

Shrewsbury: an archaeological assessment of an English border town by *Nigel Baker*, Oxbow Books/English Heritage, Oxford, UK, 2010, 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-842-17315-2.

Nigel Baker's volume on Shrewsbury presents the final publication of the archaeological assessment for the county town of Shropshire, first undertaken in 1998 and revised and updated between 2003 and 2006. It arises from the programme promoted and partly funded by English Heritage over the past 15 years to create Urban Archaeological Databases (UAD) for important towns and develop coherent research strategies for their future management. However, as might be expected from an author with such wide-ranging expertise in urban archaeology, it goes beyond a simple synthesis of previous archaeological work in Shrewsbury to become a major monograph on the history and development of one of England's best preserved historic towns.

The volume is well structured to achieve its varied goals. Part I contains a full assessment of Shrewsbury's archaeological record in five chapters. After a brief introduction, Chapter 2 outlines early antiquarian discoveries and post-war archaeological investigations within the historic core, and presents the evidence of historic maps from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of 'the shape of Shrewsbury' outlining the town's landscape setting and the significance of terracing to its development. This is followed in Chapter 4 by a predictive deposit model for buried archaeology defined by a series of landscape and activity zones, and in Chapter 5 an assessment of the town's standing buildings. Whilst this section is designed to meet the needs of urban planners responsible for managing Shrewsbury's historic environment, it also presents a sensitive analysis of the character and survival of medieval urban archaeological deposits and monuments which is of wider relevance than for Shrewsbury alone. Part II provides a narrative history of the town in seven chapters, drawing on the below-ground and above-ground archaeological evidence. Baker describes Shrewsbury's origins in the Anglo-Saxon period and its medieval and post-medieval development up to c. 1700, followed by a summary of the later post-medieval period which is rather disappointingly brief. Part III consists of a short chapter outlining key research priorities for the future. The volume is well supported by a gazetteer and a series of large-scale maps showing existing sites and monuments in the UAD, as well as an extensive bibliography.

One of the most striking conclusions of the volume as a whole is the long-term effect of Shrewsbury's distinctive topographic position. Located on a hill within a loop of the River Severn, the town site is almost an island except for a narrow land corridor to the north; it was here that pre-Conquest defences and later the Norman castle were erected. The town possessed two medieval bridges, the 'English bridge' on the east and the 'Welsh bridge' on the west, each with suburban settlements. The naming of the bridges highlights that Shrewsbury was for many centuries the 'border town' of the book's subtitle, a major defensive point in the contested March of Wales. The restricted site had a significant effect on the development of the urban landscape; the entire hilltop site within the river loop has been subject to extensive terracing, both small-scale initiatives within individual properties or groups of properties, and large-scale landscaping operations, most notably the city wall, constructed between 1220 and 1242, which cuts across several groups of tenements on the east and west sides of the town. The town's buildings often have deep cellars or undercrofts to take advantage of the terraces and create level building platforms. All of this has had a severe negative impact on the survival of earlier buried archaeological deposits, although some areas of valuable early archaeology may be preserved within medieval courtyards, making these priority areas for preservation and future research.

Baker highlights that the lack of archaeological evidence makes the origins and early development of Shrewsbury very difficult to assess. In the Roman period the regional capital was 5 miles to the south-east at Wroxeter, where a significant post-Roman elite centre has also been identified, but there may have been a river crossing on the medieval town site. Shrewsbury first emerges as an historic centre in the seventh or eighth century around two prominent Minster churches, St Chad's and St Mary's, both located on the highest point within the river loop; a royal residence is known from a charter of 901. There is evidence for the development of churches, defences and domestic occupation in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the Norman Conquest had a significant impact on the urban landscape with the construction of the castle and the foundation of a Benedictine abbey in the eastern suburb. There is no firm evidence for formal planning in the layout of streets and tenements, but Baker argues that this reflects the underlying topography which made geometric planning difficult to apply; a concern with shaping the urban environment can be seen in the creation

of a new market in the thirteenth century on the site of an infilled bog or pool known as the *Gumbes-tolemore*. Shrewsbury retains a significant collection of large stone houses belonging to members of the prominent mercantile and gentry elite dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as extensive survivals of stone and timber-framed houses from the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which are fully described and analysed according to their construction and plan forms. However, with only limited archaeological investigation of urban tenements, the evidence for economic development and material culture from the town remains sparse, and only a limited amount is known about the city's medieval parish churches and friaries.

In this substantially researched and erudite work, Baker makes good use of the available archaeological evidence for medieval and post-medieval Shrewsbury, as well as honestly and critically reflecting on gaps in our knowledge and the limitations of what has survived. In so doing, he has produced a major contribution both to our understanding of the unique landscape of one of England's best preserved medieval towns, and through this single case study raises important questions for our understanding of medieval town development and urban archaeology as a whole.

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Urban maps: instruments of narrative and interpretation in the city by *Richard Brook* and *Nick Dunn*, Ashgate, Farnham, UK, 2011, 250pp. ISBN 978-0-754676-5-77.

Urban maps discusses new ways and tools to read and navigate the contemporary city. Each chapter investigates a possible approach to unravel the complexity of contemporary urban forms. Each tool is first defined, introducing its philosophical background, and is then discussed with case studies, showing its relevance for the navigation of the built environment. Urbanism classics such as the work of Lynch, Jacobs, Venuti and Scott-Brown, Lefebvre and Walter Benjamin are fundamental in setting the framework of the volume. In the introduction cities and mapping are first discussed, the former are illustrated as 'a composite of invisible networks devoid of landmarks and overrun by nodes' (p. 3),

and 'a series of unbounded spaces where mass production and mass consumption reproduce a standardised quasi-global culture' (p. 6).

In the first chapter, 'Brand, image and identity', the emerging role that commercial logos have in the definition of urban space is discussed in detail. Branding pervades Western, or Westernised, societies at multiple scales: a strong visual culture is based on the repetition of images that create a network. The chapter discusses brands in a general sense, including logos, signs, advertisements, and also branded architecture. The latter is investigated through specific typologies, such as the 'cardboard box', the 'graphic building', and the 'pure sign'. Every category addresses a particular use of design to brand an architectural item or a space.

The second chapter turns to 'networks'. 'Rather than contributing to a reduced sense of awe, networks have the capability to enrich and extend our everyday experience and understanding of the city' (p. 114). Discussion ranges from physical relationships to digital networks, from the geographical scale of poli-nucleated cities to specific artistic experimentation like *Soundcities* by Stanza or *Blur Buildings* by Diller Scofidio and Renfro. Technology is extensively used to introduce different points of view on the built environment. New media and other devices allow the creation of networks based not on physical or special relationships but on social and cultural ones. In this way the 'mapping of space' is not directly related to the built form, but more to human behaviour.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to film as a way to represent the perception and navigation of the built environment. Lefebvre's discussion of spatial practices, representation of space and representational spaces provides the theoretical framework of this section. Several contemporary films, dealing with experiences of particular urban, suburban or marginal built environments, are introduced as case studies, with the examples mainly consisting of British films depicting middle-class dramas. The role of technology is also introduced presenting CCTV networks as a means of monitoring and mapping people's use of space.

Chapter 4 deals mainly with graffiti and artwork. The tension between ownership and use of space is presented, arguing that the urban environment is increasingly being privatized. The social role that the arts have in defining the identity of a place, especially reclaiming its ownership, is discussed. Graffiti is argued to be a form of branding. Daniel Buren, Espo and Eltono are just some of the artists presented, stress being placed on how the repetition of their work in the urban environment is creating