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## **The Archaeology of the Charles Darwin Centre**

**A report on the archaeological  
watching-brief, to John Laing  
Developments Limited.  
The Shrewsbury Heritage  
Project**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



Institute of Field  
Archaeologists



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1996

THE ARCHÆOLOGY  
OF THE  
CHARLES DARWIN CENTRE

A report on the archæological watching-brief,  
to John Laing Developments Limited.  
THE SHREWBURY HERITAGE PROJECT

(BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY FIELD ARCHÆOLOGY UNIT)

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#### SUMMARY.

This report describes the results of the archaeological monitoring of construction work for the Charles Darwin Centre, Pride Hill, Shrewsbury, funded by John Laing Developments Ltd.

Two masonry cellars of late medieval and later date were found, and the course of the 13th-century town wall was identified. The origins of the alleyway known as Seventy Steps were established.

These results, set in context by background research, contribute substantially to our understanding of the economic life of the town in the later Middle Ages.

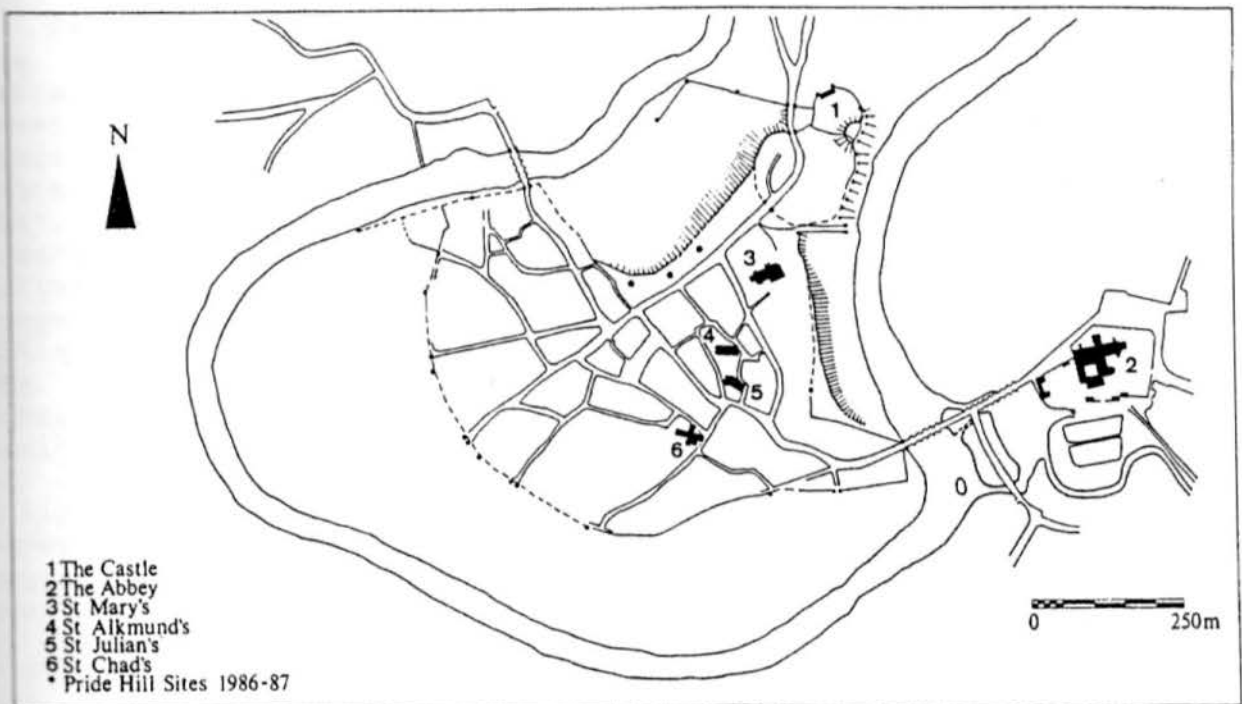


Fig.1: Medieval Shrewsbury.

#### INTRODUCTION.

'This is not the story of three men and a boat, but of three men and a candle (and sometimes only a box of matches), the said three men being a committee of a learned Society appointed to investigate the remains of the town wall and mark them on the map, and thus secure a permanent record of them. The remains of our earliest wall are only to be found in the basements and cellars of modern houses, and on going into these lower regions they have discovered a wonderful series of cellars and vaults such as no other town can show. The most remarkable are on the north-west side of Castle Street and Pride Hill'.

(Shrewsbury Chronicle 21-1-13).

Pride Hill, with Castle Street, its north-easterly continuation, is the principal commercial street of the modern town centre of Shrewsbury. This is likely to have been the case in the Middle Ages as well: the northern end of Pride Hill, a wide street-market, was the site of the medieval High Cross, a focus of commercial activity and civic ceremony - processions and executions. These two streets were also, in a sense, part of the urban fringe. The buildings lining the north-western side are constructed on the edge of a steep slope down into the area known since the Middle Ages as Raven Meadows, an alluvial area of flood-prone meadowland, not built up to any great extent before the middle of the 19th century. As a result, the properties on this side of the road had some of the most valuable frontages anywhere in the town, while their backlands extended down the slope into an open area of grazing-land and gardens.

The medieval town wall, probably built in the first half of the 13th century, is known to have followed this slope: as a terrace wall at the south-west end of Pride Hill, climbing to the crest of the slope towards the north end of Castle Street and heading for the upper gate into the town, near the present Library complex (fig.2). Previous work in the area has shown that, even within a century and a half of its construction, the free-standing sections were being gradually demolished and colonised by buildings. As a terrace wall, its life was somewhat longer. Since the end of the 18th century, topographers and antiquarians have been exploring this part of the town, noting the remains of stone buildings, sections of the town wall, and stonework that could have been derived from either. One of the earliest was the artist and topographer David Parkes who, writing in c.1800 (1) described the remains of an ancient red sandstone building in an alleyway behind No.2 Pride Hill; this structure, known locally as the 'Old Mint' was identified later in the 19th century (wrongly, in all probability) as 'Bennett's Hall', a very wealthy building of mid- 13th century date. There are no accounts of the buildings at the north end of the street until 1844, when T.F.Dukes, in his Antiquities of Shropshire (2), notes the presence of a building that he interpreted as a former chapel 'now a warehouse adjoining a shop at the top of Pride Hill'.

One of the more controversial 19th-century writers was the Reverend C.H. Drinkwater. He put forward the case for a defensive town wall in the town centre within, and earlier in date than, the 13th-century wall described above. At the back of properties on the north-west side of Pride Hill, he noted: 'Two walls are found running nearly parallel at a distance of about eight yards. The outer, and, as I infer, the more modern one, is of dressed freestone of excellent quality, and the inner one of softer, more friable, more highly coloured sandstone, not regularly dressed nor so carefully put together' (3). Drinkwater's observation is essentially accurate, though the work undertaken in 1987 has shown that his interpretation is incorrect.

Although it was not recorded in print until after the turn of the century, in c.1879 an unusual event occurred at No.20 Pride Hill, the site later occupied by the TopShop building: 'the floor of a cellar next the street at No.20 Pride Hill fell in, and beneath was found a small vaulted crypt, cruciform in plan, but it has been so rudely repaired that all distinguishing features are destroyed' (4). Although several stone-built cellars of medieval date are known in Shrewsbury, none of them appears to have had a stone-vaulted roof. Besides the example described here, probably not a 'crypt' in the ecclesiastical sense but a vaulted domestic undercroft, only two other cases are known in the town- both are now destroyed: one at the junction of Dogpole and Wyle Cop, and one on the Talbot Chambers site in Market Street. The 1987 work was able to confirm the existence of a former lower basement level at No.20, but no details of its construction were obtainable.

However, on the property next door, No.22 Pride Hill, down the



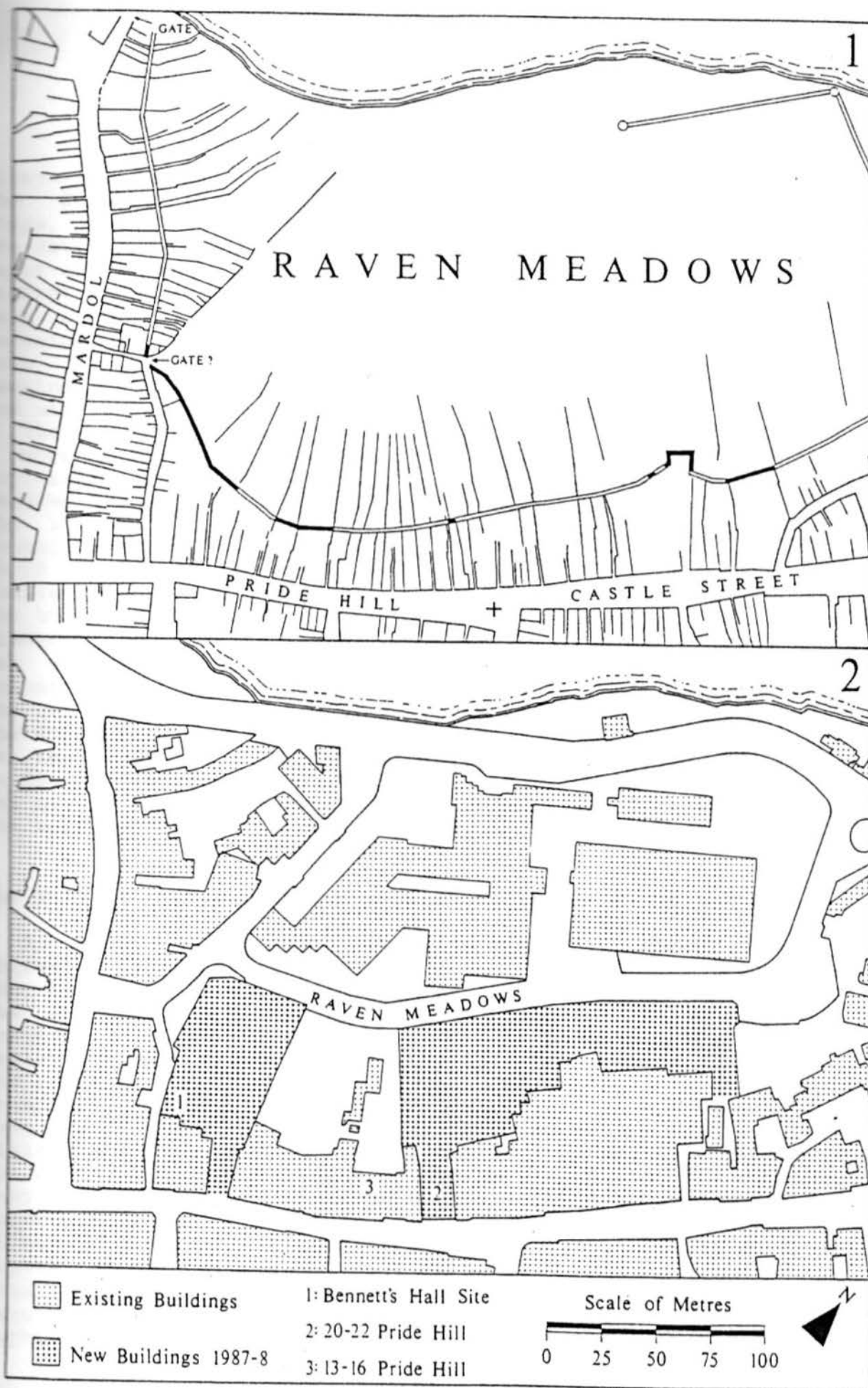


Fig.2: The Pride Hill area: historic features, the modern landscape, and all work reported on, 1986-7.

alleyway known as Burley's Shut, or The Coach-and-Horses Shut, or The Hundred Steps, and in the 20th century as Seventy Steps, another ancient structure was noted by antiquarians, like the Reverend J.B. Blakeway: 'Nearly opposite the public-house (the Wagon-and-Horses, to the rear of No.23) are the remains of an ancient edifice of Grinshill stone said traditionally to have been a chapel, one of the numerous ones which the piety of our ancestors filled, as we know from records, every part of the town, but the sites of many of which are now forgotten' (5). The remains of this structure were found in the 1987 watching-brief, and will be described below.

The later 20th century, particularly the post-war period, saw a more methodical approach to the analysis of the townscape and buildings, and the excavation of several sites in the Raven Meadows - Castle Street - Pride Hill area. In the late 1950's, the 13th-century town wall was excavated on a site adjoining Roushill; in 1972-4, Pride Hill Chambers (now MacDonald's, behind 11-12 Pride Hill) was excavated and surveyed, and found to consist of a stone undercroft of c.1400, terraced into the slope, and built on the remains of the town wall; in 1978 Rigg's Hall, a timber-framed building within the Castle Gates Library complex, was excavated and surveyed, and it too was found to have colonised the reduced town wall from c.1400 (6). The 1987 work on the Charles Darwin Centre site followed other work undertaken by the Shrewsbury Heritage Project in 1986 on a redevelopment site at the south end of Pride Hill. With the conclusion of the work on the Charles Darwin Centre, this part of Shrewsbury has become one of the most intensively-studied areas of any historic town in the West Midlands.

#### The Work on the Charles Darwin Centre: Organisation and Method.

In 1985, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit was requested by Shropshire County Council to undertake rescue work for several redevelopment projects in Shrewsbury. As a result, the Shrewsbury Heritage Project was created. The archaeological monitoring of construction work for the Charles Darwin Centre, generously funded by the developers, John Laing Construction Ltd., began in November 1986 when work on the Town Walk access from Castle Court into Raven Meadows revealed the footings of the town wall. Over the following thirteen months project staff visited the construction site on about sixty separate occasions. The duration of these visits varied in length from ten minutes to many hours, and was dictated by the construction process under observation and the nature of the ground or structure that was affected by it. Ground conditions varied considerably, from great depths of black alluvial silt in the low, wet, Raven Meadows area, to the yellow silty-sandy clay of the hillside above. Generally, however, throughout the site, there was no significant survival of archaeological deposits, at least in the sense of



soils and other materials deposited in a coherent manner over a long period of time, containing artefacts or stratified structural remains. Nearly all of the information recovered from the construction site came in the form of hard structures: buildings and parts of buildings, and their relationship to other structures, boundaries, the street frontage and Seventy Steps, and to the natural and built-up ground surface. Although a watch was kept on excavation work throughout the site, the archaeological watching-brief inevitably came to concentrate on the hillside, in particular the TopShop site, formerly Nos.20-22 Pride Hill (fig.2).

#### THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING-BRIEF.

##### Raven Meadows.

The natural subsoil within the Raven Meadows area of the construction site can broadly be divided into two zones. Within the northern two-thirds of the site (from the new Library Extension building on Castle Gates, to the rear of Littlewood's), the natural red-brown sandy-silty clay of the hillside and high ground to the east lay close under the modern ground surface, particularly at the foot of the slope. Against the Raven Meadows frontage, the natural ground lay under a wedge-shaped deposit of mid- to late- 19th-century refuse: a land-fill of ashy tips containing quantities of domestic pottery.

The character of the southern third of the site was rather different. In this area, the brown sandy natural was overlain by grey to black waterlogged alluvial silt that increased in depth towards the south and west. This deposit was found in 1986 in the Raven Meadows area of the Hardanger's redevelopment, where the brown sandy subsoil rose again sharply up to Roushill Bank to the south-west. These observations are interpreted as giving strong support to the argument that the Raven Meadows floodplain represents a redundant meander of the River Severn, which formerly cut deeply into the high ground in the angle of Roushill Bank and Pride Hill. No evidence was recovered to date this feature or establish a chronology for its infilling; it is, however, likely to be prehistoric in date, possibly cut off and filled up in the Neolithic period, on the analogy of a similar feature in the Coton Hill area to the north.

No evidence was recovered for human activity in the Raven Meadows area of the redevelopment site earlier than the mid-19th century. The earliest dateable feature was a length of yellow sandstone retaining wall, exposed immediately outside the east wall of the multi-storey car-park, running north-south, heading under the car-park to the north (fig. 3). This may be identified as the east wall of the former Smithfield Cattle-Market, built in

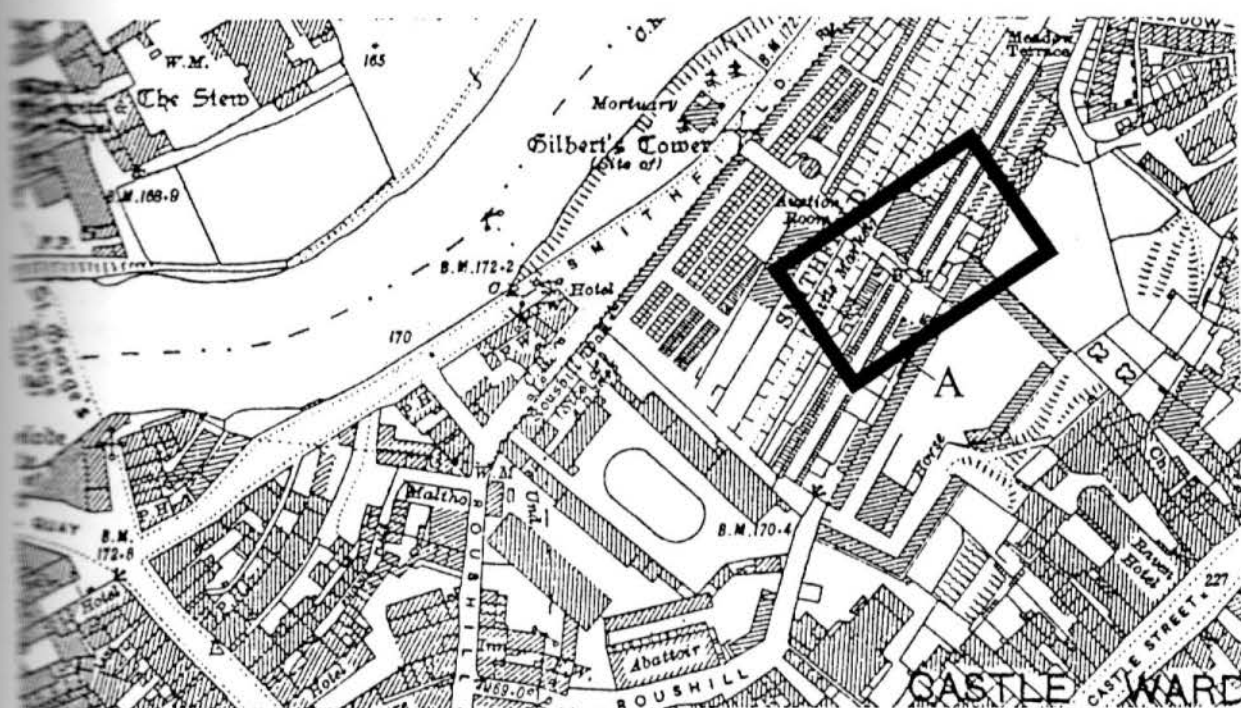


Fig.3: The Raven Meadows Area. Early 20th century. Outline of present multi-storey car-park, with location of wall of cattle-market exposed in 1987.

the mid-19th century. The 19th-century rubbish-filled deposit, referred to above, built up against this wall and clearly represents the reclamation of ground between the east side of the cattle-market and the foot of the slope further to the east. This reclamation was followed by the northwards extension of the Raven Meadows road to the present junction with Smithfield Road, at a date after 1880.

The southern, alluvial area of the site was occupied by massive 19th and early 20th-century foundations and culverts cut into the waterlogged subsoil. These represent the remains of mid-to late-19th-century industrial premises that occupied ground on both sides of the southern end of the Raven Meadows road.

### The Hillside: The Town Wall.

The course of the town wall along the Pride Hill-Castle Street slope has always been known, in general, if not with precision. John Speed's map of Shrewsbury, published in 1610, bears the legend 'the town wall built upon with houses', along the north-west side of the street. Sanders' 'View of Shrewsbury from the North' of 1787, shows substantial lengths of the free-standing wall still surviving in the area now occupied by Woolworth's. However, the precise course of the wall between the MacDonald's site (10-12 Pride Hill) to the south-west, and the Woolworth's site to the north-east, has never been known precisely, and this uncertainty has been the cause of much of the confusion in the interpretation of the 19th-century observations of sandstone masonry in the area. The watching-brief on construction work on the hillside behind Nos.20-23 Pride Hill has, however, identified the course of the wall with some certainty, even though the wall itself was never actually observed in elevation.

In September 1987, underpinning work took place at the rear of Lilley & Skinner's, behind No.23 Pride Hill. A deep pit excavated by the contractors against the south-west corner of the standing building cut through a mass of purple Keele Beds sandstone rubble set in a greenish gritty mortar, at a distance of c.32.5 metres from the street frontage. The stonework and its matrix were identical to the core material of the 13th-century town wall observed and excavated at three other sites in the area.

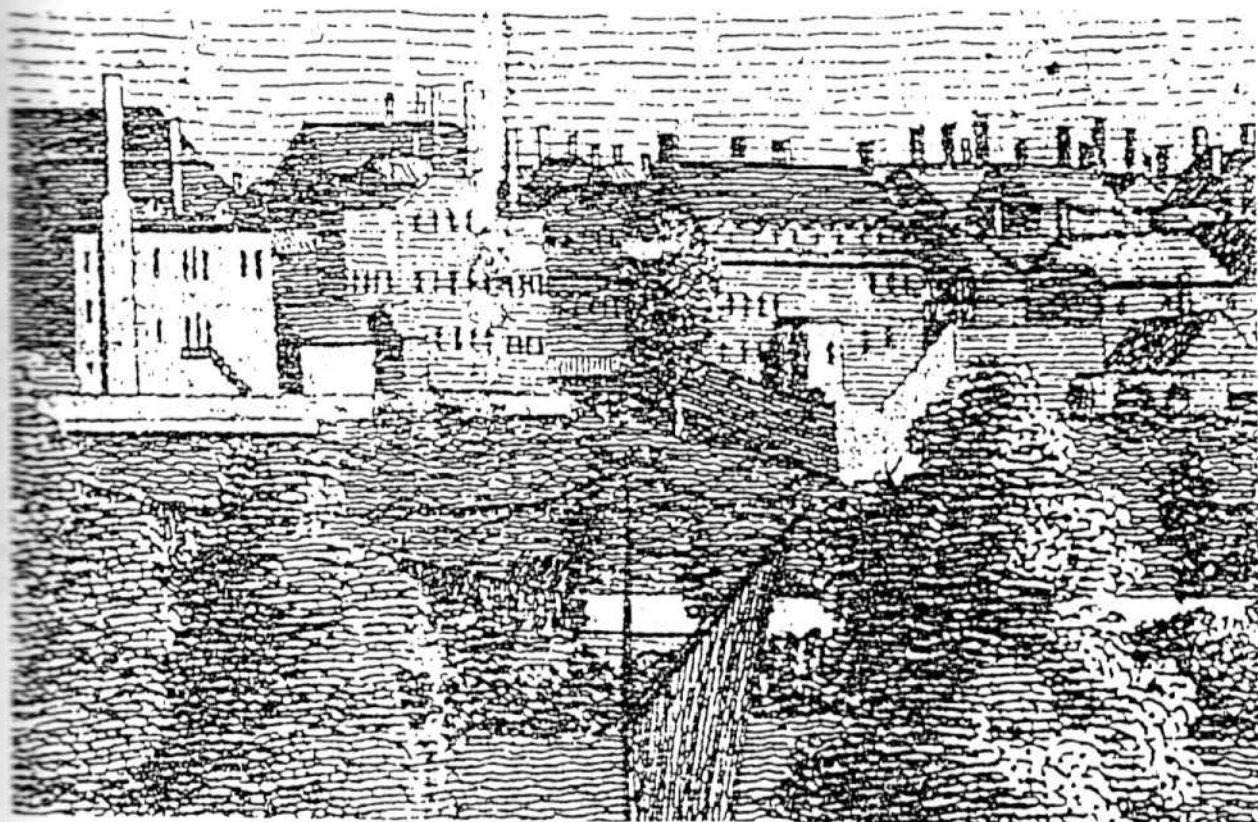


Fig.4: Extract from Sanders' 'View of Shrewsbury from the North' 1787, showing town wall on Woolworths' site.

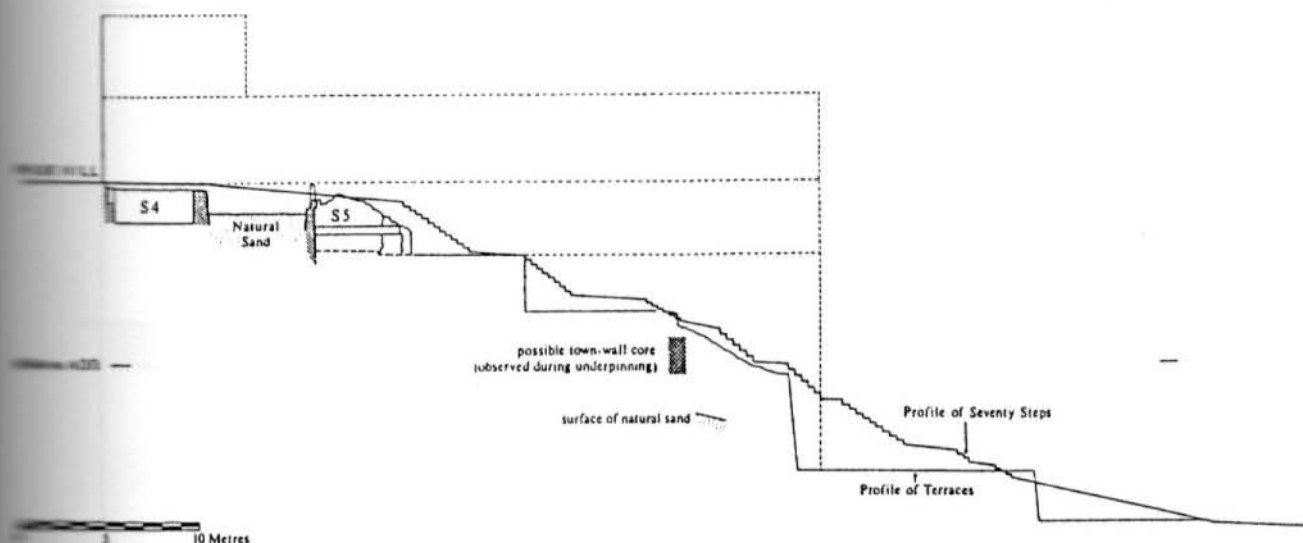


Fig.5: No.22 Pride Hill and Seventy Steps. Section and profile.

The TopShop Site: 20-22 Pride Hill (figs. 5, 6, and 9).

When work began, this site was occupied by the former TopShop premises, a large, flat-roofed multi-storey brick structure, that had started life as Woolworth's in the 1930's. The building was deeply terraced into the hillside, with an upper basement level, consisting of a large lower sales floor and a cellar, stretching from the street frontage to the rear wall. There were further basements below this at the rear. An initial assessment suggested that there was little chance of recovering archaeological evidence from the site.

An early stage of the construction process saw the excavation of test-holes, by the site engineers, through the brick walls of the basements in order to determine what lay beyond. A number of these holes located sealed-off spaces in the area bounded by Pride Hill, the north-east wall of the front cellar, and the front wall of the former lower sales floor. Inspection of these spaces by the archaeological team showed that substantial, and potentially early, sandstone walls survived within. The visible sections of wall were recorded photographically, and with written notes, by the team working with a generator and floodlights.



# PRIDE HILL

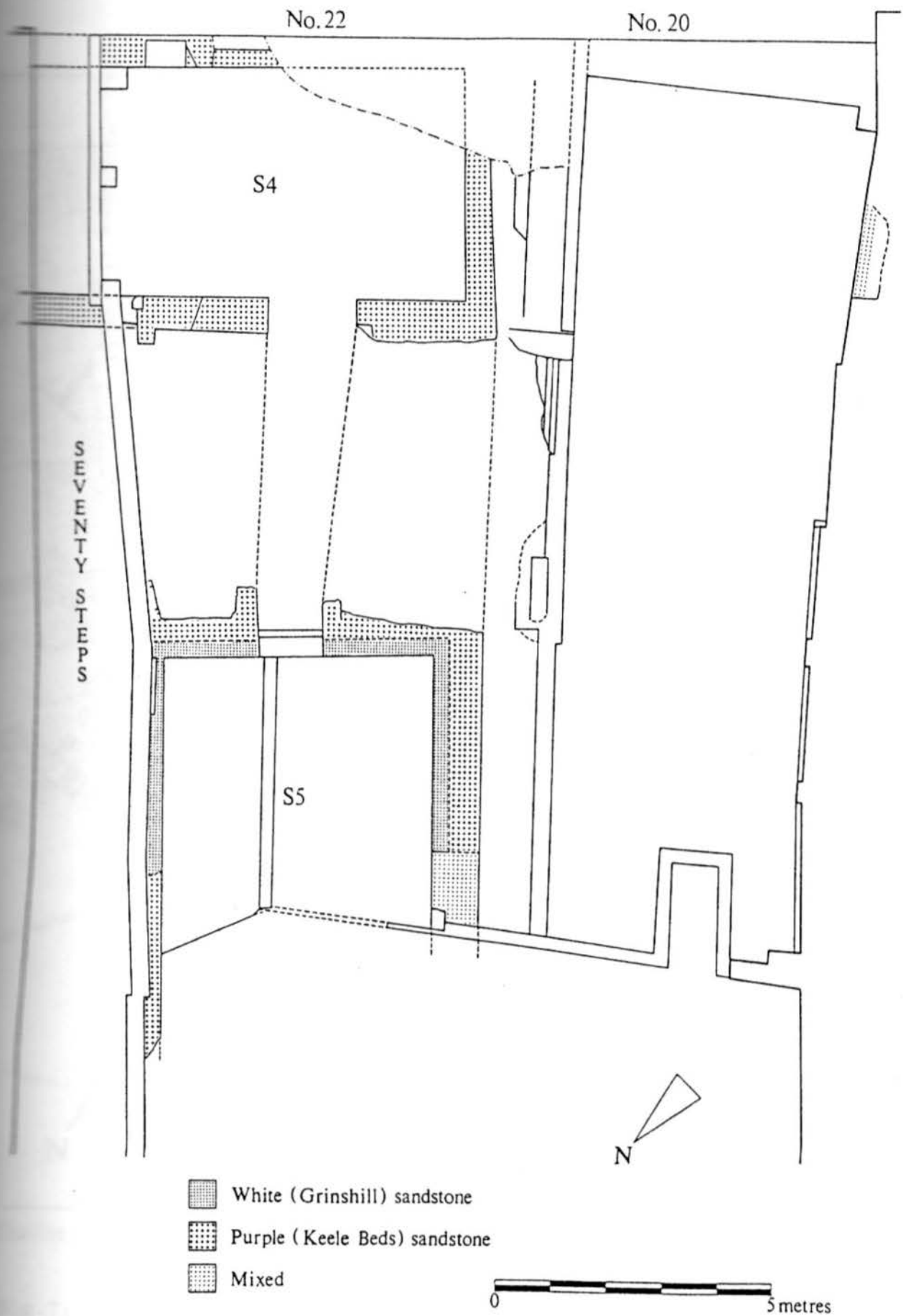
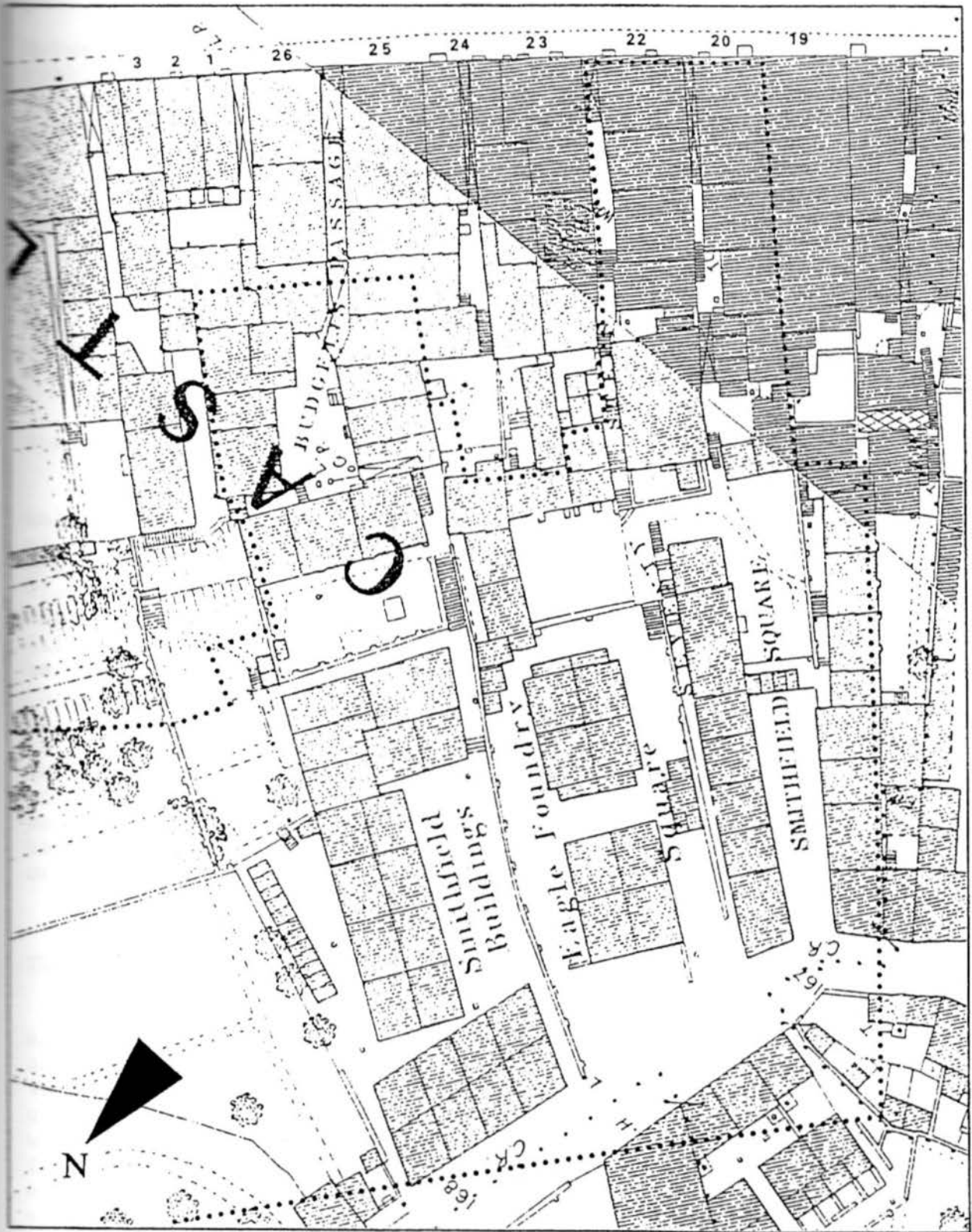


Fig. 6: The TopShop Site (20 and 22 Pride Hill).  
Plan of historic structures.





Outline of Charles Darwin Centre .....

Fig.7: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey town plan, (1882). The TopShop site and 22-26 Pride Hill. 1:500.

Subsequently, demolition of the superstructure and clearance of rubble showed that these walls represented three sides of a masonry cellar, terraced into the slope c.11 metres behind the street frontage, with one side wall adjoining Seventy Steps. Further clearance by the contractors revealed a second stone-built cellar on the frontage, on the corner of Seventy Steps. The First Edition Ordnance Survey 1:500 town plan (1882) showed that these cellars occupied the property that was formerly No.22 Pride Hill, and that an earth-filled space c.1 metre wide that separated them from the open front cellar of the TopShop Building represented an alleyway, not unlike Seventy Steps, that ran between No.20 and No.22 (see figs 4,5, and 9). The location of No.21 is uncertain.

#### The TopShop front cellar (No.20).

This stretched from the frontage back as far as the lower sales floor, which was at a slightly lower level. Its walls were of brick construction, though re-used sandstone masonry was present in the jambs of a blocked opening in the north-east wall. Visible in the base of this wall were the tops of two brick segmental arches, either relieving arches or openings on to the alleyway. Sections of the wall were built with potentially early hand-made bricks (measured and sampled). The front wall was largely of modern brick construction. The south-west wall, the party wall with the Gas Board premises, was similarly modern in date, though a patch consisting of several blocks of sandstone ashlar was incorporated in it c.4 metres from the frontage. A contractor's test-pit dug into the floor at this point revealed made ground, suggesting the possibility of a lower cellar that had subsequently been filled. This may very well have been the cruciform 'vaulted crypt' discovered by accident in c.1879.

#### The rear cellar (S5) (22 Pride Hill).

This structure was c.5 metres wide, and lay with its long side against Seventy Steps. Its back (north-west) wall was missing, having probably been destroyed by the terrace-cut for the Woolworth's/TopShop building's lower sales floor (fig.6). The outside face of its walls, which were subterranean, were built with Keele Beds sandstone rubble; the interior was lined with finely squared, coursed, and jointed blocks of Grinshill sandstone ashlar. The north-west ends of both side walls showed evidence of a break in construction just short of the point where they had been truncated by the lower sales floor (fig.9). The surviving southern 1-2 metres of the side walls were built with Keele Beds sandstone rubble. This implies that the cellar was of more than one phase of construction but this could not have been understood more fully without excavation. Further evidence of modifications to the structure were provided by the truncated springings of a brick barrel-vault in the side walls; rough

chisel- or pick-marks in the course of masonry above the truncated vault-springings showed that the vault was a later alteration to the structure and that it had been roughly inserted into the pre-existing masonry. Traces of the semi-circular scar left by the removal of the vault were visible on the end wall (fig.9). One further structural detail presents a problem: whereas the coursing of the masonry in the side walls was consistent, the coursing in the end wall, either side of a blocked doorway, was not. The confused coursing of the end wall might suggest that the ashlar blocks were re-used, very probably second-hand materials from a late medieval building. However, the perfect coursing of the side walls suggests that the stonework here may have been new, and not re-used. In default of further dating evidence, it cannot be determined whether S5 represented the remains of an adapted late medieval building or a purely post-medieval building.

Reference, again, to the First Edition Ordnance Survey plan (fig.7) shows that opposite S5, on the other side of Seventy Steps, was the pub known as the Waggon (or Coach) and Horses. This immediately brings to mind the description by Blakeway of 'an ancient edifice of Grinshill stone' 'nearly opposite the

public house'. There can be little doubt that this and S5 are the same. Further, in a book on Shrewsbury published in 1905 (7), the illustration reproduced here occurs with the caption 'Town Wall (Pride Hill)'. However, the scene is almost certainly Seventy Steps and S5, shown with a semi-circular arched doorway through masonry supporting a timber-framed building of late 16th - 17th century character. Finally, the drawing of the doorway allows us, with some certainty, to identify S5 with another 19th-century observation by the



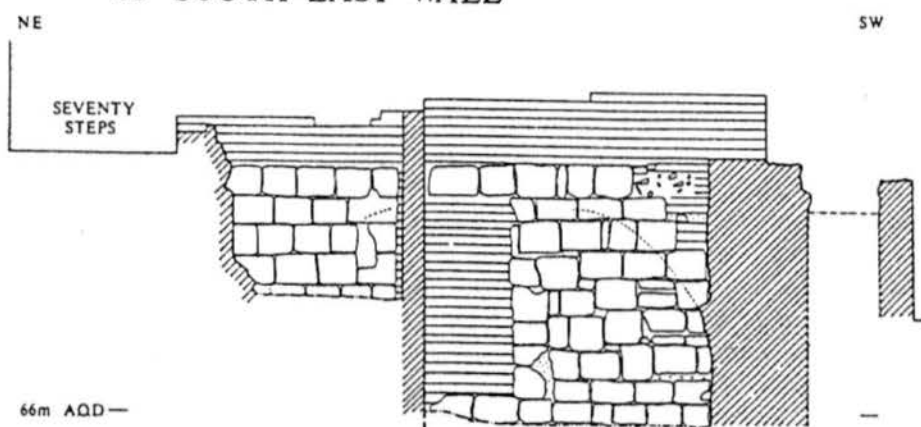
Fig. 8.

Reverend Drinkwater: 'down the seventy steps passage, a doorway with a semicircular heading leads into a large vaulted room'... 'which is lighted by two very perfect embrasures' (8). These 'embrasures' were probably destroyed by the construction of the Woolworth's/TopShop building in the 1930's.

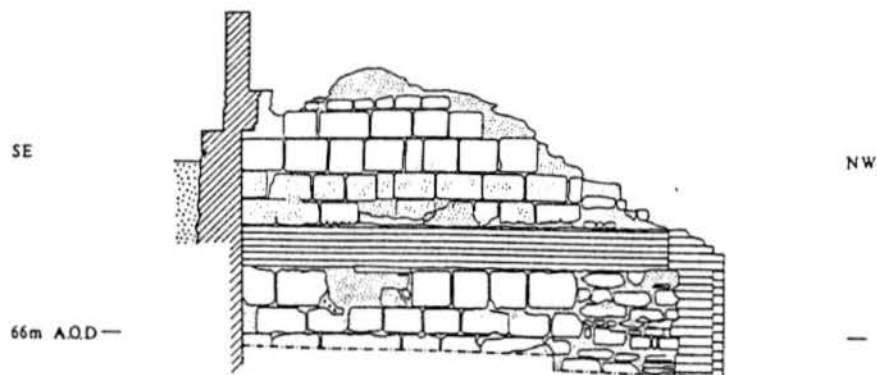
#### The front cellar (S4) (22 Pride Hill).

This cellar was built mainly (where the fabric could be seen) of red-purple Keele Beds sandstone rubble. The exterior subterranean wall-faces were left rough, while the interior faces were rendered. Window-like openings in the front and rear walls

### S5 SOUTH-EAST WALL



### S5 SOUTH-WEST WALL



### S4 NORTH-WEST WALL

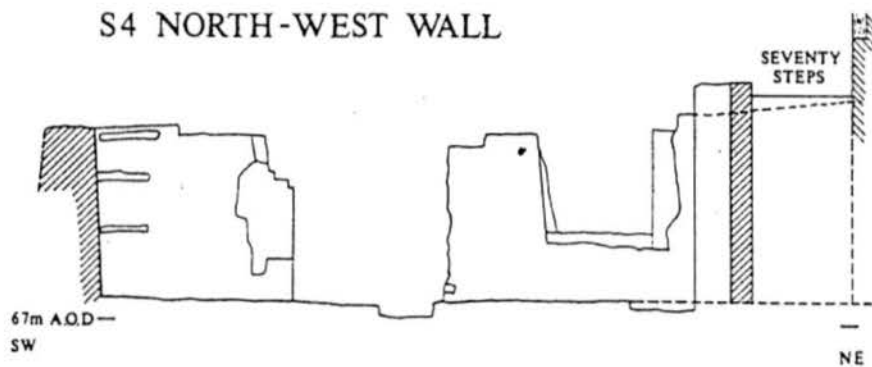


Fig.9: No.22 Pride Hill: Cellar wall elevations.



were probably light-wells, though it could not be determined whether or not these were original features or later insertions. In the centre of the back wall was a wide doorway, giving access via a passage to S5 to the rear; again, it could not be determined whether this doorway was an original feature (figs.6 and 9). As first exposed and emptied (of 20th-century backfill) by the contractors, S4 consisted of three sandstone rubble walls, and one brick-built end wall against Seventy Steps. As construction work proceeded, Seventy Steps itself was removed, and the rear wall of S4 was seen to continue eastwards, under the former alleyway. Still more unexpected was the observation that the wall continued under the gable wall and timber-frame of the building on the adjoining property, No.23, Dunn & Co. The upper part of this timber-frame had been exposed earlier in 1987 during the demolition of the TopShop building at which time it was recorded (photographically) by project staff. It was found to be constructed with square-panelled framing with short, straight, braces, and can be dated with some certainty to the late 16th or 17th centuries. Inspection of the cellar of Dunn & Co. has shown that all the walls are of brick construction, with the exception of the front section of the party wall between No.23 and No.24. This is of sandstone rubble construction (see fig.12).

#### Nos. 20,22, and 23 Pride Hill: An Interpretation. (Fig.10).

1. It is clear that the front cellar, S4, on No.22 Pride Hill, pre-dated both Seventy Steps and the timber-framed building next door; that is to say, S4 must have been earlier in date than the late 16th-17th century, probably late medieval.
2. S4, as it lay within the redevelopment area, was but one half of a larger structure that was subsequently subdivided between Nos.22 and 23. It is probable that the original north-east end wall is represented by the sandstone rubble in the party wall between Nos. 23 and 24, described above (see fig.12).
3. If this is the case, S4 must originally have measured 14.8 metres by 4.1 metres (internal), with its long side against the street frontage. These proportions make it virtually certain that S4 represents the sub-divided remains of a former terrace or row-building. The stone cellar walls probably originally supported a timber-framed superstructure, as they did after the sub-division had taken place. The form of the building on the frontage of No.22 between the 16th-17th century sub-division and the 1930's is, however, almost completely unknown except for photographs that show a brick front of 18th-19th century character.
4. Seventy Steps, as a public thoroughfare, was an insertion through the property of the late 16th-17th century, contemporary with the timber-framed building on No.23, alongside whose gable wall it ran. It gave access to the rear of the site, and to the building represented by the timber-framing (again of 16th/17th century date) seen in fig.8 over the masonry of S5.



5. There is, however, the possibility that S5 was, in origin, a medieval building. If this were the case, Seventy Steps may be a post-medieval thoroughfare perpetuating an earlier, medieval, access-route through the site from the frontage. This access, or entry, was, in all probability, on an internal partition-line between units of the proposed row building. Thus, an internal division within a rented structure, originally in single ownership, may have become fossilised as a property boundary between post-medieval freeholds.

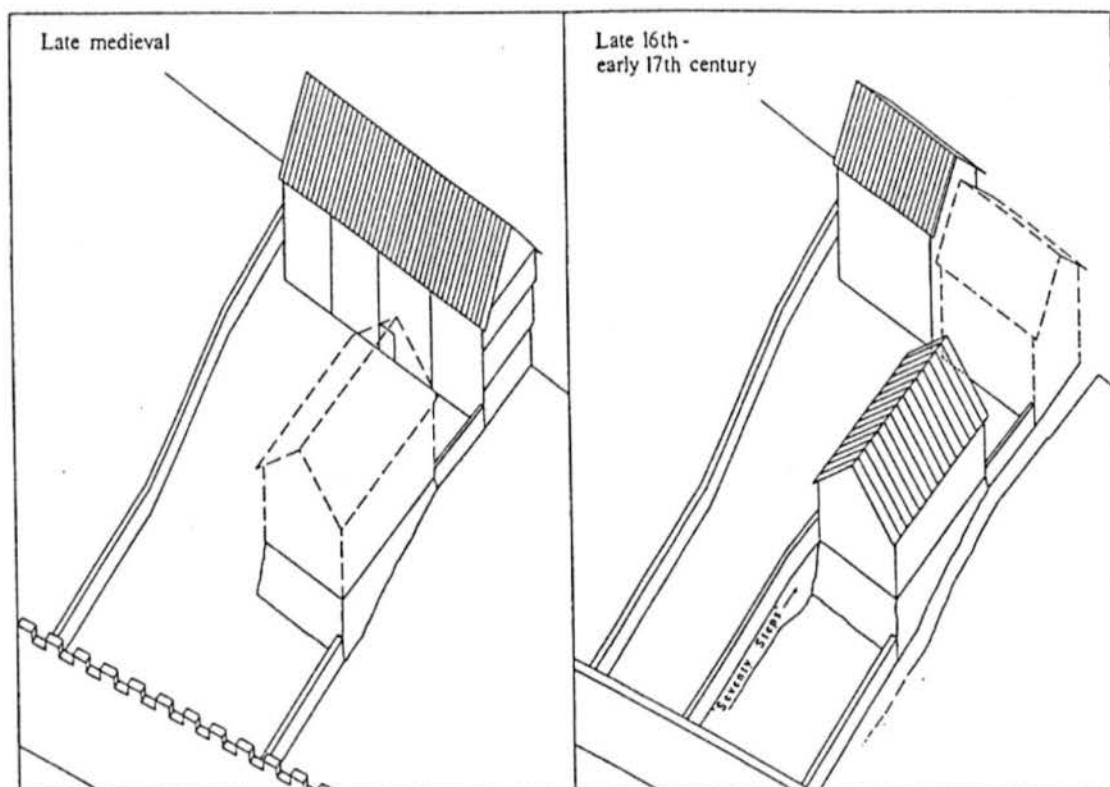


Fig.10: Nos. 22-23 Pride Hill: hypothetical development.

#### THE SITE IN CONTEXT: INVESTIGATIONS IN THE SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE.

It became clear while work on site was in progress that there was a considerable potential in the Pride Hill area for finding the remains of early buildings incorporated within cellars beneath much later structures. When the manpower became available, a cellar survey was carried out on all accessible properties in Castle Street, Pride Hill, and Mardol, to establish a context for the findings on the redevelopment.

The first target of the cellar survey was a group of properties overlooking the southern end of the redevelopment area, Nos.13-16 Pride Hill, where a section of Grinshill sandstone masonry was visible amongst the 18th and 19th-century

brickwork in the properties' rear wall, at the top of the slope overlooking Raven Meadows. The properties were described in the 19th century by the Reverend Drinkwater (see above) as the site of two parallel town walls.

Nos. 13-16 Pride Hill.

Systematic survey in the basements of these properties established that Drinkwater's parallel town walls were, in fact, the front and back walls of a medieval stone undercroft belonging to a very large building set back from, but parallel to, the Pride Hill frontage, terraced into the hillside in the same way as the cellars on No.22. Both the back and front walls of this structure (S3: figs. 12 and 13) contained architectural features dateable to the medieval period.

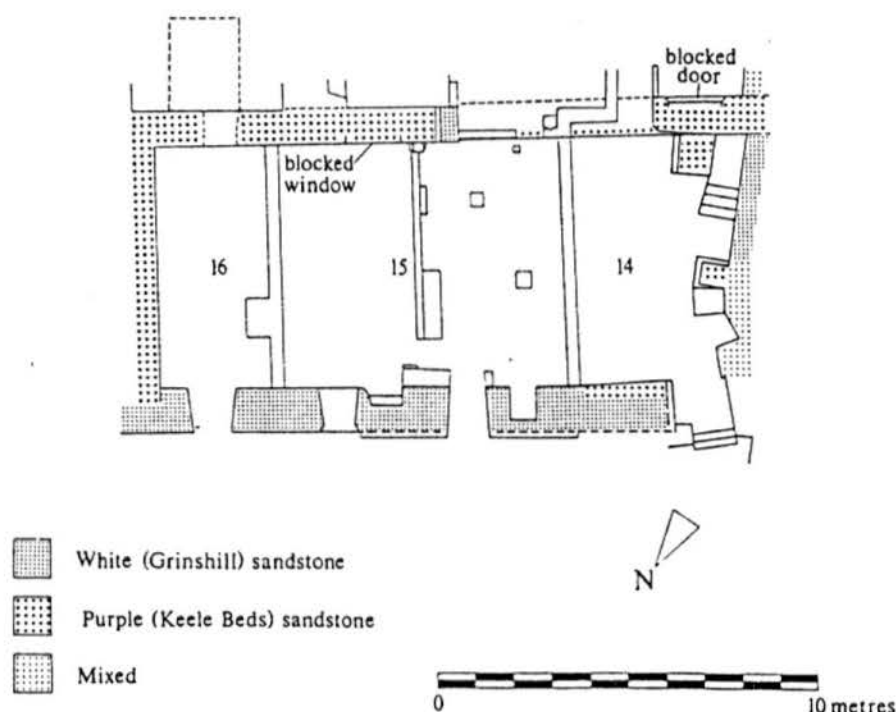


Fig.11: Plan of S3 (14-16 Pride Hill).

This building (S3), unknown and unsurveyed before 1987, showed evidence of two phases of construction, the earlier of which is probably dateable to the 13th-14th centuries. The form of this building and, in particular, its relationship to the street frontage, closely resemble the Pride Hill Chambers undercroft (now MacDonald's) immediately to the south-west (S2, fig.12).

Like S4 on the Charles Darwin Centre Site, S3 had been subdivided in the post-medieval period. Property boundaries associated with these subdivisions ran down the slope into Raven Meadows, some surviving above ground, others below ground, where observation of the construction work recorded them in the form of 19th-century brick walls. Observation of wall-junctions within the building confirmed that S3 had originally continued into what is now No.13 Pride Hill, though the cellars of this property were found to have been rebuilt in the modern period, destroying evidence of the medieval building.

Nos. 9-23 Pride Hill- a summary (fig.12).

To summarise, along the north-west side of Pride Hill, there is now considerable evidence for the form of the late medieval landscape. On the MacDonald's site, excavated in 1972-4, were two medieval stone buildings (S1,S2) set back behind the street frontage, terraced into the slope both occupying long properties stretching into Raven Meadows. Next door, now divided between Nos.13 to 16 Pride Hill, was another large stone building (S3), found in 1987, also set back from the street and terraced into the slope. A short distance to the north, on the Charles Darwin Centre site (No.20), was the mysterious cruciform 'vaulted crypt'. Next to this was the timber-framed terrace building (S4: 22-23 Pride Hill), also occupying the head of a wide plot stretching down the slope; again, there is some evidence for a medieval stone building behind (S5).

Nos. 24-26 Pride Hill: walls and skeletons.

Further to the north, our evidence all but runs out. The watching-brief recorded sandstone masonry within brickwork at the rear of the Lilley & Skinner premises (fig. 12, S6) in a basement aligned on old tenement boundaries, but this is likely to have been building material re-used in the 19th century. The Lilley & Skinner and Menzies premises themselves (24-26 Pride Hill) date from 1925-6, and an account of that date (9) relates that 'the work has involved sweeping away every trace of the older buildings on the site, right down to the foundations'. However, the same account describes the discovery of 'a very thick wall of red sandstone blocks' 'about eight yards back from the street', a sighting that cannot now be interpreted but probably implies the presence of another large and early stone building.

At the same time, somewhere behind the frontage in this area, the workmen discovered a 'a mass of masonry', 'and when the men were clearing away the debris in the basement, they came across two human skeletons, lying side by side at full length'...'the bones appeared to be ancient'. Antiquarian speculation favoured execution victims from the near-by High Cross. Apparently though, contemporary popular opinion favoured a quite different explanation. During the course of the archaeological

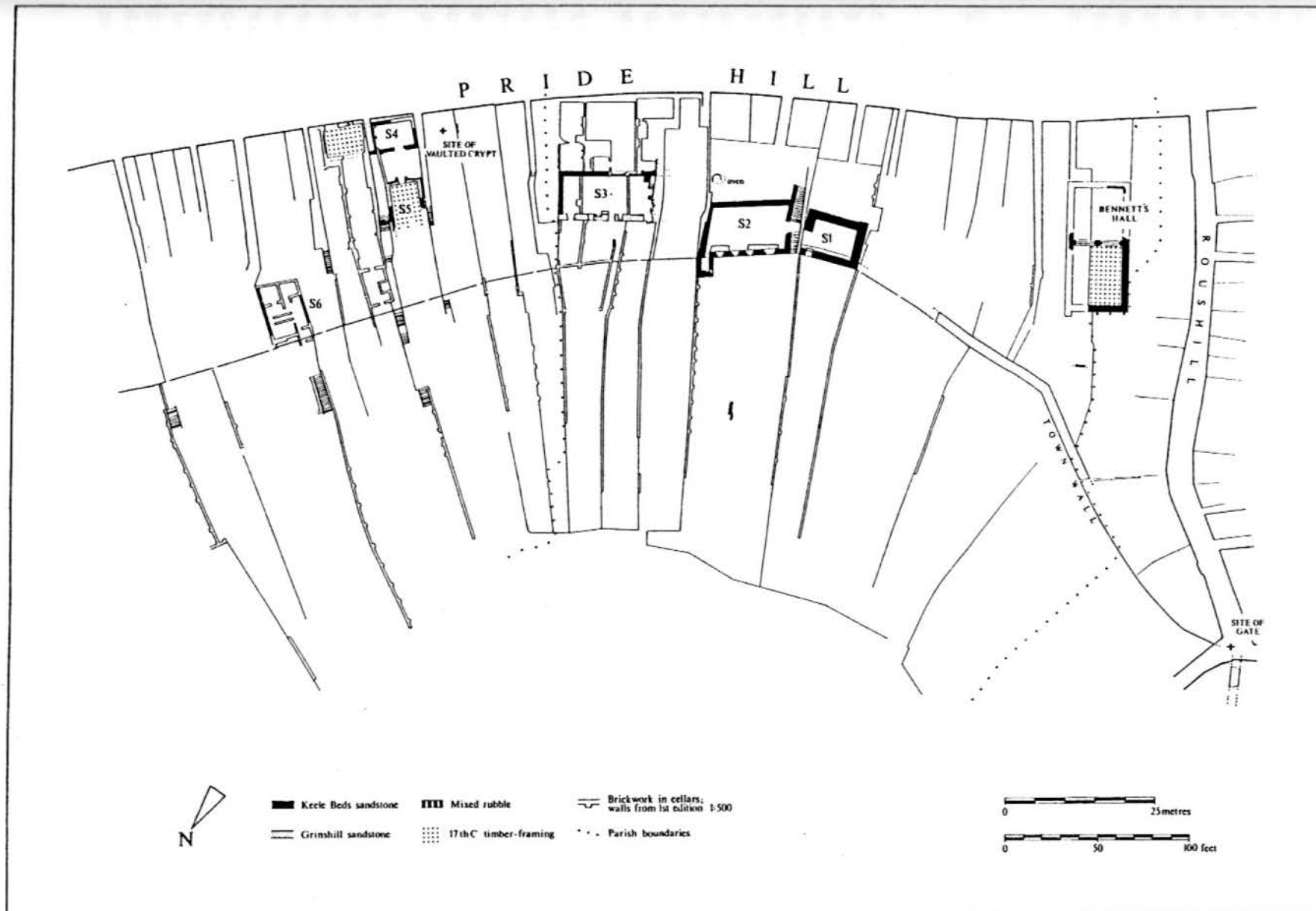


Fig.12: Pride Hill: Stonework, buildings, and boundaries.

investigation, the project office was visited by an elderly lady who had worked in Woolworth's (later TopShop) before the war. As well as passing on information about cellars in the area, she related several stories told to her by her grandfather, who had lived and worked in the area. She described the Seventy Steps area, as it had been around the turn of the century, as an area of small cottages inhabited by a community of 'Italian nail-makers' who had a local reputation for hostility and violence, making Seventy Steps a 'no-go' area after dark. When the two skeletons were discovered, there were few doubts, in non-academic circles, as to how they came to be there.

#### CONCLUSIONS: INTERPRETING THE LANDSCAPE.

The importance of the archaeology of the Charles Darwin Centre clearly has little to do with a profusion of objects of historical or intrinsic value: hardly a single artefact normally associated with archaeological investigations (pottery, coins, metalwork) was recovered from the site that was earlier in date than the 19th century. A few badly-damaged blocks of sandstone that had once formed parts of architectural features were found on the site but their condition was too poor, and their features too indistinct, to make recovery worthwhile. The only 'find' brought off site was an iron hook, just possibly medieval in date, recovered from the cellar on the frontage of the TopShop site.

The complete lack of portable objects was a direct result of the ground conditions: apart from Raven Meadows, which was unoccupied until the 19th century (but owned and used and not, until the late 19th century, an acceptable place for disposing of rubbish on a large scale), the gradient and soft natural subsoil encouraged terracing and cellaring, and there was no accumulation of the stratified deposits of occupation debris in which such objects are normally found.

These conditions are common to most of the elevated ground in the town centre, particularly where the gradients are steep. A report produced in the mid-1970's predicted this (10) and, in consequence, assessed the overall archaeological potential of the town centre in extremely pessimistic terms. The results of the work on the Charles Darwin Centre will modify this, by showing that by the recording and mapping of historic buildings, ancient cellars preserved beneath later buildings, terraces, and historic boundaries, and by observing and analysing the relationships between these features and their surroundings, it may still be possible to make a significant contribution to the history of the development of the town. The exploration of the remains of the medieval town has, in fact, scarcely begun.



## Medieval Pride Hill: the documentary evidence.

Written evidence from the medieval period survives, as it does for the rest of the town, only in a very fragmentary form. A number of deeds, from the 13th century onwards, give occasional glimpses of property transactions that can only rarely be associated with a particular modern, numbered, property. The analysis of this type of evidence is a highly-skilled process, beyond the scope of the present project; this report can only, therefore, give an impression of the documentary evidence where it has been transcribed, translated, and published.

The earliest surviving deeds (11) show that, in some respects, the main characteristic of the modern street had already been established by the 13th century: it was a street lined with shops, not purely 'retail outlets' in the modern sense but structures that probably combined retail and productive functions - shops/workshops. Over these shops were 'solars'-living accommodation. The south side of Pride Hill was known for a long time as Corvisers' Row, indicating a concentration of the leather-working trades. Occupations on the other side of the street may have been more diverse. It is also clear from some of the published documents that a single property might contain several individual shops and other structures as well: one document describes 'four shops and their solars' as part of a single message, another, of the late 14th century, 'a message and four shops in the front thereof'. There are also implicit and explicit references to houses behind the frontages within properties.

It is also clear from the published documents that some of the leading merchant families of the town were acquiring shops and properties along the street from at least the early 13th century, and that some families built up considerable holdings in the area. Notable among these families were the Prides, one of the wealthiest merchant families whose members repeatedly held civic office in the 13th and 14th centuries, and who gave their name to the street. 19th-century antiquarians attempted to identify the site of their principal dwelling - 'Pride's Mansion', and though all agreed that it would have been on the north-west side of Pride Hill (within the area under study) neither its site, nor in fact its existence as a named structure, were ever confirmed.

The archaeological evidence, though fragmentary, shows us a local settlement pattern, hinted at by the documents, consisting of very large tenements (in one case with a frontage width in excess of eighty feet) extending from the street into Raven Meadows. In three, possibly four, cases, shops on the frontages concealed substantial stone buildings behind, separated from them by courtyards. Analogies with other towns (Oxford and Chester, for example) suggest that these were investment properties, with rents from multiple shops on the frontage providing income to the high-status hall buildings behind. The shops themselves were previously only known through the documentary evidence, but the discovery of S4 on the Charles Darwin Site has added some physical evidence to this. Significantly, S4 was part of a

terrace or row-building, a structure designed to maximise the return on a prime frontage, almost overlooking the High Cross.

The archaeological evidence also allows us to assess, in general terms, the level of the investment in this area in the later middle ages. The dominant factor here is the gradient: the value of this land must have been dramatically increased, and could only be fully realised by, the construction of substantial terrace walls maximising the amount of useable ground within each property. Medieval terrace walls in the area under study also served as the foundations for very substantial buildings, and while the form of their upper superstructures is not known, the size of the undercrofts, and the quality of construction and success in overcoming local engineering difficulties is adequate evidence for the wealth of their owners.

The Charles Darwin Centre site (20-22 Pride Hill) also yielded invaluable information on the break-up of this pattern. Documentary evidence for changes in the town's population and economy suggests that there was a period of stagnation from the later 15th century into the mid 16th century, followed by a period of prosperity and rapid growth that lasted into the early to mid 17th century. This evidence shows the town growing fastest in the suburban and peripheral areas of the town in the late 16th- 17th century; the archaeology shows the beginnings of the more subtle process of infilling in the core areas. At No.2 Pride Hill, the medieval hall known as 'Bennett's Hall' (see Introduction) was partially demolished, and its remains colonised by cottages with timber-framing suggesting a 16th-17th-century date, lining a new alleyway inserted down the tenement giving access from the frontage to the rear (12). This sequence parallels that at 22-23 Pride Hill, where the evidence given above suggests a 16th-17th century date for the subdivision of a medieval tenement and the creation of the alleyway known subsequently as Seventy Steps.

Finally, the question remains as to the origin of this landscape. In 1972-4 a pit containing Anglo-Saxon pottery was excavated on the MacDonald's site, but this is still our only evidence of any activity in the area under study before the Norman Conquest (13). The earliest dateable structural feature in the area is the town wall, usually dated to c.1220-1240 on documentary evidence. Several of the medieval property boundaries in the area, and also nearby on the north side of Mardol (fig.2), pass across the line of the wall without interruption. This suggests that the basic system of property divisions may be earlier than the town wall which, when it was constructed, bisected the properties which had, perhaps, been laid out in the 11th or 12th century. The Charles Darwin Centre will be the largest single building ever constructed in the town, the ultimate stage in 'the evolution of shopping' in Shrewsbury: it is entirely appropriate that even this new building will be shaped, in part, by boundaries respected over eight centuries of town life.

## FUTURE WORK.

This report represents a fairly complete summary of the findings from the watching-brief on the Charles Darwin Centre; a more detailed academic paper is currently in preparation by the writer, and other contributors. This will describe all of the work undertaken in the Pride Hill area by the Shrewsbury Heritage Project, together with an assessment of previous archaeological work, a detailed report on the Bennett's Hall building, and a survey of the available documentary evidence. The paper has, in principle, been accepted for publication in 1989 by the Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society. It is hoped to be able to produce a short interim report for the general public, outlining the results of the project's work at Shrewsbury Abbey and in the town centre though this will depend upon the availability of resources later in 1988. The scope for the popular presentation of the archaeology of Shrewsbury is, in fact, considerable, and has yet to be exploited.

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