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Former Salem Chapel
 Off Nursery Gardens
 Thirsk
 North Yorkshire
 SE 43150 82065

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Authorised by

Date:.....

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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Non-Technical Summary

An Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. on the site of the former Salem Chapel, off Nursery Gardens, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, during September 2006 and January 2007. The work involved monitoring groundworks associated with the erection of a block of new residential properties.

No archaeological features or finds were encountered during the Watching Brief.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 An Archaeological Watching Brief was conducted by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. on the site of the former Salem Chapel, off Nursery Gardens, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, on the on the 14th September 2006 and from the 8th to 12th January 2007. The work was undertaken in order to fulfil a condition attached to a Planning Application Consent and involved monitoring groundworks associated with the erection of a block of residential properties.
- 1.3 All work was funded by MacCleary Developments Ltd.
- 1.4 All maps within this report have been produced from the Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright, Licence No. AL 50453A.
- 1.5 The project was assigned the MAP site code 08.02.07.

2. Site Description

- 2.1 The site lies within the town of Thirsk, to the west of the Cod Beck, at SE 43150 82065 (Figs. 1 and 2). It is bounded to the North by Thirsk Public Library, to the east by the Cod Beck, the south by residential properties and the west by Nursery Gardens.
- 2.2 The site lies on soils of the Newport 1 Association, which are characterized by deep well-drained sandy and coarse loamy soils over glaciofluvial drift (Mackney 1984).
- 2.3 The site was formerly occupied by Salem Chapel. This building was demolished in 1991, after which time the development site was left as derelict land. At the time of the Watching Brief, the site consisted of open land that was fringed to the east by trees and bushes (Pl. 1).

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

- 3.1 The name Thirsk derives from the Old Swedish *Thraesk*, meaning lake or fen (Ekwall 1974). The town is first mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Tresche*. There were two manors at the time of Domesday, one held by the king and the other by Hugh FitzBaldrick (Williams & Martin 2003). The twin manors are reflected in the growth of the town, which developed as Old Thirsk, to the east of the River Codbeck, and New Thirsk, to the west of the river.
- 3.2 Roger de Mowbray's charter of foundation of the Priory of Newburgh suggests that a borough had been founded at Old Thirsk by 1145 AD (Bulmer 1990). A market was established on St James' Green, to the east of the current development, but it is thought that the establishment of Thirsk Castle on the opposite side of Cod Beck stimulated the development of New Thirsk, the growing economic importance of which was reflected in change of focus of the market to its present location in Market Place.
- 3.3 Salem Chapel was constructed in 1850, serving a Nonconformist religious community with its roots in Wesleyan Methodism. "*Salem*" is a common epithet for chapels

established in the mid 19th century, although the reasons and significance of this are unclear. The chapel ceased to be used for worship in 1961.

- 3.4 Salem Chapel became the subject of controversy during 1987, when a planning application was put forward that proposed the demolition of the building as part of the development of a supermarket on Finkle Street. The plans met with considerable local opposition and became the subject of a public inquiry, during the course of which the chapel was destroyed by fire. The derelict remains of the structure were finally demolished in 1991.
- 3.5 The 1796 Estate Map of Thirsk (Fig. 3) shows the site as open land, forming part of a field bordering Cod Beck. The 1843 Tithe Map of Thirsk (Fig. 4) shows the site as part of an open field marked "97". There is a new boundary shown to the north of the site, and the neighbouring plot to the north, marked "98" contains a newly-built building. To the west of the site, the open field shown on the 1793 map now contains a number of small buildings and a series of paths, suggesting that it has been laid out as gardens.
- 3.6 The 1856 First Edition Ordnance Survey map of Thirsk (Fig. 5) shows a building marked "*Salem Chapel, Independent*", with the building on the plot to the north of the site marked as "*school*". Further buildings are also shown in the field to the west.
- 3.7 The 1912 Ordnance Survey map of Thirsk (Fig. 6) shows the chapel as "*Salem Chapel, congl.*". The field to the west of the site is marked as "*Nursery*", with both orchards and greenhouses marked.

4. Methodology

- 4.1 The monitored groundworks consisted in the first instance of the drilling of six test boreholes. These were undertaken by a mini percussion borer rig. Following completion of the borehole survey, the footprint of the proposed new building was excavated by a back-acting mechanical excavator that was fitted with a toothless bucket. All excavations were undertaken under full archaeological supervision.

- 4.2 All work was carried out in line with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct (IFA 1998). All archaeological deposits were recorded according to correct principles of stratigraphic excavation on MAP's pro forma context sheets, which are compatible with the MoLAS recording system.
- 4.3 Archaeological deposits and features were recorded in section and plan on drawing film.
- 4.4 A photographic record was made of all the archaeological features encountered during the Watching Brief, using a digital camera (Appendix 3).
- 4.5 All artefacts were retained for specialist analysis. Finds were processed in accordance with English Heritage Guidelines (EH 1995). All finds were cleaned, identified, assessed, spot dated (where possible), marked (where appropriate), and properly packed and stored according to national guidelines.

5. Results (Fig. 7)

5.1 Borehole Survey (Pls. 2 and 3)

5.1.2 The boreholes revealed a sequence of deposits, the earliest of which were deposits of naturally-formed sandy clay (context 1001). These were situated at a mean depth of 1m below existing ground level. Deposit 1001 was sealed by a naturally-formed silty sand subsoil (context 1002). Outside the footprint of the former chapel, Deposit 1002 was sealed by a 0.3m deep deposit of humic, loamy topsoil (context 1003), whilst, within the footprint of the building, it was sealed by a 0.30m deep sandy silt demolition deposit that contained fragments of brick (context 1004).

5.1.2 During the borehole survey the opportunity was taken for a walk-over investigation of the site, focussing particularly on the south-eastern corner of the site and the eastern margin of the site bounding the Cod Beck. This area lay outside the footprint of the chapel building and formed the chapel burial ground. Under the proposed

development scheme, the majority of this area is to be retained and maintained by Thirsk Council as Community Open Space. A survey undertaken on behalf of the developers had already located a series of five funerary monuments and their associated graves. The site walk-over identified a further three graves which had evidently been obscured by vegetation at the time of this survey (Fig. 7). Two of these were double-grave plots and were situated towards the southern boundary of the site. Both double-graves were delineated by stone kerbs, each of which covered an area of 1.80m x 2.60m. Both graves had the remains of headstone bases at their western ends. The third grave was situated in the north-eastern part of the site and measured 1.20m x 2.40m. The grave was again delineated by kerbstones, but was almost totally obscured by a covering of ground ivy.

- 5.1.3 A discussion with the developer ascertained that the single grave lay within the area scheduled for preservation, whilst the two double-graves lay outside the footprint of the proposed new building and thus could also be preserved in situ.

5.2 Foundation Excavations

- 5.2.1 The Foundation excavations involved the removal of topsoil and subsoils to a maximum depth of 1.0mm over a 22.21m x 24.20m area of the site situated along the Nursery gardens frontage. This area marked the footprint of the proposed new building.
- 5.2.2 In accordance with the planning application, the ground reduction over the area of the new building was largely confined within the footprint of the demolished chapel. Indeed, the outline of the chapel could clearly be seen in the form of a circuit of partially-demolished walls, visible at the northern, eastern and western limits of the excavation area (Pl. 4).
- 5.2.3 Excavations revealed naturally-formed sandy clay at the surface level of the reduced area (context 1001, Pls. 5 and 6). Deposit 1001 was sealed by silty sand subsoil (context 1002). Within the footprint of the building, Deposit 1002 was sealed by a mixed deposit of sandy silt and building rubble (context 1004), whilst beyond the

footprint, Subsoil Deposit 1002 was sealed by a modern deposit of humic silty topsoil (context 1003, Pl. 7).

- 5.2.4 With the exception of wall foundations and drainage associated with the demolished building, no archaeological features were encountered during the ground reduction. Particular care was taken when excavating close to the two double graves identified in the south-eastern part of the site during the borehole survey (Pl. 8). Immediately to the west of these burials, the remains of a partially-destroyed brick structure proved to be the site of the chapel urinals, rather than a further funerary monument.
- 5.2.5 No human remains were encountered or disturbed during the groundworks.
- 5.2.6 During the course of the Watching Brief, two large gravestones, dated 1900 and 1906, were recovered from Deposit 2002. It is likely that these stones were inadvertently damaged during the initial demolition of the chapel remains in 1991. The stones were retained on site and were laid horizontally on the two unmarked graves.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 No archaeological features were encountered during the borehole and foundation excavations, reflecting the fact that the site appears to have been utilised as pastoral or agricultural land on the margins of the town, before becoming the site of Salem Chapel in the mid 19th century.
- 6.2 All the graves visible on the site were of 19th century or later date. There was no evidence for an earlier tradition of burial preceding the establishment of the chapel.
- 6.3 Due to the full co-operation of the developer and contractors, no burials or human remains were disturbed during the monitored groundworks.

7. **Bibliography**

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Mackney, D. 1984 Soils and Their Uses in Northern England.

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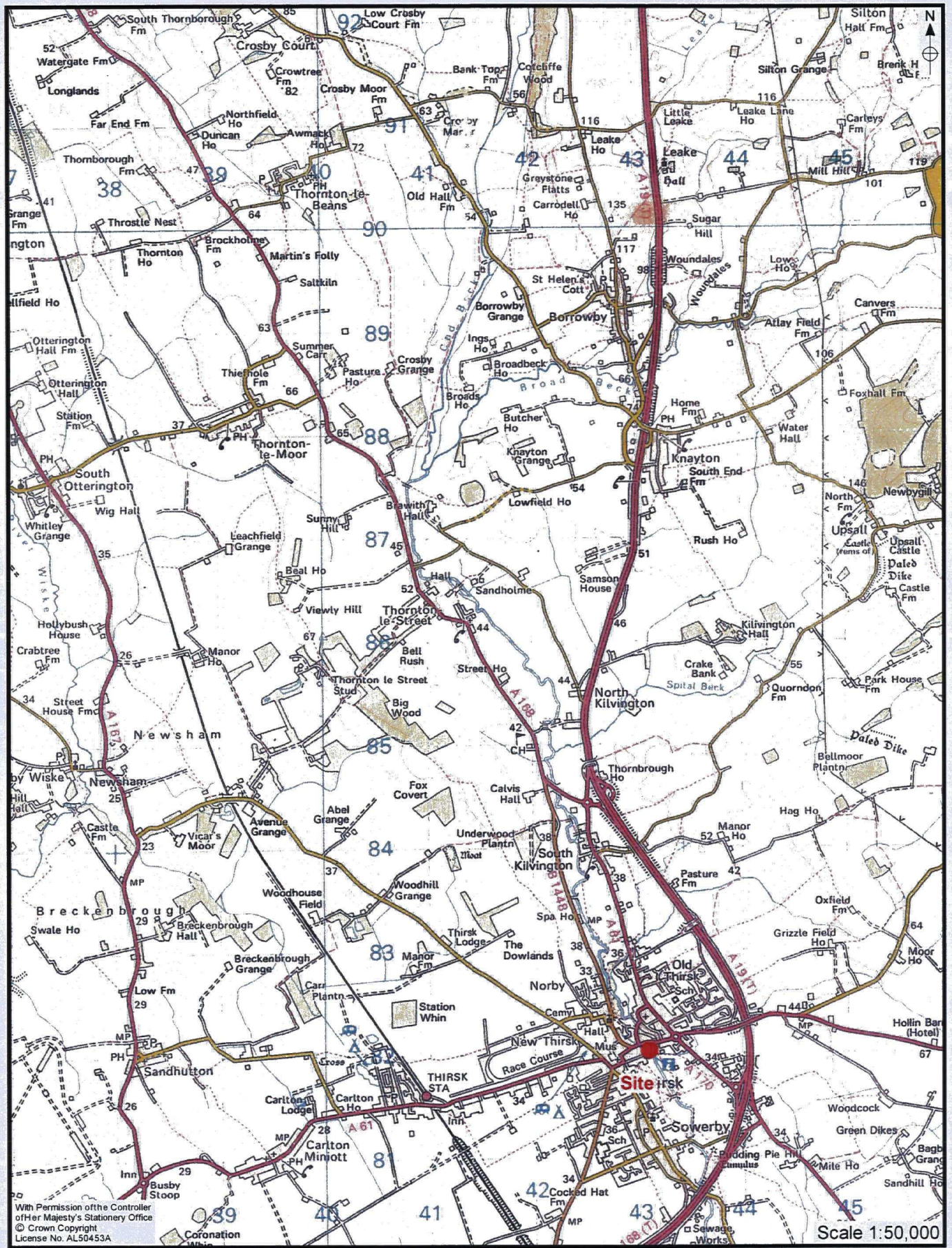


Figure 1. Site Location

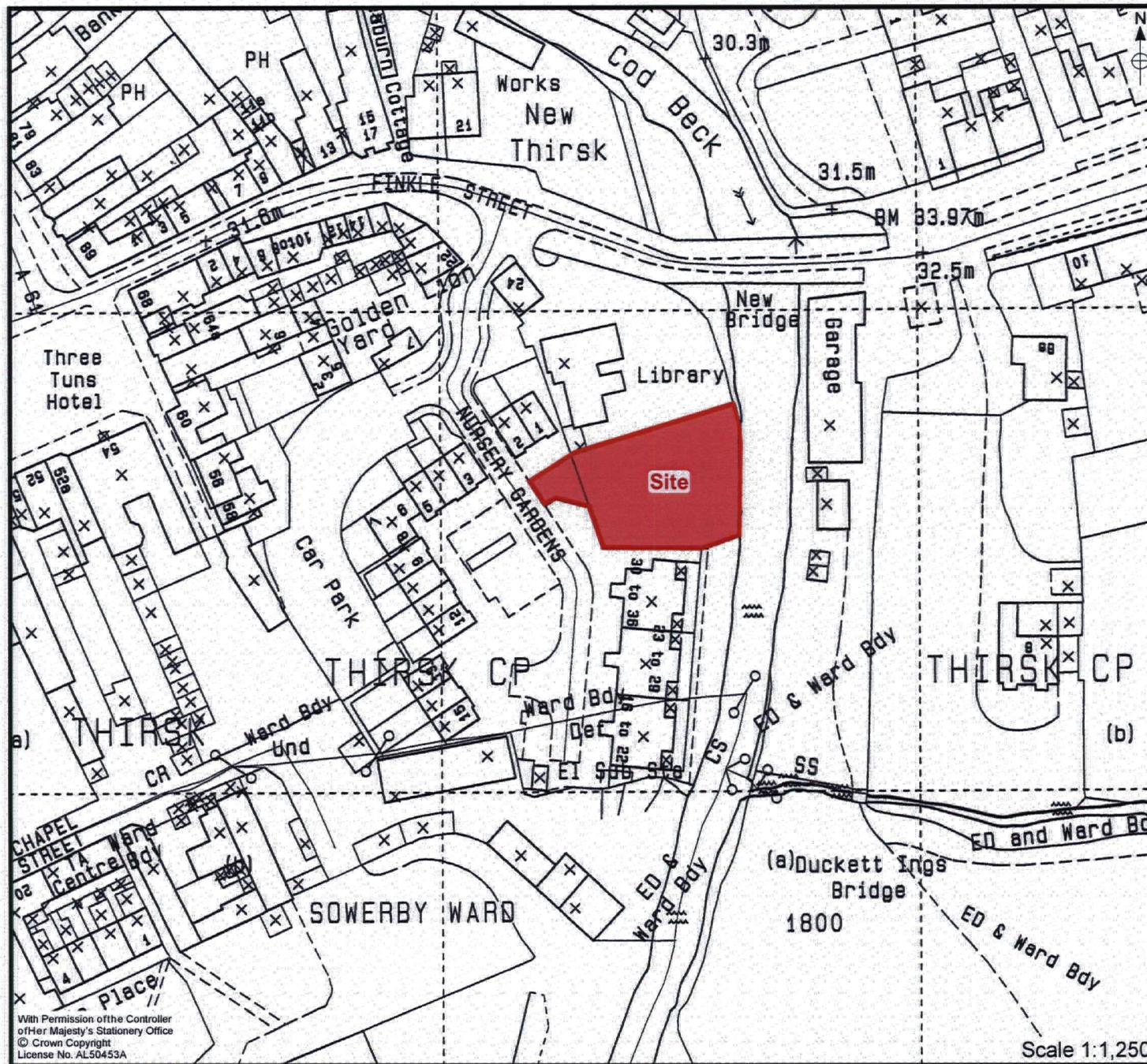


Figure 2. Area of Development



Figure 3. Extract from the 1796 Estate Map of Thirsk



Figure 4. Extract from the 1843 Tithe Map of Thirsk



Figure 5. Extract from the 1856 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map

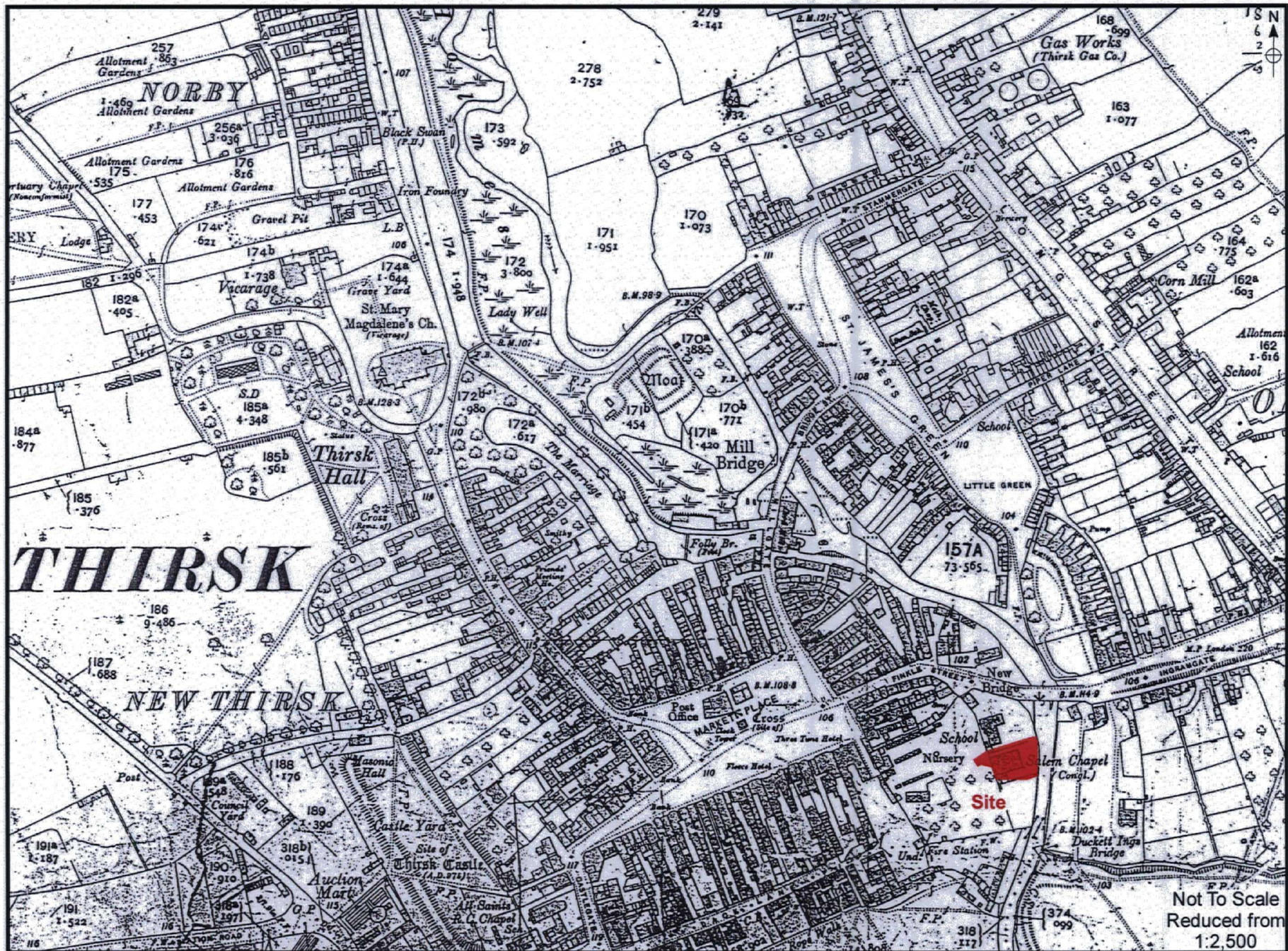


Figure 6. Extract from the 1912 Edition Ordnance Survey Map 15



Figure 7. Area of Watching Brief