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**The Old Post Office  
81/83 The High Street  
Knaresborough  
North Yorkshire  
SE 349 572**

**Residential & Commercial Development  
Archaeological Excavation**

**MAP  
July 2003**

**The Old Post Office  
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**Summary**

*Prior to the redevelopment of 81-83 High Street, Knaresborough MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd undertook an Archaeological Watching Brief during the excavation of two geotechnical testpits, and conducted a map regression for the site.*

*Historical research showed that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Barrel Inn occupied the site. During the 1920's this building appears to have been demolished and the Old Post Office constructed.*

*The Archaeological Watching Brief recorded a high degree of disturbance on the site possibly relating to the 20<sup>th</sup> century redevelopment. Natural deposits were incredibly close to the surface along the southern boundary of the site. Excavation revealed a steep sided ditch aligned east to west of undermined date and function.*

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by Fulford Builders (Northern) Ltd to assess an area for a proposed housing and commercial development situated at 81-83 High Street, Knaresborough (NGR SE 349 572 : Figs. 1 & 2 : Pls. 1-8).
- 1.2 This report was funded by Fulford Builders (Northern) Ltd.
- 1.3 All maps within this report have been produced from Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright. License No. AL 50453A.

## **2. Site Description**

2.1 The proposed development area is currently an area of open land as the Old Post Office was demolished in June, 2003 (Pls. 1-2). The previous building had a cellar and this is currently exposed (Pls. 3 & 4).

2.2.1 The site is rectangular measuring 240m<sup>2</sup> and stands at an elevation of approximately 71.9m AOD.

2.3 The site is bordered by No. 2 Hilton Lane to the west, Hilton Lane to the north, the High Street to the east and No. 79 High Street to the south (Pls. 1-2).

## **3. Aims and Objectives**

3.1 The objective of the report is to give a brief outline of the archaeological and historical background of the development site including:-

- Historical Background of Knaresborough.
- Summary of archaeological potential of the general area around the proposed development site.
- To provide recommendations for further work.

## **4. Methodology**

4.1 The historical and archaeological background of Knaresbrough has been gathered from a variety of sources including Knaresborough and Harrogate Libraries, the North Riding County Record Office. Surviving documents, cartographic evidence, and previously published works were consulted.

## **5. Historical Background**

5.1 The origin of the place name of Knaresborough appears to derive from the Anglo Saxon word for fortress or fortified Settlement "BURGH" whereas the "Knare" may be a personal name or from "Kner" meaning a rocky outcrop. A number of streets in the town can be traced back to a Scandinavian word origin such as Briggate – the street leading to the bridge, Kirkgate the street leading to the church, Tentergate the place where cloth was stretched for drying on tenterhooks and most interesting Gracious Street from the Anglo Saxon (GRACHT – HUYS) the houses on the ditch ([www.knaresborough.co.uk](http://www.knaresborough.co.uk)).



- 5.2 Knaresborough is mentioned in Domesday as the manor of Chenaresburg, which is listed as waste.
- 5.3 The site lies to the west of Knaresborough castle, situated on the top of a large cliff with a commanding view of the River Nidd and originally the forest of Knaresborough.
- 5.4 The earliest castle was established after the Norman Conquest. The first documented reference to a castle at Knaresborough is from the Pipe Rolls of 1129-1130, which make reference to £11 spent by Eustace fitz John for the king's works.
- 5.5 King John spent £1290 on building works including the excavation or enlargement of the moat. The remains of the moat can still be seen around the southern and northern halves of the castle and this is the earliest remaining visible construction.
- 5.6 Knaresborough Castle supported the Royalist Cause during the Civil War. After the battle of Marston Moor in July 1644, the castle was besieged and finally surrendered when cannon breached the wall on December 20, 1646. Parliament ordered the castle to be rendered untenable and by 1648 demolition had commenced. Nearly the entire circuit of the curtain wall was destroyed, as were all the buildings in the grounds, except the Courthouse. The King's Tower was in the process of demolition when the townspeople petitioned Parliament to allow them to maintain it as a prison. Demolition was halted and the Tower was left standing. The King's Tower and Courthouse was to serve as a prison for some time after this date.
- 5.7 Knaresborough had a thriving textile industry with the focus being on the woollen market in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, which was replaced by a trade in high quality linen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Originally a cottage industry production was transferred to a number of mills situated on the River Nidd in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Industrial development was hampered by the lack of an efficient transport system to import and export the raw materials and manufactured goods. In 1851 the railway viaduct was completed providing efficient and cost effective transport for the town.
- 5.8 During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a programme to raise living standards by the Improvement Commissioners resulted in gas lighting in 1824 and new sewage installations in 1850.
- 5.9 The site is situated 200m north of the Castle, 150m north-west of the Market Place and stands on the main thoroughfare of the town. A consideration of the trade directories from 1822 – 1932 (Table 1) illustrates the use of the site during this period. Between 1822 and 1915 it would appear from both from the directories and

the cartographic evidence (see below) that the site was used as a public house. Between 1861 and 1866 81-83 High Street was not only a public house, but also a butchers. From 1910 the directories list two businesses operating from the site. The Barrel Inn is now listed as being on Hilton Lane and a Post Office is recorded on the High Street. In 1915 The Barrel Inn is accompanied by cycle agents operating from 81-83 High Street. From 1916 the site is used as a Post Office but from 1918-1921 a Post Office and cycle agents operate from the site. From 1925 –2003 a single building occupied the site and was used as the Post Office.

- 5.10 The frontispiece shows a two storey brick structure with sloping tiled roof, this is probably the building that housed The Barrel Inn until 1915. The building which was demolished in 2003, appears to have been constructed after the demolition of The Barrel Inn sometime in the early 1900's.

## **5.9 Cartographic Evidence**

- 5.9.1 No evidence was forthcoming on the site from Tithe Award or Enclosure Award Plans.
- 5.9.2 The First Edition Ordnance Survey map for Knaresborough is at too small a scale to provide accurate information on the layout of the site (Fig. 3), however buildings are shown at the junction of Hilton Lane and High Street.
- 5.9.3 A plan of Knaresborough in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (NYCRO MIC3275/443) shows an identical layout of the site to that depicted on the 1890 Ordnance Survey Town Series Edition (Fig. 4), on this map the site is occupied by the Barrel (PH), with two units extending long Hilton Lane and access from Hilton Lane to a courtyard behind the Inn street frontage.
- 5.9.4 The 1910 Ordnance Survey shows the site as developed as does the 1938 Ordnance Survey sheet (both not illustrated).
- 5.9.4 The 1932 Ordnance Survey County Series map shows the site as a single unit entitled PO (Fig. 5).
- 5.9.5 More recent Ordnance Survey maps (Figs. 6, 7 & 2: dated 1969/70, 1971 & 1985 respectively) show the site as a single unit titled Post Office.

## **6. Archaeological Watching Brief**

- 6.1 In June 2003, an Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken during the excavation of two geotechnical test pits (Fig. 8).



- 6.2 Each test pit measured approximately 3m in length, 0.6 in width and was excavated to a depth of approximately 2.25m from the existing ground surface. Test pit 1 was extended after the recorded stratigraphy in Test pit 2 were found to have implications for the foundation design of the redevelopment. Excavations were undertaken using a JCB with a backactor and a toothless bucket.
- 6.3 Both test pits exhibited identical stratigraphy consisting of natural limestone bedrock at a depth of 2.25m at its deepest from the existing ground level. Although in both test pits it was observed that the bedrock rose sharply towards the southern boundary of the site being 0.4m below the existing ground level close to the boundary with 79 High Street (Fig 8: Pls. 3-8). The bedrock was also observed to rise steeply to the north thus giving the impression that the site was bisected by a steep sided 'V' shaped ditch.
- 6.4 Above the bedrock was up to 0.45m deposit of medium sand (10YR 4/4). This deposit was sealed by two substantial deposits of silt clay (10YR 4/6), and limestone rubble, both measuring approx 1m in depth. The uppermost deposit was sealed by a layer of demolition rubble associated with the demolition of the Old Post Office building. No finds were observed from any of the deposits described above. In fact the sand deposit above the bedrock was compacted and had the appearance of laminations possibly from water borne deposition. The exceptionally loose nature of the majority of deposits above the sand suggested deliberate backfilling, however, although the form of the 'V' - profiled linear feature suggests an early date, the lack of finds and the fact it was impossible to enter the trench for health & safety reasons. Coupled with the lack of cartographic information makes it impossible to interpret this feature further.
- 6.5 The site is cellared and the shallowness of the bedrock observed in the southern end of Testpits 1 and 2 was also seen in the exposed cellar wall (Pls.3&4). Although originally it was planned to remove one of the cellar walls to record the stratigraphy it was felt that the unstable deposits recorded in Test pits 1 & 2 negated such an action.

## 7. Discussion

- 7.1 The map regression has shown that the site was developed in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The trade directories illustrate that the 81-83 High Street was for much of its life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century a public house, which was replaced in early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Post Office building which was demolished in 2003.

- 7.2 Little archaeological work has been undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the site. The Archaeological Watching Brief on the geotechnical test pits showed that a single 'V' shaped linear bisected the site. Unfortunately the unstable nature of the features fill and complete lack of dating material makes an absolute interpretation problematic. The form of the ditch did not suggest that it housed any modern drainage facilities, however, the primary sand fill did suggest water deposition and therefore the ditch may have been an open sewer which was backfilled prior to the sanitation improvements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The topography of Hilton Lane immediately adjacent to the site indicates the natural fall of land down to the river. This taken along with the alignment of Gap Row to the east suggests an earlier street alignment, which has been removed by Hilton Lane. Unfortunately it was not possible to test this theory as no earlier maps than the 19<sup>th</sup> century were available for consultation.
- 7.3 Proposed commercial and residential development of the site and associated ground disturbance has little likelihood of revealing archaeological features. The site has been cellared and there is obvious disturbance from previous 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century development. There is a small possibility that in situ archaeological deposits may survive along street frontage, however a view of the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Frontispiece) shows development in this area of the site.

## **8. Bibliography**

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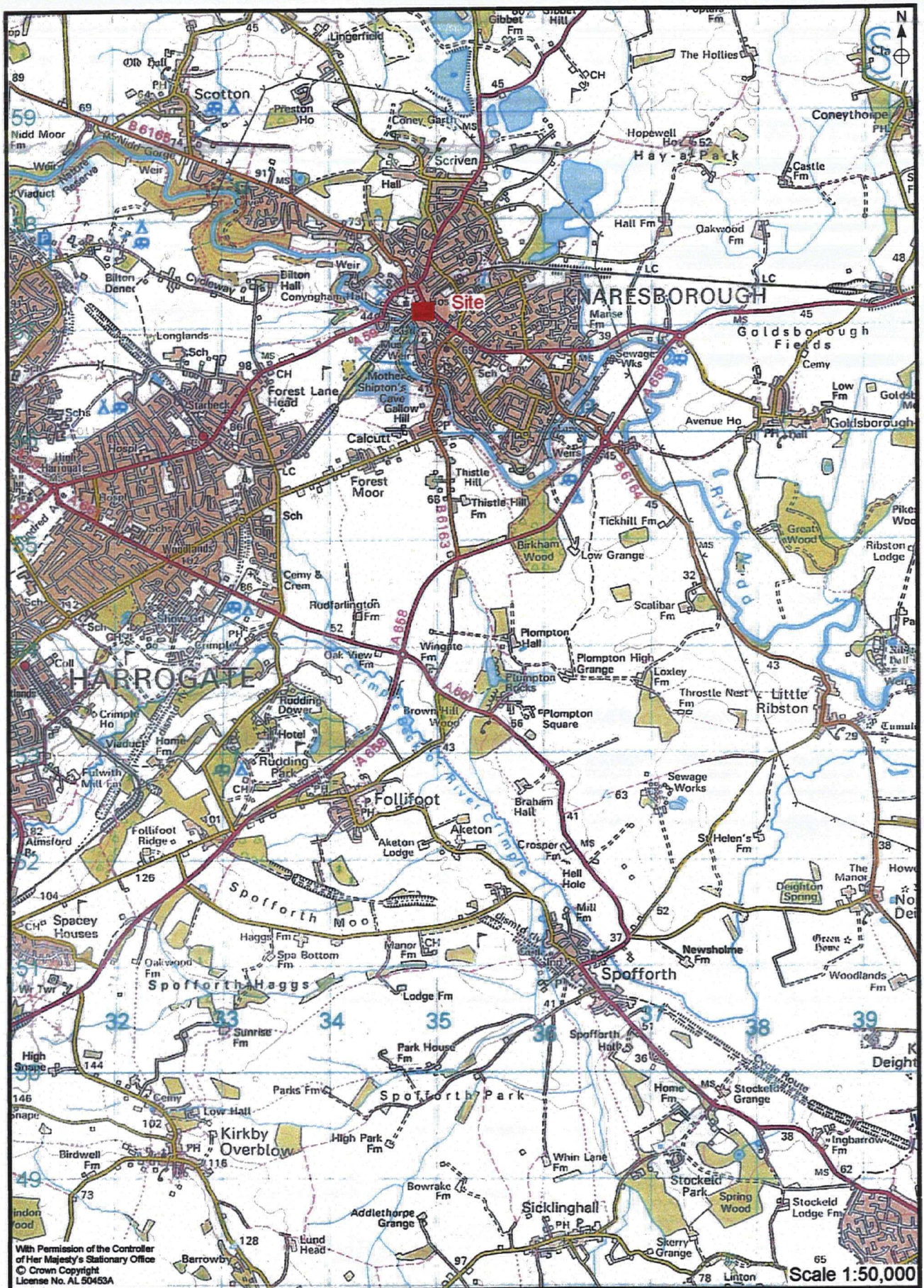


Figure 1. Site Location





Figure 2. Site Location







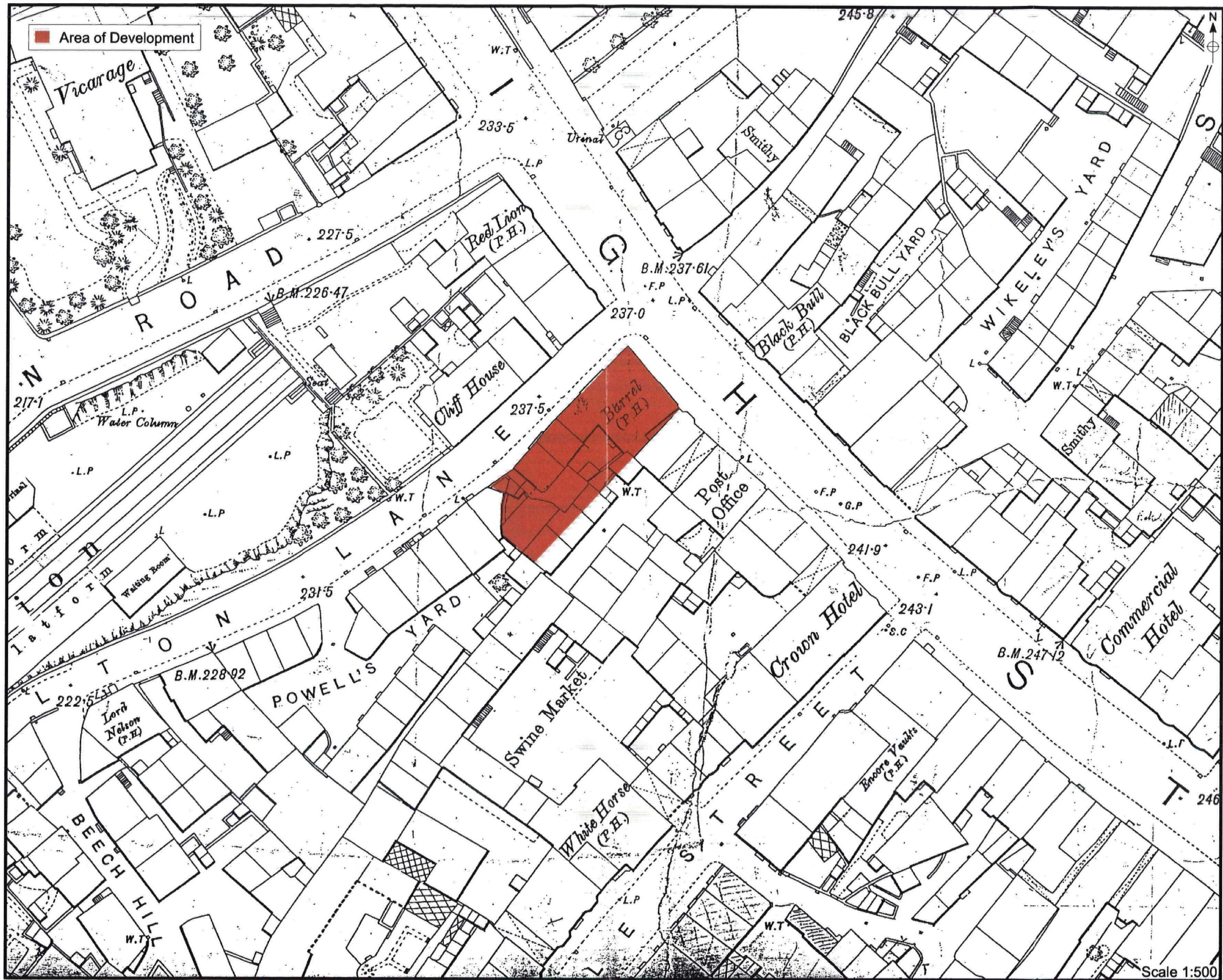


Figure 4. Extract from Ordnance Survey Map, 1890





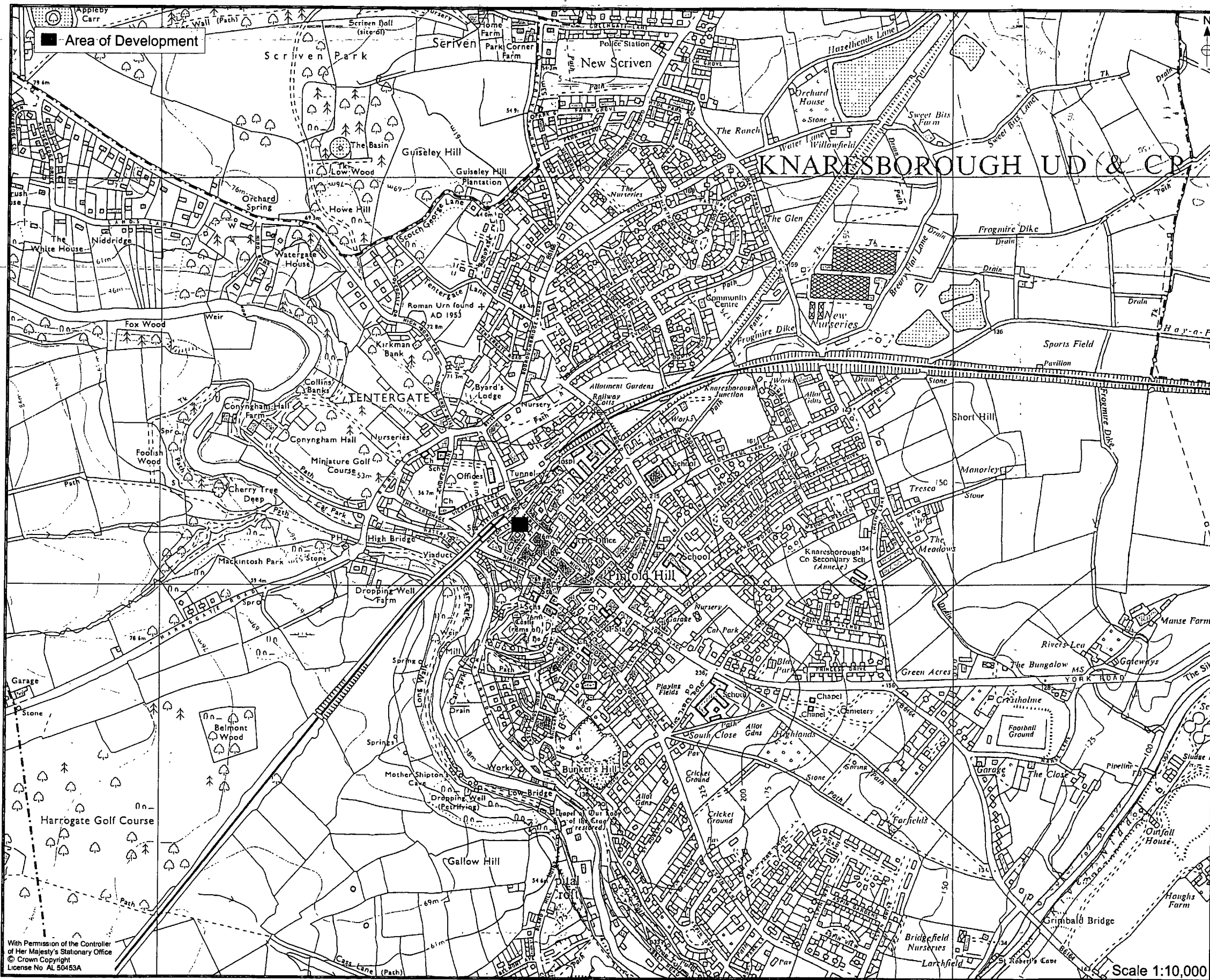


Figure 6. Extract from Ordnance Survey Maps, 1969/1970









Figure 8. Watching Brief Features