

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
at the Former Royal  
Tiger Public House, Wednesfield,  
West Midlands.**

by

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## **1.0 Summary**

An archaeological watching brief was conducted during the redevelopment of the former Royal Tiger Public House, 45 High Street, Wednesfield, by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in the period June - July 1995. Prior to this project no below-ground archaeological investigations had been conducted within Wednesfield or its immediate environs and the potential for survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. Survival adjacent to the High Street frontage was limited to deposits associated with the construction of the Royal Tiger itself. However, a number of earlier archaeological deposits, dated to the mid-18th century and early 19th century, were identified within the footprint of the public house and within the present-day carpark.

## **2.0 Introduction**

This report outlines the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at the former Royal Tiger Public House, 45 High Street, Wednesfield (SMR 6293), Wolverhampton. The work was undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Crampin and Pring and it fulfilled a planning application requirement that archaeological salvage recording be undertaken in advance of alteration of, and extension to, the former Royal Tiger public house building itself, which was to be converted into two retail units. A specific provision that all foundations were to be excavated under archaeological supervision, with proper recording of significant archaeological deposits, was also included. The archaeological investigations and a photographic survey were conducted in accordance with a brief prepared by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record (White 1995) and conformed to PPG 16 guidelines.

## **3.0 The Site and its Location (Figures 1 and 2)**

The site, which lies within a designated conservation area and within a zone of archaeological importance (NGR SJ 94350015, centred on St. Thomas' church to the southwest), comprises the standing structure of the former Royal Tiger public house and a carpark area to the rear (Fig. 2). The public house, and cellar, front on to the northern side of High Street and they share a boundary to the west with a baker's yard. Access to a rear carpark is situated to the east of the building. The carpark extends

back from the street frontage to a boundary defined by the Wyrley and Essington Canal. The ground level close to the High Street is flush with the present day road. It gradually slopes upwards from the rear of the former public house towards the canal.

#### **4.0 Additional Archaeological Investigation**

The historic core of Wednesfield village has been designated as a conservation area by Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council and as an area of archaeological importance by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record. Recently, Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council, as one part of a Heritage Survey Programme, commissioned a desk-top study of the archaeological potential of Wednesfield. Unfortunately the results of the archaeological survey have not yet been placed with the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record and therefore the results cannot be used to contextualise the detail within this present report.

#### **5.0 Objective**

The objective of this archaeological watching brief was to allow the preservation by record of archaeological structures and deposits affected by the proposed development.

#### **6.0 Method**

A rapid internal and external photographic survey of the existing structures was undertaken prior to renovation and demolition of certain features. The rear portion and internal walls of the existing building were subsequently demolished by the contractors. The foundation trenches for new structures and a series of trenches for incoming services were then excavated. Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during these below-ground excavations and all significant archaeological deposits were recorded. The stratigraphic sequences were recorded and contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

#### **7.0 The Archaeological Results (Figure 3)**

Modern demolition debris was cleared from the footprint of the former Royal Tiger public house before Trenches 1-8 were mechanically excavated. These included trenches for incoming services to the new structure (Trenches 1-5) and the foundation trenches for additional walls to the rear of the building (Trenches 6, 7 and 9). The footprint for the altered building is shown in Figure 3 along with the locations of the recorded observations. In addition two standing sections (Face 1 and Face 2), two test-pits within the cellar, and one manhole and sewer connection, were also observed.

##### **Trench 1**

This trench (0.44m x 2.05m), which extended northeast from the street frontage, was to house an incoming electrical supply and was excavated to 0.22m below the modern floor level. The natural clay-sand horizon (1003) was just visible within the excavation limits. It was overlain by a charcoal-flecked layer of redeposited sandy-clay (1002), which was, in turn, sealed by a layer of machine-brick rubble (1001), which represented

the backfill of the frontage wall foundation trench (F100). This rubble was sealed by the modern floor level (1000).

#### Trench 2

An incoming water supply was to be fed through this trench (0.46m x 2.30m) which was excavated to a depth of 0.35m below the modern floor level. The natural clay-sand (2004) was cut at the southwest end of the trench by a foundation trench for the street frontage wall (F200). To the northeast, context 2004 was overlain by a layer of redeposited clay-sand (2003), sealed by a machine-brick rubble deposit (2002). The rubble was sealed by the modern floor level (2000).

#### Trench 3

This trench (0.70m x 9m) was excavated to a depth of 0.32m - 0.45m below the modern floor level. At the southwestern end an extremely compact natural clay-sand horizon (3002) was truncated by a cut for the cellar (F300) which lay at the front of the public house. Immediately to the northeast of F300 the natural clay-sand was overlain by a machine-brick rubble foundation (F301). This was sealed by the remains of a thin concrete floor level (3000). To the northeast, the natural clay-sand was overlain by a green-grey, silty clay-sand layer containing charcoal flecks and lumps (3003). This layer was also seen to the northwest (5002). No artefacts were recovered from either layer. A northwest-southeast aligned service trench (F302), with its pipe still *in situ*, was seen to cut the natural clay-sand (3002) at the northeastern end of Trench 3. This service trench was also seen in Trenches 5 and 6.

#### Trench 4

An incoming electric supply was to be fed through Trench 4, which measured 0.50m x 2.20m, to utilise an existing service trench (F400). The existing trench cut the natural clay-sand horizon (4002).

#### Trench 5

This trench was located 0.40m to the northwest of Trench 3 and ran parallel to it. Within the southwestern half of the trench the natural clay-sand (5003) was overlain by a green-grey silty clay-sand layer containing charcoal flecks and lumps (5002), seen in Trench 3 as 3003. This was sealed by a layer of modern floor foundation material (5000). Context 5002 was not present within the northeastern half of the trench, where the natural clay-sand (5003) was cut by a series of three service trenches (F500-F502), one of which was also seen in Trenches 3 and 6, and was sealed by the layer of modern floor foundation material (5000).

#### Trenches 6 and 7

Trench 6 was a wall foundation trench, 0.85m wide, extending northeast from an existing perimeter wall. Together with Trench 7 (also 0.85m wide), it formed an extension to the existing building footprint. Both trenches were cut into the natural clay-sand (6001 and 7001), which was sealed by a layer of modern floor foundation material (6000 and 7000).

#### Trench 8

This trench (1.80m x 1.55m) cut an area of very compact natural clay-sand (8001) to form a concrete pile foundation. A service pipe trench (F800) and machine-brick wall foundation (F801) also cut the natural, which was sealed by a layer of modern floor foundation material (8000).

### Trench 9

Foundation trench for southeastern wall. The southern part of this foundation trench (2.25m deep) was cut through a deposit of clinker (up to 1.5m thick) which filled the foundation trench for a former outbuilding. This cut the compact, red-brown clay-sand natural. The northern part (1.3m deep) was cut directly into the natural clay-sand and the overlying rubble and modern tarmac (up to 0.3m thick).

### Standing Sections

The rear extension of the retail units incorporated an area previously unaffected by building activity associated with the Royal Tiger. The southwest-facing section (Face 1) revealed a build-up of deposits, from which a small sample of ceramic fragments was recovered. A number of medium-sized (0.10m) stones (9008) were pressed into the natural clay-sand (9009) which was overlain by a 0.50m thick deposit of black silt-sand, whose make-up included pottery and bone fragments, charcoal lumps and ash debris (9006). At the eastern end of the section, context 9008 was cut by a pit (F902) which contained a concentration of broken clay pipe stems, some bone and pottery (9007). Feature F902 and context 9006 were sealed by a thin deposit of cinders (9003), which was, in turn, overlain by two layers of modern building debris (9001 and 9002). These were sealed by a layer of tarmac which formed a carpark surface.

The southeast-facing section (Face 2) revealed that the sequence of deposits, including the natural clay-sand (9009), seen in the southwest-facing section (Face 1) had been truncated by a steep-sided cut (F903), which corresponded with the footprint of the former public house.

### Cellar Test-Pits

Prior to the casting of a concrete pile foundation, two test-pits were cut into the floor of the cellar. The floor was seen to immediately overlay a natural sandstone and sand horizon.

### Manhole and Sewer Connections

A manhole and sewer connection were inserted close to the southeastern side of the existing structure, in the path of access to the carpark. This area had been severely disturbed by existing services (cut to a depth of 2.50m at Manhole 1, Figure 3), the trenches of which were cut into the natural clay-sand horizon.

## **8.0 The Pottery**

Only 34 sherds of pottery were recovered during monitoring of groundworks. Although only a small assemblage, sufficient diagnostic fragments were recovered to ascertain a mid 18th century date for the black occupation deposit (9006) and an early 19th century date for the pit F902.

## **9.0 A Discussion of the Archaeological Results**

Yates's map of 1775 depicts structural activity along the whole length of the High Street in Wednesfield. However, it is clear from the results of this watching brief that construction of the former Royal Tiger Public House in the mid 19th century effectively scoured away any earlier archaeological deposits which may have survived on the street frontage up to that point (Figure 4, Ordnance Survey 1st edition, 1890). It is likely that the cut (F903) observed in the southeast-facing section of the new building footprint (Face 2) belongs to a mid 19th century phase of activity in which an

existing building was demolished, the debris cleared, and the ground level lowered to a depth where the natural sand-clay provided a simple, compact foundation layer. A discrete area of survival was recorded within the limits of the public house (3003 and 5002), however, the absence of artefacts prevents identification of the nature and dating of this deposit.

The survival of archaeological deposits was significantly greater outside the footprint of the former public house, where the ground level of the carpark was noticeably higher than that closer to the street frontage. The thick, black silt-sand deposit (9006) is very similar to late 18th century occupation deposits seen in back-plots elsewhere within the West Midlands (Litherland 1994, Mould 1994a, 1994b and 1995) and the recording of a pit (F902), albeit early 19th century, does suggest that the backplot of this site may have provided a focal point for activity. However, without further below-ground investigation it is not possible to judge the extent or character of such activity.

#### **10.0 An Assessment of the Archaeological Importance of the former Royal Tiger Public House**

Prior to the commencement of this watching brief no below-ground archaeological investigations had taken place in Wednesfield and the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, their nature and condition, was unknown. This watching brief has demonstrated that although a history of demolition, scouring of the ground level and cellaring may have erased evidence of any earlier occupation along Wednesfield's High Street frontage, survival of archaeological deposits may be anticipated within backplot areas. The depth of occupation deposits immediately to the rear of the former Royal Tiger Public House suggests that the degree of preservation further away from the building may be significantly higher.

In the absence of further below-ground investigation it is impossible to place the sequence of events recorded by this watching brief into a coherent historical context. However, the value of the archaeological resource in this area, specifically along the High Street, should not be underestimated. Surviving archaeological deposits within the site of the former Royal Tiger Public House and within Wednesfield as a whole have the potential to shed light on the historical development of the area and any future development should contain provision for above and below-ground archaeological investigation.

## 11.0 References

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## 12.0 Acknowledgements

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# The Royal Tiger , Wednesfield 1995

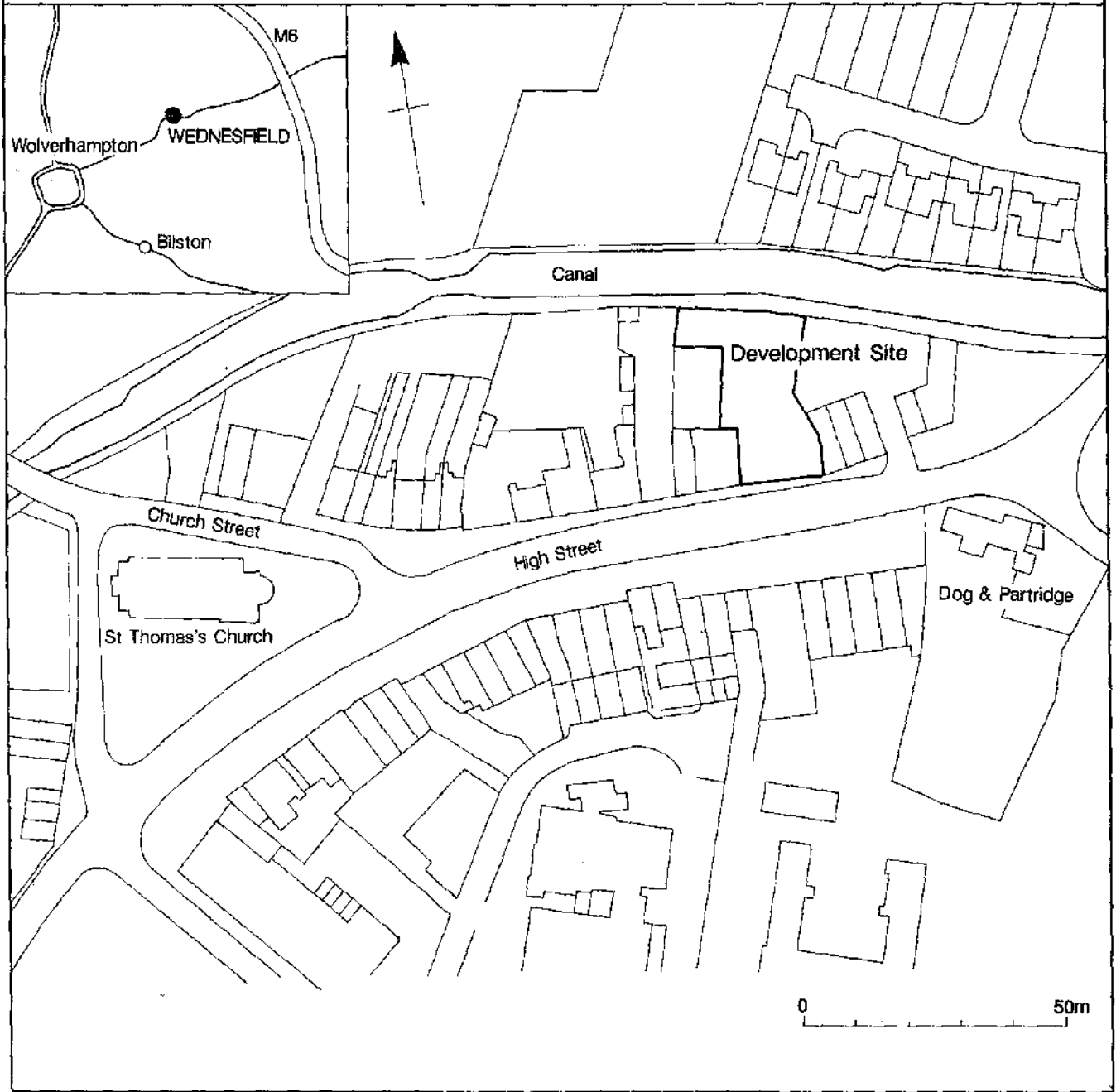


Fig. 1: Location



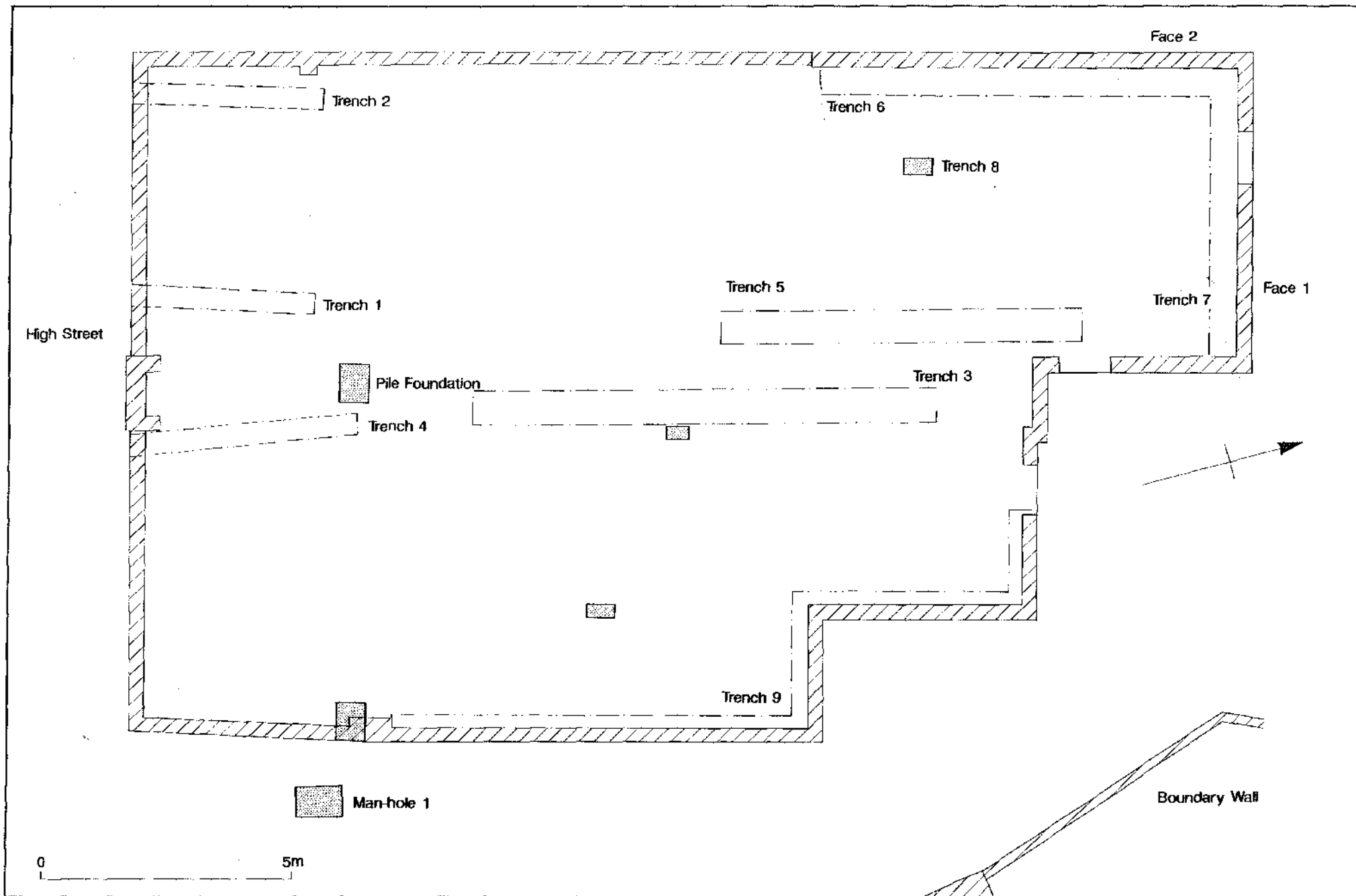


Fig. 3: Plan showing approximate locations of recorded observations

05-JUN-1995 11:50 FROM CRAMPIN AND PRING SHEFF TO 01214-49510 P.08

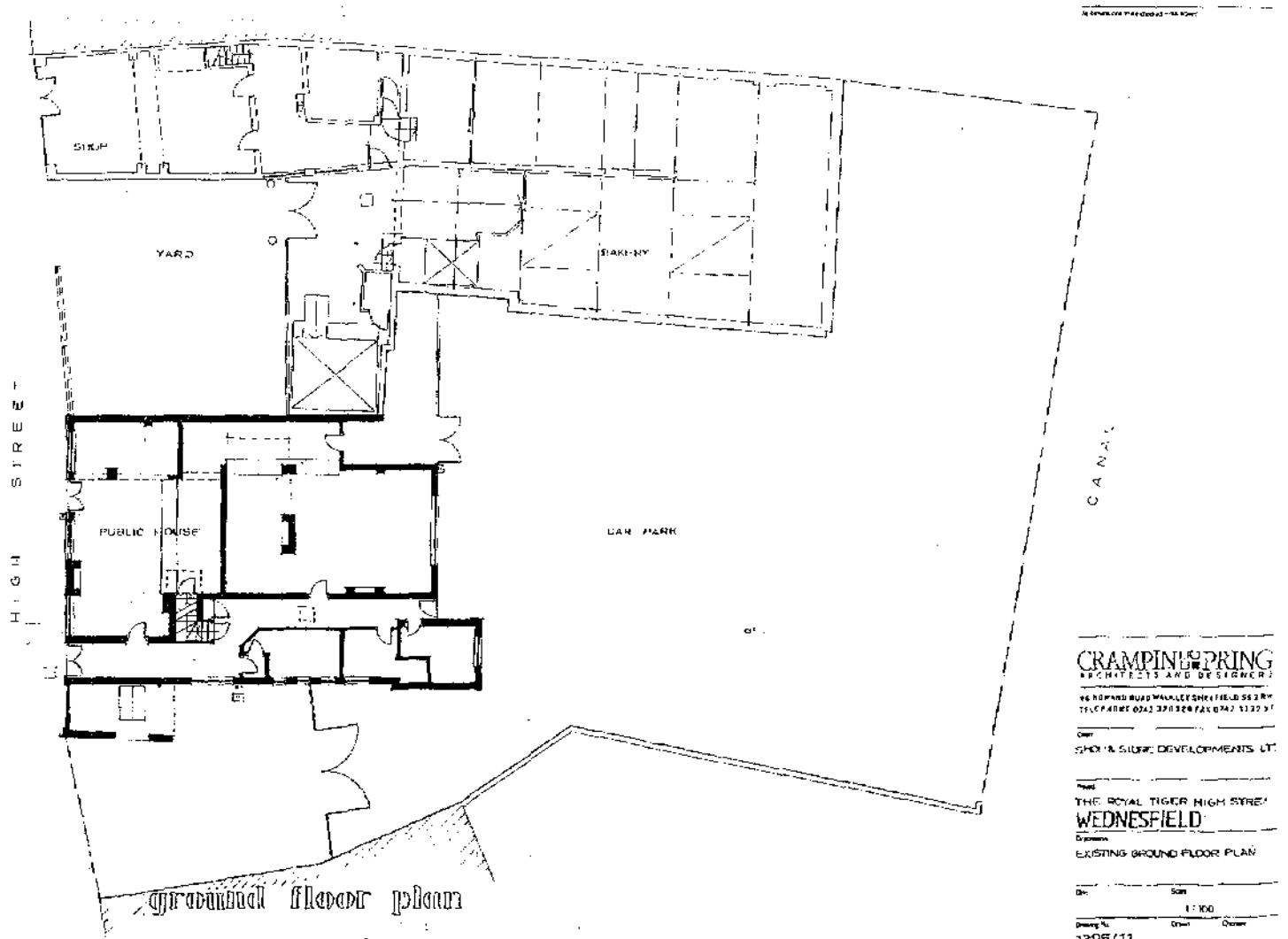


Fig. 2: The Royal Tiger Public House

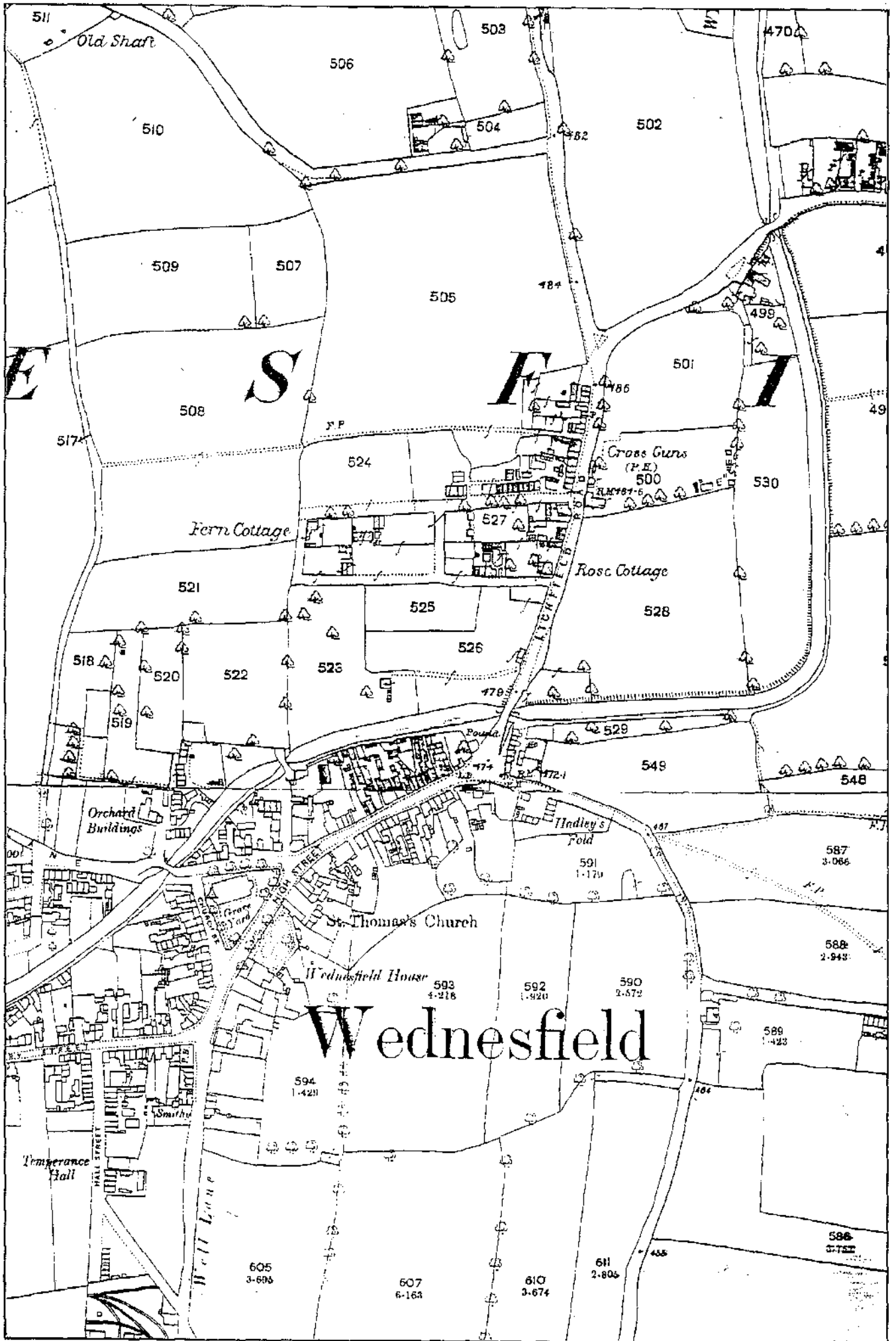


Fig. 4: OS 1st edition map (1890)