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MASHAM '96

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

FOR

NORTHERN ELECTRIC

ALISON CLARKE

NOVEMBER 1998

↓ Kenn Cole - fieldwork

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT MASHAM, NORTH YORKSHIRE, FOR NORTHERN ELECTRIC

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Northern Electric carried out a programme of work to underground overhead electricity cables in the centre of the market town of Masham. The town has previously produced evidence of archaeological deposits, including early medieval human burials from the Little Market Place and Dixon Keld areas. As the Northern Electric works involved ground disturbance in areas with a high likelihood of survival of archaeological deposits, an archaeologist was required to be present during all ground disturbance work.

The work took the form of a number of hand-dug trial holes, several hand-dug road crossing trenches, and several machine cut trenches around the Market Place, on Silver Street, Chapman Lane and Millgate. All of these were archaeologically recorded.

SILVER STREET

Two trial holes and eight service trenches were excavated in Silver Street. TH 15, in the central part of Silver Street, revealed a layer of cobbles at a depth of 42cm, below a thin layer of lime mortar. ST 6, also in the central area of Silver Street, contained sandstone wall foundations at its eastern end. These were aligned parallel to the kerb, and consisted of two courses of roughly dressed sandstone blocks, mortared and bedded onto cobble foundations. A possible buried garden soil was close to the foundations. As the existing buildings on the east side of Silver Street adjacent to ST 6 were constructed in 1934, these buried features indicate that the course of Silver Street was previously further west than at present, and probably considerably narrower.

A little further south, ST 7 contained a cobble surface at a depth of 96cm below the present surface, and a layer of black silt at the same level. The depth of the cobbles is greater than those encountered elsewhere, and is considerably lower than the threshold levels of adjacent eighteenth century buildings. It would seem therefore that it represents a much earlier ground level, or is a cellar floor of a building previously intruding into the west side of Silver Street. Other cellars on the west side of the street do not extend beyond the footprint of the existing buildings.

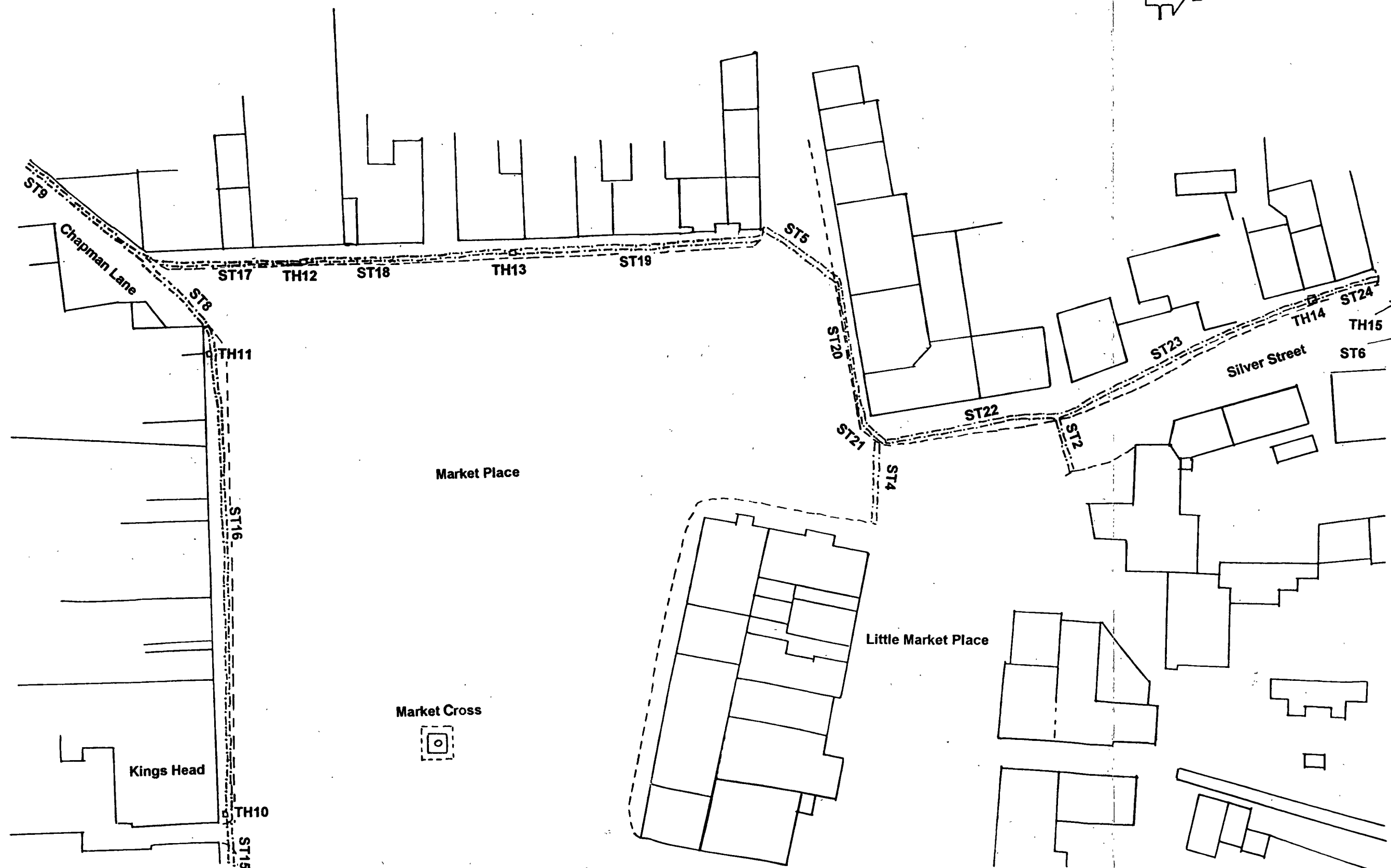
The other trial holes and service trenches running up the western side of Silver Street contained loamy sands with a scattering of animal bone and pottery from late medieval to modern, overlying natural sands and gravels. Several box culverts were encountered, and modern services had disturbed many of the layers.

MILLGATE

Three trial holes were excavated along Millgate. None contained any archaeological features, although there was a scatter of nineteenth and twentieth century pottery. Modern services cut through loamy sands, sands and gravel which represented a build up of subsoil above the undisturbed natural soils.

MASHAM MARKET PLACE - WATCHING BRIEF 1996 - PLAN 1

Scale 1:500



CHAPMAN LANE

A service trench running along the north-west side of Chapman Lane, ST 9, contained a cobbled surface 25cm below the present ground surface, probably representing the nineteenth century street surface. Other layers of mixtures of loam, sand and clay contained animal bone and late medieval pottery.

MARKET PLACE

The majority of the work took place around the Market Place, with trial holes and service trenches ringing the entire square except for a section across Little Market Place.

EAST SIDE

Beneath the tarmac and road base, most of the trenches on the eastern side of the Market Place contained a cobble surface, which probably represents the nineteenth century street surface. The cobbles were bedded onto sandy clayey loam and in one place onto a compacted sandy loam with eighteenth century pottery and the appearance of builder's rubble. At the north-east corner a sandstone box culvert ran east across ST 10. ST 13 contained an earlier layer of cobbles bedded into a dark brown loam, and a structural feature consisting of a concentration of cobbles beneath a large limestone slab, aligned north-south. Finds included bone and pottery from late medieval to nineteenth century.

In the south-east corner of the Market Place, ST 14 contained sandstone wall foundations aligned north-south. These consisted of roughly dressed red sandstone blocks with a cobble core, in two lines only 1.5 metres apart. The proximity of the two walls suggests a porch or small room extending out into the Market Place, which might predate the early eighteenth century building to the immediate south. Associated finds included animal bone and a small quantity of post medieval pottery.

SOUTH SIDE

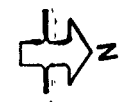
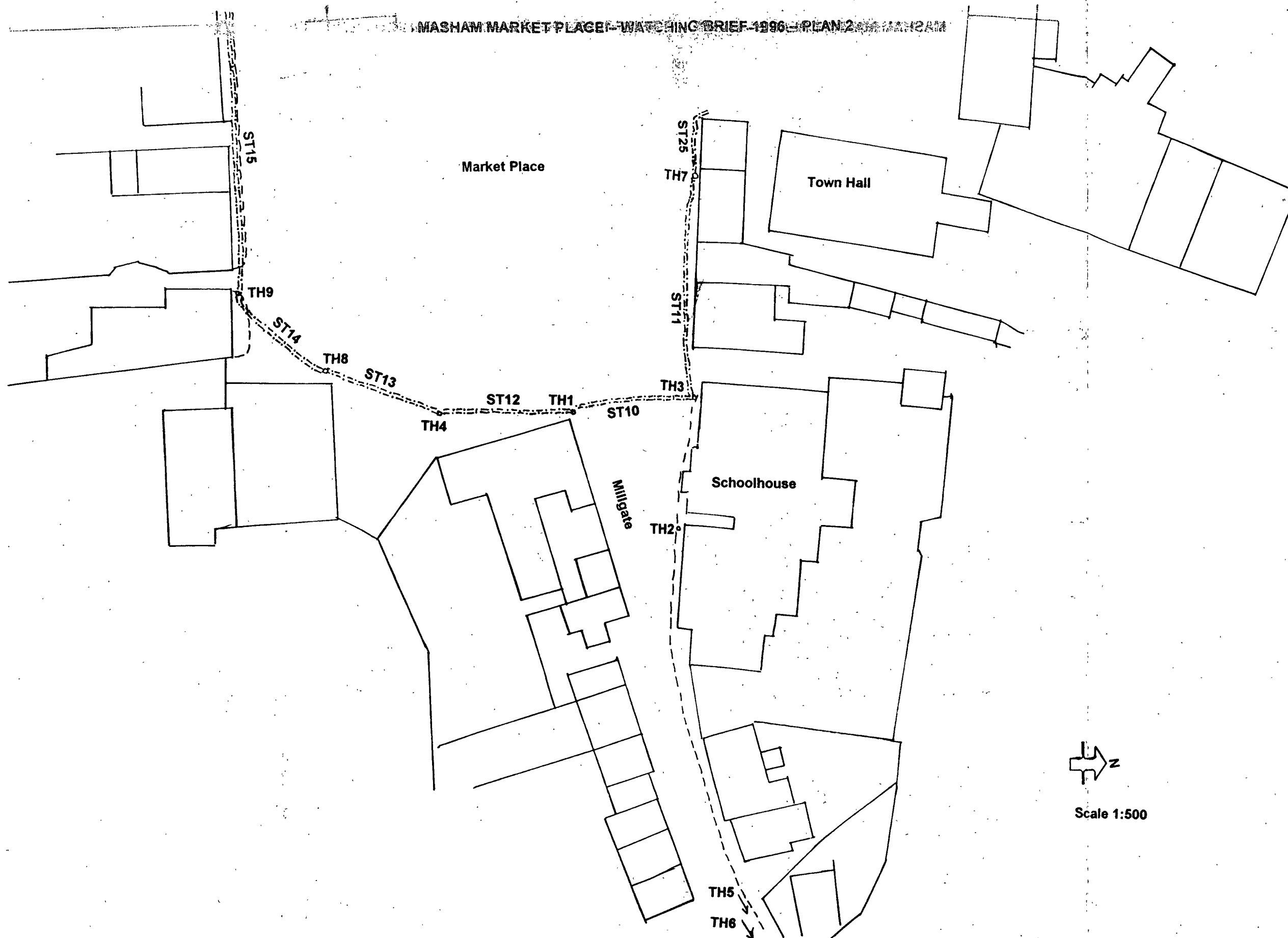
Along the south side of the Market Place the cobble surface observed elsewhere also occurred, though interrupted in places. It was replaced by loamy sands and sandy clayey loams in places, containing bone fragments (including human) and pottery from late medieval to nineteenth century. TH 11 contained a cobble concentration interpreted as wall foundations running north-south. They were 48cm below existing ground level and were bedded onto a sandy loam buried topsoil. The loamy sandy clay at the base of ST 8 in the south-west corner of the Market Place continued up Chapman Lane in ST 9.

WEST SIDE

The trenches on the west side of Market Place ran from Chapman Lane in the south-west to the corner of Silver Street in the north-west. The nineteenth century cobble surface continued in the southern half, but was not present towards the north, being replaced by disturbed sandy clays and gravel.

Towards the middle part of the western side, in ST17 and TH12, a layer containing late medieval pottery was identified. It consisted of a red-orange clayey sand and also contained some bone.

MASHAM MARKET PLACE - WATCHING BRIEF - 1996 - PLAN 2



Scale 1:500

The northern end of ST 18 contained cobble wall foundations four courses deep immediately below the road base. Bone, late medieval and nineteenth century pottery was associated with these foundations which ran north-south for 5 metres. The adjacent building to the west is eighteenth century, so the implication is that these foundations are earlier than the standing building, and supported a building extending further into the Market Place.

A box culvert in ST 5, which runs across the end of Church Street, may be the same as one encountered in ST 7 at the southern end of Silver Street.

ST 20, at the north-west corner of the Market Place at the end of Church Street, contained loamy sand beneath the road base with a very high quantity of butchered animal bone. Generally the disturbed soils overlay natural clayey sands, sands and gravels.

NORTH SIDE

Trenches on the north side of the Market Place were restricted to the eastern half, running up to the Town Hall but not extending across Little Market Place. The cobble surface visible in TII 3 did not extend westwards, though cobbles were present beneath the road base in sandy loam in ST 11. The cobbles may be associated with building work on the adjacent seventeenth century properties which are only 50cm away from the trench.

A double line of sandstone wall foundations ran north-south near the eastern end of ST11. They were 3.5 metres apart and each consisted of a double line of roughly dressed sandstone with a cobble core. They appear to run beneath the western end of the existing schoolhouse, and may represent an earlier schoolhouse building than the existing one which was built in 1834.

Elsewhere the disturbed sandy clayey loam overlay natural clayey sand or sand and gravel.

CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief produced evidence of the medieval and later occupation of Masham. It is apparent that some stone buildings, earlier than the predominantly eighteenth century standing buildings, extended into the Market Place. The evidence for a narrower Silver Street, on the west side of the current line, also indicates alterations in the detailed layout of the town centre.

Medieval evidence was thin. This could be the result of the limited retrieval possible in a watching brief, or a true reflection of the survival of medieval material in the centre of Masham. The soil samples and animal bones help to confirm a picture of enhanced activity (or survival?) in the post-medieval period, when Masham was a prosperous market centre for animals and animal products. This is particularly shown by the animal bone remains which indicate the presence of improved breeds as well as the smaller medieval types of both sheep and cattle.

Human bones have previously been found in Little Market Place. Two fragments of human bone were identified on the south side of the Market Place, but the significance of these is unclear.

The potential for further work at Masham remains high, especially for the post-medieval period (see recommendations in Animal Bone Report).