

# AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING-BRIEF ON THE LINE OF NOTTINGHAM'S MARKET WALL

by

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## Background

The one-day watching-brief reported on here was commissioned by Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd. and was carried out by the author for Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit in February 2005 during the redevelopment of the Old Market Square, Nottingham.

## Nottingham's Old Market Square and Market Wall: historical context

The Saturday Market (whose site is now known as the Old Market Square) was established on previously-undeveloped land taken within the town as part of the post-Conquest extension of the Anglo-Saxon town, extending from Bridlesmith Gate to the castle (Holland Walker, 1931, 74). The market is first referred to in a charter of Henry II (1154–1189), but was probably established in about 1070 to 1080 (Holland Walker, 1931, 76).

The market area was always a large, mainly open, space: any booths or tents used by the traders were initially of a temporary nature, erected on market days and removed immediately afterwards. Prior to the 17th century some of these stalls had become permanent: at the east end of the market stood the butchers' stalls (shambles) and shoe booths (Fig. 1; Iliffe and Baguley, 1970, 19). However, from at least 1530 the market place also contained the 'Market Wall', which crossed the open space from east to west. Its line is shown on early maps up to 1714 (Fig. 1). In the 18th century this wall was breast-high, with openings "at proper distances to pass from one side to the other" (Deering 1751, 7). Deering states that the wall had divided commodities for sale, with space for timber and

animals (horses, cattle and pigs) to the south and produce (corn, malt, oatmeal, salt, and milliners, hardware-sellers, bakers, turners, braziers, tinmen, chandlers, collar-makers and gardeners) to the north. After the demolition of the wall and the reorganization of the market-place, the market people kept as far as possible to the same places as before (Deering 1751, 8).

The market contained part of the boundary between two legal and administrative areas, the English Borough and the French Borough (broadly, the former Saxon town located in the Lace Market area and the post-Conquest extension, respectively). The distinction between the boroughs lasted from 1068 to 1713/14 (Mastoris, 1981, 68). Mastoris identified the probable line of the common boundary between the boroughs from documentary evidence, and concluded that the Market Wall probably demarcated part of it. 'It is surely not entirely coincidental that the Market Wall was partially demolished by the Corporation in 1714, the same year the distinction between the two Boroughs was abolished, the remainder of the wall coming down in 1728 (*RBN* vi, 61, 116)' (Mastoris 1981, 69). The earliest surviving reference to the Market Wall is for 1530 (*RBN* iii, 363; Mastoris 1981, 74, note 11). A physical barrier would have usefully separated livestock from commodities, but it would also have provided physical demarcation of the borough boundary where it crossed the large open space; for example, one of the legal differences between the boroughs was in the rate of fines for affray: it was important to know in which borough an incident had taken place.

Before 1711 the Market Place and surrounding streets were largely unpaved, or at best were indifferently paved with river pebbles, or boulders

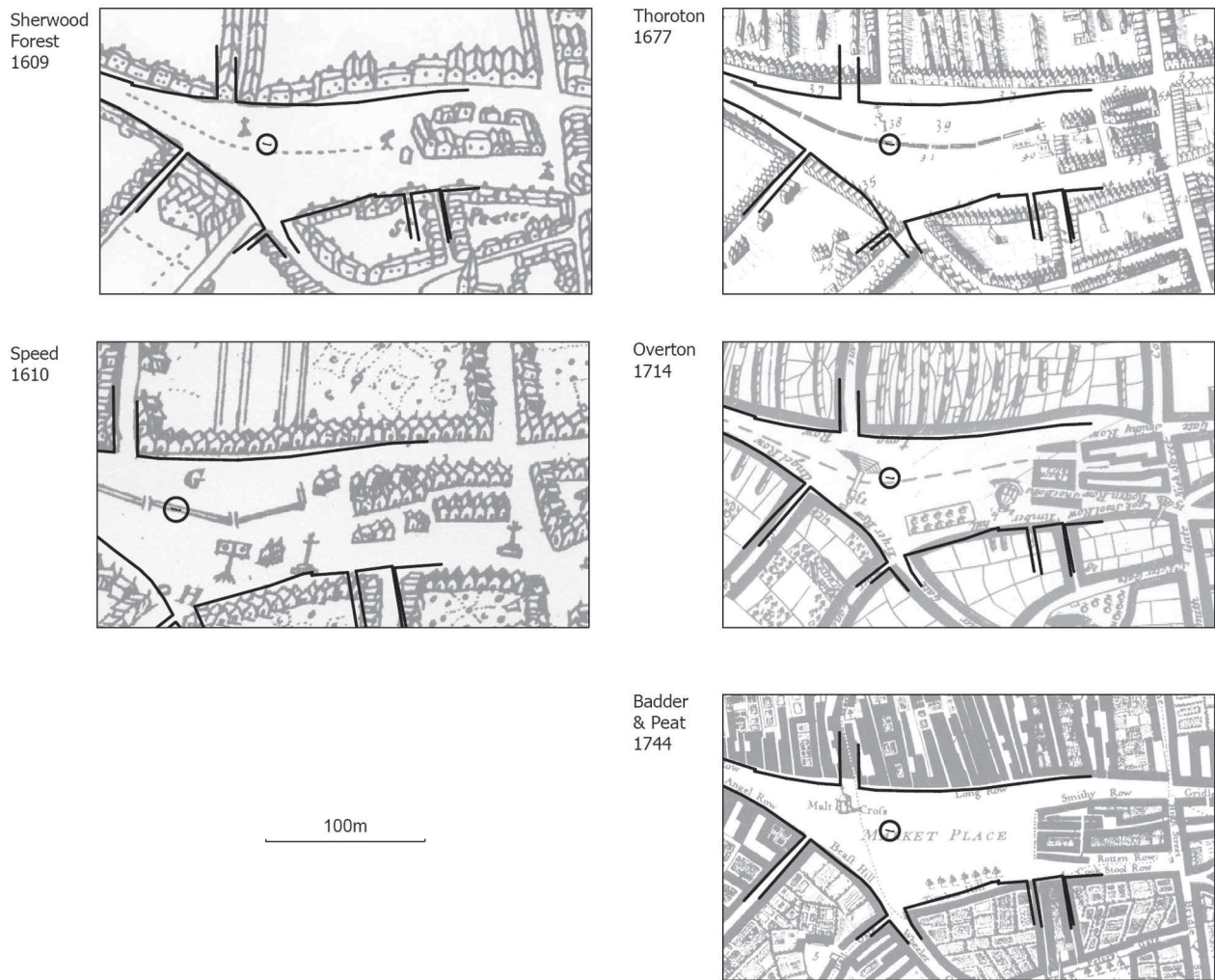


FIGURE 1: The wall found in the watching-brief (ringed, showing correct size and orientation) superimposed on greyed-out representations of the Old Market Square shown on 17th and 18th-century maps; the frontages as mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1882 are shown in outline; ‘G’ on Speed indicates the Corn Market, and the Malt Cross is indicated by 38 on Thoroton and 13 on Overton.

from Kegworth (Gill, 1912, 42). In 1714, when the market wall was partly demolished, the Market Place was paved (Gill, 1912, 41–87). Holland Walker (1931, 80) says of the Market Place that “in 1720 it was paved with boulders which ... were fetched from the Fosse Way in the neighbourhood of Willoughby-on-the-Wolds and had begun life as the pavement of that great Roman thoroughfare”.

In the early post-medieval medieval period the Market Place contained three crosses (Iliffe and

Baguley, 1970, 7–8): the Malt Cross, situated halfway between the bottom of St James’s Street and Sheep Lane (close to the location of the watching-brief), the tall Hen-cross near the top of Cuckstool Row (Poultry), and the Butter-Cross (Fig. 1). Other small structures of unknown function can be seen at differing locations towards the east end of the Market Square on the 17th-century maps (Fig. 1).

## The watching-brief

When the site was first visited on invitation from Balfour Beatty on 15th February 2006, widespread surface stripping had already taken place and a number of service trenches had been excavated. An area was selected for watching-brief the following day during excavation as this was the chief remaining area where deep (over 300mm) excavation remained to be carried out, in an area without known prior disturbance.

The excavation revealed a 9in-thick brick wall (0002a) with stone footings (0002b), lying about 300mm beneath the existing surface; it was straight in plan, with a total length of 5.7m, though it appeared to have extended beyond the limit of excavation and both ends (Fig. 2). The south side had a fair face, but the north face was contained within a slightly irregular foundation trench (0002c) cut into a slight step in the bedrock (0012), the rock on the north side of the wall being higher than that on the south. The wall and an area round it was hand cleaned and recorded in plan, section and photographs (Fig. 2, Plates 1–2). The bricks measured 240×115×55mm and were quite irregular in shape and firing. They stood on a footing of irregular sandstones, and the whole work was bedded in pale soft yellow-brown mortar,

suggesting that the footings were contemporary with the brickwork. There was no sign of an earlier phase.

A series of small pits (0004–0007) filled with dark grey-brown pebbly sand had been excavated into the south side of the wall; no finds were recovered from these but they post-date the demolition of the wall, as they cut through its fabric. They might represent a fence replacing the wall, or a structure built respecting the former boundary which the brick wall represented.

To the south of the wall was a series of three superimposed layers (0009–0011), of clean yellow sand, dark grey ashy sand and pebbles and mid-brown sand and pebbles. They filled the shallow step immediately to the south of the wall's south face. The full extent of the step to the south of the wall was not determined. Sherds of a single 17th-century Yellow Ware pancheon were found in 0010. As there is a general drop in ground level across the Square between the building frontages of about 1 in 23 from north to south; the step on the south side of the wall 0002 may have resulted from erosion there, or it may have been deliberately formed as part of some localised terracing against the slope; it might even have been a robbed structure, perhaps a wider predecessor of the brick wall.

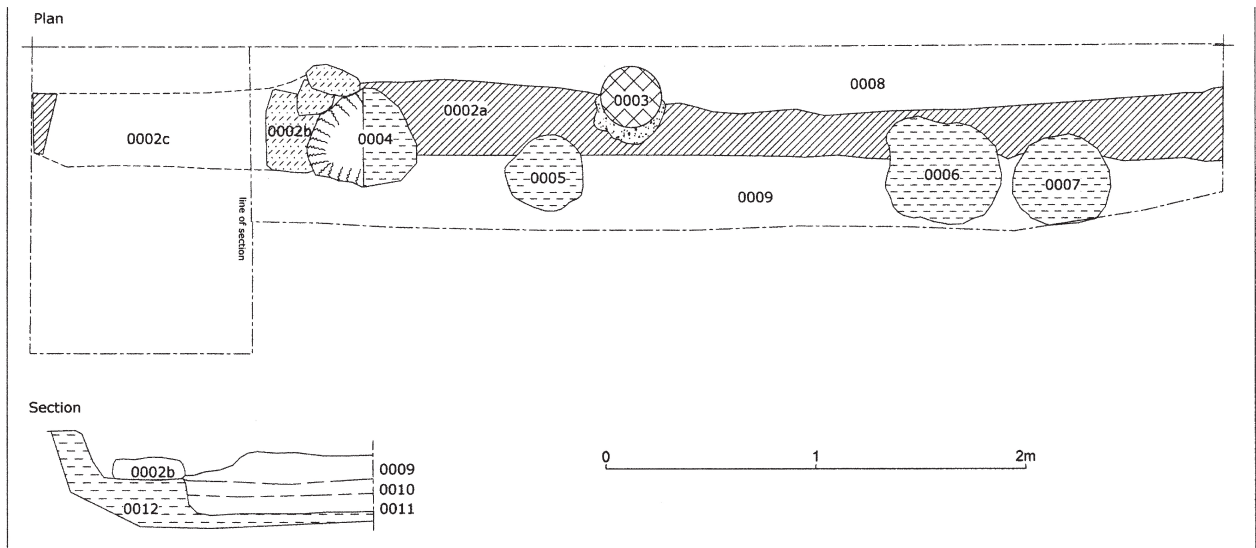


FIGURE 2: Plan of wall 0002 showing later postholes (0004–0007) and pile 0003; a section across the wall is shown in the bottom left corner.





PLATE 1: General view of the wall after excavation looking east.

### Interpretation

The location, length and alignment of the excavated wall fit much more comfortably with the mapped Market Wall than with the only other structure mapped in the vicinity, the Malt Cross. Comparison of the location of the building frontages around the Square shown on the early maps with those mapped by the Ordnance Survey in 1882 indicates the variability in the early mapping but also the fair degree of accuracy achieved in some.

The Malt Cross stood, apparently undergoing several modifications, until between 1744 and 1820. Deering's description of it having had a central post with ten steps fits the representation in Overton's map of 1714 (Fig. 1) but the excavated wall length of at least 5.7m fitted to the hexagonal or octagonal plan shown would result in it being at least 11.4m across at the base (compare Weekday Cross at 5.0m). Deering also states that the structure was modified into the six-post roofed structure seen in the very accurate map of Badder & Peat of 1744, where it is 30m away from the excavation. The workmen on site said that they had not come across any other evidence of similar structures during works to date.

The excavated brick wall is therefore very likely to have been the Market Wall, but the use of brick points to a construction date no earlier than the 17th



PLATE 2: The wall 0002 after excavation looking east. The vertical pipe in the centre of the wall is a modern pipe.

century; its demolition may be dated to 1714 or 1728 (see above). The earliest surviving documented date for the Market Wall of 1530 therefore requires there to have been an earlier physical phase, and it is possible that an earlier (robbed) stone wall is represented by the step filled with layers 0009–0011. The pancheon sherds in the filling suggest that it was filled in the 17th century, perhaps when the brick wall was built as a replacement.

It will be remembered that Deering asserted that in addition to perhaps demarcating the borough boundary, the wall also certainly formed a boundary between commercial functions within the square. The post-demolition re-use of the line, represented by the pits or post-holes 0004–0007, suggests that this physical boundary persisted in modified form after the wall, and the legal boundary that it represented, was demolished.

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