1

Introduction

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1.1. Background to the work

In the summer months of 2000, a team of archaeologists undertook a three-month excavation project on the site for a new magistrates court in Worcester. The site is bounded by Castle St and Britannia St with the new police station to its west and car parking to its north. The south-west corner of the site lay within the footprint of a Presbyterian Church. It is centred at NGR SO 8474 5544 (Illus 1.01).

Prior to the work taking place the excavation of a number of trenches as well as additional observations had been carried out on the site. It was clear from these that some level of Roman occupation had taken place within the area proposed for the new development. One trench in the north-east of the site had revealed a gravel surface associated with an unstated quantity of Roman pottery. Excavations to the west of the site had identified the remnants of what was interpreted as the north-west corner of a ditched enclosure. The trenches and observations between were recorded as containing no significant archaeological deposits or material (Illus 1.02).

An archaeological proposal was submitted to the archaeological advisor for the planning authority (James Dinn) in November 1998 and a final version of this was produced accommodating his comments in January 1999. The following is extracted from that final document and outlines the reasons for the work within the main area of excavation.

> 'The required foundation design for the building is a post-pad foundation. These will support the super structure. However, they will not support the basement slab which would need to rest on make up from the gravel surface up to the base of the basement slab. In this case it is necessary for the ground level to be reduced to sand and gravel which would destroy archaeological levels and their relationship to archaeological features. PPG16 would look to the preservation of deposits in situ and where this is not possible preservation by record (i.e. excavation). Taking into account the size of the proposed disturbances e.g. the foundation pads; and the nature of the likely archaeology, i.e. a single surface of Roman date, it is also important to note that the piecemeal excavation which would result from targeting pile caps or pads would not adequately tackle problems such as the subtlety of post Roman occupation on the site or the existence of temporary structures which would leave only very slight traces. In this case the preservation by record is likely to only be effective if the entire area of the footprint of the building is recorded at once. However, having considered this it is important to note that there is also an engineering and logistical requirement to clear the entire footprint of the building.' (Boucher 1999)

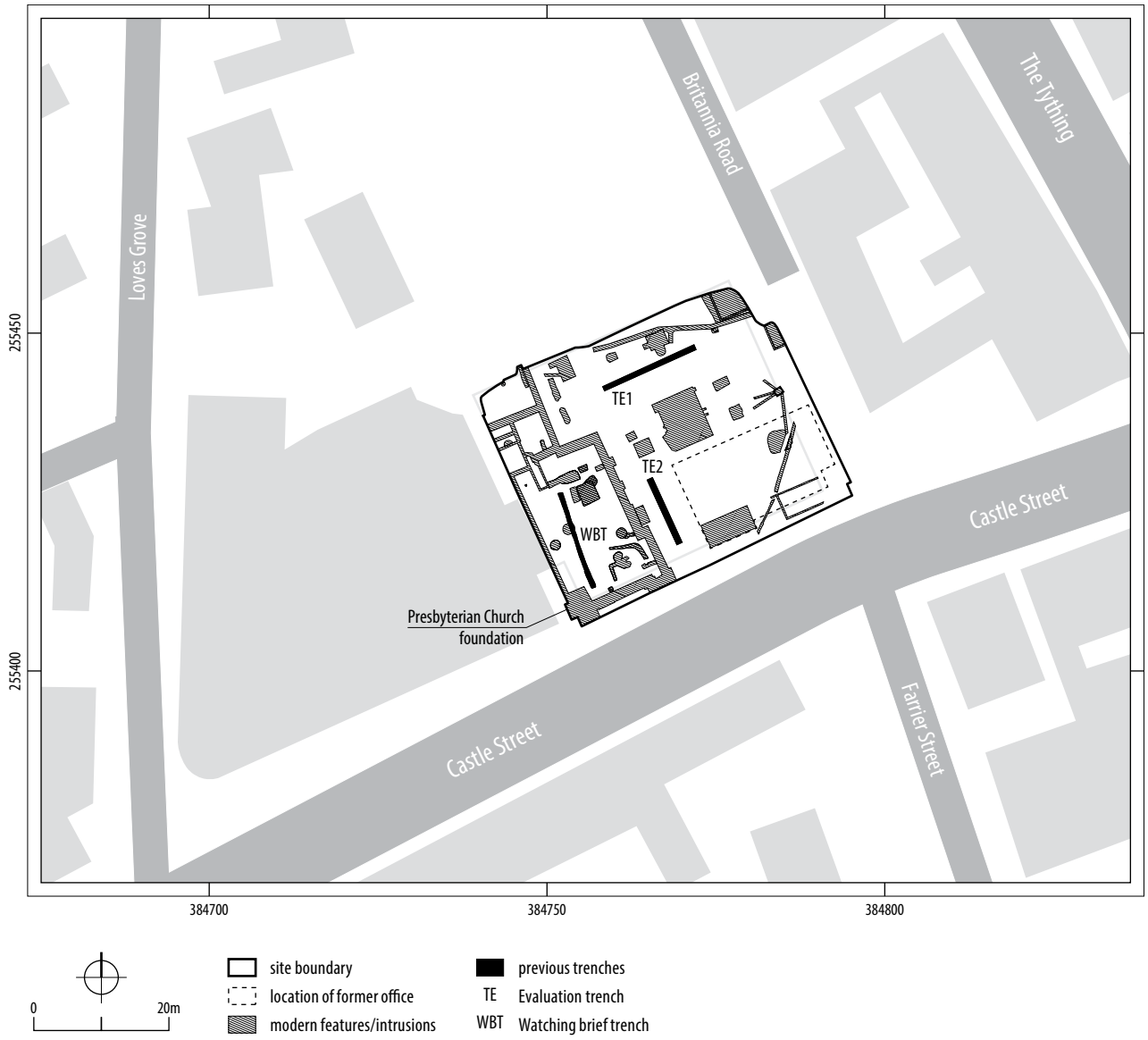
Due to a lack of sufficient information about the volume of material to be expected on the site from previous investigations undertaken there, and the complexity of the stratigraphy encountered, the timescales for post-excavation work had to be reviewed. With approximately 30,000 sherds of Roman pottery requiring processing and assessment the whole programme was put on hold until spot dates could be obtained. In the interim all other material was processed and draft matrices produced for the site. Sadly, before all the spot dating information became available Darren Vyce, the site director, was diagnosed with cancer and passed away shortly afterwards. The task of assembling the report fell on the current volume editor and due to competing priorities over more than a decade it was beginning to look less and less likely that the large volume of research laid out in these pages would see the light of day. In 2009 Headland Archaeology UK Ltd acquired Archaeological Investigations Ltd and agreed to support the production of the final text and publication document based on the specialist reports that had already been produced for the site. Finally, in 2015, the company was in a position to make time and resources available to provide the final push that was needed to complete the report.

1.2. Geology, topography and drainage

The site lies on a late Devensian sand terrace of the River Severn (Morris 1974); beneath the site the outwash deposits are sands, but immediately to the west they become gravel (Jordan 1998). The depth of the drift deposit varies across the city and underlying these glacial outwash deposits is a solid geology of Triassic Keuper marl. These two materials have very different drainage characteristics so the local depth of the sand overlying the marl is likely to affect hydrology and therefore the formation and preservation of the site. The soils that develop locally upon these parent materials include typical brown sands and stagnogleyic brown earths. Such a deposit was identified in the excavations at Deansway where soil analysis indicated that a reddish-brown loamy-sand at the base of the archaeological sequence appeared to have been cultivated, with some suggestion it had been truncated by ploughing during the Iron Age (Dalwood and Edwards 2004, 39).

Topographically the site occupies the west side of a raised finger of land, the Severn to its west within a lower lying

Illus 1.01. Worcester, showing location of site



Illus 1.02. The site showing previous investigations and recent intrusions

flood plain, the historic core of Worcester to its south. Its location on this west facing slope some way outside the city has two significant consequences. Firstly, its distance from the medieval and post-medieval core of the settlement means that during these periods it was used as fields with the result that later intrusion and truncation from pits, footings or other occupation did not dramatically impact on buried Roman deposits. Secondly, and in addition to this, the site was sealed by up to 2m of soil dating from the medieval period and later with the consequence that even 19th and 20th century activity had a minimal impact on buried archaeological remains. As a result, stratified archaeological deposits of Roman date remained relatively intact across the entire area of the site, and given the natural slope of the ground these were thickest towards the south-west corner.

1.3. The nature of the archaeological record

The archaeological excavation undertaken here was carried out over the area of the whole footprint of the proposed new building and measured approximately 35m by 45m in extent (*c* 0.16ha). Archaeological deposits of Roman date lay deeply buried at around 1.5 – 2.0m below the present ground surface and were covered by bulk soil deposits of probable medieval and post-medieval date. These deposits were removed under careful archaeological supervision using a 360° tracked excavator and spoil removed from the site in lorries. A very large quantity of Roman pottery was identified in a mixed soil deposit at the base of the profile; this 0.15m thick deposit was excavated by hand and much of the pottery retained although it could not be assigned to context and was subsequently recorded as Phase 5 (see Table 1.01 for phases).

Resulting surfaces and deposits were then hand cleaned. Features were recorded using single context planning with profiles recorded of the fully excavated feature on the relevant record sheet for that feature. As the work was undertaken with considerable time pressure, and different areas of the excavation had varying densities of

Table 1.01. Principal phases of the site

Phase	Description	Date
Pre-phase 1	Plough marks?	Uncertain
1a-b	Early deposits and features	c AD 100–175
2	Establishment of rectilinear structures	c AD 125–225
3	Terracing of the site	c AD 250–320
4	Industry and occupation	c AD 250–320
5	Post-Roman mixed soil deposit	Post-Roman
6	Modern deposits	Modern

archaeology, then the area was divided into a 5m x 5m grid and each square worked at different rates to its neighbours depending on the amount of archaeology present. As a result very few structures were identified at the excavation stage from the 191 post and stake-holes present on the site. Even had this not been the case it is unlikely that many of the buildings would have been recognised due to the myriad of sub-phases in the two main occupation phases of the site (Phases 2 and 4). In practice most structures identified at this stage tended to not be supported by the stratigraphic relationships between features and other deposits. Therefore, all structures had to be re-determined following excavation in a meticulous and time-consuming manner. This was achieved by constructing the site stratigraphic matrix, plotting out all the stratigraphically early features, identifying obvious structures (like G88), removing these from the plot and checking other post-hole relationships and spot dates within them. It has resulted in the identification of clearly defined structures, something that would not have been possible should only the pad bases have been excavated. In fact, the site would have been entirely un-interpretable from key-hole investigation.

Table 1.02. The make-up of the Roman archaeological record (by context) broken down by phase

Type	1	2	3	4	Total
Post-hole	36	100	0	39	**175**
Stake-hole	0	8	0	8	**16**
Pit	1	20	0	28	**49**
Ditch/gully cut	9	17	0	12	**38**
Ovens or hearths	7	13	0	4	**24**
Stone structure	0	0	0	1	**1**
Well	0	1	0	0	**1**
Layers/surfaces	2	10	39	48	**99**
Ditch/gully fills	15	9	0	17	**41**
Post-hole fills	40	112	0	50	**202**
Stake-hole fills	0	18	0	8	**26**
Pit fills	1	41	0	103	**145**
Oven or hearth fills	8	28	0	18	**54**
Well fills	0	9	0	0	**9**
Summary					
Total features/segments	53	159	0	92	**304**
Total fills	64	217	0	196	**477**
Total surfaces	2	10	39	48	**99**