



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

Archaeological observation and recording at Brackley Town Hall, 2017

Iain Soden BA MCI(A)

With a contribution by Dr Sheila Hamilton-Dyer



Recording an early 18th century pier base during ground reduction

Email: iain@isheritage.co.uk

Tel: 07742 901760

Website: www.isheritage.co.uk

Brackley Town Hall

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Summary

Archaeological observation and recording of the floor reduction in Brackley Town Hall recorded the 1883 flagged floor, its sub-floor, and finds from the construction of the building, and some of a network of stone drains which underlie the building.

Introduction

Brackley Town Hall, built as an open-sided market hall c1707, has been undergoing a major programme of conservation and restoration, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Its position in the Market Place at the foot of the High Street of Brackley is highly likely to have been focal for much longer than the life of the current hall, with the likelihood of a foregoing market place with focal market cross (possibly itself an earlier hall) (NGR: SP 585 369; Fig 1). Consequently this, together with received wisdom that the hall has evolved considerably architecturally, led to a realisation of a need for archaeological scrutiny during reduction of floors inside the current building.

Archaeological observation was therefore scheduled to take place as soon as the first historic floors to be encountered were available for recording and at key junctures thereafter during ground reduction. The archaeological fieldwork was carried out by Joe Prentice, Barbara Evans Rees and Iain Soden.

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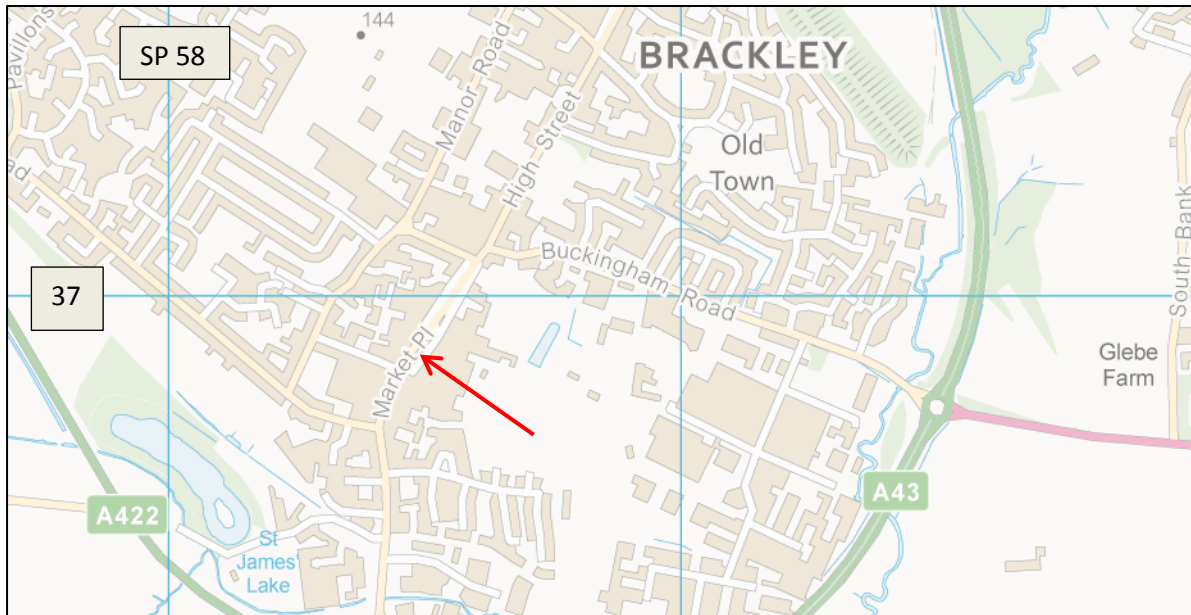


Fig 1: Site location (arrowed). Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2017

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Brackley Town Council for their commission for the work along with their architects Haverstock with Rena Pitsilli Graham and the Project Initiators Ingham Pinnock Associates. We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding the archaeological work and reporting as a by-product of the conservation of the town hall. Particular thanks to Robert Marks of Borrás Construction for his unfailing good humour and facilitating our work on site.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork fell into three simple phases:

1. Recording of the 1883 flagged floor
2. Recording during the reduction of the sub-floor beneath the 1883 flagged floor
3. Recording during the digging for new services

Phase 1

The 1883 flagged floor was uncovered almost intact when the most recent floor, c50mm of modern concrete screed, was removed throughout by means of pneumatic drills. While much of the concrete had stuck fast to the stone flags beneath, the screed was removed with only minimal surface damage to the flags. Many however, had previously been worn and cracked by use and incautious loading.

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The exposed flagged floor was drawn at 1:20 scale in a series of traditional archaeological plans, executed in order to make a record suitable for selecting flags for re-use and replacement on (if warranted) a flag-by-flag basis. An A1 sized drawing was supplied to contractors ready for marking up and potential stone re-use. The same drawing appears at smaller scale below (Fig 4).

The floor was also cleaned sufficiently for a suitable photographic record (Figs 2, 3) before the flags were removed by hand and set aside for re-use as appropriate.

Results

Visually the flagged floor cleaned up very well, although it was found that some half of all the flagstones had been cracked or broken before the concrete screed was put down. The flags neatly abutted the upper portions of the bases for the cast iron columns, clearly showing they deliberately respected the new layout. They also fitted neatly into the former arched doorways which had once characterised the open ground floor of the market hall, but also stopped neatly at each blocking wall, showing that the flagged floor was part of an enclosed hall from that date.

The layout of the flagstones did not betoken any particular layout of what stood on the ground floor. The six cast-iron pillars which still support the 1883 existing first floor, were set on Victorian concrete stanchion bases, over which the flags had lapped.



Fig 2: View looking north across the newly-uncovered 1883 stone-flagged floor; Scale 2m

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Fig 3: View looking south across the newly-uncovered 1883 stone-flagged floor; Scale 2m

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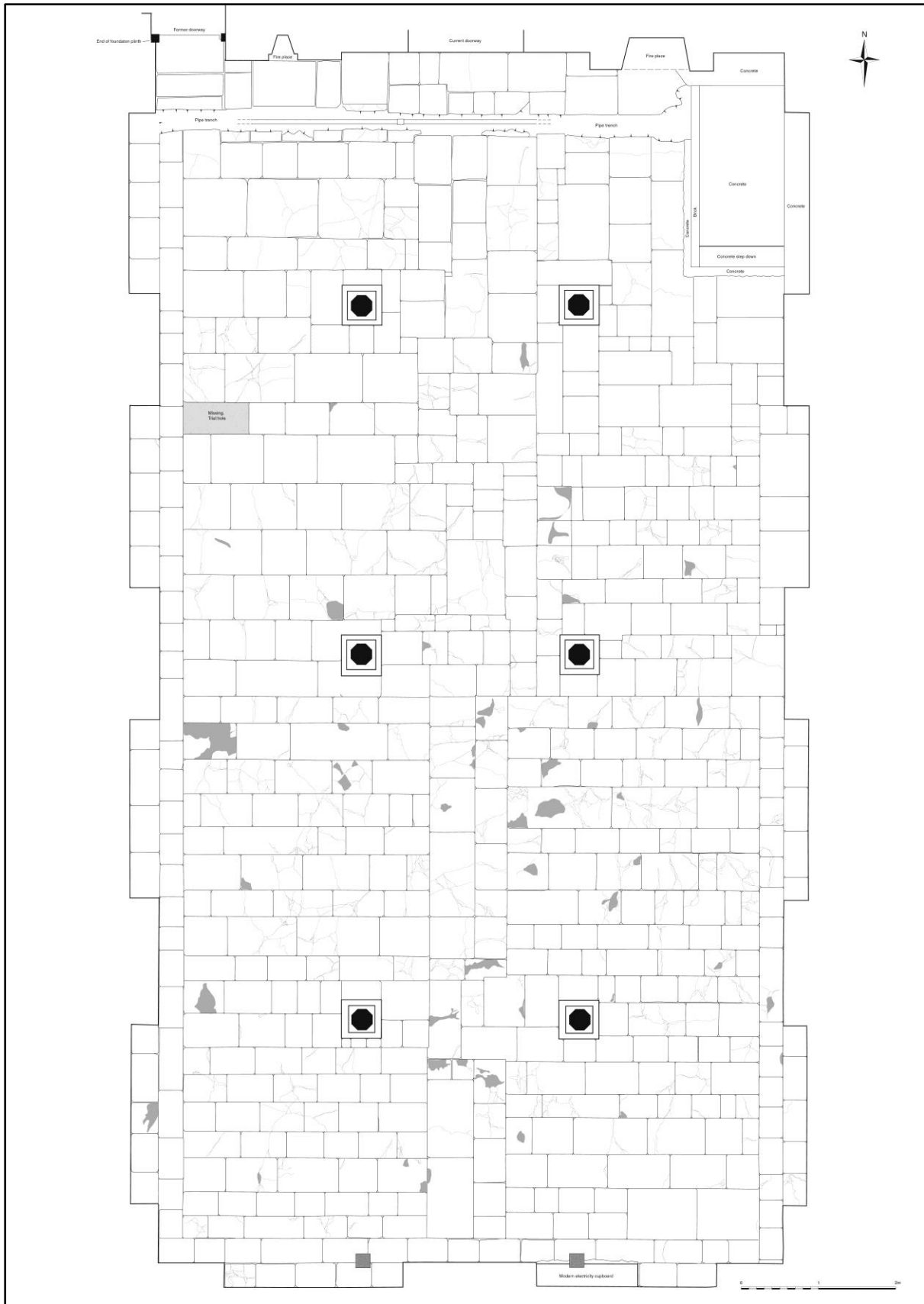


Fig 4: The 1883 flagged floor as uncovered (Andy Isham); scale 2m

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At the north-east corner the floor had been destroyed by the introduction of a modern sunken plant-room, which had also destroyed earlier remains beneath. A trench for pipework leading to and from the plant room had also damaged the flags along the northern end of the room.

Elsewhere the flags had been laid in 'blocks' or perhaps 'zones' which suggested that a number of gangs laid them simultaneously, although cleanly-cut similar sizes suggest some attempt to rationalise what the quarry had available. However, there is no overall uniformity. Subsequent finds beneath this floor suggest that the north-east quadrant may have required special attention to ensure successful coverage of the reduced foundations of the newly-demolished structures of a constable's room and cells. There appears to be a simple change in emphasis (by breaking the pattern) along the lines of these former structures. With varied bedding material, these flags may have required greater attention.

The sub-floor

The flags had been laid on a dry, sandy soil which contained numerous finds (see below). This was reduced by about 300mm using a small tracked machine fitted with a toothless bucket and working under archaeological control.

Down the centre-line of the hall lay a row of square limestone pier-bases- all that remained of the supports for the original open market-hall ceiling.



Fig 5: View looking north along the row of reduced pier-bases left over from the market hall as first built;
Scales 1m

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The southerly and the middle pier base were composites, constructed mainly from roughly-coursed limestone pieces with occasional ironstone fragments (an otherwise unknown inclusion in this building). The northerly example, however, comprised a single slab of limestone on which a mortar ghosting pattern suggested the size and square shape of the pillar which once surmounted it –or at least the lowest of the pillar courses which would have been visible. Each base was a little over 1m square in plan.

Although axial to the long centre-line of the original building, it was notable that the northerly and southerly piers projected further north and south (respectively) than the pairs of cast iron pillars which replaced them. Thus they were not quite central to the two bays they each served. This suggests that the original hall may have loaded its first floor differently, or that the piers which supported the early outer arcade were once different and have been modified to the arrangement which has pertained since 1883.

In the north-east quadrant of the hall lay the reduced foundations of some internal structures. They were built of limestone, but impressions in mortar on their upper surface showed that they once carried walls of brick construction. The foundation on the east side suggests that the structure was in place while the market hall still had open sides, prior to the current infilled arcade.

Insufficient survived to suggest where doors and windows may have stood within these structures, which are interpreted as a constable's room and two attendant cells – the town 'lock-up'.

The biggest space, the constable's room, appears to have had a fireplace in its northern wall (Figs 6 and 9). The dimensions of the fireplace match exactly that in the north wall of the present hall space so the jambs and lintel may be a direct re-use from this location.

The whole internal structure must have been demolished for the 1883 re-ordering since two of the cast iron columns stand squarely on top of the reduced foundations. When in place there would have been very little gap between the central row of columns and the wall of the room through which to squeeze.

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Fig 6: View looking north along the inserted 'Constable's room' of c1838; Scale 2m

The northern portion of the internal structure comprised two prison cells of very restricted space. Each was just over 2m long and this included a slate-lined V-shaped drain for a urinal at the southern (inner end). The doors to these cells must have been on the northern, outer end of the structure. One of the cells had been all but destroyed by construction of the modern plant room.



Fig 7: View north along one of the two cells of the 'lock-up'. Note the slate-lined urinal drain in the foreground; Scale 2m

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Interpretation as the constable's room and cells is based on a surviving plan of 1837 which shows the proposed structures by James Miller in the market hall, but actually to be set in the north-western quadrant. The plan also shows that the dimensions of the rooms as built differ from that plan (Fig 8; NRO: RZ 4194). It seems that the plan by Miller was not adopted, or at least the documented version was never carried out. Miller may have been the builder of that constructed, or it was another builder's interpretation. It is notable that the 1837 proposal would have given any miscreants spacious 9ft9in x 6ft6in cells. What they actually got was something much smaller – just enough room to lie down and enough room to stand and urinate.

These are unlikely to have been for any more than overnight incarceration - somewhere for a drunken punter to cool off after a market-day fracas or other minor infringement of the law. They would be emptied as soon as a magistrate sat locally and justice could be dispensed.

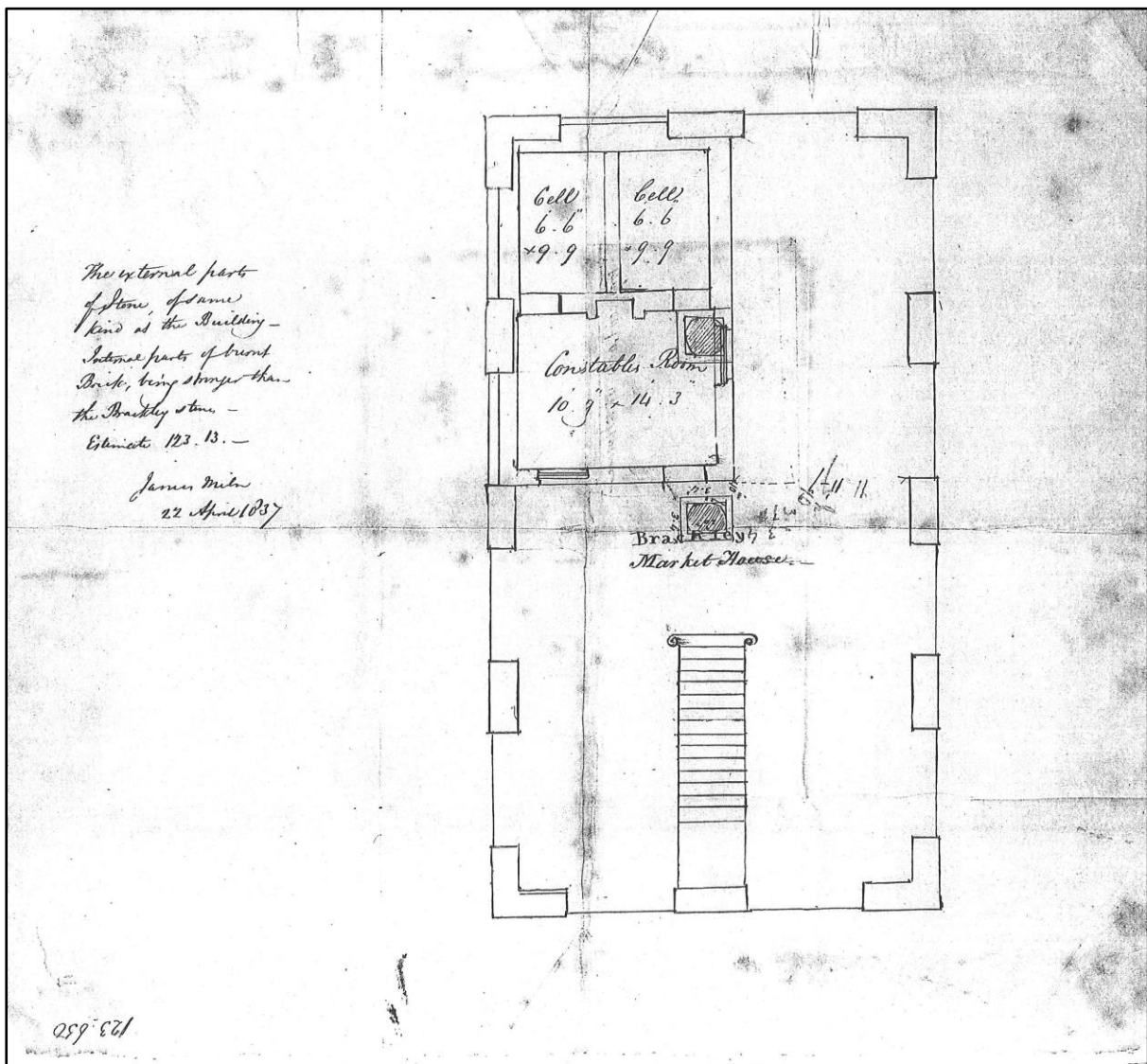


Fig 8: Unexecuted plan for the Constable's room and cells 1837 by James Miller (NRO: RZ 4194). It was to be partly of stone and partly of brick, said to be stronger than the local stone.

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The Miller plan is notable in one other respect. It shows a flight of stairs at the south end of the building. There was, however, no evidence for these stairs in the ground, and their drawn location indicates that their creation would have necessitated the removal of the southernmost pier. There was no evidence that that pier was removed at any time other than the overall 1883 re-ordering (along with the others), so the central-southern stair position is likely to have been another aspect of this unexecuted design.

By process of elimination, however, it does suggest that the early stair (if it lay on the inside) lay in the north-western quadrant of the hall, and Miller's design might have required its removal to another location (in his eyes southern and central) and with it the total reordering of the ground floor. In 1837 this was clearly not what was required.

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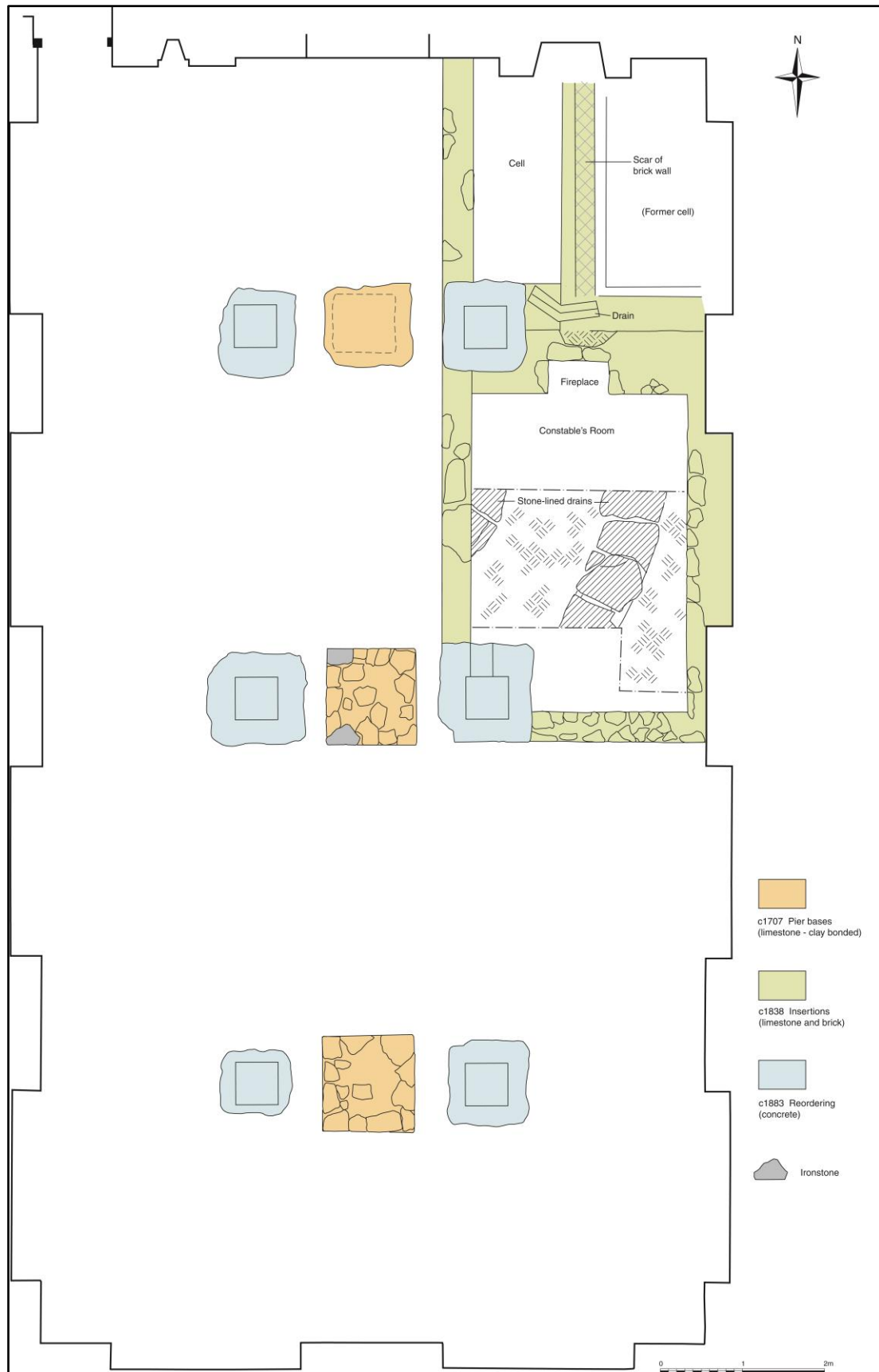


Fig 9: Plan of the interior, 1883 floor removed, with original pier bases, constable's room and cells, with an area further reduced to drain-level for new services (Andy Isham); Scale 2m

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Underneath the constable's room digging continued to insert new services. An area in the eastern third of the hall was therefore further reduced (this time by hand) under archaeological scrutiny. At a depth of about a further 600mm two limestone-lined and limestone-capped drains were uncovered (Figs 9, 10 and 11). These were set into lias clay and one at least was still conducting groundwater.



Fig 10: Vertical view of a stone lined drain below the Constable's room; scale 1m. North to right.



Fig 11: Same view as above, stone capping removed, the drain still doing its work; scale 1m. North to right.

Finds

A variety of finds was recovered, all from the machine-reduction of the sub-floor. As such these may be considered as only loosely stratified within the below-ground sequence. Appropriate scrutiny of each type shows that they derive from potentially a variety of sources, the material brought in to make up the floor at the construction of the hall in 1707. Closely datable material shows that there was probably no further introduction of waste when the 1883 floor was prepared.

Coin

A copper alloy Britannia Farthing of Charles II was recovered from the sub-floor. Charles reigned 1660-85.

Knife

A distinctively-shaped iron knife blade and tang was recovered from the sub-floor. It is a short, sickle-shaped blade and may have been used for paring down leather, perhaps in the making of shoes.

Pottery

A total of 41 sherds of pottery was recovered from the sub-floor deposit. There are no joining sherds and the pottery derives from eleven basic types or fabrics which date between the 14th/15th/16th century and the early 18th century. There is also a small fragment of medieval green-glazed roof tile. These are clearly residual sherds, few of which would have been of types in use when the market hall was built.

The types present are:

- 1 x Potterspury-type ware (unglazed) (medieval)
- 2 x Potterspury-type ware (glazed) (14th-16th century)
- 8 x Glazed redwares (16th-17th century)
- 3 x Midland Purple ware (15th-17th century)
- 6 x Cistercian-type ware (c1480-1580)
- 7 x Midland Black ware (c1550-1700)
- 3 x Dark-on-light slipware (17th century)
- 1 x Tin glazed earthenware (16th-17th century)
- 6 x **Manganese-glazed mottled wares** (c1680-1740)
- 1 x **Frechen (German) stoneware** (17th -18th century)
- 2 x **Westerwald (German) stoneware** (post 1664-18th century)

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The pottery is of limited value and is not an illustration of the early use of the hall, but rather suggests that the soils were imported from potentially a variety of sources around and even outside the town, perhaps rubbish middens. Only the few types (in bold) would have been in use at the time of the market hall's construction.

Almost nothing dates with any certainty to the early 18th-century alone so it does seem likely that the early floor was a solid surface, perhaps stone flags, into which no further pottery was trampled or on which it was deposited.

Animal Bone

By Dr Sheila Hamilton-Dyer

Introduction

The bones come from a watching brief on conservation works to the interior of the listed market hall. The material was recovered from the soil under the 1883 flagstone floor.

The animal bone material consists of 1 box containing just over 2kg of bone. The number of individual bones from hand-collection is 67 specimens. This total takes into account recent breakages and loose teeth that can be re-joined and replaced.

Methodology

Taxonomic identifications were made using the author's modern comparative collections. All fragments were counted and were identified to taxon and element. Sheep and goat were separated using the methods of Boessneck (1969). Recently broken fragments were re-joined where possible and have been counted as single specimens. Tooth eruption and wear stages of cattle mandibles were recorded following Grant (1982). Measurements mainly follow von den Driesch (1976) and are in millimetres unless otherwise stated. The archive includes details of metrical and other data not presented in the text below.

Results

The condition of the bone is generally good and most of the bones can be identified to taxon. The remains can be identified as domestic cattle, sheep/goat, horse, and undiagnostic fragments of these size classes. Most bones are of the same pale tan colour with a slightly chalky surface but there are a few of darker, more mineralised preservation. A few bones and teeth are fragile and show a dark grey/purple stain internally, suggestive of damp mould growth. Fine details such as butchery marks and gnawing are clearly visible on the bones.

A total of 29 of the specimens can be positively identified as cattle with a further 16 rib, vertebral and other fragments of cattle-size. The bones are a mixture of elements and include pieces of limb bones, pelvis, scapula, foot bones, mandibles and a maxilla. The cattle-sized fragments are mainly of ribs and vertebrae and most are definitely of cattle. These include several axially divided lumbar vertebrae; the division of the carcass having been made by axe or cleaver rather than sawn as is the standard method today. One bone, a first phalanx from the hind foot, has a fine cut mark that

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indicates disarticulation from the second phalanx and hoof. Most of the bones are from mature animals but two, a metatarsus and a humerus, are from calves.

Ovicaprid bones total ten with four positively identified as sheep, none as goat. A further six fragments are of this size class. The bones are a mixture of the main meat bones together with three from the forefoot.

One bone can be positively identified as horse; this is a portion of a first phalanx and has been axially chopped. This is a foot bone and not from the prime meat areas but foot bones can be used to extract glue.

Although no other species are present in this small sample, the presence of gnaw marks on at least 15 of the bones gives indirectly evidence of dog. Marks on the ovicaprid carpal are from small sharp teeth, perhaps indicating a puppy or cat.

Discussion

The condition of this assemblage is good and a high proportion of the remains can be identified to taxon. Butchery marks are common and readily observable. The traces are mainly of heavy bladed instruments such as cleavers and in several cases nick marks on the blade have left their pattern in the chop marks. The butchery style is positive with several bounce and chatter marks visible.

The gnaw marks indicate that at least some of the bones were available to dogs rather than immediately covered after use. Very few, however, are eroded or of different types of preservation; this suggests that the majority of bones were not left for any length of time before final burial.

The assemblage indicates a dump of relatively clean material, either fresh or redeposited from a rapidly covered midden or pit. The bones are mainly large pieces of bone rather than small broken and trampled fragments. Most of the bones are of cattle, several clearly butchered, and are a mixture of elements rather than, for example, just the head and foot bones from slaughter or tanning. There are also a few mixed elements of sheep/goat and a horse phalanx that might have been waste from glue manufacture. Although several bones have canid gnaw marks they are not heavily chewed as might be the case if the bones are from material deliberately fed to dogs. A small number of bones are of different preservation and were perhaps already trampled into the surface or were transported in from somewhere else.

There are several possible interpretations for the origin of the bones including, an early make-up level for the first floor, an early 18th century accumulated dump of trampled-earth flooring and waste from market traders or make-up material prior to laying the 19th century flagstones. The first of these is the most likely, given the good dating of the pottery (above) and clay tobacco pipes (below).

Clay tobacco pipes

The clay tobacco pipes were compared with the published examples found on the Historic England-sponsored National Pipe Archive, to be found in full at:

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<http://www.pipearchive.co.uk/howto/date.html>

A single clay tobacco-pipe bowl was recovered from the drain fill below the constable's room. This is of Oswald type 9. It dates around 1700. As such it was probably broken during drain construction or shortly after washed into the drain and got stuck in the silt, never to be washed out again.

Some 22 Clay tobacco pipe bowls or parts thereof were recovered from the sub-floor layer.

Four have heels and are of Oswald Type 8 or 9, with a further six with heels but slightly taller and elongated (type 10). All date to the end of the 17th or beginning of the 18th century.

The remainder have spurs rather than heels but in all cases the bowls are much less well-preserved. These are again late 17th or early 18th century in date and are Oswald type 18 or 19.

In addition a further 132 fragments of clay tobacco pipe stem were recovered from the sub-floor layer. They are of varied lengths, thicknesses and with very varied large stem bores, the latter broadly indicative of a wide 17th-18th century date-range. They have no further use in this context as the related bowls cover the deposit much more closely.

As with the pottery the date range of the clay pipes suggests that they represent at least some material imported with middened rubbish to make up the ground, with perhaps others being broken by workmen at the site during the foundation and drain digging. There were none of 19th-century date.

Conclusions

The fieldwork has uncovered remains which indicate at least some of the original arrangements of the open market hall from construction in the early 18th century until the later 19th century.

Materials brought in at construction contained finds from that and foregoing periods, probably gathered up from waste found in middens and dumps around the town to form an extensive make-up layer on which to set the first floor. About 300mm of this layer was excavated under archaeological control. It is estimated that at least the same thickness again still survives in situ for the future.

There is structural evidence for the insertion of a constable's room and two cells, identified by its close resemblance to a surviving 1837 document. However, sufficient differences exist to note that at least two designs, whether competing or one being progressively adapted to suit finances and the client's wishes.

No structural evidence was exposed for any pre-1700 market hall or market cross (the name is sometimes interchangeable), but the possibility that such a structure stood here or close by cannot be discounted.

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Appendix

OASIS data

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Project Name | Brackley Town Hall |
| OASIS ID | iainsode1-293482 |
| Project Type | Watching Brief |
| Originator | Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd |
| Project Manager | Iain Soden |
| Previous/future work | No |
| Current land use | In use as a building |
| Development type | HLF Conservation |
| Reason for investigation | Client-led restoration for HLF/Brackley Town Council |
| National grid reference | SP 585 369 |
| Start/end dates of fieldwork | March-May 2017 |
| Archive recipient | Initially Brackley Town Council |
| Study area | 800 sq m |



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

18 August 2017