

## Archaeological excavations at Newport Street, Worcester

The completion of the archaeological fieldwork at Newport Street, Worcester successfully brought to a conclusion the largest programme of excavation undertaken within this historic city since the late 1980's.

The size of the project led to the work being undertaken by a partnership formed between the Field Section of Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service and [Cotswold Archaeology](#) two of the largest archaeological field units in the region. Working closely with the developers Cabot Homes and their archaeological consultants, [Archenfield Archaeology](#), a team of up to 30 archaeologists spent nearly 6 months carefully excavating and recording the site.

During the course of the fieldwork, a written record was made of over 2900 individual layers, deposits, walls, rubbish pits, cess pits and other features, with detailed drawings made of about 2750 of these. Some 45,000 objects were recovered and 190 soil samples were taken for scientific analysis. Since the end of the excavation the project team have been working on the first part of a two year programme of painstakingly processing and analysing these results



The excavation has examined an area that in medieval and early post-medieval times included up to 14 properties, the largest single area ever to have been uncovered within the medieval city walls. The site also lay very close to known areas of the Roman town.

Despite this location, almost nothing was known of the archaeology of this part of the city from Roman times onwards, representing a major gap in the history and archaeology of the 2000 year old settlement. The potential of the excavation to redress this gap provided the basis of the planning conditions placed on the Cabot Homes development by Worcester City Council. The conditions were tied to a series of archaeological questions for the excavation to attempt to answer. These were established by James Dinn, the City's Planning Archaeologist and a measure of success of the fieldwork is that it even prior to the detailed analysis of the results we know that these have all been partly or wholly answered.

Key results can be summarised as follows:

### **Roman Newport Street**

The excavation has demonstrated that during Roman times a road, solidly constructed from iron slag and gravel, linked the town to the river and probably to a ford at the end of what later became Newport Street. Pits and deposits containing pottery, roof tile and other finds indicate that buildings probably lay to either side of this road forming a previously unsuspected area of the Roman small town.



recording the Roman road (photo: Mike Glyde)



Roman roof tile

### Post-Roman activity

Although the Roman town seems to have been largely deserted by 400 AD, the road has been shown to have almost certainly continued in use until the medieval bridge was built at the end of Newport Street when the road line shifted to where it is to this day. The presence of pits and posts cut into the Roman road surface indicates that even before the Norman Conquest the road was once again the focus for urban activity.

### Medieval and early post-medieval Newport Street

From the time of the Norman Conquest through to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was known that Newport Street was one of the most important in Worcester leading down to the bridge and taking traffic coming across the Seven up into the city. However, previously almost nothing was known of the commercial life of this part of one of the most important towns in medieval England. Finds and the remains of buildings, ovens and hearths uncovered during the excavations provide strong evidence for leather working, iron smithing and the weaving and dyeing of cloth in this area.



12/13<sup>th</sup> cellar belonging to a wealthy merchant on Newport Street

Of these the evidence for the clothing industry is the most significant, for little is known about the way in which cloth was produced and dyed in the period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was this industry above all others on which England's increasing wealth and expanding global influence were based. At this time Worcester was one of the most important production centres in the country, producing cloth exported all over the country and across much of Europe. Within the City, the site is known occupy one of the key cloth producing areas and thus the opportunity to further our understanding of this industry is of considerable local and indeed national importance.



Post-medieval oven



Late medieval stone lined cess pit

- Apart from the large amount of previously unknown information about the layout and commercial life of this part of the Roman town and medieval city, the excavation has been the first in Worcester to have taken place close to the river.

As a result waterlogged deposits have produced finds such as wooden bowls and leather shoe and glove fragments. These have not been previously recovered in Worcester and are rarely found anywhere, so add to our understanding of the range of items in everyday use in the city.



Fragments of a 14/15<sup>th</sup> century wooden bowl

Apart from the importance of the discoveries from an archaeological and historical perspective, the excavations have generated considerable public interest. This was reflected in the attendance of over 200 people at a site open day, with many more passers-by regularly stopping and observing the archaeologists at work or reading information provided on site notice boards. Local papers and radio have covered the excavations and students from the local University Archaeology Department have used the site as a case study. A group of local residents have also helped in the cleaning of the finds recovered. Consequently local people, students and visitors to the city have been able to be involved in and benefit from the knowledge being gained. Through published reports, deposition of the finds with the local museum and provision of artwork on the building itself, this contribution will be able to continue long beyond completion of the archaeological project.



Public Open Day



Pewter Spoon



Bone comb



Pottery from a late 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century cess pit

For further information contact [Robin Jackson](#), Newport Street Excavations Project Manager