

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham,  
Rutland  
(SK 859 087)**

Gerwyn Richards

for

**M.G. Evans & Co.**

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## **An Archaeological Watching Brief at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (NGR SK 859 087)**

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## **An Archaeological Standing Building Survey at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (NGR SK 859 087)**

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### **Summary**

*University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) was commissioned by M.G Evans & Co to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (SK 859 087).*

*Planning permission had been granted for the demolition of two outbuildings and the construction of two new retail/residential units to the south of number 15 Gaol Street. Previous work, including an archaeological desk-based assessment and archaeological evaluation indicated the site had some archaeological potential.*

*The archaeological watching brief did not uncover any significant archaeological stratigraphy, but what was observed indicated the area has seventeenth/eighteenth century occupational evidence and remained largely untouched during the twentieth century.*

*The archive will be held by Rutland County Museum under accession number OAKRM2008.57.*

### **1. Introduction**

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) was commissioned by M.G. Evans & Co to undertake a archaeological watching brief during groundworks at 17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (SK 859 087). Planning permission was granted for the demolition of the existing outbuildings to the south west of number 17 and construction of two new retail units with two flats (Planning Application Number FUL/2007/1205). The proposed development area lies within the historic medieval and post medieval core of Oakham.

The Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council, as advisor to Rutland County Council, advised that the proposed works would impact upon earthfast archaeological remains. It was therefore recommended that provision be made for a programme of archaeological attendance. Specifically an archaeological watching brief should be maintained on all groundworks.

Previous archaeological research in connection with the proposed development included an archaeological desk-based assessment and building appraisal (Boutsikas, 2008) and an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching (Baker, 2008) and a standing building record of the outbuildings (Richards, 2009). The desk-based assessment concluded that the proposed development site lies within an area of

significant archaeological potential, within the historic core of Oakham. In particular, there was evidence from historic maps that the site lay within the walls of the early post medieval County Gaol, which stood on the corner of High Street and Gaol Lane, parts of which were still standing in 1935 (VCH). In 1811 a new County Gaol was built on Station Road, but it closed in 1878 due to a lack of inmates. The building survey indicated that the southern and western boundary walls may indeed be the remnants of the County Gaol. The archaeological evaluation revealed a post-medieval pit feature with pottery and a post-hole of indeterminate date (Baker 2008).

## **2. Aims and Methodology**

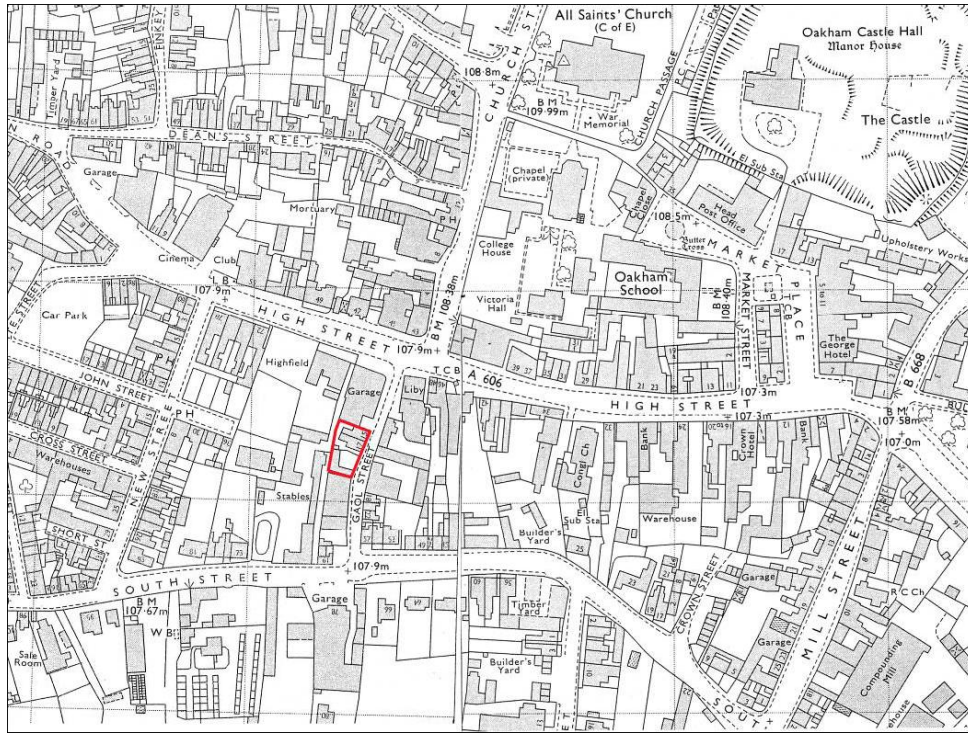
The specific aims of the archaeological work were to:-

- The project will involve the presence on site of an archaeologist to observe any groundworks and prepare a record of significant features by photography, drawings and written account as appropriate. The archaeologist will cooperate at all times with the contractors to ensure that their work is not delayed or hindered. However, if any archaeological deposits are seen to be present, the archaeologist will have the power to temporarily halt the works in order to define and record areas of archaeological importance.
- Any archaeological deposits encountered will be recorded and excavated using standard ULAS procedures.
- In the event that unforeseen archaeological discoveries are made during the development, ULAS shall have the power to halt any ground works and shall inform the site agent/project manager, the Planning Archaeologist and Planning Authority and prepare a short written statement with plan detailing the archaeological evidence. Following assessment of the archaeological remains by the Planning Archaeologist, the Archaeological Contractor shall, if required, implement on behalf of the Client a contingency scheme for emergency excavation of affected archaeological features.
- To produce an archive and report of the results.

The project involved the monitoring of works carried out by the client's contractors. Excavation was carried out by 7.5tonne back actor with a ditching bucket. After consulting the evaluation report (Baker 2008) it was decided that the initial overburden strip, of approximately 300mm would progress without archaeological monitoring (the exposed surface was examined during the watching brief). The groundworks consisted of two foundation trenches (*Figure 4*) which were excavated under continuous archaeological observation.

The watching brief was carried out by Gerwyn Richards. The site visit was carried out on March 5<sup>th</sup> 2009.

The project was completed in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) *Code of Conduct* and adhered to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*. In addition, Leicestershire County Council's *Guidelines and Procedures for Archaeological Work in Leicestershire and Rutland* was followed.



**Figure 1.** Site location (From the 1970 Ordnance Survey)  
Licence number AL 10002186

### 3. Results

Prior to the site visit, approximately 250mm to 300mm of overburden was excavated, a rapid examination of this surface revealed nothing of archaeological significance. A further two foundation trenches were then excavated under archaeological supervision. The first footing was excavated perpendicular to the westernmost wall, aligned approximately west-northwest, east-southeast (*Figure 4*). The footing was 600mm wide and excavated until bedrock was exposed, approximately 450mm-470mm below the existing ground level. The exposed stratigraphy consisted of a clayey-silt, grey-brown in colour (002), approximately 300mm-400mm in depth, in places there were isolated layers of subsoil. The bedrock consisted of weathered ironstone.

Although no cut features were recorded, a considerable amount of dating evidence was recovered from (002); this consisted of eighteenth and nineteenth century ceramics (not retained) and a large assemblage of clay pipe. These finds confirm that the yard had remained un-disturbed throughout the later part of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and (002) was the original garden soil or topsoil. Of the twelve clay pipe bowls recovered and retained, nine were clearly identifiable as Midlands Spur type (Higgins 1985) and mid seventeenth century in date. Interestingly four were fully milled and therefore, likely to date from the early part of the seventeenth century, milling became less fashionable in the later part of the seventeenth century this is represented by four bowls which have only half milled rims facing the smoker. Similar examples recovered during excavations at Causeway Lane in Leicester were dated to 1660-1680. Two later heel bowl types were also recovered; these are 1730 to 1780 in date. The final recovered bowl had sustained damage to both the rim and the heel making identification impossible.

The second footing was excavated parallel with Gaol Street and aligned approximately north-northeast, south-southwest (*Figure 4*). There was nowhere near the same depth of garden soil, only approximately 140mm was excavated before bedrock was exposed; nor was there the same density of artefacts observed. It is likely, therefore, that the Gaol Street frontage experienced more ground disturbance than the areas further away from the frontage. A single sherd of Bourne D ware (c.1450-c.1650), a green glazed pottery (Sawday, *D. pers comm.*), was recovered from the spoil excavated from this footing.



**Figure 3** Cullingworth Map of 1787 (Including Detail).

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite the limited scope of the watching brief, the results were significant. The watching brief confirmed that the site had not undergone any significant re-development; both the observed and recovered artefacts indicate a very limited period of activity during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This suggests that the site was indeed within the confines of the County Gaol as indicated by the Cullingworth Map of 1787 (*Figure 3*) and as such remained undeveloped until the Gaol's closure in 1811. Even after the closure of the Gaol, the site, with the exception of the two outbuildings, again remained undeveloped. The excavated layers represent garden soil and other normal yard activity, such as the rubbish pit recorded during the evaluation.

## 5. References

Baker, S. 2008 *An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trenching of land at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (NGR 8596 0873)*. ULAS Report 2008-111.

Boutsikas, E. 2008 *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment for the Proposed Development on land at 15-17, Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (SK 8596 0873)*. ULAS Report 2008-019.

<http://www.dawnmist.demon.co.uk/gallery.htm>

Fletcher, E. 1972 *Bottle Collecting*. Blandford Press.

Higgins, D.A. 1999 *The Clay Tobacco Pipes in Roman & Medieval Occupation in Causeway Lane, Leicester*. Leicester Archaeology Monographs No 5.

Victoria County History (VCH), 1935. Parishes: Oakham', *A History of the County of Rutland: Volume 2* (1935), pp. 5-27.

## 6. Archive & Publication

The site archive consists of

2 A3 permatrace sheets containing building plans & excavation plans and sections

51 Black & White negatives & contact prints

CD containing 18 digital images from evaluation stage

CD containing 50 digital images from building recording stage

CD containing 13 digital images from watching brief

4 A4 contact sheet

3 A4 photo index sheet

6 A1 paper plans supplied by client

1 A4 watching brief sheet

8 context sheets

2 trench recording sheets

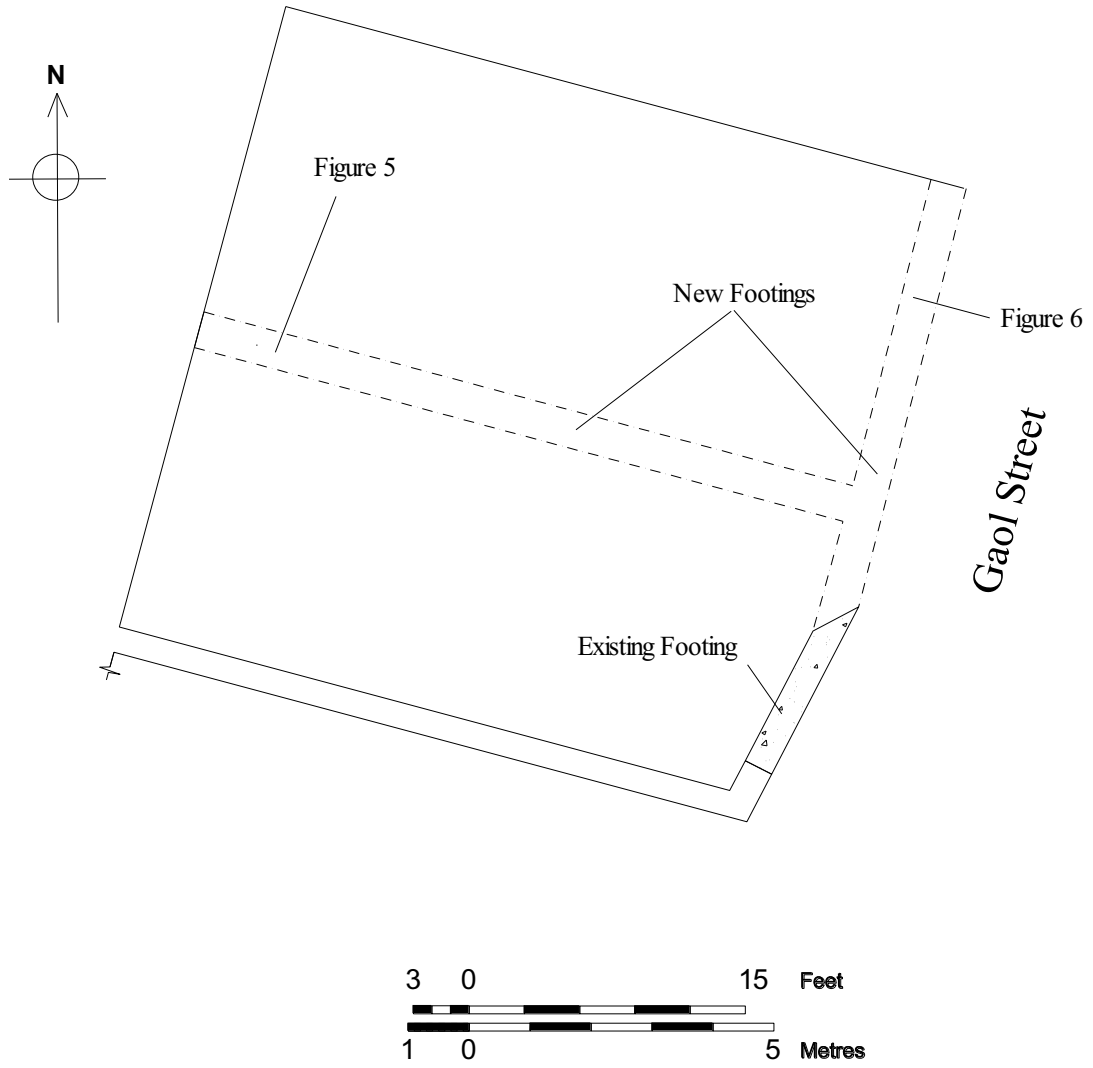
Unbound Copy of This Report (ULAS Report Number 2009-031)

Unbound copy of An Archaeological Standing Building Survey of 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (ULAS Report No 2009-21)

Unbound copy of An Archaeological Evaluation by trial trenching of land at 15-17 Gaol Street, Oakham, Rutland (ULAS Report 2008-111).

The archive will be held at Leicestershire County Council under the Accession Number OAKRM2008.57

A version of the summary (above) will be submitted to the editor of the local journal *Transactions of Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* for inclusion in the next edition.



**Figure 4** Excavations Monitored During Watching Brief.





**Figure 5** Work in Progress (looking south east).



**Figure 6** Excavated Footing (see Figure 4 for location).



**Figure 7** Excavated Footing (see Figure 4 for location).