

Bewell Street

In 2005 Archaeological Excavations Ltd. carried out an excavation on Bewell Street, Hereford. The site is now occupied by retail units and flats located to the north of All Saints Church. An evaluation of the site carried out in 2004 had identified stratified remains dating from the Saxo-Norman period sealed by deposits and features of later medieval and post-medieval date. It is thought that the City of Hereford was established in the 7th century AD when an ecclesiastical site is suggested by documentary references. The city seems to have been open until the 10th century when it was enclosed by a turf and gravel rampart and ditch. The site lies outside and to the north of these defences but near to what could have been the northern entrance to the city. Following the Norman Conquest, William Fitz Osbern established a market place outside and to the north of the Saxon defences, encompassing High Town and possibly running westward to what was later Eign Gate. At this time he enclosed an area to the north of the Saxon city forming the line of the medieval defences known today. The site lies within this medieval enclosure. Three phases of iron working, almost certainly smithing, took place on the site, probably commencing in the Saxon period and continuing during the Saxo-Norman period, with slag and burnt clay by-products identified on the site. A considerable amount of anvil debris were found, particularly in the earlier deposits. Out of 36 deposits in which anvil debris was identified, 20 dated to the earliest industrial phase of the site. The 'lustrous' nature of the hammerscale suggests that smithing was taking place at a very high temperature, an implication borne out by the considerable amount of vitrified furnace lining also present on the site. This might argue a later part of the smithing process, such as the edging of tools. Pottery evidence suggests that the majority of the ironworking took place in the 10th to 12th centuries. The different phases were sealed by spreads of industrial debris rather than being marked by any change of purpose. Interestingly very little animal bone and pottery was burnt, suggesting that it may have been deposited from a separate source; possibly domestic waste was deposited with the iron working by-products. One of the reasons for good survival of 11th-12th century features at the street frontage is the comparative lack of activity in the 13th to early 14th centuries, unusual for medieval Hereford. This might be a result of the increased proximity of the church at this time as a result of the extension of the building. Pits and features in the immediate area of the church seem to predate the construction of the present building in the 13th to 14th centuries. Post-medieval industry on the site may be suggested by the animal bone, implying that some specialised exploitation took place, possibly tanning or tawing. The features associated with this phase were dated to the 16th century.