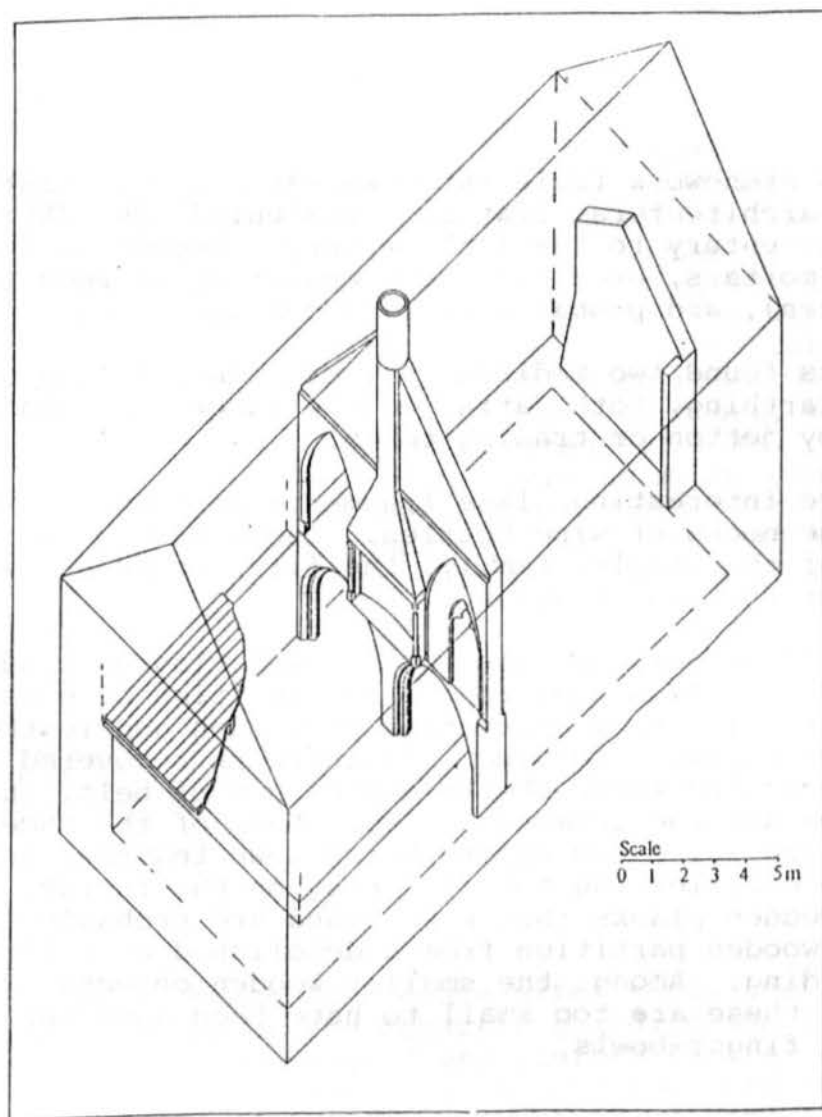
An exhibition featuring the results of excavation and research on Shrewsbury Abbey will be touring a number of venues around Shrewsbury from November. For the first week of the exhibition, in the Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, some of the finds from the excavation will be on display.

Shirehall, Abbey Foregate .....	21st - 28th November
Rowley's House Museum .....	31st Jan - 28th Feb 1987
Bear Steps .....	15th - 21st March
The Abbey Church .....	April 1987

#### EXCAVATIONS IN THE TOWN CENTRE

In the first half of 1986, the Project undertook excavations and watching briefs (monitoring construction work) on two sites in Shrewsbury; the Bennett's Hall site (the Hardanger Properties development between Pride Hill and Raven Meadows), and the Talbot Chambers site (development by Fletcher Estates Ltd) on Market Street.

Excavation, and a subsequent watching brief, on the Bennett's Hall site found large late medieval rubbish pits at the bottom



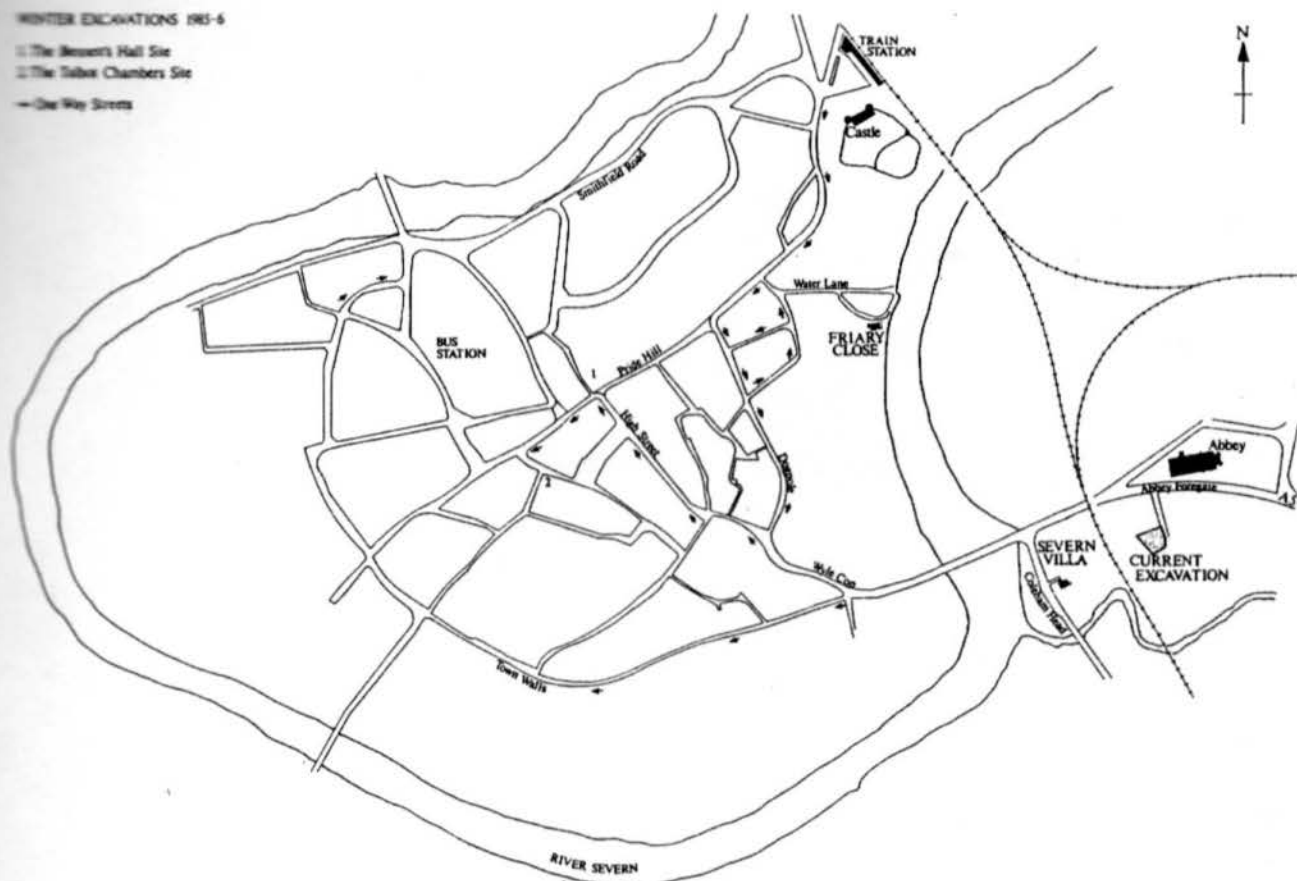
Bennett's Hall. Interim reconstruction drawing showing remains of the medieval merchant's house, largely incorporated within John Collier, 2 Pride Hill.

of properties backing onto the 13th century town wall. The town wall itself was recorded during redevelopment. It was found that the masonry face had been totally rebuilt in the post-medieval period, though the original 13th century core survived behind it. The remains of Bennett's Hall itself (incorporated within, and to the rear of John Collier, 2 Pride Hill) have been re-examined, and evidence for its partial destruction in the 16th or 17th century was found in the excavation, in the form of medieval building materials thrown into a disused cess-pit. Other finds from the site include decorated medieval floor tiles, medieval and later pottery, a fragment of painted window glass and a complete stone mortar of the type found at the Abbey.

Excavation on the Talbot Chambers site on Market Street found no evidence of activity on the site before the late 12th or 13th century. Late medieval pits were found cut into yard areas behind modern cellars and the site of a vaulted medieval undercroft or cellar, known from an early 19th century plan.

WINTER EXCAVATIONS 1985-6

- 1 The Bessett's Hall Site
- 2 The Talbot Chambers Site
- One Way Streets



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THE SHREWSBURY HERITAGE PROJECT

is sponsored and assisted by:

British Rail  
The Community Programme  
Erect-a-Scaffold  
Hardanger Properties PLC  
John Laing Developments Ltd  
Lichfield Diocese  
Lloyd's Bank PLC  
Severn-Trent Water Authority  
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council  
Shropshire County Council  
Standard Life  
The Walker Trust  
Walton Survey Partnership

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Cover Illustration

From S. & N. Buck's 'West View of Shrewsbury Abbey', 1731  
(Shropshire Libraries, Local Studies Dept.)