

**Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,  
Shropshire  
Archaeological Watching Brief  
2003**

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**Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire**  
**Archaeological Watching Brief 2003**

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# Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archaeological Watching Brief 2003

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**1.0 Summary**

*Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief on behalf of Severn Trent Water Ltd. in October 2003 during preliminary geotechnical investigations in the Abbey Foregate area of Shrewsbury adjacent to the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Abbey Church (SA359). Three boreholes required archaeological monitoring. One was located adjacent to Abbey Foregate west of the Abbey Church and a further two were sited in the car park east of the Old Potts Way. No distinct archaeological remains were located within three of the boreholes. However, initial excavation of BH4 revealed the remains of brickwork wall foundations at a depth of 3.20m. Levels of made-ground in BH3 and BH4a may suggest the presence of water features located south of the abbey precinct revealed by documentary evidence. Artifactual evidence was limited to post-medieval ceramics.*

**2.0 Introduction**

This report describes the results of a watching brief carried out in October 2003, during geotechnical investigations in advance of the construction of a new sewer and water main in the vicinity of the Abbey Church, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury. Shropshire County Council recommended the maintenance of an archaeological watching brief. The watching brief followed the requirements of a Written Scheme of Investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2003) approved by Shropshire County Council.

**3.0 The site**

A total of three boreholes were investigated, as follows:

**BH1:** This borehole was located in the angle between two frontages of Abbey Foregate, to the west of the Abbey Church. Advice from English Heritage indicated that this borehole lay just outside the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument, and that therefore no application for Scheduled Monument Consent was required. This borehole was dug to a depth of 8m.

**BH3:** This was located adjoining a car park, to the southwest of the Abbey Church. It was located just outside the southern limits of the Scheduled Monument boundary.

**BH4:** This borehole was located to the southwest of borehole BH3, and was clearly outside the Scheduled Ancient Monument boundary. It was subsequently moved 4m to the south to avoid building foundations.

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### **4.0 Archaeological and historical background**

The first Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul was founded in 1083 when Earl Roger re-founded the church of St. Peter, granting it the surrounding suburb. The abbey was dissolved in 1540. However, the nave of the monks church survived for the use of the parish as the 'The Abbey Church' (Baker 1999). Much of the remainder of the abbey has now been destroyed by the development of the surrounding suburb. Excavations as part of the Shrewsbury Heritage Project (1985-88) revealed remains of the abbey south of Abbey Foregate. The majority of the proposed new sewer and water main lies in an area to the southwest of the abbey precinct. John Rocque's map of Shrewsbury, 1746, reveals this to be an area dominated by the mill stream and the former abbey pool and fishponds.

### **5.0 Objectives**

The archaeological watching brief was intended to provide a record of any archaeological deposits or features that might have been present below the modern ground surface and to contribute towards an understanding of any natural deposits, including palaeochannels, that were present.

A total of three boreholes (BH1, BH3, BH4/4a) were archaeologically monitored. The material recovered was examined by experienced archaeologists during boring operations between 6-25m. BH2 was not dug.

### **6.0 Method (Fig. 2)**

Deposits recovered from the three boreholes were inspected and recorded by an experienced archaeologist. Photographs were taken, and written descriptions made, as appropriate.

The detailed aims of the archaeological watching brief (Birmingham Archaeology) were:

- 1) to record the depth of modern overburden/disturbance.
- 2) to identify and record archaeological features, or possible archaeological features and to identify their depth.
- 3) to investigate the evidence for palaeochannels which could contribute towards an understanding of the broader landscape setting of the Abbey and its environs.
- 4) to test the nature of the subsoil present, and the depth of overlying material.

### **7.0 The results**

**BH1:** The borehole was initially moved 2.1m to the northeast of its original position to allow easier access for the cable-percussion rig, moving it further away from the Scheduled Ancient Monument. A hand-excavated access pit (0.3 X 0.3m) was

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excavated to a depth of 1.2m through the tarmac surface. The borehole was terminated at a depth of 6.50m.

Depth below ground level (m)	Description of stratigraphy	Comment
0-0.3	Tarmac surface and hardcore	-
0.3-2.45	Brown silt-sand-gravel with brick fragments	<i>Made-ground</i>
2.45-6.50	Brown slightly sandy clay	<i>Natural river sands</i>

**BH3:** An access pit for boring was initially excavated to a depth of 0.6m and was 0.35m wide. Below this depth deposits were investigated by boring. The results are outlined below. The borehole was terminated at a depth of 7.5m below the ground surface.

Depth below ground level (m)	Description of stratigraphy	Comment
0-0.23	Tarmac	-
0.23-0.33	Light grey-brown gravel hardcore	<i>Car park hardcore</i>
0.33-1.11	Red fine sand intermixed with red sandstone	-
1.11-2.33	Dark grey sand	<i>Made-ground or flood plain deposit</i>
2.33-3.23	Dark grey silt-sand	<i>Made-ground or flood plain deposit</i>
3.23-6.00	Dark grey silt-clay	<i>Termination of made-ground at c. 5m</i>
6.00-7.50	Red-brown grey clay-deposit	<i>Waterlogged at 6.50m</i>

**BH4:** This was the original location of the borehole. An access pit was excavated to a depth of 1.20m within which post-medieval pottery and brick fragments were recovered. The percussion-rig was unable to penetrate the brickwork and the borehole was terminated at 4.0m. Therefore, the borehole was relocated c. 5.0m to the south as **BH4a** (see below).

Depth below ground level (m)	Description of stratigraphy	Comments
0-0.30	Tarmac and hard-core	
0.30-3.20	Brown sand-silt	<i>Made-ground</i>
3.20-	Brickwork	<i>Wall foundations</i>

**BH4a:** An access pit was initially excavated to a depth of 1.0m. The borehole was terminated at a depth of 22.45m due to the compaction of the soil preventing further boring.

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Depth below ground level (m)	Description of stratigraphy	Comments
0-0.30	Tarmac and hardcore	-
0.30-3.25	Dark grey ash-silt	<i>Made-ground</i>
3.25-4.41	Green-grey silt-sand	<i>Waterlogged</i>
4.41-15.00	Red-brown-grey clay deposit	-
15.00-22.45	Red-brown grey clay-deposit	-

### 8.0 Discussion

Borehole BH1, located just off Abbey Foregate revealed made-ground to a depth of 2.45m. Below that river sands were located. In the medieval period the river was closer to the abbey and this would explain the location of river sands so far from the present river course.

Boreholes BH3 and BH4a revealed depths of made-ground up to 4-5m. John Rocque's map of 1746 reveals the presence of the abbey mill-stream pool and fish pond all located south of the abbey precinct and outside the Scheduled Ancient Monument area. The evidence from the boreholes supports this interpretation. There is no clear explanation at this time for the presence of the brick structure located in borehole BH4. However, industrial re-use of this area did occur before the 1980s redevelopment of the area.

### 9.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was sponsored by Severn Trent Water Ltd. Thanks to Dan Evans of Soil Mechanics for his assistance, and to all the site contractors for their co-operation. The watching brief was undertaken by Mark Hewson and Chris Hewitson of Birmingham Archaeology. The project was managed by Alex Jones for Birmingham Archaeology who also edited this report. Illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

### 10.0 References

Baker, N 1999 *Shrewsbury Abbey: A Medieval Monastery*, Shropshire Books, Shrewsbury

Birmingham Archaeology 2003 *Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Watching Brief 2003, Written Scheme of Investigation*