

# MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY AT VICTORS WAY, BARNET

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*With contributions from Jacqui Pearce (pottery), Kevin Reilly (animal bone), Ian Betts (building material), Kate Roberts (plant remains), Tony Grey (clay tobacco pipe) and Nicola Powell (metalwork, glass, stone and coins)*

## SUMMARY

*Archaeological investigation in 2005 at the rear of the Mitre Inn, Victors Way revealed activity from the medieval to the post-medieval and modern periods. During the medieval period, the site area was dominated by boundary ditches. There followed a period of apparent disuse until activity resumed in the 16th century. Post-medieval and modern exploitation of the site varied between phases of domestic pitting and organised soil deposition and the creation of associated pathways. These phases of activity may reflect changes in the developing town of Barnet.*

## INTRODUCTION

The investigation at Victors Way, to the rear of the Mitre Inn, 58 High Street, Barnet, was conducted in advance of the redevelopment of the site by Mitchell Price. The site is located approximately 100m east of the crest of Barnet Hill in High Barnet, centred on NGR TQ 24690 96477 (Fig 1). An initial evaluation was carried out by the HADAS between 1989 and 1990 (site code: BM89). This consisted of a single test pit measuring 12m by 2m which revealed a number of post-medieval structural footings, possible floors and dump layers. The dump layers contained a varied amount of ceramics, including residual tile and pottery of Roman and medieval date (Thompson *et al* 1998). A further evaluation was carried out in November 2003 by Wessex Archaeology (site code: VWY04), which indicated the presence of medieval and post-medieval remains (GLSMR 2007). An open-area excavation of the development site was conducted by AOC Archaeology Group in

September and October 2005 using the site code VWA 05.

## GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying geology consists of Pleistocene Stanmore Terrace Gravels overlying deposits of London Clay (British Geological Survey 1994). The site lies on a ridge of ground at approximately 126m OD. The topography of the local area slopes to the south and east to form a valley. The site is relatively flat at ground level; however the underlying natural topography slopes to the east from 124.67m OD to 123.64m OD. The Ordnance Datum levels of the gravel across the site also reflect the downward slope in the natural terrain towards the valley of a previously existing Thames tributary, probably the River Brent.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Medieval

Little is known of the medieval archaeology of Barnet. The nave in the church of St Mary the Virgin, East Barnet, is thought to date to the Anglo-Saxon/Norman period *c.*1140 (RCHME 1910, 86). A second church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, was situated further west in what is now Chipping Barnet. At this time Barnet and the surrounding area was held by the Abbey of St Albans (Gear 1987, 7). In 1199 King John granted the Abbot a Market Charter, which in turn encouraged trade. The origins of the place-

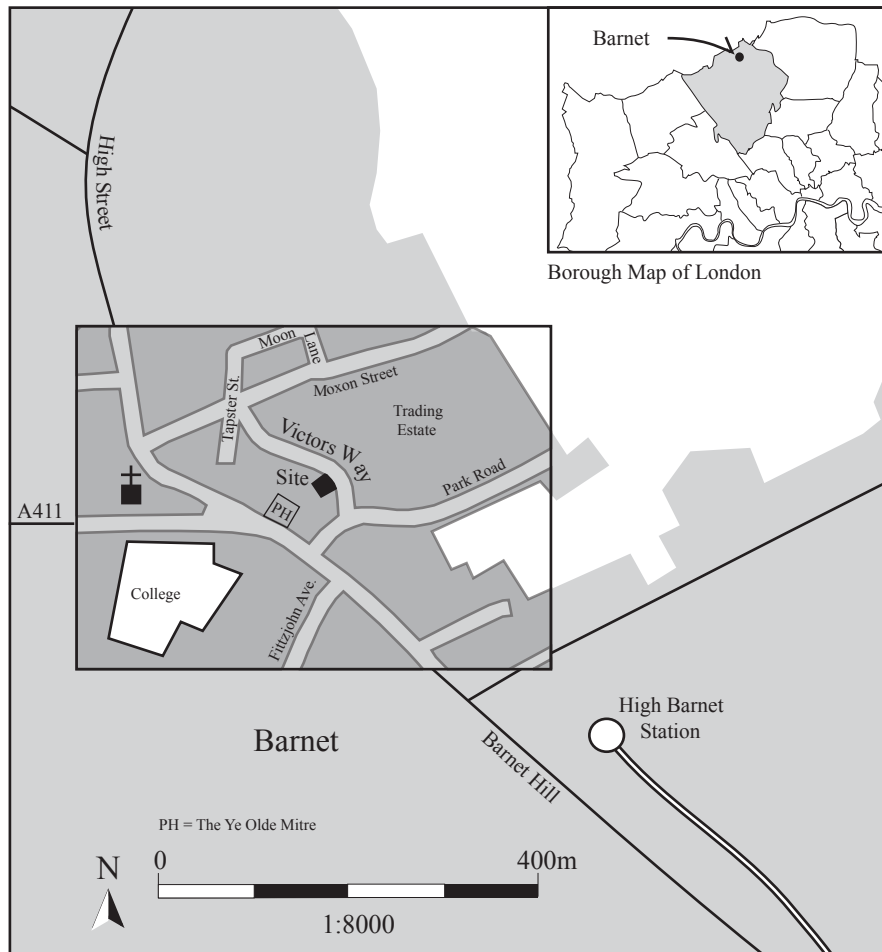


Fig 1. Site location

name Chipping Barnet may reflect this activity, with 'Chipping' derived from the Old English '*cieping*' meaning market (Gover 1938, 71).

The scarcity of excavated archaeological evidence for occupation during the early medieval period suggests that the local agricultural community was widely dispersed. Excavations at Tapster Street (site code: TAP95), approximately 100m to the north-west of the site, revealed a rubbish pit dated to the mid-12th century, along with quarry pits that were dated to the 14th century (GLSMR 2007). The use of mainly timber based structures in the local Hertfordshire style would account for the lack of structural remains (Walker 1987, 9).

Restoration work at 70 High Street uncovered a section of wattle and daub associated with the older origins of the building (GLSMR 2007).

The only other medieval structural remains in the area were found during excavations at 19–25 High Street, which recorded a mortared flint and tile wall thought to be the base of a timber structure (GLSMR 2007; site code: BHS90). Other medieval finds from excavations along the High Street include a steelyard weight, fragments of jugs and undefined vessels in redware and south Hertfordshire greyware fabrics, and a 14th-century shoe (GLSMR 2007).

### Post-medieval

The growth of Barnet in the post-medieval period can be attributed to two factors: the market and the annual fair (established during the 16th century), and the presence of the Great North Road. The market became prominent during

the later medieval and post-medieval periods, mainly due to the cattle and horse trade. The cattle market alone would attract farmers and drovers from as far off as Scotland and Wales. The best butchers from London would travel to Barnet to purchase cattle, where they would be held locally until they were needed (London Borough of Barnet 2007). At this time the market also supplied meat to Smithfield Market (Walker 1987, 10).

The Great North Road ran from London, via Barnet, and continued north through to Scotland. This medieval route became further established during the post-medieval period and it was noted that ‘over a hundred and fifty mail and stage coaches, besides post-chaises, private carriages, wagons,... passed daily through the town’ (Victoria County History 1908, 329). The increase in visitors to Barnet led to the establishment of numerous inns and coaching houses, with Barnet labelled the ‘Town of Inns’ (Weinreb & Hibbert 1983, 386). The Mitre Inn is thought to have been part of a large complex, originating in the medieval period and later incorporating Tudor houses known as La Rose and La Crown to become ‘The Rose and Crown and Mitre’ (Jolliffe & Jones 1995, 14–15). It is unclear exactly when the inn was constructed but it was in existence as a wine tavern by 1633 and is possibly the oldest remaining coaching inn building. In 1660 General Monck stayed at the Mitre on his way to London to restore Charles II after the Commonwealth. The Mitre was described as ‘new built’ in April 1785 with ‘stabling for upwards of one hundred horses’, and ‘roomy conveniences for carriages’ in 1790 (London Borough of Barnet 2007).

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

### Medieval 1170–1350

There was no evidence for any activity predating the medieval period. The medieval remains were confined to the central part of the site (Fig 2) and consisted of a small layer of redeposited gravel (not illustrated), which was cut by an undated, large circular posthole, and two contemporaneous linear ditches — Ditches 1 and 2. Ditch 1 ran north–south whilst Ditch 2 ran east–west perpendicular to Ditch 1 (Fig 2). The ditches are likely to have been boundary or enclosure ditches, marking the ownership of land or serving as an internal division within

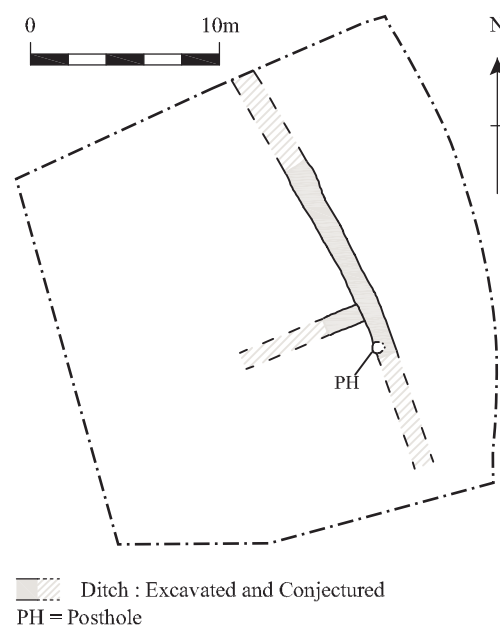


Fig 2. Medieval ditches

a larger plot. No activity either relating to the market or suggesting the presence of structures nearby was found.

The ditches were dated to 1170–1350 from the 26 pottery sherds recovered from the accumulative fill in Ditch 1. The assemblage was mainly composed of cooking pots, jars and jugs. South Hertfordshire-type greywares were the most common medieval pottery and are representative of local pottery manufacture across south Hertfordshire and north Middlesex (Blackmore & Pearce, in prep). This fabric, along with coarse London-type ware and its gritty variant, marks the introduction of wheel-thrown technology and glazing in pottery production, whereas previously the locally made wares would have been hand-built. Interesting examples of south Hertfordshire-type greyware include a rare socketed dish or frying pan from Ditch 2. The fragment included a short tubular handle attached over a hole cut just below the rim (Fig 3, a). The rim of the handle is lightly thumbled all around, an unusual feature for such a plain utilitarian form. Ditch 2 also produced jug sherds, one of which had deep double-thumbings running down its length (Fig 3, b). This feature is typical of south Hertfordshire-type greywares and is found throughout the area of production, as well as in London, which

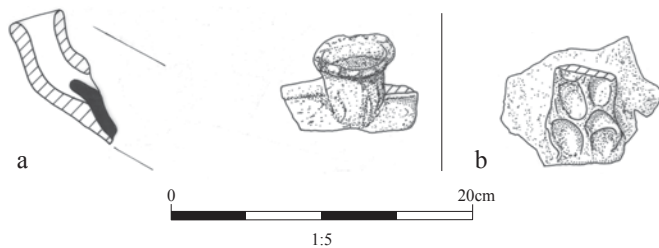


Fig 3. Medieval ceramics

provided a major market for the industry during the 13th and early 14th centuries. The presence of ceramics on the site may be the result of sporadic deposition disturbed by trampling or agricultural activities, corresponding to the use of the site as open ground. A single fragment of fired clay (not illustrated) was recovered from Ditch 1. The fragment may contain a wattle impression, in which case the fragment is accidentally-fired daub. Environmental residues from the ditches revealed remains of charred wood and waterlogged roots; however no seeds or grains were noted in the samples.

### Post-medieval

Between the 13th and 16th centuries there was a hiatus in activity on the site. Reoccupation of the site began with occasional postholes and small-scale pitting, probably for the extraction of clay, sand or gravel, and a later garden or reoccupation soil. The main feature relating to

the 16th-century activity was a square-shaped flint structure [158] thought to be a basement or cellar. This structure, located in the north-west corner of the site, represents the only building recorded on site (Figs 4–5). The basement/cellar was backfilled with several dump layers, and individual pits, which included cess and general domestic refuse. Only nine sherds of pottery were recovered from the backfill, including examples of a locally made jug and bowl as well as an imported Cistercian ware cup and a Cologne-Frechen stoneware jug. Environmental sampling of the backfill produced small quantities of charred cereal grains, which included examples of free-threshing wheat (*Triticum aestivum/compactum/turgidum*), hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare sl*) and possible oat (*cf Avena spp*). These are likely to have been deposited on site as cereal waste rather than as a result of on-site processing. Examples of fruit remains, including seeds of fig (*Ficus carica*), blackberry/raspberry (*Rubus fruticosus/idaeus*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*),

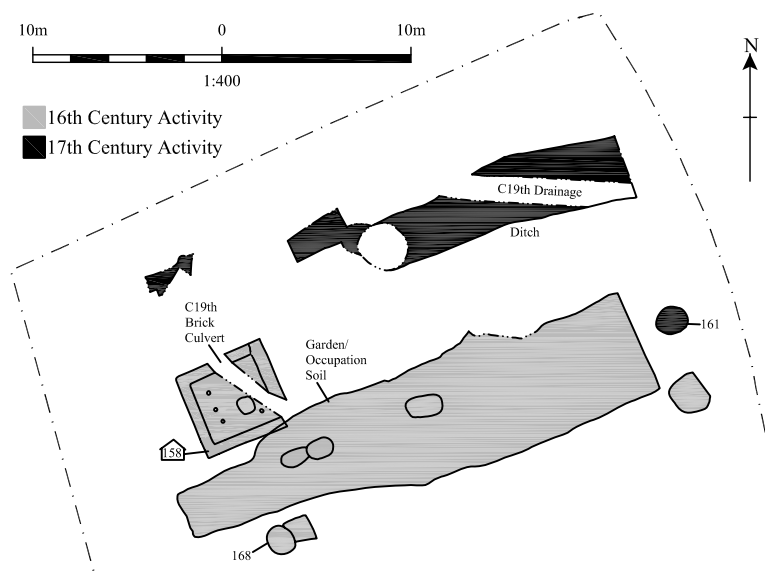


Fig 4. 16th- and 17th-century activity

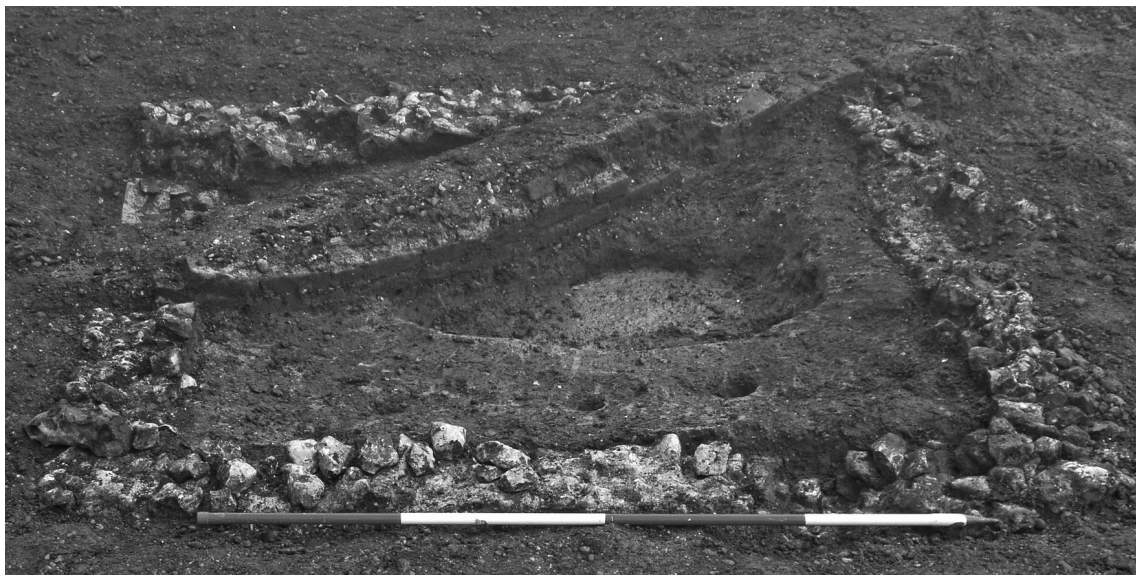


Fig 5. Structure [158]

were also recorded in the backfill deposits. The presence of these seeds, along with sedge seeds (*Carex* spp), indicates the deposition of cess. The small amount of chicken bone recovered from the backfill may represent a single meal. During this period poultry was regarded as ‘poor man’s food’ (Reilly 2007).

The limited pottery assemblage was dominated by red earthenwares. The forms are typical of the 16th century; however the fabric differs from that of the London-area, early post-medieval redware, which is found throughout central London in this period. As such it is termed ‘post-medieval Hertfordshire-type redware’. The main forms identified at Victors Way are bowls, dishes, jugs and cauldrons or pipkins. Examples of both flared and rounded bowls are represented on site. Fragments from a rounded bowl with a broad flanged rim, lightly pinched all round, were recovered from an 18th-century dated pit (Fig 6, A). Two flared bowls or dishes from the same pit have rims with a wide external flange (Fig 6, B & D), while an example from a pit dated 1480–1600 has an externally thickened and bevelled rim with a more triangular profile (Fig 6, C). Part of a deep flared bowl, recovered from a pit within structure [158], has a broad flanged rim with a slightly thickened, rounded edge (Fig 6, E).

Sherds from three jugs recovered from pit [100] include part of a thickened, externally

bevelled (triangular) rim above a straight-sided neck (Fig 6, F), and part of an unglazed strap handle with shallow central groove (Fig 6, G). Also recovered from pit [100] was a fragment of a jar or pipkin. The surviving rim is everted and thickened with an externally bevelled edge and internal lid seating (Fig 6, H). The sherd has a rounded profile, glazed inside and out, with two shallow grooves running around the maximum girth. 16th-century London-area redwares were also found in chronologically mixed contexts dated by later material to the 17th or 18th centuries, especially pit [100]. These included sherds from a cauldron in London-area, early post-medieval redware, glazed inside and out, with a rilled upper body, and an everted, thickened rim (Fig 6, I). Part of a carinated dish in London-area, post-medieval slipped redware with clear glaze is of similar date (Fig 6, J). The everted rim has a broad, bevelled top and a deep, undercut collar, and the vessel is coated inside the base with white slip, up to the mid-point in the profile, with a clear glaze over the entire interior.

The site changed very little during the 17th century. The focus of activity was limited to the north of the site with two pits and the addition of a 0.63m-deep east–west aligned ditch. The ditch is possibly too deep for a simple enclosure ditch; however there was no organic evidence or natural accumulative material present to suggest drainage. It contained fragments of pottery,



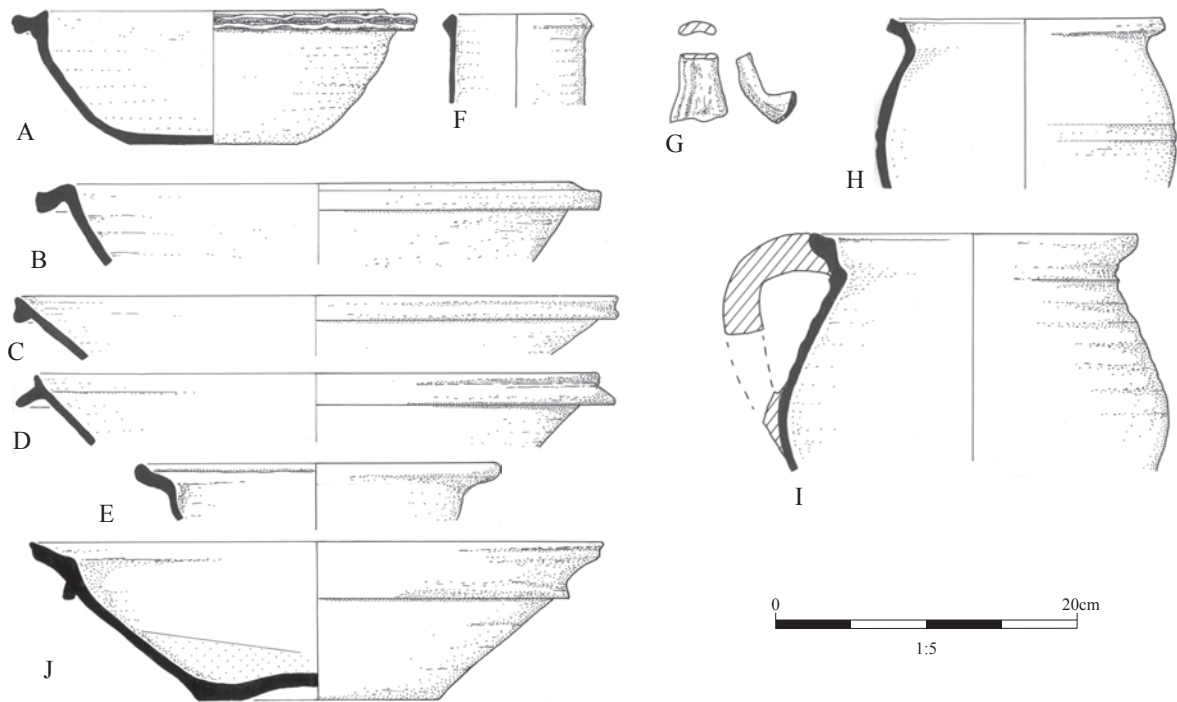


Fig 6. Post-medieval ceramics

including sherds of post-medieval redware, tin glazed ware and imported Chinese porcelain. There is no activity on site relating to structure [158], established in the 16th century. This may suggest that the building was already out of use by the end of the 16th century. Two fragments of a cat jug (not illustrated) recovered from pit [161] signify a higher status of wealth on site. This is a rare piece which would have been regarded as a luxury display item. It is possible that the jug/figurine was originally on display in the Mitre.

Throughout the 18th century there was further small-scale pitting across the site (Fig 7), which was followed in the 19th century by two phases of cultivation soils and the establishment of a pathway (Fig 8). The pathway, which was constructed out of compacted gravel and sand, snaked across the site, forming smaller plots which may have been individually owned or one large plot with smaller internal divisions. The cultivation soil contained fragments of bottle glass, iron nails, pantile, brick and wall plaster, along with post-medieval redware, pearlware, post-medieval black-glazed ware and London sourced stoneware. A small assemblage of animal

bone was also recovered, which was identified as sheep/goat- and cow-sized bones. The remains suggest the presence of the meatier parts of the animal.

There was a distinct change in activity during the mid to late 19th century. The path and associated soils were truncated by intensive pitting, dump layers and postholes (Fig 7). The pits appear to have been used solely for the deposition of domestic waste as no industrial waste was recorded. Occasional fragments of peg tiles, pantile, and brick were recovered, along with fragments of animal bone, clay tobacco pipe, iron, lead, and window and bottle glass. Pottery sherds included examples of Surrey-Hampshire border redware, post-medieval redware, creamware, stoneware, yellow ware, earthenware and English porcelain. Environmental residues from a posthole identified very occasional water-logged seeds from blackberry/raspberry (*Rubus fruticosus/idaeus*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*), suggesting cess was deposited either within the posthole backfill or in close proximity to the posthole.

The pitting activity ceased during the late 19th century when a drainage system was

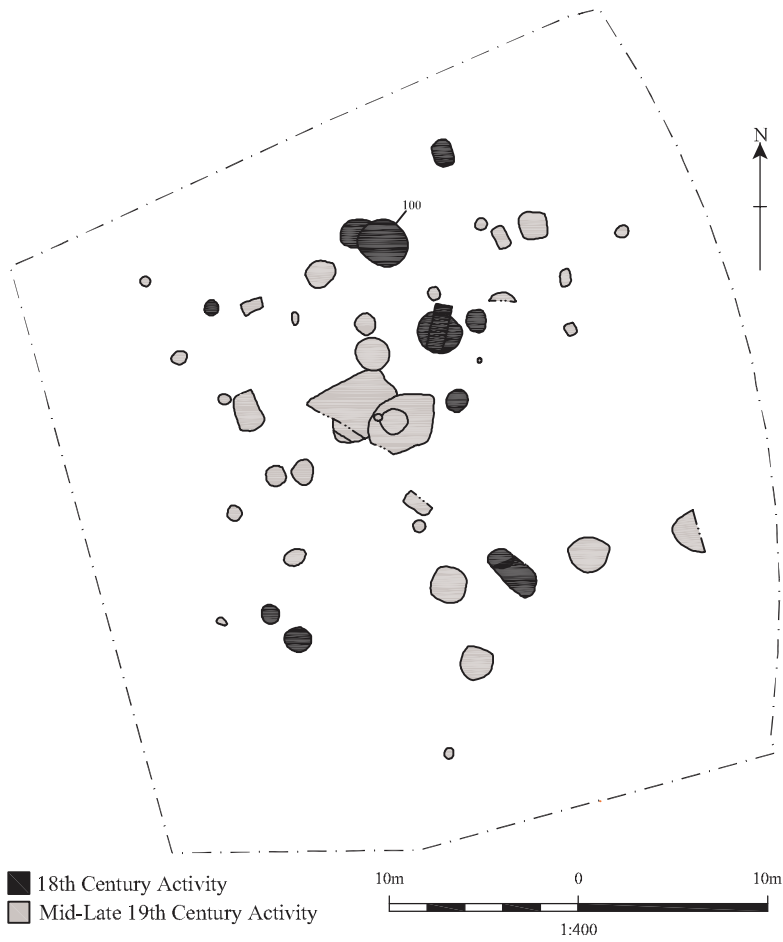


Fig 7. Two phases of pitting activity: 18th century and mid to late 19th century

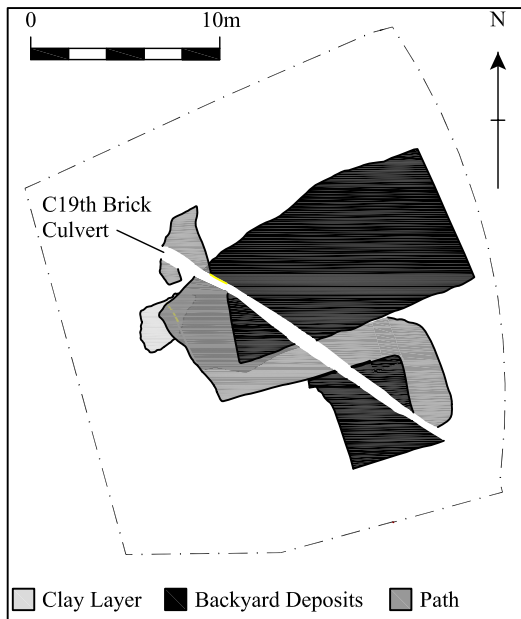


Fig 8. Backyard deposits: mid-19th-century activity

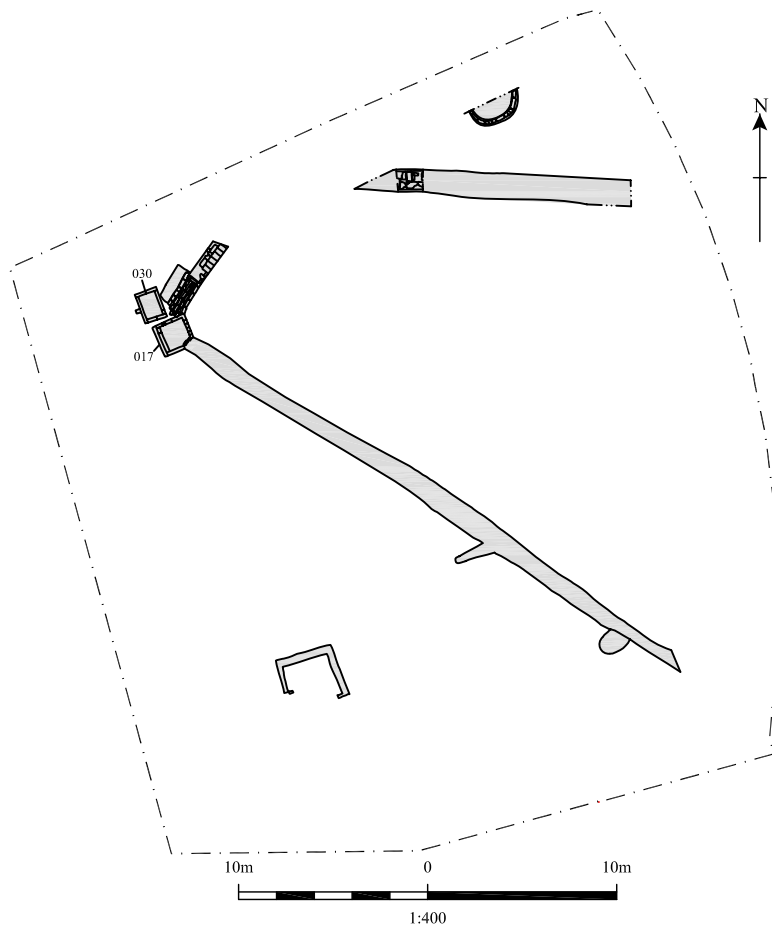


Fig 9. 19th-century drainage

established (Fig 9). The system consisted of a linear culvert, a truncated box-drain, a linear ditch, and one circular and two rectangular-shaped soakaways. The bricks dated to 1850–1950 and are likely to have been produced locally. One brick recovered from the circular soakaway was identified as being produced at the Barnet Gate Brick Works, which is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1896. The backfill of the rectangular soakaways contained domestic waste including a large assemblage of pottery. Soakaway [030] contained 43 sherds of pottery dating to 1807–1850. Soakaway [017] contained environmental data, including free-threshing wheat (*Triticum aestivum/compactum/turgidum*) and hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare sl*), seeds of stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and sedge (*Carex* spp), along with a mineralised fragment of grape pip (*Vitis vinifera*) and waterlogged seeds of fig (*Ficus carica*), raspberry (*Rubus cf idaeus*), blackberry/raspberry (*Rubus fruticosus/idaeus*)

and elder (*Sambucus nigra*). The presence of fruit remains and sedge seeds suggests disposal of human waste. The occurrence of fig and grape remains, which were less common outside of London (Giorgi 1997, 203), is a mark of relative status. The drains and the soakaways are likely to relate to the Mitre, an establishment which would have been able to obtain sought-after luxuries for guests.

20th-century activity on site was restricted to three pits, a ceramic pipe, a modern foundation trench, and a large sub-circular well/water tank/soakaway. The latter was constructed of red brick with a concrete capping roof.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Medieval

There is little archaeological evidence in Barnet that relates to the early origins of the town. The



local population would have been predominately agriculturally based and is likely to have been widely dispersed. The archaeological evidence found at Victors Way expands our knowledge of medieval Barnet as it demonstrates evidence for land management and individual ownership/plot division during the 12th to 14th centuries. The ditches recorded on site and the lack of any building material suggest that the area was still undeveloped and was used as agricultural or pasture land. The only finds recovered from the medieval period were the single fragment of daub and the small assemblage of animal bone, and sherds of domestic pottery. The pottery suggests a trend towards south Hertfordshire and north Middlesex potteries and that these local potteries would have provided the bulk of the household requirements.

### Post-medieval

There is a distinct lack of evidence on site for the period between the 12th and 16th centuries. This suggests that the local area, used as open pasture, remained unaltered or abandoned until the 16th century when activity returns to the site. Occupation of the site in the 16th century may reflect the expansion and growth of Barnet, relating to the establishment of the Annual Fair and the development of Tudor housing and inns. The deposition of garden or reoccupation soil suggests a change in the use of the site from occasional domestic refuse pitting, to a planned and laid out soil in the form of a solitary plot. The positioning of the plot (*ie* east-west) suggests a direct relationship with the High Street. The exact function of structure [158] remains unclear. There was no evidence of any steps constructed in flint or timber within the structure, though this does not discount its use as a basement or cellar. The artefactual remains dating to this period suggest that the local population was purchasing local wares, with less demand for London wares and imported pottery. All fragments are from standard domestic households with no suggestion of high status. Environmental residues and animal bone remains on site demonstrate the deposition of food waste and cess and the food waste is suggestive of a typical diet of meat and fruit. The inclusion of chicken within the remains and the lack of exotic fruit or delicacies recovered would seem to indicate a poorer household.

Development of the site in the 17th century

was limited. Only three features were dated to this period and it is worth noting that none of these features impacted on the land management or pitting of the previous century. This may suggest that there was no access to that particular part of the site for activity or that the 17th-century activity was a continuation of the same land management scheme. There appears to be a slight shift in the status of the artefacts deposited on site during the 17th century. The pottery sherds are still predominately local; however there are more examples of London based wares, which may indicate a decline in the local potteries or the desire for the more popular fabrics predominately used in London. The occurrence of more London based goods and higher status products, such as the cat jug, is unsurprising considering the popularity of Barnet's market, an ideal location for the promotion of ceramic goods.

The varied activity on site during the 18th to 19th centuries suggests a constantly changing environment, possibly echoing the changes and demands of the town. The relatively short-lived use of the path and garden/yard soils suggests that (during the mid-19th century) the site was organised and functional. Its proximity to the Mitre suggests that they are related and may represent a period of the Mitre's expansion. The area may have been the location of stables, as it is known that the Mitre housed coaches and had enough stable room for 100 horses (London Borough of Barnet 2007). Perhaps the path represents this phase in the Mitre's history. The change in land use back to general pitting by the late 19th century suggests that the function or purpose for the pathway no longer existed; this would have allowed the return of refuse deposition at an increased rate. If the land had been used for temporary stabling and coach housing associated with the Mitre, the return of refuse pitting might suggest that the demand for such facilities declined. The establishment of larger and more centralised markets in London shifted the focus of the cattle trade away from Barnet, and with it the human and bovine traffic. This would have had a dramatic impact on Barnet. It was not until the arrival of the railway in 1850 that Barnet became established as a dormitory town for commuters.

The ceramics recovered from the site are common to other sites excavated in and around Greater London and reflect trends and popular designs of the 18th to 19th centuries. The

assemblage recovered represents inexpensive wares that were at the lower end of the market, suggesting that the population depositing their waste on site were from the lower classes. This is echoed by the lack of imports on site as well as the absence of elaborately decorated or unusual vessels which may indicate wealth. This contrasts with the environmental data, where the occurrence of 'exotic' fruits, including fig and grape, from this period suggests a relatively high status population. It is possible that the soakaways and culverts relate to the Mitre and that it is in this establishment that the 'exotic' fruits were consumed. This may account for the differences in wealth, as the refuse pitting could have been from the local population whilst the inn could have catered for travellers of a higher status.

There is noticeably less activity on site during the modern period. This is possibly due to the reduction in size of the Mitre as it became a public house rather than a coaching house. This reduced activity can also be attributed to the establishment of side streets leading off from the High Street, standardised development and occupation of the High Street, and the later addition of a car park over the entire area.

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