

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
During Groundworks at 28 Fairfield Road,
Market Harborough, Leicestershire
(NGR SP 732 875)**

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For J. H. Hallam and Son Ltd.

Planning Application Ref: 2004/0931/3

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Harborough, Leicestershire (NGR SP 732 875)**

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Summary

University of Leicester Archaeological Services undertook a watching brief during removal of demolition rubble and the excavation of foundation trenches on land at Fairfield Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire (NGR SP 732 875). Much of the ground area was found to have been previously disturbed and the remains of several brick foundations relating to earlier buildings were noted. No medieval or earlier activity was identified during the work. The archive will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museums under the Accession number X.A125 2005.

Introduction

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out during groundworks on land at 28 Fairfield Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire (NGR SP 732 875) (*figures 1 & 2*) in Harborough District. Planning permission for the construction of a three-storey apartment development with parking and landscaping was granted subject to archaeological conditions (PA 2004/0931/3). The work follows the *Brief for Archaeological Watching brief at 28, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough* prepared on 8th September 2004 by the Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council Historic and Natural Environment Team, which detailed and the *Design Specification for Archaeological Works at 28 Fairfield Road* produced by ULAS on 3rd February 2005.

The site is located towards the north end of Market Harborough. The British Geological Survey map 1:50 000 Series, Sheet 170, indicates that the underlying geology consists of Jurassic clays and silts.

Historical Background

An archaeological desk based assessment was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in April 2004, following advice from Harborough District Council. The following information derives primarily from this report.

The study concluded that no specific archaeological sites were known to exist within the development area but that the site is located within the medieval settlement core of Market Harborough and therefore had potential to contain surviving archaeological remains. Market Harborough is believed to be a planned town, with origins in the 12th century and was centred round a wide, main street acting as the market area. Roman activity is known from the locality but no evidence has yet been recovered close to the site. An Anglo-Saxon spearhead recovered from Fairfield Road, was believed to have accompanied a burial. In addition, a number of medieval finds have been made in the area. The earliest available map (Turner's map of 1776) showed that the long thin plots which would have extended back from the High Street in the medieval period,

have been amalgamated into larger plots. No buildings were depicted at this time. An 1839 map shows a number of outbuildings on the site. The 1886 OS map indicates that there have been some changes to the outbuildings, which possibly belonged to the Angel Hotel, a post-medieval coaching inn fronting onto the High Street. By 1900 the site appears to have been used as a smithy. Map evidence indicates that the site was re-developed in the mid-20th century, when the narrow outbuildings were removed and a central square building was constructed.

The site was previously occupied by PL Textiles Ltd. and was enclosed by high brick walls, which have been retained by the current development.

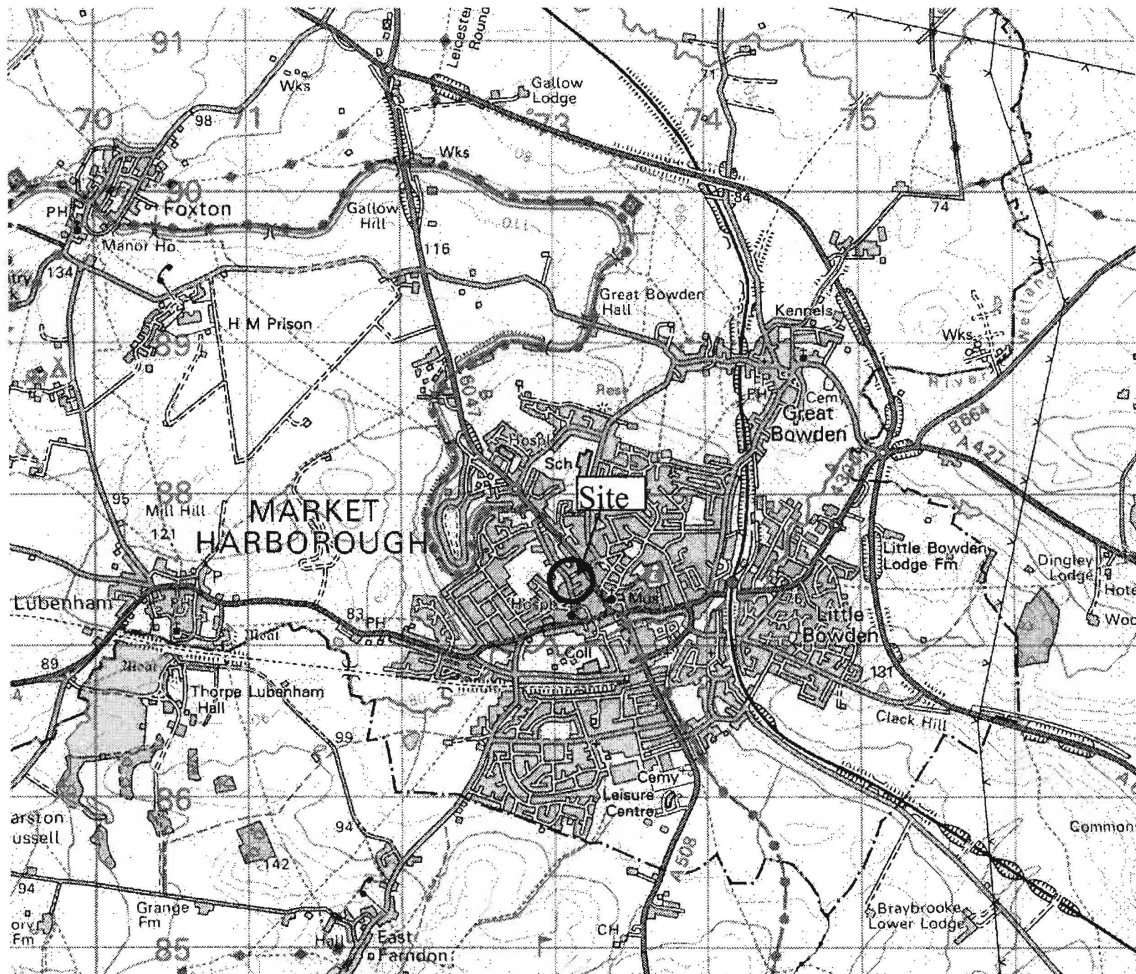


Figure 1: Location Map Scale 1:50000 © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence Number: AL100021186

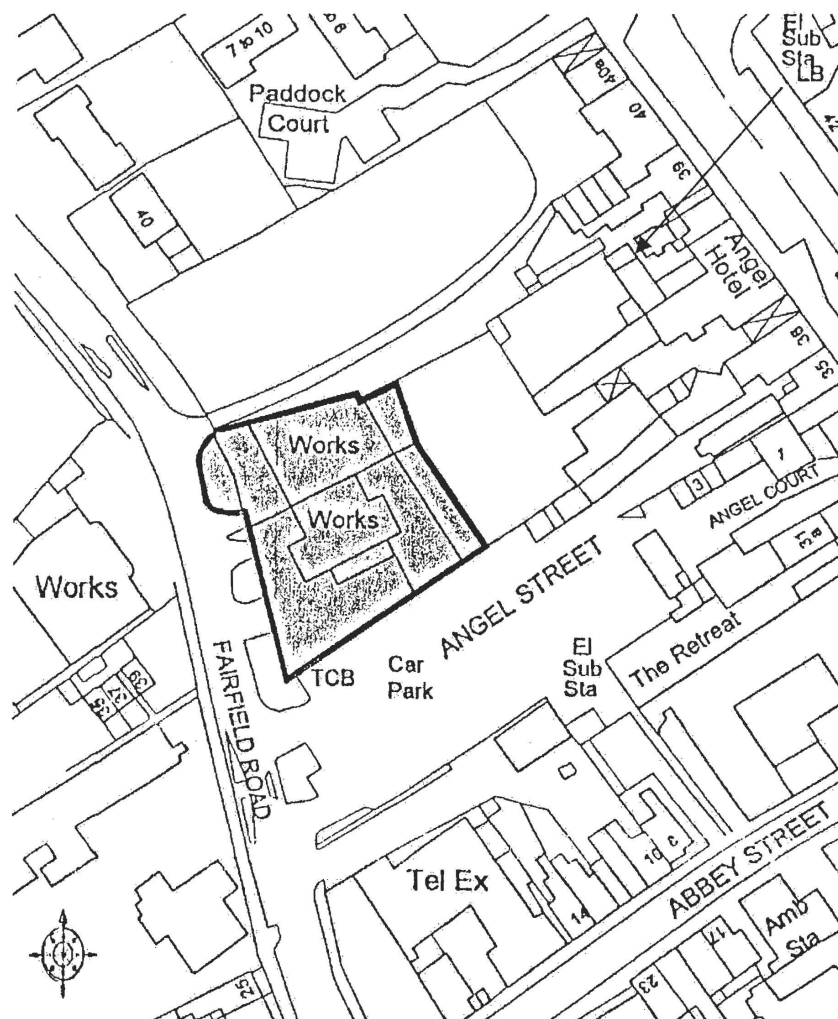


Figure 2: Site location plan. Scale 1:1250 (Supplied by client).

Aims and Methods

The aim of the archaeological work was to observe the groundworks and to record, as appropriate, any archaeological deposits or features encountered. The work followed the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*, the *Design Specification (ULAS)* and the *Brief*.

The site was visited on five occasions between 19th May and 28th June 2005, when the programme of work consisted of removal of demolition rubble and the excavation of foundation trenches for the two new apartment buildings.

Results

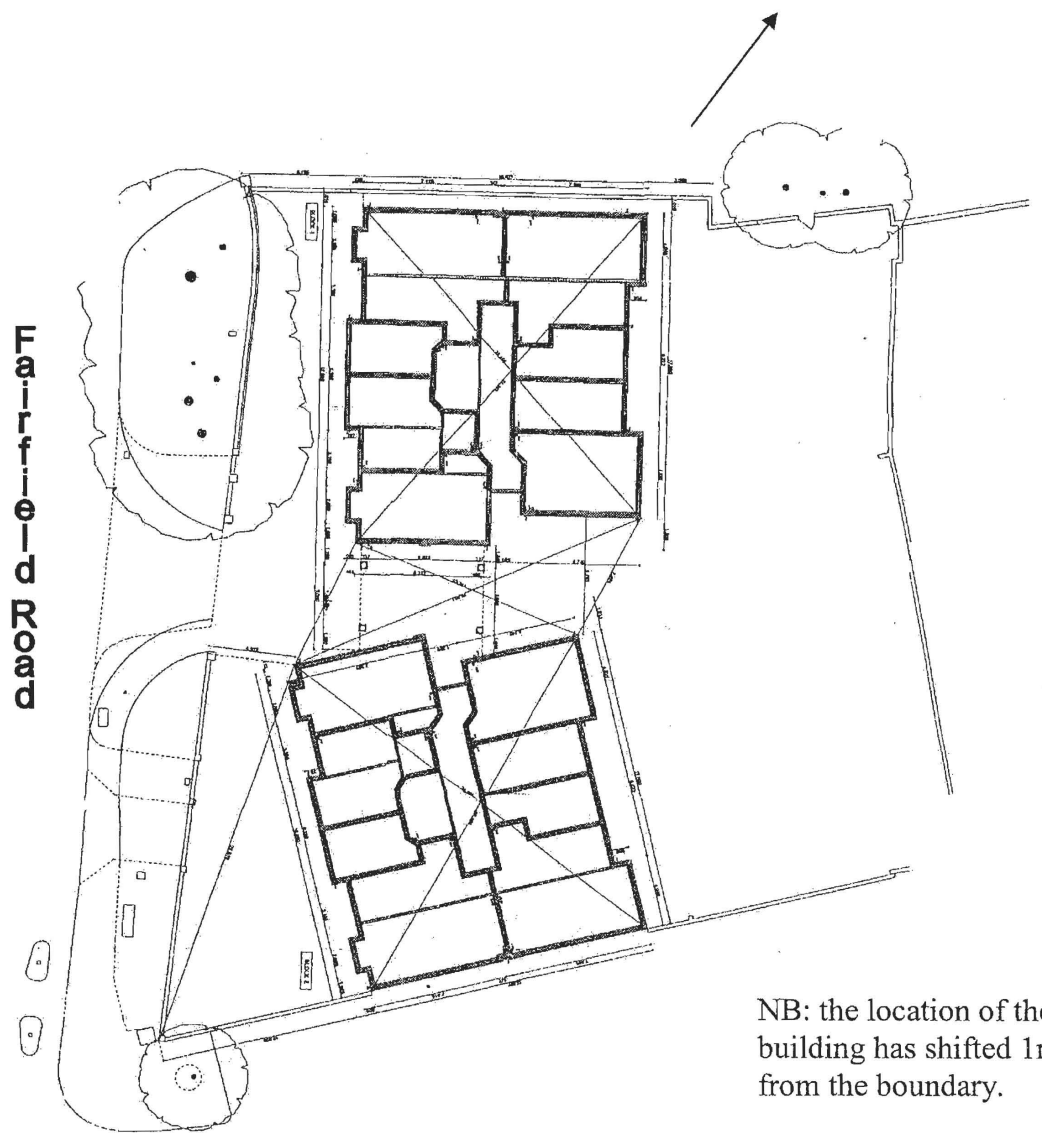
During the first visit ground stripping was observed for the car park at the rear of the plot and a small area for the site compound at the front. The site was largely covered in rubble resulting from the demolition of the former buildings. Between 0.3 and 0.5m of overburden was stripped from both areas. On the frontage, mid yellow brown sandy clay subsoil was revealed, although there were some signs of modern intrusions. The exposed surface at the rear of the site appeared very disturbed, with frequent brick

rubble, hardcore, glass, concrete fragments etc. Few areas of clear subsoil were visible and an old pipe trench excavated in the southeast corner of the site indicated that the ground was disturbed to a minimum depth of 0.5m. A well or soft water tank, constructed from angled curved well bricks was observed in the southeast corner of the site. Soft water tanks are quite common and tend to date from the 19th century. These were often found at the rear of terraced houses and served to collect run off water, which could be used for washing or other domestic tasks (Neil Finn *pers. comm.*).

Foundation trenches for the northern apartment building were excavated through a layer of demolition rubble (up to 0.8m thick), below which was thick dark yellow brown clay, above blue clay subsoil with ironstone fragments (*c.* 1.5m below ground level). In the trench directly adjacent to the north-western boundary, waterlogged grey/brown clay with black organic deposits was recorded underneath the rubble overburden. Below this there was a stony/sandy layer overlying large river cobbles with black charcoal or mineral deposits, sitting in blue/grey clay. Unfortunately, it was not possible to examine the deposit further due to the rapid influx of water. Fragments of tile were retrieved from the clays above and below; these were undiagnostic but thought to be post-medieval and subsequently discarded. The waterlogging observed on this side of the site was possibly due to a small spring in one of the trenches to the west. The remainder of the trenches for the northern building were *c.* 1.2m deep and comprised overburden with rubble (0.3-0.4m thick) overlying a thick grey clay (*c.* 0.7m thick), with a blue/yellow mottled clay (possibly natural subsoil) at the base of the trench. Brick wall foundations on a northwest southeast alignment were observed in trenches 2 and 6.

The ground level of the adjacent land, belonging to 39 and 40 High Street, was approximately 0.5m higher than that of the development site, with established trees. This might suggest that the site itself had previously been stripped or levelled prior to the construction of one of the former buildings.

Foundation trenches for the southern apartment building were excavated on the 28th June. The first trench to be excavated lay along the south-eastern boundary. Near the base of the trench (*c.* 1.6m deep) there was a sewer pipe, below layers of rubble and backfilled waterlogged clay. The southern side of the site appeared to have been previously disturbed. However, towards the centre of the site, undisturbed natural subsoil, consisting of bright yellow brown sandy clay, was visible at approximately 1.5m below ground level. Brick rubble was observed crossing the trenches on an approximate northeast to southwest alignment. Some sections were mortared and are likely to be the remains of foundations for earlier buildings. All observed sections were constructed of modern-sized brick, which indicates that the buildings represented were no earlier in date than the 19th century.



NB: the location of the southern building has shifted 1m away from the boundary.

Conclusion

The watching brief revealed a number of brick wall footings but did not provide evidence of any medieval or earlier activity. It seems likely that any traces of early archaeology have been eradicated by disturbance caused by later building construction and the excavation of service trenches.

Archive

The archive consists of site notes, colour slides and black and white negatives and will be held by Leicestershire County Council Museums under the Accession number X.A125 2005.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kevin Parrot, Craig and everyone else on site for their help and co-operation during this watching brief. James Meek managed the project.

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ULAS Report: 2006-054

References

Northamptonshire Archaeology 2004 *Archaeological Desk-based assessment at 28 Fairfield Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire NGR 732 875*