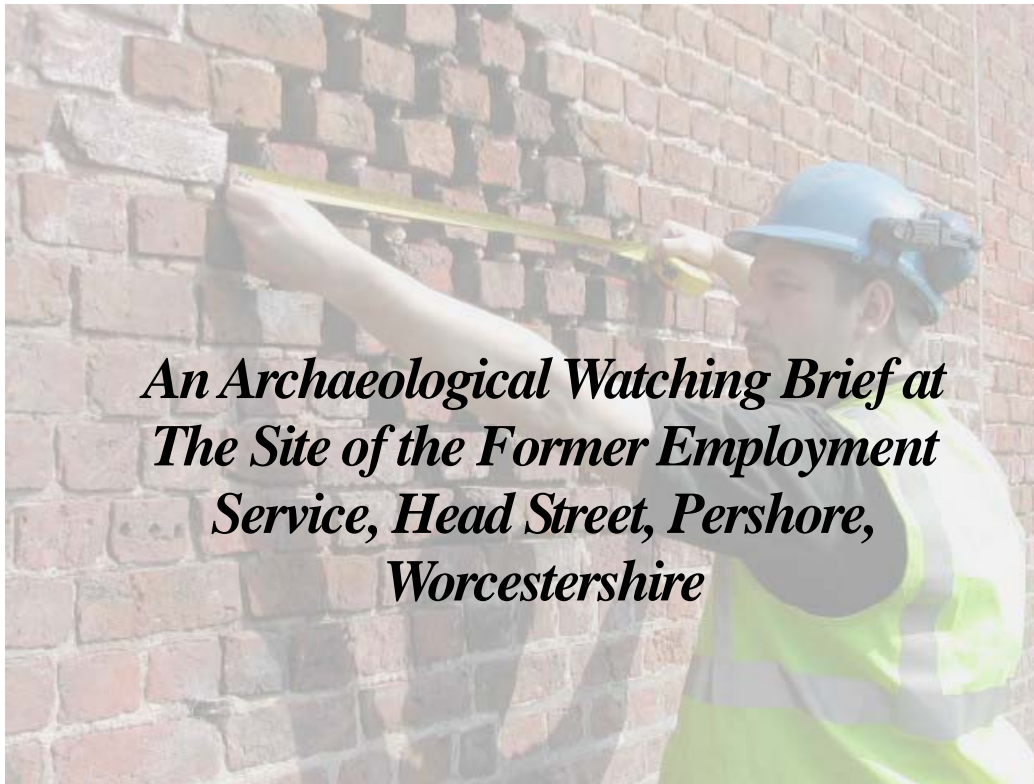


# Mercian Archaeology

-taking the past into the future

*Watching Brief at the Site of the  
Former Employment Service, Head Street,  
Pershore, Worcestershire*



*An Archaeological Watching Brief at  
The Site of the Former Employment  
Service, Head Street, Pershore,  
Worcestershire*

*A Report for EEC Construction Services Ltd*

October 2005

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**Project: PJ 148**

**WSM 34752**

***Mercian Archaeology** undertake archaeological projects across much of the West Midlands and the Welsh Marches. **We specialise in Historic Building Recording and Analysis.** We also undertake archaeological watching-briefs, evaluation and excavation, desk-based assessment, historic landscape assessment and osteological analysis. We now also carry out historic reconstruction and can produce illustrations for publication, website or interpretative panels.*

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# 1. Project Background

## 1.1. Location of the Site

Prior to demolition, the former Employment Service offices lay on the western side of Head Street, a residential street of mixed date buildings, which runs southwards off Pershore High Street (NGR SO 9456 4604). The market town of Pershore lies around 8 kilometres to the south-east of Worcester and around 6 kilometres to the north-west of Evesham, the A44 linking the three. (Figure 1).

## 1.2. Project Details

A planning application was presented to Wychavon District Council for the demolition of the offices of the Employment Service and the construction of three domestic units in a single block (W/04/1729). The planning process determined that the proposed development site might affect a site contained on the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (WSM 16052) as a 'site of archaeological interest'. As a result, the Planning Archaeologist, Worcestershire County Council, placed a 'watching brief' planning condition on the application, for which a brief of work was written (WHEAS 2005).

## 1.3. Reasons for the Watching Brief

The archaeological watching brief has been suggested as the appropriate response to the threat posed to the potential archaeological site by the development process. This would involve the excavation of foundation trenches and service trenches for the proposed new building.

A watching brief is defined as:

*A formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be in a specified area on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed (IFA 1999).*

A watching brief at the site was proposed in order that a record of any archaeological remains or deposits encountered during excavations associated with the development may be made and placed into context using our current archaeological knowledge of the area.

## 2. Methods and Process

### 2.1. Project Specification

- The project fieldwork conforms to the Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (IFA 1999).
- The archive conforms to the standards and guidelines established by the Archaeological Data Service.
- The project conforms to a brief prepared by the Planning Advisory Section, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service (WHEAS, 2005) and for which a project proposal and detailed specification was produced (Mercian Archaeology (2005).
- Mercian Archaeology adhere to the service practice and health and safety policy as contained within the Mercian Archaeology Service Manual (Williams 2003)

### 2.2. Aims of the Project

The watching brief aimed to:

- Use the results of the archaeological work to produce a report highlighting: -
  1. The survival and location of any archaeological deposits.
  2. Make an analysis and interpretation of all identified natural and cultural deposits
- Based on the above, establish the significance, survival, condition and period of the archaeological remains and place them within context at local, regional or national level where relevant.

## 3. The Documentary Research

### 3.1. The Topography

The market town of Pershore lies within a loop in the River Avon at around 20m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The soils are gleyed clayey pe-lo-alluvial of the Fladbury Series with stagnogleyic argillic brown earths of the Bishampton Series further away from the river course (Beard et al 1986). Below the soils the geology is of Lower Lias clay laid down in the Jurassic period (British Geological Survey 1:50,000, Sheet 199). The geological setting is an alluvial river terrace above the current floodplain.

### A Brief Archaeological Overview

There is limited evidence for Roman activity in Pershore, with Black Burnished ware pottery sherds having been found somewhere in the Priest Street area of the town (WSM 16059). Further Roman pottery has been identified from two sites at Newlands (WSM 02222; WSM 16037). Other Roman finds from the town include a coin hoard (WSM 15733).

Like the majority of the county and indeed the west of Britain in general, there is little evidence for the transition period from Roman to Anglo-Saxon, the period usually termed the Dark Age. The Minster Church of Pershore was established around AD 689 by Oswald, prince of the Hwicce (Hooke 1998, 13), which is likely to have been the catalyst for the foundation of a settlement spreading out from the church precinct that later developed into the town of Pershore. Pershore Abbey that we see today dates from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards and was built on the site of the existent Anglo Saxon Minster. There is a suggestion that Pershore was the site of a royal mint within a defended *burh* by the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century (Bond in Dalwood *et al* 1996), although the evidence for this is conjectural (Dalwood *et al* 1996). The artefactual evidence for Anglo-Saxon Pershore is scarce; a pit was excavated during archaeological work at Priest Lane, which included a sherd of glass tempered pottery dateable to the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD (Dalwood *et al* 1996), with later Anglo-Saxon finds of a spearhead (WSM 15893) and the 'Pershore censer-cover' (WSM 15751) (Cook 2005).

At Domesday, there were 28 burgesses in Pershore (Thorn and Thorn 1982) who would have paid rents to the church. A year earlier in 1065 King Edward gave much of the estate of Pershore Abbey to Westminster Abbey, with the Abbot of Pershore retaining the remainder, including burgess plots in High Street and at Newlands (new lands), which appears to have been planned and laid out by the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Dalwood *et al* 1996). Recent archaeological work on the site of St Agatha's Hall on the eastern side of Head Street located a substantial boundary ditch aligned approximately east-west and dateable to sometime before the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Cook 2005; WSM 33856; WSM 33857) and it seems likely that this feature represents the back boundary of the burgage plots aligned on High Street and consequently the limit of medieval activity. Archaeological evaluation work has produced supporting evidence for medieval Pershore; pits and building foundations were located at 14-16 Newlands (WSM

07195); stratified medieval deposits were identified at Little Priest Lane (WSM 16037) and buried road surfaces noted in Priest lane are also likely to be medieval (WSM 16039); further medieval remains have been identified at 37 High Street (WSM 15293) and 25 High Street (WSM 15825).

The Central Marches Historic Town Survey for Pershore (Dalwood *et al*) indicates that the town was fairly prosperous with a thriving wool trade, which was bolstered by good communications to the south-east aided by the medieval bridge over the Avon and to Worcester in the opposite direction, where the navigable River Severn allowed trade further afield.

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, Pershore Abbey was taken into private ownership. The English Civil Wars left their mark on Pershore and the medieval bridge was partly destroyed by Parliamentary forces during skirmishes with the Royalist garrison in the town.

Post-medieval Pershore retained a wealth of diverse trades with glove making, silk weaving, tanning and leather working predominant (Dalwood *et al*). The coming of the railway in 1853 further fuelled the wealth of the town.

### 3.2. The Cartography

The detailed 25" to 1 mile 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885 shows a row of terraced houses along the Head Street frontage of the sit. The western site boundary was in place and marked the current boundary. There were orchards backing onto the western side of the site (Figure 2).

The later edition map of 1938 shows development to the west of the site and the terraced houses still along the frontage. It is likely that these were demolished in the late 1960's and soon after the Employment Service building erected.

#### Cartographic Sources Used

Source	Reference Number
Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" (1885) Worcestershire Sheet XLI.11	Worcester Records Office
Ordnance Survey Provisional Edition 1:2500. Worcestershire Sheet XLI.11 (1938)	Worcester Records Office

Other sources used are referenced within the report.

### 3.4. The Fieldwork Methodology

The watching brief was undertaken between 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2005.

The site photography was carried out using digital format. A 1-metre scale was used where possible.

Proforma Record Forms were used to record the site stratigraphy in tandem with site notes to produce the final record contained within this report.

The methodology adopted and the favourable working conditions meant that the aims and objectives of the brief could be fully met and the fieldwork was successfully concluded.

## 4. The Watching Brief

The watching brief was carried out on excavated foundation trenches across the development site following the progress of the ground workers. The trenches were excavated to a depth of between 1.10 and 2.00 metres. Natural undisturbed parent material was seen in all trenches observed. In undisturbed areas, natural was seen at 0.70 to 0.80 metres below the surface (road level).

The general stratigraphic sequence across the site was a 20 to 30 centimetre thick layer of recently disturbed dark brown sandy silt containing frequent demolition material (brick / tile/ mortar/ glass/ iron etc) and small round stones [100]. This sealed a brown silty sand layer of around 40 centimetres thick, containing frequent small to medium round stones, occasional charcoal flecks and occasional inclusion of brick and tile [101]. The yellowish brown sandy-gravel natural was observed below this level [103].

The eastern third of the site had been truncated by cellarge relating to the terraced houses shown on the early Ordnance Survey maps. Foundation walls some 50 centimetres thick, constructed of orange brick and mortar [105] were noted in the excavated trenches (Plate 1). The areas between the walls were filled with loose demolition material, clinker, sandy gravel and tipped garden soil [106] representing the backfilling and levelling of the cellars at the time of demolition. The grey clay foundation level of the cellar floors [107] was noted 1.20 metres below the ground level (Plate 2), indicating that the lower floor level of the houses must have been reached by steps from the frontage to allow adequate headroom in the cellars. The evidence also indicated that the houses did not extend to the southern site boundary, the first being located some 4 metres to the north.

In the south-western quarter of the site there were a series of pits. A pit [108] measuring some 3.50 metres wide and surviving to 1 metre deep was filled with a dark blackish loamy matrix containing brick and tile fragments (Plate 3), small and medium rounded stones and ceramics [109]. A second pit [110] filled with similar material [111] was identified around 1 metre further to the north (Plate 4), although due to the constraints of the watching brief it is possible that this was part of the same pit as [108], which may have been an amorphic shape. A third pit [112] was filled solely with brick and tile [113], which were the same colour and size as the bricks used in the foundation walls on the eastern side of the site (Plate 5).

A further feature was seen in section and appears to be the backfilled cut of a circular feature, interpreted as a well [114]. This was seen to a depth of 2 metres.

There were no significant archaeological deposits or finds located during the watching brief.



## 5. Discussion of the Physical and Documentary Evidence

The watching brief determined that there were no significant archaeological features or deposits within the development area and the evidence suggests that the site had been disturbed during the demolition of the cottages, probably in the late 1960's or 70's.

The earliest features on the site were the foundation walls [105] of the terraced houses, which were constructed of 2 ¾" brick in a lime mortar and are likely to date to the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The early Ordnance Survey map shows a terrace of houses along the eastern side of the site, although the evidence on the ground indicates that there was not a house in the south-eastern corner of the site and the terrace started 4 metres to the north of the southern site boundary. This anomaly cannot be explained other than that the map shows houses and yards. The proposed well [114] must also date from this time, as it would have served the requirements of the occupiers of the houses.

The pits [108 and 110] date from the period of occupation of the houses and are probably 19<sup>th</sup> century rubbish pits. The features contained clay tobacco pipe, 19<sup>th</sup> century ceramic sherds and one sherd of 18<sup>th</sup> century ripple rim-moulded slipware.

The latest feature encountered was the pit [112] containing demolition material from the terraced houses and while we cannot say that the pit was dug at this time specifically for this purpose, we can say that it was open at the time of demolition.

The lack of medieval features, finds or deposits, supports the hypothesis above that the ditch encountered during archaeological work on the opposite side of Head Street, marks the southern boundary of the medieval burgage plots to the north and hence the limit of medieval activity.

## 6. Conclusion

*The results of the archaeological watching brief demonstrate that there was no significant archaeological remains or deposits located within the development area. The physical evidence indicated that the site was levelled after demolition of cottages fronting Head Street sometime during the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The houses were built with cellars / basements, probably in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a well in the back plots and evidence that rubbish was being buried in pits on the south-western side of the site.*

## 7. Acknowledgements

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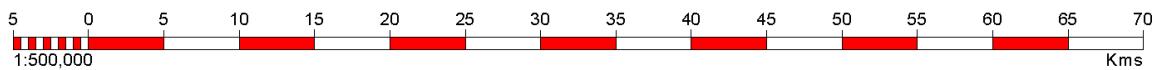
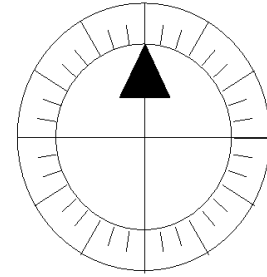
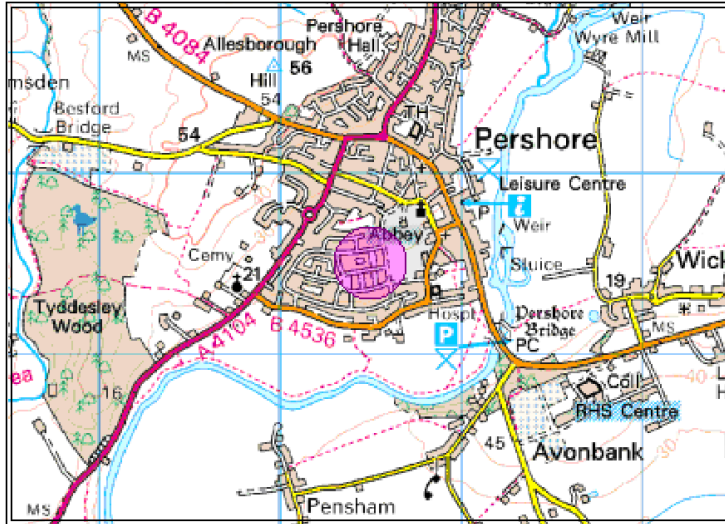
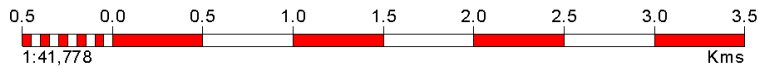
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# Figure 1: Location of the Site

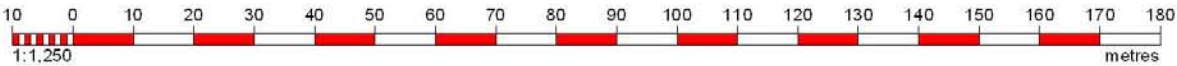
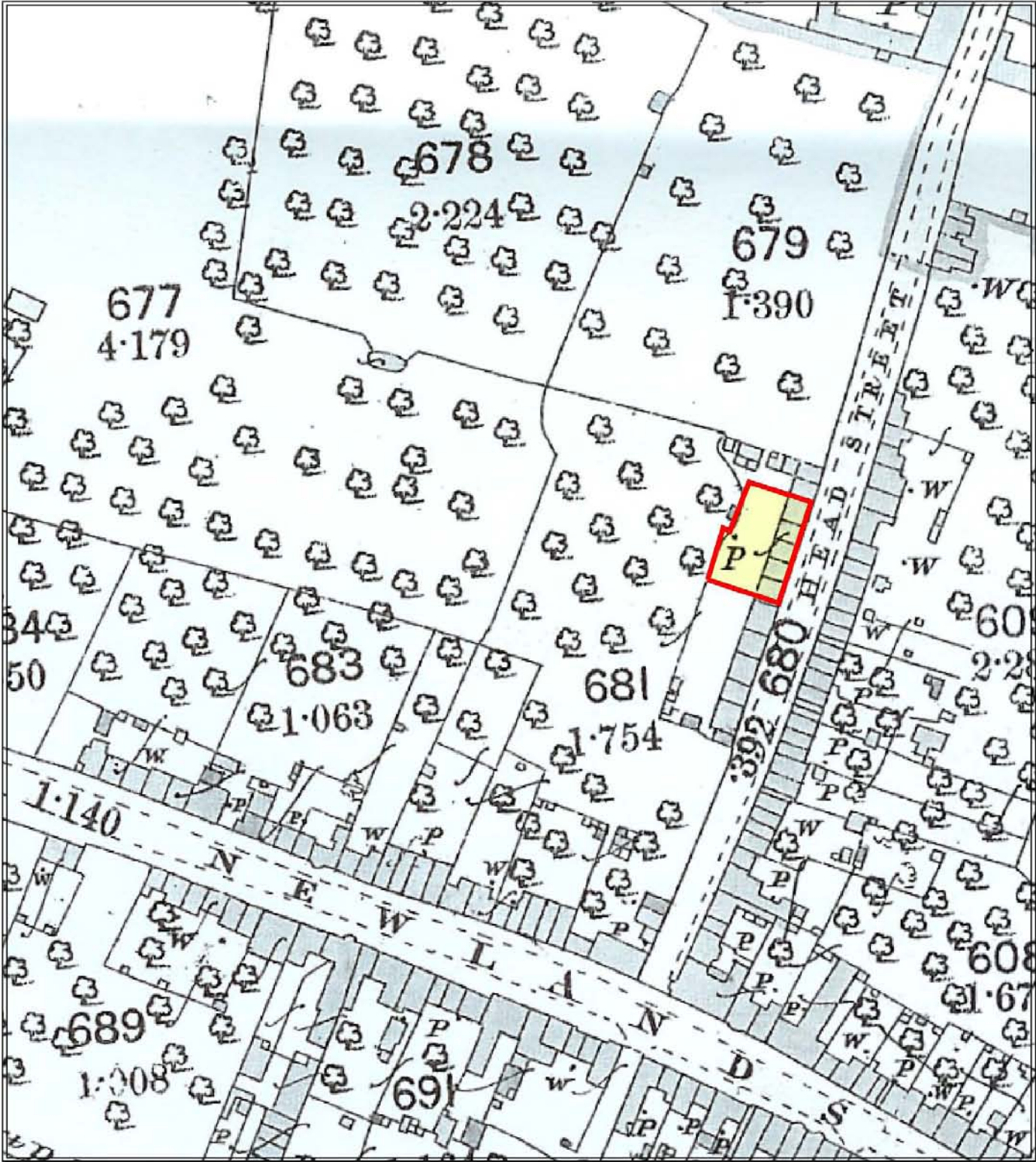


Location of the Site at Head Street,  
Persnore

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Figure 2: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1885)



The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map with the development site highlighted

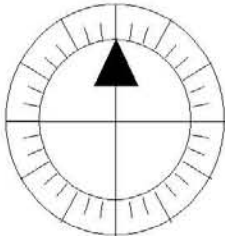
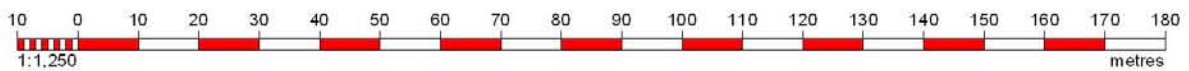
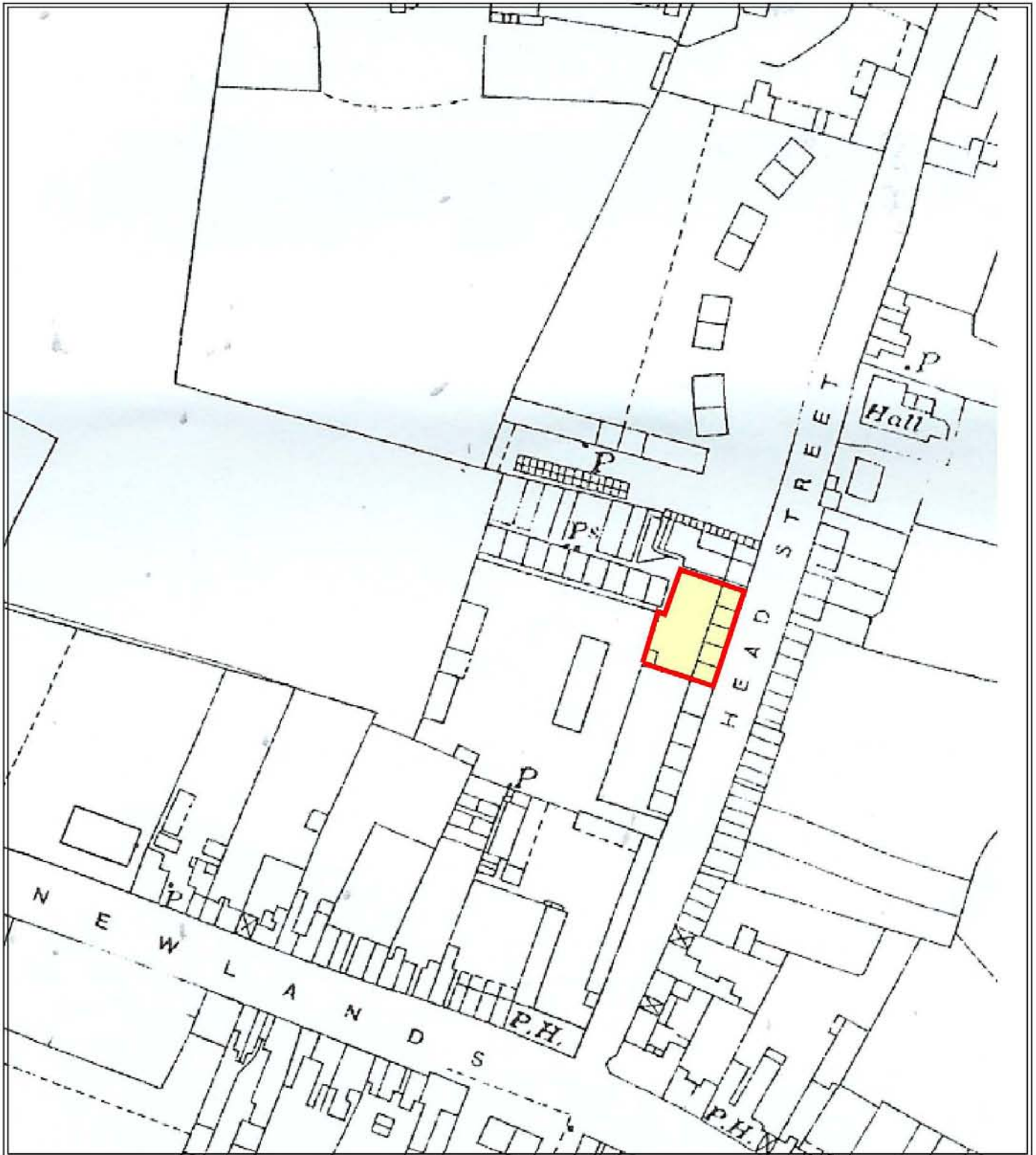
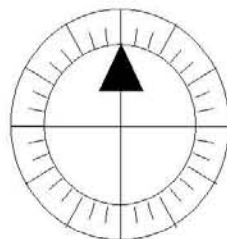
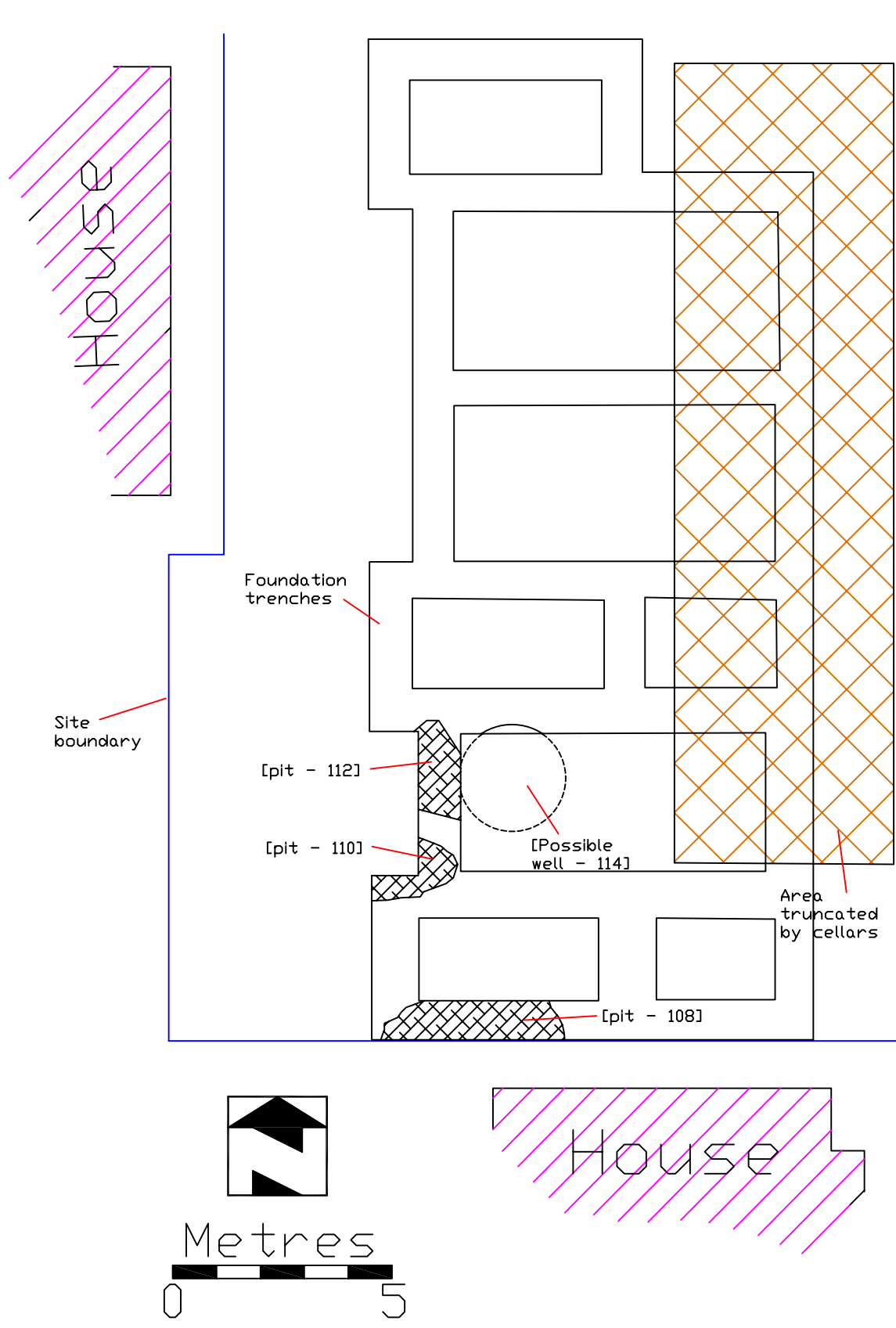


Figure 3: Revised Ordnance Survey (1938)



The 1938 Ordnance Survey map with the development site highlighted





Head Street

Figure 4: Site Plan

# Plates

## Plate 1



*Wall foundations [105] looking west (scale 1 metre). Note the cellar backfill to the right and none to the left*

## Plate 2



*The clay floor level (dark line) of the cellar floor (trench depth 1.50 metres)*



# Plates

## Plate 3



*Pit [108] looking south-west (scale 1 metre)*

## Plate 4



*Pit [110] looking west (trench depth 1.10 metres)*

# Plates

## Plate 5



*Pit [112] filled with loose brick and tile rubble*

## Plate 6



*Work in progress at Head Street*