



An archaeological profile of
Kington

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June 2007

D R A F T

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1. Introduction

Kington, and the Herefordshire market-town profiles

Herefordshire is widely regarded as the most rural of all English counties, closely identified with images of rich farmland and the wild beauty of the lower Wye Valley. Nevertheless, the great majority of the population is urban, living in the county town and the five market towns. It is also true that, at the peak of its prosperity before the Black Death of 1348-9, Herefordshire had as many as twenty-nine towns within its borders, although already by c.1500 this was reduced to eight (Ray 2001, 3). The urban past is important to Herefordshire – because so many of its inhabitants live and work in its present towns, because these places have such a major role in the economy of the county and of the region, and because the long-term trends that result, in some places, in sheep grazing where market traders once bargained, are of major historical significance. It is an unfortunate inevitability that the archaeological evidence for the urban past is most at risk in those places that continue to be most successfully urban.

This is an archaeological study, or profile, of the town of Kington in north-west Herefordshire, the second of a series of profiles of the county's market towns designed to provide new summary overviews of the character, quality and significance of the archaeology of each place. This is the second such document produced for Kington, the first being an archaeological assessment compiled by Victoria Bryant (then Buteux), for Hereford & Worcester County Council in 1996. This was one of a series of such reports produced by the *Central Marches Historic Towns Survey*, a project that covered about eighty past and present urban places in the three historic counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire.

The CMHTS, funded by English Heritage, served as a pilot study for the *Extensive Urban Surveys* that this body has since sponsored in most English counties. Assessments were made of existing models of urban development, the archaeological resource below- and above-ground, artefactual and environmental potential, and archival resources available. However, the scope and depth of the individual town reports were very tightly circumscribed by the resources then available. Additionally, in the decade that has passed since the CMHTS reports were written a large amount of archaeological fieldwork has taken place, much of it under the provisions of PPG16, government guidance that allows planning authorities to request the prior archaeological investigation of prospective development sites. For these reasons – to widen the scope of the enquiry, to address some issues in more detail, and to bring the information up to date – the need for market-town profiles was identified in a 2001 management review of Herefordshire towns (Ray 2001, 35). Ross-on-Wye was the subject of the first of the *Herefordshire Archaeology* market-town profiles; Kington is the second, and it is hoped to follow this with a profile of Leominster later in 2007. In their attention to the character of historic townscapes, these profiles have an additional function in supporting and informing the production of *Conservation Area Appraisals* – reviews of the

validity and scope of Conservation Areas now required by central government.

The archaeology of Kington is, for the purposes of this study, very broadly defined, embracing buried remains and deposits, and the urban landscape – including both historic buildings and the settlement pattern in which they are set. The profile commences with a brief review of previous historical and archaeological research and writing and with a topographical introduction to the town and its immediate surroundings. Section 2 presents a summary of current historical understanding of the town, its origins, its development, and its major features (the church, castle), concentrating on the medieval and early modern periods. The physical evidence is dealt with in section 3 (the settlement pattern and historic buildings) and section 4 (buried archaeology). Section 5 considers the future of the archaeological resource – areas for further research, and its management and exploitation.

Previous archaeological and historical research

The starting-point for historians of Kington is Richard Parry's *The history of Kington by a member of the Mechanics' Institute*, published locally in 1845. Parry, the town registrar, surveyor and coal merchant (Harrison 1999), produced an unusually substantial (303-page) volume for such a small town at this date, covering the manorial history, public buildings, government, population, the Church, trade and commerce, transport and accommodation and a number of other issues. Of particular archaeological interest is his topographical account of the town and its principal buildings, at the time at which he was writing and in the recent, remembered past. More of Parry's writings were collected and published under the auspices of the Kington Historical Society in 1984 (Southwood [ed.] 1984).

Kington is, even today, incompletely understood from an architectural-historical perspective. The earliest descriptive account of any substance is that of the Royal Commission inventory volume of 1934 (Herefordshire volume 3). To this may be added a short but useful chapter by J W Tonkin (1992) 'The houses of Kington', a contribution that deliberately sought out early fabric concealed by later facades, together with a note in the *Woolhope Transactions* by the same author (1991) relating the discovery of a cruck-built open hall on the north side of High Street. In the 1996 Central Marches Historic Towns Survey report Richard K Morriss expressed the opinion that the town has a 'sufficiently large percentage of historic buildings to warrant a fairly detailed synthetic study' and, further, that the post-medieval buildings have a 'high potential for detailed study and recording' (Morriss, in Buteux 1996, 11). Other than the List of Buildings and a number of short historical accounts of town families and their houses published by the Kington Historical Society, no further literature has been identified. Since Richard Morriss's assessment, a limited amount of further survey has taken place, principally by Duncan James, and at least one building has been recorded and analysed and the results reported in 'grey literature' (limited-distribution client report) format.

The buried archaeology of Kington is virtually unexplored. Four development-related projects have taken place within the town, all in the Church Street area, but none found significant or well-preserved archaeological deposits. In default of further data, predictions as to the likely state of preservation and depth of archaeological deposits in other parts of the town can only be estimated – very roughly – from the present surface topography and from comparison with similar situations in other small towns (see section 4).

After Parry's *History* of 1845 there appears to have been almost no published historical writing specifically on Kington until the establishment of the Kington Historical Society in 1977. Since then, the society has maintained an unbroken run of biannual published papers on local subjects, inevitably dominated by the later post-medieval centuries but nevertheless constituting an invaluable research resource for the archaeologist. In addition to this output, publications by J B Sinclair and Dr R W D Fenn (1992, 1995) have added substantially to the corpus, although there has, even now, been little progress with medieval documentation since Parry.

Topographical introduction

The historic settlement plan of Kington as a whole may be most simply introduced in terms of the contrasts between 'Old Kington' and 'New Kington' (see p.00). The former is represented by irregular clusters of buildings around the church and Castle Hill, scattered along the irregular road network that frames the small but steep hills in this area. New Kington, the present town centre, is characterised by much denser and thoroughly urban settlement accommodated within a notably regular, rectilinear town plan on the foot of the ridge in the valley bottom. The historic town plan is itself accommodated within a broader rectilinear framework of fields that adopt the north-west to south-east orientation that prevails in this part of the county (see p.00). Within the study area this ruling alignment breaks down around Old Kington as the rectilinear fields give way to small irregular closes on the steep gradients around the church.



Fig.00 Oblique air photograph of Kington from the south-east. Old Kington lies amongst the trees (top/centre) beyond the town centre (New Kington)

The physical topography is, as usual, a major determinant of the settlement geography. Kington lies on the north side of the River Arrow at a point where it flows from south-west to north-east, about a kilometre upstream of its confluence with the Back Brook, joining from the north-west. The latter flows through a steep-sided valley between the two most prominent hills in the vicinity, Hergest Ridge, due west of Kington, and Bradnor Hill, due north across the brook (fig.00). The foot of Hergest Ridge descends slowly to the east with some marked undulations, and it is on this extended foot, on a south-facing slope, that the present town centre is situated, at an altitude of about 155 metres AOD (above Ordnance Datum). Just north of the town centre, in the area of the Greenfields estate, the ridge rises to the north before dropping again into the Back Brook valley. Across the Arrow, the ground rises more gently on the south side of the valley. The river has, in this area, a very narrow floodplain, generally about 100m across.

2. The development of Kington: an historical-archaeological model

Before Kington...

While there have been occasional finds of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic artefacts from the Arrow Valley, it is only from the Neolithic period onwards that human activity is well represented in the local archaeological record. The county's largest lowland barrow cemetery is located north of Pembridge and other individual barrows are known in the valley. Occasional metalwork finds are indicative of activity in the Bronze Age. Activity and settlement appear to

have intensified in the Iron Age, with major hillforts at Ivington Camp near Leominster and Wapley Hill near Staunton-on-Arrow and a number of farmstead enclosures in the valley bottom (White 2003, 19).

Within the immediate area of Kington, prehistoric flints and Roman pottery have been found on the Greenfields estate immediately north of the town centre (SMR 7401, 7402), a flint scraper from the Kington Wood area south of the town (SMR 9065), a Bronze Age stone axe-hammer from Kington churchyard (SMR 8375), and an axe and an Iron Age spindle whorl from unidentified locations within the parish (SMR 7410 and 8372). None of this material is individually of great significance but as a group it represents the archaeological 'background noise' to be expected of a fertile river valley.

The most striking and potentially the most significant evidence for late prehistoric activity in the middle and upper reaches of the Arrow, is to be found in the present agrarian landscape. Modern field boundaries over a wide area, extending eastwards almost as far as Leominster, have a common ruling alignment, north-west to south-east (White 2003, 43). The fields appear to have inherited the alignment of a much earlier co-axial field system; where such systems have been investigated elsewhere in the country (Essex, and North Norfolk, for example) they have been found to be of late prehistoric origin and to have been maintained in use – with changes and adaptations – ever since. Excavations at the Leen, east of Staunton, were able to demonstrate the presence of Roman period enclosures slotted into this ruling alignment, contrasting with the post-Roman Rowe Ditch that cut diagonally across it (White, *ibid.*). It is therefore possible that the 'landscape grain' of the countryside in the Kington area derives from such a system, implying continuity of farming over at least two millennia. The enclosures excavated at the Leen may either have been associated with a nearby high-status farmstead, or may have been a village type settlement composed of small adjacent farmsteads (White 2003, 44-47).

The Kington area, in the post-Roman period, was not just agricultural countryside, it was also a frontier region, and this is represented in the archaeological record by the presence of west-facing linear dykes. The Rowe Ditch, referred to already, crossed the Arrow Valley a kilometre west of Pembridge; its three-metre deep western ditch would have been an effective barrier to movement westwards down the valley. Not accurately dated, other than as a post-Roman, pre-medieval work, it is suspected to belong to the earlier post-Roman centuries (White 2003, 47). It may have been a local precursor to the 8th-century Offa's Dyke which also appears to run through the Kington area. Although its course south of Herrock Hill (3km north-west of Kington) is not completely certain, it appears to run east and then south, crossing the Arrow 2km downstream from Kington, leaving the site of the future town outside the dyke in an eastward-projecting salient.

The origins of Kington: the rural manor, the church and castle

'In Kington 4 hides...Earl Harold held these lands. Now the King has them; they are waste' (DB 181b; Thorn & Thorn 1983, 1.69). This extremely sparse description in Domesday Book represents the first appearance of Kington in the historical record. A small rural manor then generating no measurable return for its lord, it was nevertheless a royal manor, its status also implicit in its place name, the king's *tun*, a farm or small settlement. Before the Conquest it had been one of several manors in the hands of Earl Harold Godwinson, before escheating to the crown following the latter's death at Hastings. How it came into Harold's possession does not appear to be known for certain. However, the Domesday characterisation of it as waste may imply that it had no recorded pre-1066 value, having only recently been added to the kingdom, possibly as a consequence of Harold's seizure of Welsh lands in 1063. It may be that this was, as Parry suggested (1845, pp.4-5) the occasion when its English name was first applied and that, prior to that, it had been Welsh. Nor, so far, is there any archaeological evidence for the pre-Conquest manor.

Probably between April 1107 and May the following year, the manor, along with fifteen other waste manors in royal hands, was granted by Henry I to Adam de Port, Sheriff of Hereford. Together, this group of manors was known as the Honour or Barony of Kington, suggesting that Adam established his principal seat or *caput* there, presumably at the castle, though the latter is not recorded for another sixty or so years (Coplestone-Crow 1996). It may have been established as a border defence to deter incursions from the highlands into the county between Radnor and the Wye (Remfry 1996).

The Church of St Mary

There is no Domesday record of either a church or a priest at Domesday and the origins of the church are unknown. The earliest standing fabric is the (originally) detached south tower, built c.1200. Its alignment is a couple of degrees off that of the remainder of the church and presumably relates to an earlier, wholly replaced, church building, or other unknown structures. Masonry fragments of Romanesque character (with chevron ornament for example) re-used in the later church fabric, and the present Norman font, are assumed to derive from this earlier church. The chancel is the next earliest element (early 13th-century), presumably rebuilt against an earlier nave that was completely destroyed by the building of the present fully-aisled nave of c.1300. The south porch and south chapel were both additions of the first half of the 14th century; by the time of the Black Death the church had therefore already grown to its maximum pre-Victorian extent. 15th-century alterations were largely confined to the south chancel chapel (RCHM 1934, 89). No record has been found of any archaeological investigation in the church or churchyard, and understanding of the fabric rests largely as the Royal Commission investigators left it.



Fig.00 The church of St Mary, seen from the rising ground to the north west

As noted above, the church stands on a small but prominent hill commanding wide views of the town below, and of the Arrow Valley. The hill is defined by roads around its base forming a roughly triangular site. This is shared with the vicarage, or rectory house, occupying a plot immediately adjoining the north side of the churchyard and situated on a terrace below it, cut into the steeply rising gradient. Richard Parry said of it that it had originally been a much smaller building 'undoubtedly of remote antiquity' that had been extended on the south side in 1834. The earliest reference he found was of 1365, when the newly appointed vicar, William Brown, was given possession of the rectory house. A terrier of 1607, copying an earlier document, listed a hall, chamber, milk house, two lofts or chambers over, a kitchen, a stable in the back yard, a thatched barn and fold, together with two gardens, two orchards and one and a half acres of arable lying behind (Parry 1845, 22). The close proximity of the church and vicarage sharing the hilltop suggests that they have always had an intimate association, and that the rectory house, as recorded above, was but the penultimate structure in a long line of priest's houses on the same site.

Kington Castle

The earliest historical evidence for a castle at Kington is an account in the Pipe Rolls of the expenditure of ten shillings in 1187 for repairing the palisade in the castle (*palitii in castello de Kinton*) (Coplestone-Crow 1996, 26). Given the need for repairs the castle had clearly been extant for some time, but its foundation is not recorded. The greatest probability is that the castle was established with the creation of the Lordship of Kington, possibly in 1107-8

(see above, p.00; Coplestone Crow 1996, 26). The latest direct reference to the castle in use appears to be in 1203, when William de Braose was in possession of Kington Castle with its town and all its appurtenances, held by knight service. Kington was probably one of five castles at first fortified against, but soon surrendered to, King John by de Braose in 1207. Kington may have been amongst the Braose possessions assaulted and burnt in 1216 by the king; this is uncertain, but no further references to the functioning castle appear after this date.

In his *History of the Castles of Herefordshire* (1867, 86-7), the Reverend Robinson noted that there was, amongst the manorial records of Kington seen by a Mr R W Banks, a note regarding the rent paid in 1529 for the 'pasture of the Castle Hill and of the moat of the same castle and also for the farm [rent] of the fishpool and one pasture about the castle, of old belonging to the porter of the said castle'. This brief note is of some importance, not only because it records the former presence of a moat (ditch) and fishpond, but also because it provides an early reference to the topographical feature still known as Castle Hill and unambiguously recorded as such on the Tithe Map of 1845. This, in turn, matters because the physical remains are, to say the least, enigmatic.



Fig.00 Castle Hill, from the west

Castle Hill, viewed from the south, presents itself as a not untypical large conical motte, though exposures of bedrock in its north side, where it has eroded into the valley of the Back Brook, shows that it is at least in part a natural formation. The earliest modern archaeological description is provided by the Royal Commission, their inventory volume describing it as an irregularly shaped knoll, its sides possibly artificially steepened in places, with

a mound on the summit and a possible rampart with scarping on the south side; the investigators were, however, left uncertain that the identification with Kington Castle was in fact correct (RCHM 1934, 91). The motte top (planned in the 1990s by Paul Remfry: see Halliwell 1999) is roughly wedge-shaped in plan, with a distinct mound rising a further c. two metres above the flat top. When inspected by the writer (February 2007) there were no visible signs of stone footings, but a report of 1998 suggests the presence of a twenty-foot diameter stone tower protruding from the north side of the motte and stone rubble in the summit mound suggestive of a demolished motte-top tower (Sterling-Brown 1998). These remain to be confirmed by future investigation (see p.00). Although not impossible, it also seems inherently improbable that the motte was the only defensive feature of the castle particularly if it was for a while the *caput* of the honour. While earthwork features may have disappeared from the area south and west of Castle Hill, the natural topography suggests no obvious site for a bailey. One possibility may be that some element of the castle lay to the north, on the opposite side of the Back Brook valley (pers. comm. Ken Reeves). The fishpond mentioned in 1529 – assuming it was not a product of damming the fast-flowing Back Brook – is most likely to have been located in what is now the bottom of the pasture field immediately west of Castle Hill; stonework in the field boundary on its south side may represent the fabric of a retaining wall. The site of the ditch is uncertain but is perhaps most likely to have been around the south side of Castle Hill, beneath the present houses.



Fig.00 The township of Broken Banks; the pasture in the foreground may be the site of the castle fishpool documented in 1529 – if it was not in the valley of the Back Brook

Kington Castle appears to have been sited very specifically to control movements along the valley of the Back Brook. But a question is raised by its

relationship to the church on its own hilltop, 140m to the south. While, in general terms, close spatial relationships between castles and churches are common, generally reflecting seigneurial foundations, in this particular instance the geography is such that St Mary's effectively screens the castle site from the south, thus obscuring views from it of the Arrow Valley below. It is difficult to envisage how such a tactical disadvantage could have been offset unless the church too was regarded as part of the same seigneurial complex. In this context it may be worth noting that the detached tower of c. 1200, with its restricted, possibly secondary, ground-floor access, thick (1.8m) walls and commanding views to the south, would almost certainly have been built at a time when the castle was still in use. If the castle was not destroyed by King John's action in 1216, it would probably have fallen into sharp decline with the transfer of the head of the Barony to Huntington Castle between 1221 and 1228 (Remfry 1996, 33; Coplestone-Crow 1996, 29).

The medieval borough: foundation, functions and growth

No borough charters or market grants survive for Kington, though there is no doubt that it was a borough, with burgess tenure, by c.1300 and little doubt that it also had a market. The earliest reference to a borough at Kington is from 1267, and shows that, by then, there were in fact two boroughs, described simply as 'the borough' and 'the new borough' and that these were regarded as sufficiently distinct for their rents to be accounted separately (see below). The 19th-century historian, Richard Parry, was the first to comment on their physical identity. 'Tradition informs us' he wrote, that the old town was 'no more than a small village, which probably fell into decay and was gradually deserted on the building of the new town eastward of the church, called, as before mentioned in some old deeds relating to property, Kinton in the Fields' (Parry 1845, 18). Unfortunately he gives no actual details of any early documentary references to Kington in the Fields, and until this basic archival ground is re-explored, historians will have to be content with repetitions of Parry's assertion.

Lacking charters, the foundation dates of both boroughs are uncertain, and so too are the magnate families responsible for them. New Kington was, according to Coplestone-Crow 'laid out by the Braose family as a new town sometime between 1175 and 1230' (1989, 115). However, it seems possible that the creation of at least the older of the two boroughs, if not both, is more likely to have taken place while Kington was still head of the Honour, before Roger de Port's rebellion in 1173, his subsequent forfeiture of the Honour and the eventual transfer of the *caput* to Huntington (Noble 1965, 66-7).

In 1267 an *inquisition post mortem* following the death of Humphrey de Bohun, husband of Eleanor de Braose, showed that rents from the borough of Kington yielded 22 shillings, rents from the foreign (the manor outside the borough) brought in 38 shillings, and rents from the borough of New Kington yielded 64s. 3d (Noble 1965, 69; Coplestone-Crow 1996, 28). The figures suggest that, by the 1260s New Kington may have outstripped the original borough by, very approximately, a factor of three to one.

Another *inquisition post mortem* of 1299, following the death of Humphrey de Bohun, is transcribed and published in Parry's *History of Kington* and raises questions of some historical and archaeological interest. The document lists, amongst other items, the rents of fifty-nine free tenants of Kington – those paying cash rents rather than owing services. It does not distinguish New Kington by name, though the total value of the rents at just over £3, very close to the 64s 3d of the 1267 survey, suggests either that this was what was being described or that the 'Old Borough' had simply ceased to matter as a separate tenurial entity, perhaps having been intimately associated with the now-defunct castle. The majority of free tenants (thirty-six) held plots described as messuages along with parcels of land of between a half and twelve acres, for which they paid varying rents. Over 150 acres of land were thus held, making it quite clear that these tenants were in possession of agricultural land extending throughout the manor and not confined to the town. In the middle of the list is a group of ten people who held eleven burgages, for which they mostly paid standard rents of one shilling, or sixpence – the familiar 'standard' burgage and half-burgage rents, often, but not necessarily, found associated with planned medieval towns.

Two main questions arise from this document: what was the nature, or function, of Kington at this time, and what are the physical implications of this pattern of property holding? The first of these questions seems easier to answer: most of the inhabitants of Kington were engaged in agriculture as their primary source of income, even if they pursued some kind of secondary, perhaps craft-related, unrecorded occupation. Only a minority of the surnames given in the 1299 document are occupational (most being locational or familial) and, although this small sample is not particularly helpful, it does not give an impression of dynamic urbanism. Amongst the burgage holders were a miller, a catchpole (a manorial official) and a *sharestere* (unidentified), neither of the identifiable occupations being particularly urban in character. Amongst the messuage- and land-holders were a chalonier, a clerk, a shoemaker and another miller: again, while indicative of non-agricultural occupations, they are not as a group indicative of a complex urban community. The 1299 inquisition also includes the free tenants of the failed borough of Huntington, 4km south-west of Kington. Again, most of the tenants, generally bearing familial or locational surnames, held messuages with land attached. In the middle of the list of these tenants occur three occupiers of half-burgages and one of a whole burgage; one of these individuals also held four messuages in Kington. The only recorded occupation amongst this group was a hangman.

The implications of this document seem fairly clear, if perhaps surprising. Although the end of the 13th century was the apogee of pre-Black Death medieval urban development, Kington – and Huntington – were not urban communities servicing an agricultural hinterland, they were agricultural communities with an urban dimension. The only alternative to this interpretation of the document is that there was a whole category of unrecorded sub-tenants, renting from the listed plot holders and pursuing truly urban occupations. The disappearance of Old Kington as a place worthy of

separate listing in the 1299 inquisition seems to imply that any non-agricultural functions that once made it distinct had also disappeared.

The implications of the 1299 inquisition for the physical layout and appearance of late 13th-century Kington are less clear. The association between the burgages and standard shilling rents may, as elsewhere, be indicative of carefully planned and regulated urban plots: careful planning is certainly evident in the town plan (see p.00) though the extent of this must be greater than eleven plots. It seems inevitable that the properties let as messuages for odd amounts of rent must have been included within the town's neatly regular grid-plan. The land rented with them must in almost every case (excepting, possibly, a couple of half-acre parcels) have been in the rural manor, the foreign. Again, unless there is an invisible group of urban sub-tenants, farmers must have lived side-by-side on plots that are, at least now, physically indistinguishable from burgages. These issues are significant not just for Kington (and Huntington) but for early- and high medieval border communities generally, and will be explored in the Research Agenda, below (p.00).

Late medieval and early post-medieval Kington

Although, without detailed documentary evidence or dendrochronologically-dated buildings (see p.00), the finer points of the later medieval economic trajectory of Kington are obscure to us, there are signs at least of economic problems in the period between c.1400 and c.1600. At the beginning of the 15th century, at a time of intensive border raiding by Owen Glyndwr, the register of Bishop Robert Maskell for 1406 recorded thirty-eight impoverished benefices, Kington amongst them (O'Donnell 1971, 192). It is nevertheless clear that there are a number of surviving 15th-century buildings in the town though their construction dates are not yet known (pers. comm. Duncan James; see below, pp.00-00). In 1564 rents from 29 burgages in Kington yielded only 14s 6d (Kay 1980, 10). Thus although the number of plots held by burgage tenure had apparently almost trebled since 1299, the income derived from that had been reduced to less than a third; few if any could have been yielding their full annual rents.

Early Modern Kington

As before, all the definitive economic indicators are, so far, lacking for Kington in this period. The impression given by the buildings stock is that there must have been a considerable revival in the town's fortunes at some point in the 17th century to account for the number of timber-framed buildings that survive – but, lacking dendrochronological evidence, this remains to be confirmed (see p.00). In 1678, thirty-one tenements were held in burgage tenure, with rights to sell goods in the town's market free of tolls (Parry 1845, 18), but the economic implications of this lone statistic are anything but clear. Some anecdotal evidence of a comparative revival in Kington's economic fortunes comes from the very end of the 17th century, with Richard Blome's account of

the collapse of the market at Pembridge and the decline of Weobley on account of the rise of the market at Kington 'which is the best in the county for corn, cattle, provisions and several commodities' (O'Donnell 1971, 191). Throughout this period six fairs were held annually. The clothing trade was of some importance in the 18th-century town, though this decayed around 1790 and gloving, another core industry, failed around 1820. Population figures only become available with the 1801 census, which recorded a total of 2,062, though Parry thought this an under-estimate (Parry 1845, 38, 25). In terms of the impact of this period on the built environment, we have Parry's own estimation: 'The spirit of improvement has of late years much animated the inhabitants, many new houses having been erected and old projections taken down, and the whole town has assumed a more regular, uniform and respectable appearance'. A contrast was drawn with 'earlier days', presumably closer to 1800, in an account taken by Parry from 'an eminent writer': 'this town was awake only once a week, and that was on a Market-day'. Further, 'The shops were cold for want of glass in the windows, and the articles exposed for sale appeared as if they had been in that state ever since Noah's flood, and old-fashioned enough to have come out of his ark...the quacking of a duck or the squeaking of a pump handle, could be heard from one end of the town to another' (Parry, 1845, 17-19).

3. The historic townscape of Kington: a characterisation

This section is concerned with the recent and present above-ground physical character of Kington, and its historical evolution. The subject is approached by first considering the settlement pattern. This is the essentially two-dimensional framework of roads, streets, plots and other boundaries within which the town has developed. The contents of the town – its buildings stock – are considered next, primarily in terms of the survival of buildings from successive historic periods. Each of these aspects of the townscape is problematic, and the need for further work is emphasised here and considered further in part 5, below.

The rural framework

The historic road pattern in Kington parish is first recorded schematically by Isaac Taylor's county map of 1754, and in detail by the Tithe Map of 1845. These show both Old and New Kington occupying important local road junctions. Around Old Kington, Taylor's map shows three routes converging. From the north-west, one road can be seen coming up via Broken Banks from the valley of the Back (or Black) Brook, taking traffic from a broad, apparently causewayed, route along the north side of the brook. From the west, a track leads onto the top of Hergest Ridge. From the south-west, the road from the head of the Arrow Valley approaches the town along the south side of the churchyard. Branching off this road to the west of the town, another road in the valley bottom leading straight into New Kington can be recognised as an extension of Mill Street, the western section of which had, by 1845, ceased to

exist as anything more than a field boundary. Through the town, the axial High Street-Duke Street route extends this line and leads down-valley towards Pembridge and Leominster, while the Arrow Bridge leads to routes heading south towards the Wye Valley and ultimately to Hereford.

The 1845 Tithe Map for Kington parish emphasises the very variable character of the field patterns around the town. South and south-west of the town, towards the townships of Kingswood and Chickward, the fields are at their most chaotically irregular; west of the town, on the slopes of Hergest Ridge, the landscape grain trends north-south, down the gradient, with more regularity and signs of post-medieval enclosure. Much the same may also be said of the fields around Barton, north-east of the town, but it is on the town-centre peninsula between the Back Brook and the Arrow that the fields are at their most regular, and rectilinear, with a localised north-west to south-east alignment. On the high ground west, north and north-east of the town, a series of slangs – funnel-shaped enclosures – would have led livestock grazing on the hilltop commons into the valley bottom road network and fields. In the very bottom of the Arrow Valley, but also at intervals along the steeper and faster-flowing Back Brook, was a series of mill sites together with their associated infrastructure of weirs, leats and by-pass channels.

Old Kington

Old Kington occupies undulating ground around the 180-metre contour on the lower slopes of Hergest Ridge. Two knolls in particular dominate the surroundings, one crowned by the parish church of St Mary rising almost to 200m AOD, the other, Castle Hill, rising above 205m AOD, overlooking the sharp drop down to the Back Brook to the north (see p.00). The settlement character of this area is overwhelmingly rural, mainly represented by detached houses of a variety of dates from the late 15th century, mostly within small irregular land parcels. There are few signs of relict burgages or gaps between occupied plots that unmistakably represent former house sites. One possible exception is the cluster of housing on Church Road, south of the church, which includes at its western end the 17th-century Lady Hawkins Grammar School (SMR 16178). Intermittent housing to its east occupies irregular plots with their long sides generally perpendicular to the road frontage, suggesting that they could represent the remnants of a formerly more dense series of built-up plots. Disposed along the south-facing gradient, they also have a common rear boundary represented by a substantial lynchet, in the order of two metres or more in height.



Fig.00 Lynchet at the rear of the Church Road plots

This at least demonstrates the antiquity of the boundary line, even if it cannot be formally dated before 1845, when it appears on the Tithe Map; conceivably it may have been a more deliberately engineered boundary to distinguish the borough from the countryside beyond. Although supporting evidence is entirely lacking, this seems the most likely location of at least one 'urban' component of the older of the two Kington boroughs (p.00). Further remains of Old Kington may perhaps be found immediately north-west of the church around the lane called The Wych and the 15th-century and later building 1-2 The Wych (SMR 16128) opposite the churchyard. A little further north, the 1887 O.S. plan shows an empty terrace platform, immediately below the medieval and later vicarage, that lay perpendicular to the lane and could represent a further former built-up plot.



Fig.00 Modern vertical air photograph of Kington. Old Kington appears top left, New Kington centre, based on the T-junction of High Street/Duke Street and Bridge Street and flanked by 20th-century estate developments to the west, north and east

New Kington

The principal axis of New Kington is a long, straight road aligned south-west to north-east, perpendicular to the field pattern around it; this forms the horizontal bar of the 'T' plan, meeting Bridge Street at a right angle at the junction known as Lower Cross, to the east it is known as Duke (formerly Duck) Street, to the west of the junction, as the High Street. The latter continues westwards beyond the built-up area as Mill Street, and this continues further westwards as a field path into the countryside. Although it has been suggested that Mill Street represents a former main road approaching the town directly from the south-west, traffic now, and in the recorded past, approaches the town from the north-west via Church Street, diagonal to the field pattern, meeting High Street at the junction formerly known as Upper Cross. Bridge Street runs south-east to the Arrow Bridge, bending slightly to the east about two-thirds of the way towards the bridge.



Fig.00 Bridge Street, looking north, towards the change in alignment at the base of the gradient. Note repetitive gables to the 18th-century facades of the west side houses

This may, as has been suggested (Dr J Rerrie, typescript note), represent a road diversion away from an original ford to a new bridge built alongside, though the property boundaries to the east of Bridge Street display the same trend, suggesting that the present line of the road must have been established very early on in the development of the built-up area. It is also the case that the bend in the street coincides with the commencement of the level ground (former floodplain?) at the base of the slight gradient. This suggests an alternative possibility, one that could only be tested by excavation, which is that the straight section of Bridge Street terminates at the original southern edge of the town, and that this was subsequently extended down to the bridge, perhaps after a reclamation episode.

On the east side of Church Street is a rectangular open space known as the Square, or Memorial Square, with a second attached open space, Common Close, extending north from it. This name may formerly have applied to both spaces together. Common Close was said by Parry, the 19th-century historian, to be the place where successive lords of the manor 'from time immemorial' held fairs and in which livestock markets were still held. The Bullring (usually a specialised part of a livestock market where bulls were baited prior to slaughter) is another much smaller rectangular open space opening off the east side of Bridge Street. Other regular markets were held in the streets. The Upper Cross was the venue for the Wednesday poultry and butter market (Parry 1845, 20).

The lanes

One of the principal defining characteristics of the town plan of (New) Kington is the comprehensive system of narrow lanes that form common rear boundaries to, or separate, most of the series of urban plots. While back lanes are a recurrent feature of planned medieval towns, the completeness of the system at Kington is unusual, only the east side plots at the lower end of Bridge Street lacking (and displaying no signs of ever having possessed) a common back lane. The lanes are of significance for a number of reasons:

- As facilities that were common to a large number of individual plots, they add weight (if any were needed) to the contention that New Kington is a deliberately planned town, designed by a single agency
- As the system of lanes embraces nearly all of the town plan, it suggests that it is, as it appears to be, a largely single-phase creation
- The lanes probably hold a clue as to the function of the town at the time at which it was conceived (see below, p.00)
- By providing linear rights-of-way along most rear plot boundaries, the lanes have almost certainly added stability to the plot-pattern, such that casual rearward extension of properties (for example, by buying up ground from a neighbour to the rear) has been discouraged. They may therefore be seen as an important contributory factor to the very fine state of preservation of the medieval town plan.

High Street – Duke Street, north side

On the north side of the High Street and Duke Street there is continuous back-lane provision, Prospect Lane running parallel to the frontage at a distance of about 75m (c.245 ft) from it. Its precise line, and therefore the length of the plots it encloses, may well have been determined by the best fit to the steep, undulating gradient that rises behind the High Street. The plot series thus defined extends for a length of about 290 metres west to east, the lane returning south to the frontage at each end: Ellin or Allen's Lane at the west end also continued north, extending through the fields to the township of Crooked Well. Many of the plots within this block exhibit a sharp divide between the densely built-up frontage zone at the foot of the slope and the backlands or plot tails behind on the gradient, many of which remain undeveloped gardens. The transition mostly occurs around thirty metres back from the frontage and is marked in many plots by lateral property boundaries and building alignments. These do, however, appear sufficiently irregular along the series as a whole to suggest that this was a secondary response to the topography, a process by which the flat ground was sub-divided over time and densely built up, and that there was not an original arrangement of short plots with separate garden closes behind.

High Street – Duke Street, south side

South of High Street and Duke Street there are clear signs of a standard measurement repetitively employed in the design of the town plan. Plots at the west end of the High Street formerly terminated at a back lane, now opened up to form a car park, at a distance of about 84m (c. 272 feet) from the main frontage. The same distance separates Chapel Lane on the west from Furlong Lane to the east, and the frontage of Bridge Street is the same distance further east. In other words, plots on the south side of High Street and on the west side of Bridge Street were designed to be of equal length. There are signs that this measurement was also employed on the south side of Duke Street (Wishlade's Row, for example) where the plots are (or were, where truncated by the cattle market) slightly in excess of this length at c.280 feet. The open space of the Bull Ring too lies at this distance south of Duke Street and may represent a last open remnant of another back lane on this line, the rest of which has been lost by encroachment and included within the extended plots. This plot series extends east along Duke Street as far as Love Lane, which occurs at about 168m east of Bridge Street, in other words, the plots occupy a further two square 'modules' of the recurrent c.84-metre dimension.

If this reconstruction is accepted, attention immediately turns to the west side Bridge Street plots opposite, where a plot boundary at this same distance from High Street and a single exceptionally narrow plot adjacent to it hint at the possibility that an east-west lane has been encroached over in this position too. In other words, there may have been, in the original design, back lane provision for all of the High Street and Duke Street plots that thus formed four 'grid squares' in the original layout. This arrangement is reconstructed in fig.00.

Bridge Street, east side

There is however little sign of back-lane provision or of any 84-metre plots on the east side of Bridge Street. Here, north of the Bull Ring in the angle with Duke Street, the plots are much shorter, terminating at or before a small, irregular north-south lane known as Market Hall Street, connecting the Bull Ring north to Duke Street. In this inevitably congested area the general trend of the present plot boundaries, as well as those recorded by the first edition Ordnance Survey plan, is west-east, suggesting that Bridge Street rather than Duke Street was, from the first, the primary frontage, with plots facing west onto it somewhere in the order of 50m (165ft) long. The staggered and discontinuous frontages of Market Hall Street are characteristic of a secondary lane – one that has evolved over time as a consequence of joining up passages through separate properties – and it may have arisen down the side of the first of the full-length Duke Street plots. On Bridge Street south of the Bull Ring the east side plots either terminated on a common rear boundary about 50m from the frontage, or were even shorter and confined within smaller discrete land-parcels well within this rear boundary, that continued to a point two plots short of the river.

Church Street

While the comprehensive provision of the framework of lanes and, subject to confirmation by direct on-site measurement (see p.00), the pattern of regular measurements, show fairly clearly that the core of the town represented by High Street, Duke Street and Bridge Street is of single-phase origin, the status of Church Street is more ambiguous.



Fig. 00 Oblique air photograph of Church Street and the Square (centre left)

On the east side, Ellin Lane connects Common Close with the High Street and bounds the most westerly of the regular series of High Street-Duke Street north side plots. For much of its length it also runs parallel to Church Street at a distance of about 75m, suggesting that it could have been laid out to accommodate a series of plots matching those along High Street and Duke Street. None now do so, and plots at the south end are short and fragmented, ending against the elongated but fragmented tails of the first plots facing the High Street. On the west side, another lane, now developed as Churchill Road, bounded the rear of the longest plots or garden closes behind the shorter and irregular plots. The diagonal line of the street down the hill from the church, taken to be part of the pre-urban landscape, means that the plots become longer further south.

In summary, while it is possible that the plots at the bottom of the hill on the east side were regarded and/or designed as a continuation of those on High Street, the impression given by the plan is that Church Street represents an extension of the original single-phase town plan. This could be construed as being consistent with the archaeological evidence, which happens to be concentrated within this area, and shows little sign of medieval occupation (p.00). However, the very poor quality of the deposits actually encountered

makes this a dangerous assumption, one that needs to be tested further (see p.00).

The urban periphery: lanes, fields and mills

The apparently regular metrology displayed by the town plan south of High Street-Duke Street also extends into the immediate rural surroundings. Chapel Lane, running south from the Church Street/Mill Street junction, was formerly extended south to the river by field boundaries. Another north-south field boundary occurred c.84m further west, with another the same distance beyond that. There appears to be no evidence from which to judge whether this implies an intention on the part of the town founder to make provision for further urban expansion that never took place, or was just an inevitable by-product of a local re-organisation of the landscape to accommodate the new town in its known form.

Integrated with the field pattern in the valley bottom is a system of artificial watercourses or leats feeding two mills and a tannery. To the west of the town centre, on Mill Lane, about 300 metres west of Church Street is a watermill site, with surviving buildings, currently in use as part of a bus depot.



Fig.00 The former Crabtree Mill on Mill Lane

This was Crabtree Mill; once a corn mill, in 1845 it was said to have been 'lately converted into a weaving and dyeing establishment' and, in the latter guise, was still operating in 1879 (Parry 1845, 38; Sinclair and Fenn 1995, 24; SMR 16170 & 19376). It was formerly fed by a leat labelled as a mill race on the first edition O.S. plan of 1887 and is now marked above ground by a line

of trees crossing the recreation ground. This leat was taken off the River Arrow some 550m upstream of the mill, with a southward return to the river, with a parallel bypass channel, along the general NW-SE grain of the local field system. A much shorter but more substantial leat was taken off the Arrow above a high weir about 200m west/upstream of the Arrow Bridge, returning to the river alongside the bridge. This leat powered the town's principal mill, the Arrow Mill, also known as Kington Mill, which remains in use having been converted successively to turbine, steam and electric power in the course of the later 19th and 20th centuries (Sinclair and Fenn 1995, 25; SMR 19375). A third leat was taken off the Arrow Mill's leat, under the bridge and along Tanyard Lane, to the former tannery 100m downstream (SMR 37128 & 19384); this channel remains open alongside the lane as far as the tannery site. In 1754 this was equipped with a waterwheel, possibly powering a bark cutter (Sinclair and Fenn, *ibid.*); its leat returned to the river about 500m further downstream. A fast-flowing river, the Arrow was notable for its mills (eighteen in total), with the greatest concentration between Kington and Staunton (White 2003, 69).

The peripheral settlements: Headbrook, Floodgates, Broken Banks, Crooked Well and Sunset

Headbrook is Kington's tiny transpontine suburb, spread west to east along the road following the southern edge of the Arrow floodplain and grouped in an irregular knot around the southern end of the bridge. The surviving buildings (e.g. Towns End Cottage, SMR 16173) show that housing at the end of the bridge had begun to develop by c.1600. Further development eastwards may have been in the form of roadside squatter-occupation, with cottages of possible 18th- or early 19th-century date lining the road along a thin strip of ground partitioned into individual plots.

Floodgates, Broken Banks and Crooked Well are all small townships that have developed on the south side of the Back Brook around crossing-points, mill sites, and the tramway of 1820 that followed the brook until its closure in 1864 and subsequent replacement by the railway (SMR 12005; Reeves 2003, 17). Sunset, too, had industrial origins, developing around Sunset Row, cottages built in 1828 for nailmakers working at the nearby Meredith's Foundry serviced by the tramway (Sinclair and Fenn 1995, 26). At Crooked Well, the earliest standing building is no.19, with late 17th-century timber framing, part of a row of cottages with what may have been weaving lofts on the first floor (Tonkin 1992, 146; Sinclair and Fenn, 1995, 28); weaving lofts may also have been present in the cottages at the foot of Castle Hill (R. Lello, *pers. comm.*). The mill at Crooked Well was first recorded as a corn mill in 1545; it was converted to pump drinking water up into the town in the early 19th century. The mill at Floodgates was recorded as a fulling mill in 1846, though by 1860 it had become a corn mill (Sinclair and Fenn 1995, 24).

The historic landscape of Kington: interim conclusions (fig. 00)

Historic buildings will be considered next, but even without this essential ingredient it is clear that the historic landscape of Kington is an asset of the greatest importance. As discussed above, the rural landscape setting of the present town, which may be taken to include the area of Old Kington, has some outstanding features, notably the local field pattern with its possible echoes of a prehistoric origin (p.00), the articulation between the valley-bottom fields and road network and the upland commons (p.00), and the integration of milling watercourses in the valley bottom. Arable and pastoral functions are accommodated equally well within a landscape of considerable time depth. Into this landscape is fitted the thoroughly urban settlement pattern of the town centre, medieval New Kington, with many connections between the two – field boundaries and lanes extending into the built up area and forming some of the principal elements of its enduring framework.

There can be very little doubt that New Kington is a planned, planted town of the 12th or early 13th century. The strongly-marked rectilinearity of the town plan is immediately obvious, though this could in theory be accounted for solely as a product of the underlying field pattern – the morphological frame within which the town was laid out. Factors that unequivocally support a planned origin are the comprehensive provision of common lanes servicing many individual plots, the apparent use of regular measurements in the design of the town plan, and the near symmetrical overall layout. The word ‘apparent’ has been retained in this summary in deference to the problems inherent in reading dimensions and reconstructing original measurements from small-scale (even 1:2500) Ordnance Survey plans (Slater 1981). There is no substitute for direct field measurement and, at the time of writing, this process – though underway – has not yet been brought to a conclusion (pers. comm. Sheila White). A hypothetical reconstruction of the town plan as it may first have been conceived is offered in fig.00.

While planted, designed towns are a common feature of post-Conquest medieval England, Kington has additional significance by virtue of its extraordinarily fine state of preservation. This can be expressed as follows:

- Its plan suggests it is of single-phase origin and that no additions occurred to it until after the medieval period – its original limits can still clearly be read in the present landscape
- No gross post-medieval plot amalgamations have occurred anywhere. Settlements of larger size have usually been affected by amalgamations for, for example, the larger 19th-century banks, stores such as Woolworth’s in the early 20th century, or even by high-status private houses in the 16th and 17th centuries (as in Ledbury, for example)
- Virtually all the town plots retain their backlands (plot-tails), as landscape features if not as properties in single ownership. There has been little loss of backlands through clearance and amalgamation, the 19th-century cattle market behind the south-side Duke Street plots being the only exception

- 19th and 20th-century urban growth has been peripheral/additive: new estates have been developed around the pre-20th-century built-up area rather than as insertions into it or replacement of it. The only exception to this rule has been the construction of infill-housing on the plot tails north of High Street/Duke Street but, as expressed above, development has been on an ad hoc house-by-house basis and the plot boundaries have been retained

The system of lanes survives in an apparently very complete state within and around the historic core. The worst damage to this system is apparently the loss, through encroachment, of a west-east lane, and possibly one north-south lane either side of Bridge Street; this may well have taken place within the medieval period.

The widely celebrated stone-walled lanes themselves are an integral part of the distinctive character of the town and have in recent years been the subject of an intensive archaeological-architectural recording exercise, the Kington Burgage & Boundary Walls Project, undertaken by the local community (White 2005). The walls themselves are likely to be a product of the post-medieval centuries, most probably the 18th and 19th and have been suggested to be a solution to the need for the lanes to be stock-proof, facilitating passage by livestock into and around the built-up area. This may well reflect the lanes' original designed function, instead of the more familiar provision of rear access to plots for wheeled traffic to avoid the necessity for entries on valuable and remunerative street frontages.

Historic buildings

General introduction

Kington appears to be a mainly 18th-century town, at least to the casual visitor who fails to penetrate behind the public frontages. Late 18th-century brickwork facades dominate the town streets, this effect being diluted most noticeably only on Duke Street, which has a higher concentration of un-refronted, visible timber-framed buildings. The two principal streets, High Street and Bridge Street, are occupied by mainly three-storey buildings (two residential floors above shops), with a few four-storey buildings grouped around the commercial core of the town at the High Street-Duke Street-Bridge Street junction, the former Lower Cross. On the more peripheral streets – Duke Street, and Church Street – the proportion of two-storey buildings increases, as does the number of residential buildings, without shops. Purely commercial structures with no residential functions (purpose-built banks and offices), are concentrated around Lower Cross, though there are outlying commercial buildings of various types, including the 1885 Market Hall at Upper Cross (Church St/High St junction) or the timber-built garage of c.1932 at the bottom of Bridge Street.

The Conservation Area

The Conservation Area was devised to protect the medieval core based on High Street-Duke Street and Bridge Street, together with an extension north-west up Church Street and around the church, with a second extension to include the recreational open spaces of the Arrow floodplain west of the town centre. Modern housing estates north of High Street-Duke Street and north of Mill Street are excluded, as is another south of Victoria Street, east of Duke Street. A much smaller modern estate south of Mill Street and Crabtree Road is included. The most notable historical exclusions and omissions are the townships of Crooked Well and Broken Banks. The former contains one known 17th-century building, three of possible 18th-century date while the remainder are mostly 19th-century. The buildings of Broken Banks appear to be mostly 19th-century, though one cottage at least may be substantially older, and one of the two buildings at the foot of Castle Hill may be 18th-century, built to accommodate some kind of industrial activity in the well-lit loft.

Dating the built-up area: period impacts on the historic centre

Fig.00 is an attempt to map the occurrence of historic buildings of different periods in Kington, emphasising the presence of fabric and plan-forms rather than facades. As such it is a highly imperfect exercise, presented here as, hopefully, a first draft to be amended by further work in the future. Its problems are easily apparent: it attempts to map hidden fabric without being based on extensive internal inspections. It relies instead on the limited corpus of published work (principally RCHM 1934 and Tonkin 1992), guidance from local experts (with thanks to Duncan James and Dr John Rerrie), together with rapid field visits in search of early fabric, usually timber framing visible in side and rear elevations, beams exposed in the ceilings of shops and passages, and the variety of external clues – like steeply-pitched roofs, irregular wall surfaces and building patterns suggestive of former hall and cross-wing arrangements – that betray the likely presence of early cores behind Georgian frontages. Despite its many deficiencies the map probably offers at least a rough guide to the degree to which particular historical periods are represented in different parts of the town centre and a fairly accurate picture of the extent of historic buildings in relation to the urban extensions of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The conclusions may be summarised as follows, period by period:

Medieval and 16th-century. Buildings and fragments of buildings built before c.1600 occur sporadically along High Street, Duke Street and at the upper end of Bridge Street. The densest concentration is on either side of Duke Street where surviving halls with cross-wings have been identified (with thanks to Duncan James) and timber framing has more often been left exposed and not refronted than is the case in the High Street.



Fig.00 34-38 Duke Street. A medieval hall house with cross-wings at each end and a further timber-framed extension (foreground) probably of the 17th century

This suggests that the concentration of timber frames here is a product of the relative poverty of the street in the 18th and 19th centuries. On the north side of the High Street the only medieval building so far identified is the hall, first reported by Tonkin in 1992, built with jointed crucks, set back five metres from the street and parallel to it, behind nos. 12 and 13. This is most probably of 15th-century date (pers. comm. Duncan James), but no dendrochronological dates have yet been obtained for it. Its position behind the frontage suggests either that there has been post-medieval encroachment onto a much wider street, or that it belongs to the category of medieval tenement planning in which halls were built behind commercial frontages (the archetype being Tackley's Inn, Oxford). Timber-framing of probable pre-17th-century character is also visible in the side elevation of the frontage block of no.35 High Street. On Bridge Street, pre-17th century timber framing can also be seen in nos. 4 and 5, where Tonkin (1992, 143) reports a surviving medieval roof. It is highly likely that further medieval and 16th-century fabric would be found by detailed interior inspections, particularly in the rear wings of buildings on the south side of the High Street and on the west side of Bridge Street.

17th-century. Building fabric of this date survives extensively along all the town centre main streets, although the degree of re-fronting has been such that it is only occasionally apparent without seeking out rear and side elevations or other limited exposures. There appear to be two particular concentrations: on the north side of the High Street and on the west side of the upper end of Bridge Street, with intermittent survivals to the outer ends of each of the three principal streets, together with further examples along Church Street. It has been tentatively suggested (p.00, above) that the latter was built up later than the three main streets, and it is conceivable that the 17th-century buildings there represent the first-generation building cover: this,

however, is highly speculative, and the possibility that they replaced medieval buildings cannot be discounted without further archaeological evidence. At least one probable 17th-century building is present in the Crooked Well township showing that settlement there too began in this period, or earlier, and the same may also be said of the Headbrook suburb south of the river.

One building of this date deserves particular note: the Talbot Inn, on the east side of Bridge Street on the Bull Ring corner. A very substantial and well-appointed stone and timber-framed two-storey building, the Talbot was probably built early in the century as Lyon House, the residence of the lord of the manor, Philip Holman. On this account two out of the three manorial courts (the Court Leet and Court Baron) were convened there and, in 1654, Holman commissioned the carpenter John Abel to build a market hall (demolished and rebuilt 1820) behind the property. On its north side was a small prison known as the Round House, and the stocks (Parry 1845, 23; Sinclair and Fenn 1995, 6-7).



Fig.00 The Talbot, Bridge Street, south (side) elevation. The house was built as Lyon House for the lord of the manor, Philip Holman, in the early 17th century

Even without intensive survey it is becoming clear that the 17th century left a deep impression on the built form of Kington and that, by the end of the century, it had expanded to an extent scarcely exceeded by c.1800. But, as before, dendro-dates are lacking and, until the local building chronology can be accurately established, it will be difficult to relate the development of town buildings to documented processes or events.

18th-century. As already noted, the 18th century made a substantial impact on the town, particularly on the visible townscape represented by the street

frontage elevations. A recurrent motif, found throughout lower Bridge Street and High Street, was the introduction or addition of pedimented gables with central gable lights, often in the Palladian style. These occur on house after house, particularly on the west side of Lower Bridge Street, though it is not always clear whether the building behind is contemporary, or a much older, re-fronted, structure, as at 11-12 Bridge Street (Lewis 1985). There was a substantial volume of new building, notable examples including the Chained Swan (51-53 High Street) and 37-38 High Street (now Nisa supermarket), the Oxford Arms on Duke Street, and the group of houses on the north side of the Square. For a fuller account, the reader is referred to Tonkin's 'The houses of Kington' (1992).

19th-century. The 19th century too saw a substantial amount of new building and, at least to begin with, the continued re-fronting of earlier structures. A good example of the latter is the (unsuccessful) town hall of 1845 at Lower Cross, its fine neo-classical façade disguising timber-frames behind, exposed during rebuilding after a fire in 2000 (Reeves 2003). New 19th-century buildings occur at intervals throughout the town centre with particular concentrations at the extremities (the outer end of Duke Street, Church Street generally, the eastern approach to Headbrook), probably largely on previously unoccupied sites. Early 19th-century workers' housing is concentrated in the township of Sunset extending east of Duke Street/Victoria Street, and also in the townships of Crooked Well and Broken Banks. A notable group of back-plot houses of this date is to be found in Wislade's Row off the south side of Duke Street, developed behind the timber-framed frontage. The end of the century also saw a significant expansion of the built-up area, to the west along Mill Street and Park Avenue, and to the east along Victoria Street, linking the Sunset township to the old centre.

20th-century. The 20th-century impact on the built environment of Kington can be divided into replacement and infilling on the one hand, and new urban extensions on the other. 20th-century building within the old urban core was quite limited in scope, with a few main-street commercial buildings (notably the present library, the former Radnor Trading Co. offices of 1905 on the Bridge Street/Duke Street corner) and some infilling of back-plot areas by detached houses. In 1920, faced with the need to condemn twenty to thirty sub-standard dwellings, Kington UDC began work on an estate of council housing on open land north of Mill Street, the first twelve 'homes fit for heroes' allocated to tenants in 1921 (Lloyd 1992, 128). This was in effect the precursor of a series of post-war housing estates, mainly concentrated on land north of High Street-Duke Street, by means of which the built-up area of Kington achieved its present extent.

Building materials

As with the presence of buildings of particular periods, attention paid solely to frontage elevations produces a misleading impression of the range of building materials employed in the town. Brick predominates, as might be expected, at the expense of timber framing and masonry but, as before, side- and rear

elevations provide an instant corrective, revealing just a hint of the true extent of timber building (elaborated above) and more than a hint of the ubiquity of local stone construction.

Timber-frame construction certainly predominated in the medieval and early modern town and was still being used structurally, if not decoratively as late as the late 18th century – as the (incorrectly) exposed timber frame on the corner of High Street and Bridge Street demonstrates. Further examples of post-17th century timber framing may be found in passages between shops towards the west end of the High Street (south side) and in the side elevations of premises over the road. A timber-framed agricultural or service building on Sun Lane also appears to be of late 18th- or early 19th-century date.

Stone construction, other than at the church, is difficult to date where architectural features are lacking but may be taken to have been employed in secular contexts, particularly for high-status projects, from at least c.1600. The Lady Hawkins Grammar School of the 1620s, opposite the church, is an early dated example. 19 Crooked Well, an artisan cottage, is a humbler example from the latter end of the century. Local stone rubble – a very hard sandstone – was also widely used for the chimneystacks of timber-framed buildings throughout the 17th century. It is fairly clear that local building stone must have become very easily obtainable in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some sixty-four individual quarry sources have been identified in the valley of the Back Brook alone (pers. comm. Sheila Lewis) and it may be that the construction of the Kington tramway along the bottom of the valley in 1817 made these more accessible than they had previously been. Stone from these sources was certainly used for the construction of the burgage boundaries and lane walls throughout the town, and for outhouses and minor structures well into the 19th century.

Brick construction had become the normal material for polite buildings and for facades by the early 18th century, though, as we have seen, timber framing continued to be used for internal partitions and rendered elevations, and stone rubble remained the first choice for rear and side elevations, as can be seen at no.1 High Street, built as a bank in 1808.

4. Buried archaeological remains and deposits

Four below-ground investigations have taken place in recent years, all as a consequence of construction work and archaeological conditions placed on planning permissions under the provisions of PPG16. All were located in or around Church Street. At the Burton Hotel at the west end of High Street, the natural clay subsoil was found within 0.8m of the current surface; a 19th-century layer was recorded above it but no other strata (SMR 34722, see appendix). At the Swan Hotel on the east side of Church Street, undisturbed natural subsoil occurred at depths of 0.6m to 0.8m below the surface. Some medieval pottery was found, but the dark soils overlying the natural subsoil did not represent *in-situ* occupation deposit (SMR 32855, see appendix). On the

south side of the Square deposits 0.4m to 0.5m deep overlay the natural subsoil and contained 17th to 19th-century pottery; the site was however well away from the main Church Street frontage and there was, again, no evidence of occupation on that actual spot (SMR 22658, see appendix). A little further up the hill, investigation of the former Ambulance Station on the west side of Common Close found no deposits at all, the site having been deeply terraced into the gradient (SMR 32266).

No other reports of archaeological deposits, or ground conditions more generally, are known to have been recorded in the town centre. It is not therefore possible to predict variations in the depth or character of any archaeological deposits underlying the town – except in the most general sense, based on the experience of other towns with a similar history and topography. The whole of the historic core of (New) Kington lies on a gentle gradient descending southwards to the Arrow. The gradient is steepest on the north side of High Street and Duke Street, but flattens out on the south side: from this fact alone it is possible to predict that any archaeological deposits will be likely to have accumulated more deeply, and be better preserved (being less subject to being cut into by terracing), on the south side. An impression of the likely depth and character of any deposits in this area may however be gained from excavations at, for example, New Radnor. Here, on a flat site on the very edge of the occupied area, three phases of occupation spanning the late 12th to the late 15th century were compressed into a very shallow depth of deposit (well under a metre). Timber-framed buildings that had been rebuilt several times were represented in the ground by post-holes, stake-holes, clay-bonded stone footings and hearths; no floors survived (XXXX 1998). Any medieval deposits in Kington may be of this kind, with evidence of several centuries intermingled within a shallow depth of stratigraphy. The remains of individual medieval houses, particularly of the later medieval period, could, however, be more substantial. Excavations on the site of the former Old Corner House in Weobley encountered the back wall of a substantial, probably cellared, house of 13th-14th-century date with later modifications, built with very solid stone footings supporting a timber frame (Priestly 2007). The big difference between Kington on the one hand and New Radnor, or Kilpeck or parts of Weobley on the other, is of course that the former remained occupied, and urban. Shallow medieval deposits may therefore be overlain by later deposits, particularly accumulations of garden soil (sometimes quite deep) in the back-plot areas, and demolition and building debris closer to the built-up frontages.

The corollary of continued occupation is, however, continued damage. This is particularly problematic in small towns, where shallow deposits are vulnerable to, and may be completely destroyed by, the insertion and replacement of buried services, underpinning of buildings, and cellarage. The latter was examined by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, who mapped the extent of cellarage in Kington based on external evidence (traps, cellar lights etc). Their conclusions were that a majority, but not all, buildings on High Street are cellared, with a slightly lower proportion of the buildings on Bridge Street and relatively few on Duke Street being cellared (Buteux 1996, map 6).

In certain circumstances, particularly in wetland situations and on the margins of watercourses, archaeological deposits may be substantially deeper, even in relatively small towns. On the former Leominster Poultry Packers site between Bridge Street and Mill Street in Leominster, adjoining a watercourse, a sequence of deposits commencing in the late 12th century and continuing into the present was 3.3m deep (SMR 30982: Crooks 1999).

Similar conditions could apply in Kington at the lower end of Bridge Street, particularly if there has been reclamation activity or if there has been any diversion and infilling of watercourses. The only documentary evidence that may relate to such local ground conditions is frustratingly ambiguous in its locational detail. Parry reported that, in the earlier 18th century, a stream entered Church Street from the river at Hergest Mill 'and running through the street, it entered a mud pool on the west side of the street near Arrow-bridge'. The 'soil or compost' from this pool was from time to time claimed by the owner of Hergest Mill, and this was the subject of a lawsuit in 1740 (Parry 1845, 21). The description of the watercourse taken off the Arrow near Hergest Mill must surely apply to the leat driving the watermill on Mill Lane, now part of the bus depot. There is however no known evidence of its continuation westwards, even as far as Church Street, let alone Bridge Street. The issue needs further investigation, though the description of the pool adjacent to the Arrow Bridge is quite clear, and does imply that the riverside margin here was low-lying and subject to refuse disposal activities, factors which would favour the accumulation of archaeological deposits, quite possibly with waterlogging of the lowest strata, providing good conditions for the preservation of organic materials.



Fig.00 The bottom of Bridge Street, the most likely area of Kington for deep well-preserved archaeological deposits

Archaeological observations of former structures known from historical sources have been recorded for two locations. The more recent is the observation of a substantial well (still open, not backfilled) beneath the former Radnor Trading Company Office on the corner of Duke Street and Bridge Street during the recent restoration of the building, now the Library. This was identified as having been associated with the Hide Market, a market hall that stood on the site until 1768 having been described as 'old' in 1686 (Parry 1845, 41; and pers. comm. Dr J Rerrie). Another of Kington's former public wells was last seen in 1979. This was the well at Upper Cross (at the bottom of Church Street) that had supplied a public pump nearby. The pump had been moved twenty feet to the west of the well in 1886 following the erection of the market hall the previous year, and, with its protective bollards, was moved again in 1954. It was last inspected for public health purposes in 1934 (Lloyd 1979).

Another observation may well relate to a completely unrecorded archaeological site. Skeletons have been reported as having been found on the south side of the Arrow, on the east side of the bridge in the vicinity of no.1 Headbrook. If correct, this observation may relate to the existence of a medieval hospital, the most likely institution to have occupied such a roadside, transpontine site and to have no surviving documentation (pers. comm. Dr J. Rerrie). A similar situation is also to be found at Ross-on-Wye, where an unconfirmed report from the 1940s described the discovery of skeletons in the Brampton Street area, on the main approach road to the town beyond the Rudhall Brook (Baker 2006).

Nothing is known of ground conditions at the monuments of Old Kington. Despite post-medieval burials within it, the Church of St Mary must inevitably be regarded as an archaeological site of great potential value. It is probable that evidence of the 11th or 12th-century church lies beneath the present nave; so too may evidence of any preceding structures. The archaeological character of the churchyard is also unknown, at least by direct observation. However, Parry's notes record that the churchyard was full and had become a scandal and health hazard by 1844-5, and was closed finally in 1862. The year before, it was landscaped, drained, newly-walled, 'levelled' and paths laid (Southwood 1984, 10-11). The archaeological implications are therefore fairly clear: dense, intercutting post-medieval burials, no long-term deposit accumulations behind the present boundary retaining walls (also a conclusion drawn from observation by the writer of a localised collapse in 2007), and extensive mid-19th-century disturbance. The castle, similarly, is unexcavated and, except for the motte, doubts remain as to the existence or whereabouts of its component features.

5. The future of Kington's Past

Having described, at least in outline, the principal aspects of the heritage, the physical historic resource, of Kington, a number of questions arise. The first is, is it important – is the history and archaeology of Kington of any

consequence beyond Kington or is it solely of local concern? This issue is explored first, but almost immediately a number of unsolved problems are encountered, most of which have already been raised in the preceding sections. These are therefore brought together and expressed as an agenda for future archaeological-historical research. This is however but one aspect of the future of Kington's past. Two others need to be addressed. The first is the management, the curation and protection, of the historic environment; the second is its exploitation: what use is currently made of it, could more use be made of it? Investigation, protection and exploitation together form a tripartite strategy for the future.

The significance of Kington and its archaeology

The archaeology (again, broadly defined) of Kington is self-evidently of importance to Kington as a unique and irreplaceable source of evidence for the character of the town in its earliest centuries. But it is certainly of much wider interest and is potentially of at least regional significance. This arises first from the very clear physical evidence of its origin as a planned, planted town – one whose single-phase plan survives remarkably intact. Further work needs to be done on the town plan (see below) and its design, but Kington may nevertheless be taken as an exceptionally good example of a small seigneurial borough of the kind that was being planted along the Welsh border between the late 11th and late 13th centuries. It has yet to be demonstrated that Kington possesses well-preserved buried archaeological deposits, but the probability is that it does, at least in the lower part of Bridge Street. Potentially, Kington could be a key location – could certainly contain key sites – for exploring the nature of early post-Conquest urbanism in the Marches. In this context the leading question must be, how urban was urban? Were Kington, or Huntington next door, founded with the hope of adding urban rents and market tolls to the seigneurial portfolio, or were they founded as glorified defended villages, the free but nevertheless principally agricultural tenants being offered a degree of security by the castles at each place? Town-founding as an activity was taking place throughout Herefordshire in the 12th and 13th centuries, but it is not presently possible to comment from archaeological sources on any differences in character between, say, the episcopal town plantations established outside the ancient minsters in the eastern lowlands (for example Ledbury, Ross), and the smaller and more precarious castle boroughs that form such a feature of the western frontier in this period. It may well be that border boroughs such as Kington have more in common with their counterparts in Wales than they do with those in the eastern lowlands. Certainly, a significant minority of Welsh towns around 1300 (20 out of c.77) contained fewer than 30 tenants while rather more 30 towns contained between 30 and 100 tenants. Nevertheless, amongst Kington's nearest rivals over the border, Knighton, founded in the 1240s, had 71 taxpayers by c.1300 and New Radnor, another foundation of the 1240s, had 97 burgesses in 1301 rising to 189 by 1304 (Soulsby 1983, 22-3). Uncertainty as to the true character of Kington is not confined to the centuries before c.1300, it is equally the case for the later medieval centuries when new urban

foundations had long ceased and towns large and small were either stagnating or, at worst, actually shrinking.

Understanding the Past: an agenda for further archaeological research

It will be now be clearly apparent that archaeological knowledge of pre-modern Kington is still in its infancy: a few archaeological investigations have taken place but none encountered significant archaeological remains and all were concentrated in one part of town. In terms of historic buildings, some of the earliest survivors have been identified, though little detailed analysis has so far taken place and more undoubtedly remain to be found. There is, in short, considerable potential for the exploration of both the below-ground and the above-ground archaeology, and it is possible to suggest a number research priorities for each. While some of the priorities listed below will only be advanced by excavation, usually by professional contractors operating within the development process, there are also serious gaps in knowledge that require addressing via non-invasive techniques, particularly building survey, field survey and geophysics. The issues being investigated and the methods for doing so are at least as accessible to community-based organisations as they are to the commercial sector, but would nevertheless contribute directly to the informed conservation and management of the historic resource. In this respect Kington is fortunate in its existing heritage groups – the Kington Historical Society, active since the late 1970s, and – with a much more specialised remit – the Kington Burgage and Boundary Walls working party of the Town Council.

RP1 The first church

The inhabitants of 12th-century Kington were fairly certainly able to worship in a stone church. Nothing is known of it (or its foundation) other than that the present chancel and the free-standing belfry tower were built as adjuncts to it, and that it was a stone building, a few remnants of which are recognisable re-used in later fabric. From the fact that its chancel was replaced within a century and its nave replaced within two, it is tempting to conclude that it must have been architecturally undistinguished. However, if it had been built while Kington was at the head of the Honour, it would not be surprising to find some reflection of this in terms of its size, decoration and materials; rapid replacement of its fabric could have been related to the rapid growth of an urban population. Excavation or geophysical survey below the present nave should be able to determine its size and plan; excavation, or any works leading to the exposure of materials embedded in the standing fabric, might also be likely to yield further architectural fragments that would give some clue to the character of the church building at this time.

Key site: St Mary's Church, interior

RP2 The first borough

The date, character and extent of 'Old Kington' are currently a complete mystery; even its location is in some doubt, though the vicinity of the present housing to the south of and north-west of the church (Church Road and the Wych) probably represent the most likely areas. Former occupation may be locatable via geophysical prospecting and test pitting. Excavation might in the future be able to shed light on activities/occupations, house-types and aspects of contemporary material culture, all of which are currently completely obscure.

Key sites: land between nos. 11 and 12, and 12 and 13 Church Road; plot between nos. 1-5/6 and no. 7 the Wych

RP3 The castle

While the site of the castle is securely identifiable virtually every detail of it is obscure. Currently only the motte can be recognised and, while a castle consisting solely of a motte and whatever was on top of it, with no baileys or other outworks, is not unparalleled, this very basic form does not appear consistent with the role of Kington, however short lived, as the head or *caput* of the Honour. Geophysical survey around the base of the motte should be able to determine the presence of infilled ditches; geophysical survey on the motte may be able to detect buried structures and test the hypothesis that there was at least one tower projecting from the north side: any information to confirm that masonry structures were present, as has been suggested, would be an important addition to our understanding of the monument.

Key site: Castle Hill and environs

RP4 The planning and growth of New Kington

The town plan of New Kington has been discussed at some length, for the good reason that it represents an exceptionally fine example of a medieval planned, planted town. This much is apparent just from a cursory glance at the symmetrical and rectilinear elements of the plan, but there is a factor that is missing from the characterisation. This is the precise metrology – or lack of it – employed by the town's original planner. The use of regular measurements in the design of new towns and extensions is well known, the Bishop of Worcester three-and-a-half perch plots at Stratford being perhaps the most familiar in the region. Were the burgages at Kington similarly regulated? The answer to this question will only be derived from direct measurement of actual plot frontages and lengths, a process that is already underway, but not yet completed.

Key site: New Kington (Kington town centre)

RP5 The internal character of Kington

While RP4 (above) addresses the question of the design of the new town, it does not address the questions of who lived there or what they did. These fundamental questions can be asked of any medieval planted town, but in Kington assume an extra importance given the – so far very limited – documentary evidence for a substantially agricultural population in the late 13th century. The materials with which to explore these issues will only be derived from controlled archaeological excavation of town-centre sites: examining houses on the frontages and evidence for production processes and their waste products from disposal zones to the rear.

Key sites: Town centre uncellared frontages; town centre back-plot areas

RP6 Lower Bridge Street

Lower Bridge Street has been singled out here because of the strong possibility that archaeological deposits and sequences are, in general, likely to be better preserved in this area than elsewhere: at best, the lower-lying ground may contain waterlogged or anaerobic deposits containing preserved organic artefacts and/or structures and a wealth of data bearing on contemporary life, diet and environment. This part of the street appears to have been built up by c.1600 (from the former presence there of the Old House, also known as the Porch House, moved in the 1930s). It may, however, have been an extension of the original plan (p.00), possibly achieved by reclamation, either of floodplain or of one or more former channels.

Key sites: Uncellared or lightly-developed plots in the southern half of Bridge Street; in particular, the former garage (and original site of the Porch House), 20 Bridge Street.

RP7 Kington comparative

It is too easily forgotten that the economic fortunes of Kington were not necessarily solely an internal function but were intimately bound up with those of settlements that were, to an extent, competitors, either for trade directly or for administrative functions that might then generate trade or craft production. Huntington, a failed planted borough lies only 5.5km to the south-west, Lyonshall, a substantial village that underwent an extended period of contraction, is closer still, 3km to the east. The former boroughs of Pembridge, Presteigne and New Radnor, all lie within a 10km radius of Kington with Weobley only slightly further. Huntington in particular was for a while part of a single manor with Kington and the two places had burgesses and other tenants in common. Arguably, the economic history of Kington will never be fully unravelled until comparisons can be made with these other places and their inter-relationships more fully understood.

Key sites: Huntington and Lyonshall deserted settlements

RP8 The survival of early buildings

It is clear that Kington contains a substantial number of early (pre-1700) buildings (see fig.00), but it is equally clear that it is likely to contain more than is currently appreciated. Continued inspection of building interiors, whether opportunistic or undertaken as part of a concerted project, will be bound to lead to further discoveries, perhaps as impressive as the cruck hall behind 12-13 High Street (Tonkin 1991). It may be too optimistic to claim that there may, one day, be a total understanding of the composition of the built environment as, even if building remains are identified and mapped, this is still a step short of understanding their form, their date or their associations. The question of date is particularly important, and is examined next.

Key sites: New Kington (the town centre) generally, the south side of High Street and the west side of Bridge Street in particular.

RP9 The late medieval – early modern transition

Building construction, or its absence, can in general be regarded as a fairly reliable indicator of economic activity, or of a lack of it. And, as dendrochronological dating and other studies of historic town housing proceed, it is becoming clearer that there were marked regional differences in urban economic trajectories between c.1400 and c.1700. Work in settlements such as Pembridge is now beginning to address this issue, but dendrochronology in Kington itself is the only way of directly addressing the problem there, or (at a local level) of reconciling particular structures with particular, named, owner-builders. Other issues arise: are there really no pre-15th-century buildings surviving in the town and, if not, why not?

Key sites: 12-13 High Street; all pre-1700 buildings shown on fig.00; individual buildings not yet identified

RP10 Pre-modern documentation

The potential for further research using pre-modern documentary resources is uncertain. Paul Stamper, in his contribution to the *CMHTS* report, expressed the opinion that 'Kington is not well documented and there appear to be very few pre-Reformation records relating to the town' (Stamper, in Buteux 1996, 8). This may be a slightly gloomier assessment than is actually warranted as, as Parry (1845) showed, there are at least some feudal *inquisitions post mortem* that give details of the manor and its rent-paying non-customary tenants. The question of the extent and scope of unpublished pre-modern documentation held in local and national archives is therefore worth further investigation.

Managing the Past

Three mechanisms are currently in place for the protection of the historic environment. Below-ground archaeological deposits are not protected as such, but PPG 16 (Planning & Policy Guidance Note 16) allows the local planning authority to treat archaeology as a material consideration in the planning process. Prospective developers of sites within the historic core will usually be required to demonstrate the impact of their development on the archaeology and to take steps to mitigate it. In practice this means that developments that require planning permission will usually be preceded by an archaeological field evaluation to determine whether or not archaeology is present on the site and, if so, how the development might proceed without the loss of archaeological evidence – either by preserving it in situ or excavating and recording it prior to the development.

The built environment and its historic buildings are protected by two means. The first is via its status as a Conservation Area (see fig.00), with controls on the demolition, alteration and erection of buildings; the second is via the Listing process, which protects individual buildings. Richard Morriss's assessment of the current List, dating from the 1970s, was that 'although the entries are brief the coverage is comprehensive, observant and generally accurate' (Morriss, in Buteux 1996, 9).

No substantial changes are recommended for any of these regimes. A case can however be made for small-scale extensions to the Conservation Area to embrace the satellite townships of Crooked Well and Broken Banks, the former on account of its distinctive buildings, the latter on account of the setting of Castle Hill. No outstanding lacunae have been noted in the coverage of town-centre buildings by Listing, though it is probable that further investigation of building interiors will reveal more survivals of early fabric within existing Listed buildings. Attention is however drawn to the archaeological potential of the historic buildings stock, particularly uncellared premises, in terms of floors and structural sequences under and within standing buildings. These may be exceptionally vulnerable to fairly mundane building projects, such as the replacement and damp-proofing of solid floors. Similarly, even small-scale works to the superstructures of Listed buildings may entail the temporary exposure and/or replacement of historic fabric, exposures that should ideally be recorded as an integral part of the archaeological resource.

Using the Past – a community asset

Kington is fortunate in possessing an active historical community, represented by the Historical Society and by the Burgage Walls project. Kington Museum was opened in 1986 and in 1999 received a Gulbenkian Award. Well sited, adjacent to the principal town-centre car-park, it and its tearoom do steady business from Easter to the autumn, and it serves as a starting point for historically-themed walks guided by a supporting booklet and on-site interpretation plaques (Reeves 2003). Further interest in heritage issues is

enabled by the published output of the Historical Society and its members, and the society maintains a reading room within the Kington Library. Arguably, everything that should be done locally to promote, maintain and encourage interest in heritage issues is being done. A question mark does perhaps remain over external marketing. The principal delight of Kington is its timeless quality – a town forgotten by progress, at least in the sense of national chains and corporate shop-fronts and the appropriation by urban fringe-belt superstores of much of the traditional retail sector. On early closing days (Wednesday afternoons), the quacking of a duck, if not the squeak of a pump handle, could perhaps even now be heard throughout the town (see p.00). Its 'unspoilt' character appears to be largely taken for granted, and the town's external profile seems principally to be that of a centre for walkers exploring the rural hinterland and the Offa's Dyke Path. Aggressive external marketing could be counterproductive, but it may at least be wondered if the most successful balance, between all-out regeneration and gentrification on the one hand, and comfortable obscurity on the other, has yet to be struck.

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7. Gazetteer of archaeological investigations

The following small-scale archaeological investigations have taken place in Kington in recent years. All are concentrated in the western part of New Kington, around the southern part of Church Street. None encountered archaeological deposits of any great significance though cumulatively they provide some insight into ground conditions likely to be encountered in that part of town.

SMR 22658

SO 2958 5674

The Old Mill, The Square, 1995

Salvage recording

HWCC

Foundation trenches for new buildings were observed; these were 0.9m to 1.1m deep, except for a single trench at the extreme north end of the site taken down to 3m. The natural subsoil was found to be a light yellow-brown silty clay with some siltstone fragments, overlying gravel deposits at greater depth (2m below ground level). This undisturbed natural was overlain by a yellow-brown silty subsoil 0.4m to 0.5m deep which included pottery, pebbles and some charcoal and mortar flecking. All the pottery recovered from the site (40 sherds) was of 17th- to 19th-century date. It was not determined whether the absence of medieval finds or structures was because the ground level had been reduced in the post-medieval period or because the investigation was confined well behind the occupied frontage (Topping 1995).

SMR 32855

SO 2955 5666

The Swan Hotel, Church Street, 1999

Watching-brief

Marches Archaeology

Construction of a house and garage was monitored. Undisturbed natural subsoil consisted of light brown stony clay soil becoming increasingly stony with depth. This was overlain by a disturbed clayey soil 0.1m to 0.2m deep. In some areas this was in turn overlain by a darker soil up to 0.4m thick, and the whole site was covered by a layer of dark humic topsoil 0.1m to 0.5m deep. Pottery recovered included some medieval wares, found alongside 18th/19th-century material. The excavator considered that this had come from waste disposal activity rather than from occupation of the site and that the poor underlying soils did not represent prior cultivation. The undisturbed natural was found at depths between 0.6m and 0.8m (Stone 1999).

SMR 34722

SO 2959 5658

The Burton Hotel, 2001

Marches Archaeology

Foundation and service trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8m. A yellow-brown stony clayey soil seen in the base of the southernmost trenches was identified as undisturbed natural subsoil. Overlying this was a similar but less stony soil that was also identified as of natural origin and this was observed in the trenches to the west and east. In the NW part of the site this was overlain by a 19th-century layer with mortar, oyster shell, coal and brick diminishing in thickness to the south. A stone-lined culvert running NE-SW was probably of 19th-century date as was a brick foundation, bonded to it, in the west section. A 19th-century rubbish pit containing vessel glass and clay pipe fragments was also recorded (Wainwright 2001).

SMR 32266

SO 2951 5675

Old Ambulance Station, Common Close, 2002

Watching-brief

Marches Archaeology

Three test-trenches to inspect the foundations of the former St John's Ambulance HQ were recorded prior to rebuilding off the old footings. The existing building had been deeply terraced into the gradient and in all three trenches the natural gravel subsoil appeared immediately below the modern concrete floors. No artefacts were recovered (Kenney 2002).

Fig.00 The historic landscape of Kington, based on the first edition Ordnance Survey plan of 1880

Fig.00 Speculative reconstruction of the original town plan of New Kington