

# Archaeological overview of High Street and Friar Street, Droitwich, Worcestershire



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## **Archaeological overview of High Street and Friar Street, Droitwich, Worcestershire**

Derek Hurst

Illustration by Carolyn Hunt

### **Summary**

*An overview of the archaeological evidence for both High Street and Friar Street, two of the main historic streets in Droitwich, was undertaken on behalf of the Dodderhill Parish Survey Group as part of a Heritage Lottery-funded project (Historic Droitwich: its Streets and People) investigating the history of former inhabitants and of the surviving buildings in the town.*

*The results indicate that the laying out and development of the streets and, in some cases their associated buildings, could be quite intimately charted through archaeological evidence and with some level of consistency in the outcome. This also provided some clues to the living conditions (decidedly dirty and unpleasant), styles of buildings, and life-styles of the inhabitants.*

*The measuring of property frontages took place as an attempt to establish the original layout of burgage plots, both in terms of their positions, and the units of measurement used for this purpose. This met with some limited but uncertain success, as the data did not seem to lend itself to any definite mathematical resolution and, instead, a more subjective assessment had to be made of the results. The latter suggested that a rod unit of 16½ feet (or 5.03m) could have been integral to the laying out of plots. There is some suggestion in the plot width data collected that a 4 perch/rod (conventionally 66-feet or 20.12m) plot width had been applied in at least one instance, and this unit has been recorded for other towns, (eg late Saxon Winchester).*



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## Report

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Reasons for the project

As part of a Dodderhill Parish Survey Group Heritage Lottery-funded project investigating the history of the surviving buildings on the principal streets of Droitwich (*viz* High Street and Friar Street) and their former inhabitants, an overview of the archaeological evidence was also undertaken. The latter is intended to help contextualise an account of the later development of the town focussed primarily on the building history of its oldest surviving buildings and the documentary evidence for their inhabitants and owners. It examines the origins of the streets, including the earlier development of buildings and plots, which are the now vanished precursors to the present buildings, and attempts to shed some light on street events, living conditions and life styles.

### 2 Aims

The general aim of this archaeological overview is to complement the evidence for the past being gathered from other sources: *viz* the legacy of archival documentation (deeds, maps etc) and the surviving elements of the built environment – so that, when all sources of evidence are taken together, as comprehensive a picture as possible could be created of the life-styles and environments of past activity.

More specifically the aims of this overview are to:

- to provide a broad chronological framework for the development of this part of Droitwich;
- to provide additional context for understanding the lives of the inhabitants, where structures and material culture are now only represented by buried remains;
- to help fill in the current structural gaps in the townscape which could be useful for any reconstruction of street elevations relating to earlier periods;
- to augment the evidence for a contrasting way of life to that usually portrayed for Droitwich ie its urban character versus the more usually portrayed industrial side of the town.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Documentary research

This review is focussed on the results of previous archaeological investigations. Therefore, a first step has been to assemble a list of all the investigations and identified heritage assets relating to the study area. This has relied on a search of the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER). Some geotechnical (bore-hole) sampling was also incorporated via data collected and analysed for the purpose of the 2013 mapping of waterlogged urban archaeological deposits in Droitwich (Hurst *et al* 2013).

The overview presented below is largely based on the results of piece-meal evidence gathered during various types of interventions, most of which, since the early 1990s, coming about through the planning system as conditions on planning permissions. As a small modern town resources for such interventions are often minimal and this is reflected in the content of some of the results being rather limited in scale of work and of reporting (though the latter also reflects changing nature and focus of the archaeological response as small interventions became the new norm of archaeological professional practice).

Experience of this project has emphasised yet again that the synthesis of archaeological data from many sites is also rendered difficult by variation in presentation and in the differing emphases of reports and what passes for reporting. It is particularly evident to the author that, whereas the experience of archaeology in the field is visual, current practice renders this into detailed

descriptions and narrative/interpretation rather than letting the site speak more for itself, through the provision of structure data tables (contexts and dating evidence) allied with carefully selected principal site sections and plans, with a supporting commentary. The character of each site, therefore, does not emerge clearly, and the lack of systematic consistency in presentation of key data, means that comparing and contrasting sites is considerably hampered.

Additional information about the layout of the streets was collected by plot measuring, which was undertaken for High Street in conjunction with Young Archaeologists on 17 August 2014, and, for Friar Street, with the assistance of Claire Lloyd on 19 March 2017.

### **3.2 List of sources consulted**

#### *Primary cartographic sources*

- 1786 plan of the town
- 1883 (survey date) Ordnance Survey large scale (25-inch)
- 1938 Ordnance Survey (1883 as revised)

## **4 Geology and topography**

This alignment of main town streets, High Street and Friar Street (Fig 1), the latter formerly known as St Nicholas Street according to a 1786 map (Worcestershire Record Office ref BA 7887, s497) was, along the edge of the gravel terrace following the River Salwarpe and probably following the original natural contours of the ground. The evidence from WSM9553 indicates that the lowest archaeological horizon here is represented by a thin layer of gravel (0.2–0.4m thick; see below) containing Roman material and overlying sterile Mercia Mudstone – this sequence was also observed at the Upwich site (WSM4575) to the north. It is likely that these gravels were a natural layer which had been disturbed by Roman activity and, therefore, incorporated Roman material. The underlying gravel, though relatively thin as seen on the north side of Friar Street (WSM9553) and therefore petering out southwards, would have facilitated and so encouraged activity, by offering better drainage.

High Street seems to have been established of a piece with the regular (burgage) plots typical of a medieval town – though the dating of this phenomenon is not always clear and if it was analogous to changes in the countryside viz nucleation of villages and formation of open fields etc it could be pre-Conquest in origin. These burgage plots formed the core of the town as still apparent today, though now much obscured by later amalgamation and alteration, especially along Friar Street where survival is punctuated by large more modern developments such as the 1930s Norbury House. The two streets fall within two parishes: (from west to east) St Nicholas (west half of Friar Street), and St Andrew (east half of Friar Street and all of High Street). Presumably these streets can be included amongst those being referred to in John Leland's mid-16th century description as being 'ill pavyd or not pavyd' (Smith vol IV, 92).

Subsequent build-up by later resurfacing along the edge of the gravel layer, again with gravel and, later, cobbling, leading to the formation of Friar/High Street readily made this an optimum location for a street and habitation, in a region that was otherwise clay (ie poorly drained) or unsuitable due to being too low lying and so prone to flooding (the majority of the geologically gravel area).

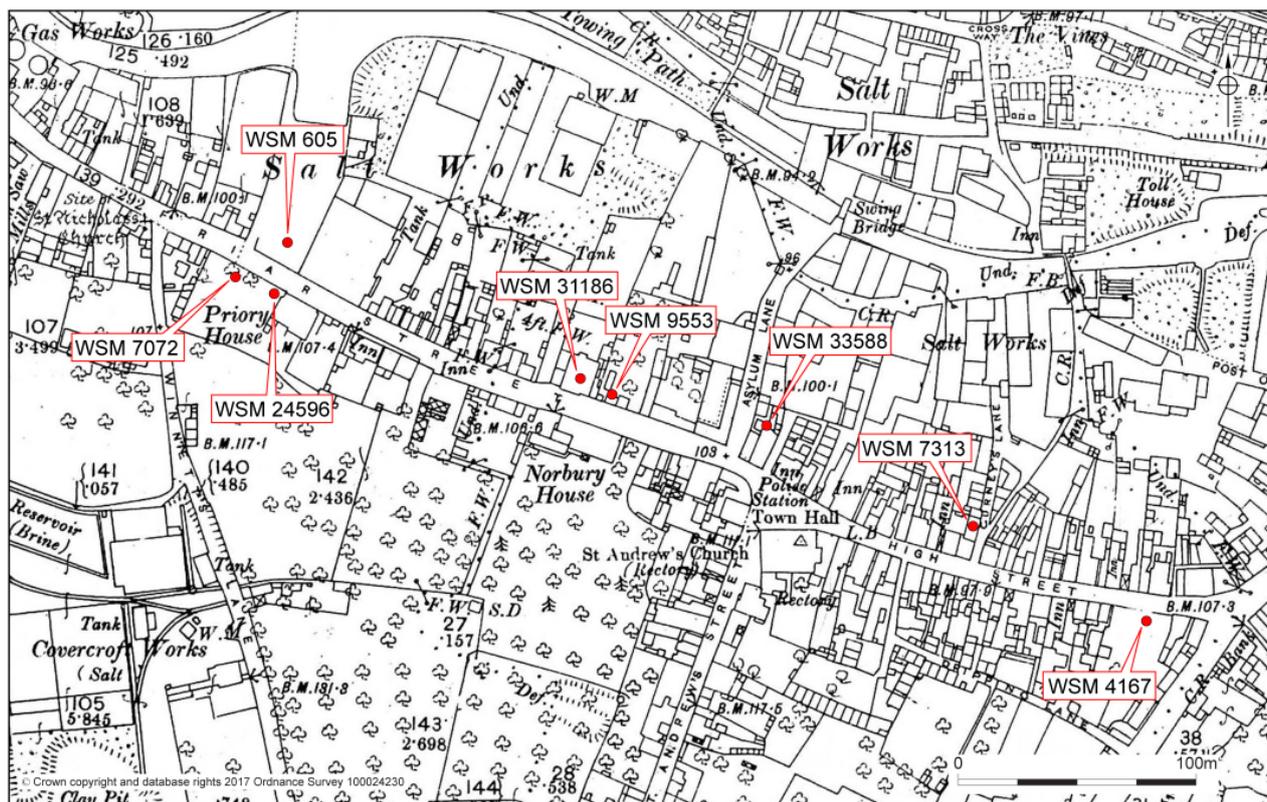
Friar Street was, once, longer than it might seem today as a result of its west end being severed by the inner ring road. It seems likely that the placing of churches was integral to the original layout as St Andrew's church does not look obviously inserted, while its small graveyard can be explained by its originally being a daughter-church of St Mary's in Witton (this is considered to be almost certain by Bassett 2008, 235). A small open market area, which it overlooks, also implying that it occupies an original position in the plot layout, was encroached upon by buildings by 1786, to the extent that the High Street was narrowed – these buildings were presumably the Chequer House and Market

House (built in 1581 and 1629 respectively; VCH iii, 80–1), so that, basically, an open market place had been converted to being covered.

The 1786 map shows Friar Street/High Street as a more or less continuous street. In 1786 there was still a remnant of funnelling at the east end of St Nicholas Street (now Friar Street) which is suggestive that an open market space was shared at the junction of the ends of these two streets (Bassett 2008 fig 3 makes this more evident in his hypothetical reconstruction of the later medieval topography of Droitwich). It is proposed here, therefore, that the dog-leg effect seen today is a product of how this open space came to be encroached upon by piecemeal development and so should not be taken to indicate (as by Hughes and Hunt 1992, 115) that Friar Street/High Street was not essentially a simultaneous creation. With the clearance of the Market House and Chequer House in 1829 (VCH iii, 80–1) much of the old medieval market was effectively recreated but now only at the west end of the High Street. The close proximity of St Andrew's church would be quite appropriate to this being the key market area in the town throughout.

That these were the main historic streets of the town is to a large extent posited from the appearance of the town today, especially in terms of where the older buildings are present. However, Droitwich has undergone a great deal of modern development often in the 1970s without archaeological input, and so it is not known what has been lost, especially along St Andrew's Street, which, with the purported manor house (formerly the Raven hotel) at its south end, also has claims to potentially having been a medieval street of some significance. Certainly, by the time it was recorded on the 1786 map, it was lined on either side by properties.

## 5 Archaeological sites



Archaeological sites shown on 1885 OS map (extract) Extract of 1885 OS

Figure 1 Archaeological sites shown on 1885 OS map (extract)

### Friar Street

1973–75 excavation (Hughes and Hunt 1992; WSM605)

An area excavation fronting almost directly onto the modern boundary with Friar Street at its now west end (currently the Fire Station) revealed, in broad terms, a vertical stratigraphic sequence starting above the Mercia Mudstone with a 'redeposited' spread of gravel of variable depth of 0.12 (E)–0.5m (W), through which Iron Age/early Roman brine settling tanks and other features relating to salt making had been constructed. The latter were eventually sealed in the sub-Roman period by a layer of pebbly clay (possibly augmented in volume by alluvium). Tanners then dug pits in the late Saxon period – this noxious activity probably being deliberately on the lower side of the town in terms of the River Salwarpe and on the opposite side of the river from adjacent salt making. Thereafter, into the 12th century, a dark soil built up as occupation got established, including domestic buildings, and rubbish (as organic waste, and, therefore, now humic) generally accumulated.

Looking at the sequence in more detail (ie including in plan), after the well-defined era of salt production in the area, there are signs of Roman domestic settlement in terms of a well and boundary ditches – interestingly the principal alignment of the latter is not unlike that of the later Friar Street (see Hughes and Hunt 1992, fig 65), but this may be simply following the lie of the land. Then a hiatus occurred until the late Saxon period possibly as activity (both industrial and domestic) focussed entirely on the Domesday salt production centres of Netherwich, Middlewich and Upwich, which are located just north of the eventual Friar/High Street alignment. In the 12th century the area appears to have been re-organised following the departure of the tanners, with the first sign of domestic activity possibly focussing here (though all very truncated; phase 5) – a ditch (structure 29) was on precisely the alignment of the modern Friar Street though lying c 5m north of the present line of the Friar Street frontage.

In the early 13th century there are clear signs of a plot/plots being laid out in a more emphatic way with much larger ditches, including a 3m wide ditch (structure 36) fronting onto the street itself in combination with a smaller N-S ditch (also structure 36, width unknown; phase 5ii). The plot was at least 20m wide E-W, and the excavator suggested that it was originally a very wide plot with the smaller N–S ditch being a secondary division – in this context Priory House is taken to be the sole survivor of houses on Friar Street being set with their main axis parallel to the street, thereby demonstrating status.

Little surviving trace of any buildings was found to go with the plot history so far, which tends to favour the view that if any building had been present at this time then it was not earth-fast but simply lay more or less on the ground surface ie they were timber-framed. Similar buildings were excavated for *sea/s* (salt-making workshops) at Upwich (eg CG117; Hurst and Hemingway 1997, 32--3 and fig 23), where two styles of building seemed to be in contemporary use and can be presumed to date to c 1264-65 when the Upwich brine well was rebuilt – here one style involved a timber ground beam whereas another was apparently more reliant on a wickerwork framework. Accordingly it is entirely possible that the first incarnation of Friar Street had buildings laid out in the 12th century at the same time as the plots of this date, but with all signs of structures being too slight to have survived. Whether the salt-making workshops doubled up as domestic structures should also be considered, perhaps especially in the light that a large amount of cooking pot was found in medieval deposits at Upwich (Lentowicz 1997). If so, it may be another explanation for the initial absence of buildings during the first phase of Friar Street. However, eventually it was found more sustainable to raise the timber frame off the ground and this is probably what is to be seen in the foundation trench of a building dating to the 13th/14th century (WSM605 structures 44/173; phase 6) (see also below).

A cobbled roadway was laid along the southern edge of the site to accompany the new 13th/14th century building (external dimensions c 20m E-W by 8m N–S; a quite substantial building in terms of its footprint; phase 6) immediately to its north, and apparently fronting with its long axis directly onto the street, and within the plot indicated in the previous phase. This could represent the first appearance of a formalised Friar Street but its northern edge was in that case c 5m **north of its present modern position**. Or it could represent street widening with the edges of an earlier street

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spreading across now infilled roadside ditches such as structure 36 (N–S). The dating of the appearance of the well-metalled street in the archaeological record coincides nicely with the first documented grant of pavage in the town in 1316 (VCH ii, 90). Thereafter, the continuing accumulation of waste about the town, now its urban function was firmly established (with the laying out of the street and the institution of (burgage) plots) is suggested by the further increase in dark/humic soils, implying that it would have been a pungent and earthy place to live, perhaps more in keeping with a farmyard.

The introduction of chimney stacks and of sunken-floor basement rooms (phase 7; Hughes and Hunt 1992) meant that later medieval domestic buildings in the 15th/16th century had more substantial elements and so become much more visible archaeologically. These remains were not interpreted as the remains of a single building but of two buildings both set at right angles with their gable-ends facing onto the street (the long axes of rooms indicates this), which would typify the layout of a subdivided plot where frontage space was now at a premium implying commercial success of the town with competition of premises for a presence on the street. Sandstone was now in the 15th/16th century first used as a principal component of house construction, either as slabs or building blocks judging by both these buildings, and it continued in use into the 18th century.

The later medieval buildings continued in use without any substantial changes into the 17th/18th century, except for some minor brick-built additions mostly focussed around the chimney and so perhaps to do with cooking and maximising the domestic fire-place for this purpose. In the mid-18th century these medieval buildings were demolished, and, in the new build, the street was apparently encroached upon from the north to the extent that the new limit of the road surface '(closely packed cobbles'; phase 10) became about the same as for the modern street for the first time. A set of postholes marked the new northern edge of this cobbled street suggesting fencing/bollards, though it is not clear whether these were a new boundary to the plot or perhaps, more likely, marked out a 'pavement' area (no actual paved surface was recorded suggesting either just a demarcated walkway without special surfacing or that the original surfacing had been salvaged). Therefore the encroachment might well have been more apparent than real, amounting to just the improvement of the area used for wheeled transport. A new row of tenements had been built and these are shown on an 1839 map – they certainly occupied about the same position as the earlier buildings. These in turn had been replaced by 1884.

Such a pattern of 18th–19th rebuilding presumably reflects the town's burgeoning salt industry with a need for small, low cost dwellings as part of speculative capitalistic development making living space for salt workers, as the borough monopoly had been broken in the late 17th century, and a great increase in salt production then resulted from the new industrial freedom. This is likely to have been increasingly accompanied by deteriorating working conditions for the ordinary workers. Seen in this light, the historic building stock losses of the 20th century could be taken as part of a trend that stretched back to at least the 18th/early 19th century.

#### *No 97 – excavation (Brown 1991; WSM9553)*

A short evaluation trench just west of 97 Friar Street produced a very good sequence of stratigraphy from the Roman period onwards. Here, in broad sequence, the laying down of a gravel layer (?surface) sealed an east-west grave with head to the west and associated with late 3rd/4th century pottery (ie late Roman), and radiocarbon dated to cal AD 135–553 (Wk-14458). The overlying gravel layer was associated with residual Roman finds and with considerable truncation of earlier remains which was not well dated, but, on balance, might well have been of sub-Roman/early-mid Saxon date. The truncation may also have affected a wide east–west ditch (119), which was associated with residual Roman pottery and partially sealed under a disturbed gravel layer (116; Roman finds) and then fully sealed by a humic layer (104) with a *tpq* of 13th century generally recorded throughout the excavation trench. Layer 104 could represent accumulated muck and debris from use of the surface (ie trample and general rubbish accumulation) spilling beyond the confines of that surface, or alternatively it might be a sign of general agricultural activity ie a non-urbanised settlement focus. The latest pottery (13th century) in this general layer (104)

marks when another gravel layer (?surface; 121) was laid down over the southern part of it along southern edge of the trench. This seems to be the first more convincing evidence that a street approximating to the eventual Friar Street was in the process of being created, with its origins possibly even earlier (ie 116) and following widespread landscaping (ie the truncation). Though the possibility remained that ditch 119 belonged to the remodelled phase with the earliest gravel surface being 116 and the accumulation of organic material with its 13th century *tpq* being the best indication of layout. These possible metallised surfaces (ie gravel 116, 121) were set back (ie extended further northwards) from the present north edge of Friar Street by c 2.5m, thereby indicating that, if the metallising represents the street, then its northern edge extended back beyond the north edge of the street we know today.

A humic deposit (123 - 0.10m thick), resulting from poorly decayed organic material and containing 13th/14th century pot, was spread throughout most of the trench sealing layers 121/104, and this, in turn, was succeeded by substantial charcoal-rich layer (124), with a c 0.20m thick ash (146) layer above. It is very tempting to relate the latter sequence to the fire of Droitwich in 1290, though no obvious structure could be seen to have burnt down (ie to the north of the presumed line of the street which passed east–west through about the centre of the trench) – though, at this point, it is useful to bear in mind that a common method of building at the time would be timber-framed building resting on the ground surface and, therefore, leaving little sign. Certainly this amount of burnt material would be compatible with a building on or adjacent to this spot with debris spilling out into the street. If so, then subsequent redevelopment of the site did not involve clearance. In the mid–north part of the trench there are next signs of a new building with a stone paved floor (144), the nature of the new depositional sequence (laminated clays and a mortar layer) suggesting that these are all floors within a building. A large 12th–early 13th century tripod pitcher had been inserted into a tight-fitting (ie purpose-made) pit inserted through the pavement flooring (though dug from a higher level potentially). This might have been an improvised place of safekeeping within the property.



*Figure 2 Large pitcher (max diameter c 360mm) standing on tripod feet but with handle now missing from pit in the floor of medieval building on north side of Friar Street (WSM9553); produced by a pottery based in Hanley Castle parish in c 1300*

In the south part of the trench the sequence is less clear in the published report but the extreme southern edge of the trench is marked by a series of pits/postholes which could represent where the edge of the plot was marked by a fence – if so, then the modern street has retreated c 1.5m to

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the south. A general movement of the north edge of the street southwards/encroachment from properties on its north side does seem to have occurred, though it is possible that ownership of a public pavement area in front of properties may have been somewhat ambiguous, if for instance responsibility for its upkeep had fallen to the property owner.

#### Burial (150)

An east-facing east-west inhumation was partly within the north-west corner of the trench. Whilst the orientation may simply be a reflection of the natural general layout of features in this area (ie aligned on the river), it was strikingly east to west and with the head at the west end as would be in keeping with a Christian burial. On present evidence it appears to be an isolated inhumation and without a graveyard association. It is just possible that this is a sign of some initial graveyard development in a context where earlier foci of Christian activity were later on superseded – such a sequence has been plotted by extensive excavations at Southampton for instance. That is to assign it to a date towards the upper end of the possible its date span. If earlier, then it could probably be taken with Roman burials at the Gardeners Arms (on Vines Lane) and on the site of the former playground on Vines Lane (ie plotting the graves may help define the main area of Roman occupation) – though even here it is not clear whether the burials are with certainty Roman. If accepted as Roman, then such a scatter of burials might imply there was no strict adherence to the Roman code that required burial to be outside a settlement and may in turn reveal better the civic status of Roman Droitwich. As an industrial area its status may have been tenuous as a civic settlement. In which case Roman Droitwich might be best understood as a villa and roadside settlement, both associated with an industrial area, in much the same way as a small civilian settlement might grow up adjacent to a fort especially where transport links favoured this (ie on a Roman road). Examples of the latter in the West Midlands would include Redhill (near Telford) in Shropshire (Mann *et al* 2015).

#### *Former site of Chorley House (Williams et al 2002; WSM31186)*

An evaluation trench on the north side of Friar Street with its south edge set back c 11m from the modern line of the street revealed a sequence of medieval clay floors c 0.5m thick which overlay c 0.5m of Roman deposits (mainly redeposited Mercia Mudstone). The trench was set too far back to provide any information about the frontage with the street. However, a testpit at the south end of the trench usefully provided sight of a deep series of floors presumably set within the main building, and this construction sequence started in the 13th/14th century by associated finds – the timber-framed building demolished in the 1962 was dated to, at the latest, the 14th century (Pevsner 1968, 57), and this building more than any other can be seen to show the scale and exuberance of building in the town at that early period, no doubt reflecting the wealth to be made from salt.

#### *Old fire station (WSM7072)*

This site had been heavily truncated during the construction of the Victorian fire station. The presence of medieval cess pits showed that domestic structures had been present.

#### *West side of Priory House (Jackson 1992; WSM24596)*

This site is immediately east of WSM7072 and on the west side of Priory House. Here late Saxon and medieval pits were recorded in a thin strip of ground extending southwards from Friar Street, In contrast with WSM7072 deposits were intact all the way back to the south and a clear break in slope was seen c 10m back from the Friar Street frontage indicating that terracing had been undertaken. Since the earliest feature in the surviving stratigraphic sequence was late Saxon/earliest post-Conquest, it was considered that the terracing had occurred after this date. However, it is not entirely clear that this was the case, as no evidence was presented that this feature was truncated.

## High Street

The radical change in ground level, due to ground subsidence in more recent times, make any review of archaeological evidence in this part of the town rather problematic. Only the ends of this street are at anywhere near their original AOD levels. A comparison of the rather sparse data on ground level on Ordnance Survey maps indicates that towards the centre of the street (opposite Gurney's Lane) the ground had dropped c 0.75m (between 1885–1964), while this drop increased further east to just under 2m at the east end of the street and onto the A38 (between 1885–1924). No data was available prior to 1885. Such a pattern of data shows that the subsidence was more pronounced at the east end than in the centre – however, this subsidence effect has now been somewhat obscured by re-levelling of the A38 in 1951 (Lyn Blewitt, pers comm).

The west end of the street remained unknown in this respect, and it is also unknown when the subsidence started ie the mapping may just capture it while already in progress (though not provable, subsidence is likely to have been significantly exacerbated, if not caused, in the 1870s when brine extraction at Stoke Prior immensely increased; Lyn Blewitt, pers comm). On the available evidence the centre of the brine runs under the High Street junction with the A38. This corresponds with the centre of the brine run as depicted by Poole and Williams (1980, fig 4) where described as the 'wet rock-head' with artesian brine at a depth of 39.62m – presumably this is where the dissolution of rock salt was at its greatest thereby causing subsidence as long as the brine was being extracted elsewhere on a large scale. For an account of the salt industry based on Stoke Prior which led to subsidence in Droitwich due to 19th century brine extraction see White (1996).

Any archaeological work to date is largely concentrated to the rear of the buildings of the High Street and especially on its north side, rather than in the vicinity of the frontages as most buildings in this street are still present. Excavation opportunities have also been limited, while the localised subsidence hollow to the north of the High Street has made these less productive by greatly increasing depths of deposits below the ground surface, so that full investigations are either not attempted or fail to materialise adequately during development due to not being sufficiently resourced. As much of the archaeology of this area is now at a great depth there are attendant difficulties to making a good record during any development (eg Goad 2005; no trench descriptions and no levels on published plans).

Returning to the surface, the most favoured side of the street must have been to the north as the ground here was less steep than to the south, and the frontages would have been better able to benefit from natural light/heat and any special architectural features designed for display would have been the more obvious. Buildings to the south were terraced back into the upwards slope which would have given them a more enclosed and, therefore, confined feel, as well as hampering any expansion.

Based on archaeological observation the natural geology is, in the main, Mercia Mudstone (clay) with overlying fluvio-glacial gravels.

### *St Andrew's church*

The earliest surviving part of the church is dated to early 13th century (Pevsner 1968, 134; chancel arch, and tower); west buttresses are also described as 13th century but the rest of the fabric as early 14th century 'probably built after fire in 1290' (Brooks and Pevsner 2007, 262–3). Given the nature of this structure this may be one of the best indicators of the foundation date of High Street/Friar Street, though the secondary character of the foundation of this church as a 'daughter-church' of St Mary's Witton may make this assertion less certain, though, in principle, it may have no need to be.

### *1A High Street (Sworn and Griffin 2004; WSM33588)*

Unfortunately observations here on the north side of the High Street were largely at the rear of the building, but it does show the potential for the survival of depositional sequence going back at least

as far the Roman period, as well as the waterlogged preservation from just over 1m below ground level (ie below c 30m AOD). In this case deposits are suggestive of surfaces including cobbling (see Sworn and Griffin 2004, section 1) which may imply that Rickett's Lane once extended beyond its present edge on its east side, or, alternatively, this may be the remains of a cobbled back yard.. Severe post-medieval truncation had, however, occurred down to later prehistoric/Roman levels in the area nearest the High Street (section 4) and so no information was available from this site to contribute to an understanding of the development of the High Street.

#### *Rear of 35 High Street (Hurst 1988; WSM7313)*

Here medieval cobbled surfacing (at least 0.3m in thickness) was encountered at 1.2m below the ground surface at 27.94m AOD c 11m to the north of the rear of the main building. This was sealed by a horizontal layer with ash (0.3m thick) and, over that a 0.5m thickness of mortary rubble. Given the proximity to the building the cobbled surface is more likely to be the remains of a yard than part of an earlier and wider predecessor to Gurney's Lane. Indeed this might now be interpreted as a cobbled yard at the rear of no (31-)35, as fresh documentary evidence shows that brine processing and salt storage was carried out on these premises and that its curtilage extended north to the Salwarpe (Lyn Blewitt, pers comm).

#### *32–38 High Street (Hillelson 1985; WSM4167)*

A 1960s excavation by David Peacock (unpublished) is thought to have largely encountered cellars on the street frontage on the west side of this site (Hillelson 1985). A second excavation (1984; Hillelson 1985) confirmed the presence of cellars on the street frontage with a great deal (1m depth) of disturbed material to the rear of the plot (ie south end). The latter was presumably from the original clearance of the site which seems to date to before 1883 as the site was already vacated of buildings by that date (OS mapping), whilst the site was also, at least partially, vacant by 1786 (also map evidence). Whereas Hillelson (1985) took the routine viewpoint that brine subsidence had caused the collapse of buildings, and therefore clearance of the site he also concluded that truncation cut 17th century features at the latest. In the face of this evidence it seems feasible that the removal of any assumed buildings at this location happened as early as 17th century, which might point, in some sense, to Civil War damage being the cause. Rebuilding following Civil War damage is known, for instance, in the case of Dodderhill Church, but the effects of the war on the town itself have not, hitherto, been potentially seen in the archaeological evidence. A new indication of severe impact on the fabric of the town may be fresh discovery that the roof of the rear wing of no 17 High St, dendrochronologically dated to 1609, was substantially renewed in 1620-48 (with the upper timbers of the wing showing charring), as this evidence may also point in the same direction (Lyn Blewitt, pers comm), that the Civil War was indeed responsible for much damage in the town.

## **6 Plot measurement**

### *General*

Investigation of and observation about the measurements involved in laying out burgage plots have been undertaken at a number of places (eg by Biddle (1990) at Winchester; by Slater (1988) for various towns). While set units were used it was also the case that plots were established as set areas, usually based on fractions of an acre or units of an acre or more, as referenced in Slater (1988).

The rod (or perch) seems to have been the conventional unit for plot layout, possibly based on the length of an ox-goad (Jones 1979) – if this was built into the local church it could be one way of retaining the local standard, prior to national organisation of weights and measures through royal authority (*ibid*). At Winchester the late 9th century street pattern seemed to have been laid out using a 4 rod unit (Biddle 1990); that is, the equivalent of 66 feet or 5½ yd (20.1m) based on a rod unit of 16½ feet (or 5.0292m). In contrast Blair (2013) has suggested the 7th–8th century use of a 15 feet unit (4.572m), while Huggins (1991), based on the dimensions of excavated buildings, has referred to a unit now equivalent to 4.65m which is quite similar. However, some have seen the

earlier foot to be the German foot and so larger than the English foot (Zupko 1968, 10), in which case 15 (German) feet could amount to the same unit length of a rod (16½ feet) as used later! As usual, when working with medieval units of measurement, it is very difficult to reach any firm conclusions, which, of course, does not aid drawing any conclusions about measurements made on the ground today.

#### *Droitwich results*

The data from the measurement of modern-day plot widths for both High Street and Friar Street did not seem to lend itself to any definite mathematical resolution, as the usual assessment of quantities in a range (standard deviation etc) did not seem to usefully suggest any original mensural unit. Instead, a more subjective assessment had to be made, which suggested that the plot width had some association with a multiplier of about 5m (c 16 feet 5 inches). There were seven plot widths of c 5m (out of 82) and c 25% (20) were of 5m (or multiples of 5m), which is the approximate width of a medieval bay, which makes it no surprise that this unit should emerge in the data.

Taking the oldest building as the best starting point for investigating what unit was originally used for laying out burgage plots, then a surviving hall-house on the north side of the High Street (now nos 33/35 High Street), *tpq* dated 1339 (based on dendrochronology), is of most interest. Though with a street frontage width of 41 feet (12.44m), this does seem an awkward fit, if a rod unit of 16½ feet (or 5.0292m) was being used; however, though not yet proven structurally, no 31 could be a cross-wing component of the same structure (S Price, pers comm) and so, in that case, if nos 31/33/35 High Street, with a combined plot width of 65 feet 3 inch (19.89m), are taken together, then an original 4 perch/rod plot width (20.12m based on a possible standard rod unit (16½ feet or 5.0292m) could well have been applied in the original layout of plots. That would then be comparable to the evidence from Winchester where the late 9th century street pattern seemed to be laid out on this basis (this also being regarded as the breadth of an acre; Biddle 1990). This is offered as an example of the tentative conclusions that might be drawn about ancient plot widths where the form of the (near-) original building(s) can be established with the aid of historic building recording.

Similarly another hall-house, newly discovered of on the south side of the High Street (nos 24, 26), is associated with a plot width of 41½ feet (12.74m), which is quite close to the width of the hall-house on the north side of the street (see above). A dendrochronological date of 1455 (no 24, Hereford House) provides a likely *terminus ante quem* for the adoption of this medieval plot width (only later split into nos 24 and 26). This might be an example of later modification to the original burgage plot boundaries with a reduction of frontage width as more properties were fitted into the High Street as a sign of its commercial success.

Looking at other major buildings for which evidence is available there seems to be quite a range of plot widths featured: for instance, Priory House at 50 feet (15.24m), and Chorley House built c 1400 (Charles and Charles 1995) at 58½ feet (17.83m), the latter with its open court at the front and open to the street (Charles and Charles 1960; Charles 1967, 55-59). In the latter case the cutting back of the gable ends of the projecting side wings provides an historical example of the modification of a building to accommodate the widening of the street (*ibid*). Taken with the hall-house plot widths given above, such a variety of modern plot widths may be interpreted as reflecting the many changes in plot boundaries that are likely to have occurred subsequently to any original (ie early medieval) burgage plot layout. And, in addition to encroachment on the street of building plots being visible in the buried archaeological evidence, it can also now be seen that the buildings themselves (in the case of Chorley House) can reveal street widening impacting on buildings. The overall impression, therefore, is that all property boundaries in the town were liable to change and that, over time, these are quite fluid and that variable movement in boundaries occurred.

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There is clearly little easily extracted evidence about original burgage plot widths in the data collected during this project, as some movement and certainly modification of boundaries can be expected over such a prolonged period of at least 800 years. In conclusion, the measuring of property frontage widths, as an attempt to establish the original layout of burgage plots, both in terms of their positions and the units of measurement applied, might, presently be considered to just have met with limited, and even uncertain, success.

## 7 Discussion

Review of the limited archaeological evidence has resulted in some insight into the origination, development, and associated living conditions and life-style of inhabitants on High/Friar Street in the medieval and later period. The available evidence seems to show some encroachment on the streets over time. Such a process might have been encouraged by the structure of buildings themselves, in that when the updating of timber-framed frontages took place, the line of the jutting could have been dropped down onto the street (evidence for this might be looked for in town archives as it usually involved a fine having been paid; Pat Hughes, pers comm). It was also noted that some caution should be exercised in the identification of street surfaces, as cobbled surfaces appear to have been in common use, in that they might also be expected in the back plots as well (eg at 33-5 High Street; Cornah 2013).

Whereas no precise overall dated sequence of development could be concluded, it is clear that the edges of streets were a dynamic zone of interaction and change in the medieval period. They had clearly become established by the early 13th century in a form that we would recognise today – both the archaeological evidence (in Friar Street) and the architectural evidence (St Andrew's in High Street) corroborate this. Such a scenario would beg the question of where the burgesses of Domesday Book (ie in 1086) lived? Were they still focussed entirely on the historic salt production of Upwich, Middlewich and Netherwich, that is, if the workshops ever doubled up as living quarters that is, or is a late Saxon town to be expected? The location of a tanning business at the western end of Friar Street in the late Saxon period (Hughes and Hunt 1992) may be the best clue here, as that might represent gravitation of activity towards the area eventually occupied by High Street/Friar Street, and so mark the first stage in the formation of an embryonic street. By the late Saxon period Droitwich lay at the centre of a nexus of route-ways for the conveyance of salt and import of other goods, especially fuel consumed by the industry, but these will have been focussed on the production centres such as Upwich located just to the north of the town, and so the burghal development of High Street/Friar Street should be seen as fundamentally an appendage to the industrial settlement, which eventually replaces it. Archaeology indicates that the development of High Street/Friar Street was under way by 12th/early 13th century, and a combination of archaeological and historic building survey indicates that the street was a dynamic zone much affected by encroachment and retreat of the street, and also by the jostling for position by the buildings, presumably subject to the economic fortunes of the town and its inhabitants, but, occasionally, with the added effects of external events such as the Civil War.

Overall, this review of specifically the archaeology of the main streets seems in a real sense to have enabled an account to emerge that reflects the fortunes of the town at large, and so provides a semblance of a backdrop, however hesitantly sketched, to the lives of those who may be traced more solidly through the documentary evidence.

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