



ACTON TOWN SQUARE STREETSCAPE PROJECT

London
W3

London Borough of Ealing

An archaeological watching brief report

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MUSEUM OF LONDON

Archaeology Service

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Summary (non-technical)

This report has been commissioned by London Borough of Ealing in order to record and assess the results of a watching brief carried out at Acton Town Square, London W3.

Two circular brick-lined features were uncovered by contractors during landscaping work in Acton Town Square, in the area immediately to the west of St Mary's Church.

The domed shape of the top of the features suggests that they may have functioned as either cesspits or soakaways rather than wells. The bricks suggest a date of late 18th century to mid-19th century, although the latter part of that date range is considered more likely. The features may have been located either within yards or possibly within outbuildings to the rear of properties fronting onto King Street to the north and High Street to the south. Cartographic evidence indicates that there were buildings present in the area to the west of the church until at least 1874, but by 1893 the area had been cleared of structures.

The features have been preserved in situ. After recording and photographing, the features were lined with 'terram' a geotextile membrane, and backfilled with layers of protective sand, prior to the area being repaved.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site background

The watching brief took place at Acton Town Square, hereafter called ‘the site’. The site is bounded by King Street to the north, High Street to the south and St Mary’s Church to the east (see Fig 1). The area of the watching brief is located by the west door of St. Mary’s Church, at OS National Grid Reference 520000 180175. Modern ground level immediately adjacent to the site is 24.40m OD. The site code is ATS06.

The watching brief took place on 22nd June 2006.

1.2 The planning and legislative framework

1.2.1 Planning Policy Guidance (PPG 16, DOE)

The then Department of the Environment published its *Archaeology and planning: a consultative document*, Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16), in November 1990. This set out the Secretary of State’s policy on archaeological remains on land, and provided recommendations many of which have been integrated into local development plans. The key points in PPG16 are the following:

Archaeological remains should be seen as a finite and non-renewable resource, and in many cases highly fragile and vulnerable to damage and destruction. Appropriate management is therefore essential to ensure that they survive in good condition. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that archaeological remains are not needlessly or thoughtlessly destroyed. They can contain irreplaceable information about our past and the potential for an increase in future knowledge. They are part of our sense of national identity and are valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism.

Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by a proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation.

The key to informed and reasonable planning decisions is for consideration to be given early, before formal planning applications are made, to the question of whether archaeological remains are known to exist on a site where development is planned and the implications for the development proposal.

When important remains are known to exist, or when archaeologists have good reason to believe that important remains exist, developers will be able to help by preparing sympathetic designs using, for example, foundations which avoid disturbing the remains altogether or minimise damage by raising ground levels under a proposed new structure, or by careful siting of landscaped or open areas. There are techniques available for sealing archaeological remains underneath buildings or landscaping, thus securing their preservation for the future even though they remain inaccessible for the time being.

If physical preservation *in situ* is not feasible, an archaeological excavation for the purposes of ‘preservation by record’ may be an acceptable alternative. From an archaeological point

of view, this should be regarded as a second-best option. Agreements should also provide for the subsequent publication of the results of any excavation programme.

Decisions by planning authorities on whether to preserve archaeological remains *in situ*, in the face of proposed development, have to be taken on merit, taking account of development plan policies and all other material considerations – including the importance of the remains – and weighing these against the need for development.

Planning authorities, when they propose to allow development which is damaging to archaeological remains, must ensure that the developer has satisfactorily provided for excavation and recording, either through voluntary agreement with the archaeologists or, in the absence of agreement, by imposing an appropriate condition on the planning permission.

PPG16 itself forms part of an emerging European framework which recognises the importance of the archaeological and historic heritage in consideration of development proposals. This has recently been formulated in the *Code of good practice on archaeological heritage in urban development policies* established by the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Council of Europe, and adopted at the 15th plenary session in Strasbourg on 8–10 March 2000 (CC-PAT [99] 18 rev 3). As stated at the beginning of that document however, ‘a balance must be struck between the desire to conserve the past and the need to renew for the future’.

1.2.2 Archaeology and planning in Ealing

The London Borough of Ealing’s Revised *Unitary Development Plan* (UDP) (‘New Plan for the Environment’) was adopted in 2004. The policies set out in this document determine the position of archaeology as a material consideration in the planning process and incorporate recommendations from the Department of the Environment’s *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG 16). The principal policies and statements on archaeology are as follows:

Section 4.9 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Interest Areas

1. The protection of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings is required by law. Any development affecting such an ancient monument requires an impact evaluation, including an archaeological assessment where appropriate.
2. It is the Council’s intention to also protect archaeological sites, and any proposal:
 - must provide adequate opportunities for archaeological investigation prior to development;
 - must be carried out in accordance with the British Archaeologists and Developers Liaison Code of Practice.
3. Where development would adversely affect Archaeological Interest Areas or archaeological remains, the applicant will normally be required to:
 - Modify designs to avoid adverse effects;
 - Design suitable land use and management strategies to safeguard any important remains, with the option to seek an agreement covering access and interpretation arrangements;
 - Preserve in situ: where this is not feasible, appropriate provision for excavation.

Where nationally important archaeological remains and their settings are affected by proposed development, there should be a presumption in favour of their physical protection. On other sites where remains are known to exist, preservation in situ can be achieved by appropriate design or location of landscaped areas. Where this is not feasible, an archaeological excavation for record purposes may be acceptable. Preservation in situ

is preferred because a full excavation is expensive, time consuming and if postponed could enable more information to be obtained with improved techniques in the future. English Heritage hold the Sites and Monuments Record for the Borough and Greater London. When remains of significance are located, the Secretary of State can schedule a site.

The Council has also designated a number of Archaeological Interest Areas in the borough. The present site does not lie within one of these.

1.3 Planning background

The archaeological watching brief was carried out on the recommendations of English Heritage Greater London Archaeology Advisory Service (GLAAS) following the exposure of structures of potential archaeological interest by contractors during landscaping work in Acton Town Square. The landscaping comprised the repaving of the entire town square and associated tree planting. At the time of recording, the majority of the landscaping work had already been completed.

1.4 Origin and scope of the report

This report was commissioned by the London Borough of Ealing and produced by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS). The report has been prepared within the terms of the relevant Standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA, 2001).

The purpose of the watching brief was to record the nature and extent of the archaeological remains and features uncovered on the site. The purpose of this report is to present the results of the watching brief and to suggest what further work, including analysis or publication (if any), should now take place.

1.5 Aims and objectives

All research is undertaken within the priorities established in the Museum of London's *A research framework for London Archaeology*, 2002

2 Geological, topographical and historical summary

Acton is located at a point where London Clay interfaces with terrace gravels sloping down to the Thames, where numerous brooks and springs provide clean water. Areas of brickearth survive in places, principally to the north-west and south-east. The western branch of Stamford Brook was recorded during excavation work in King Street (site code KSA88), 80m north-west of the site and a possible ancient bank of the brook was observed during an evaluation at 193-197 Acton High Street (site code HTA03), c 70m south of the site.

A settlement at Acton is mentioned in Domesday Book (1086), where it is referred to as part of the Bishop's Manor of Fulham. The focus of the early settlement was

around the church of St Mary, which is known to have been in existence in the thirteenth century. The church was entirely rebuilt in 1865-77 (the existing building).

The discovery in the 17th century of mineral bearing springs at Acton Wells created a spa within easy reach of London, which flourished throughout the 18th century and became a retreat for the wealthy and influential; however, it later declined as Bath and Tunbridge Wells were favoured. The extent of the settlement at Acton in the mid-18th century can be seen on Rocque's map of 1746 (Fig 3). Structural remains of 18th century date have been recorded during fieldwork at Horn Lane, approximately 160m north-east of the site (site code HLA04).

Until the mid-19th century, the economy of the area was agricultural. During the 1840s the village began to expand, but the most significant change came in 1859, when the Enclosure Award consolidated the strip-holdings of the former Common Fields, resulting in new roads and housing across the reapportioned areas. Acton's extensive brickearth was exploited for brickmaking throughout the 19th century, and in the latter part of the century further industry in Acton was represented by laundries; by 1900, the numerous small laundries concentrated in South Acton, led it to being known as 'Soapsuds Island'.

Cartographic evidence indicates that the area in which the watching brief took place had been cleared of buildings by 1893 (Fig 4), forming the area which later became the Town Square.

3 The watching brief

3.1 Methodology

All archaeological excavation and recording during the watching brief was done in accordance with the MoLAS Archaeological Site Manual (MoLAS, 1994).

The features were located by measuring off adjacent buildings and existing street features. The heights of observations and archaeological remains were recorded by measuring down from the adjacent modern ground level, and related to OD heights established on a topographical survey of the site supplied to MoLAS by London Borough of Ealing (Drawing no. ATS 01.02 Rev A, dated Feb 2006).

The site has produced one annotated measured sketch location plan and 5 photographs.

The site records can be found under the site code ATS06 in the MoL archive.

3.2 Results of the watching brief

There follows a brief description of the archaeological features exposed during works in the eastern part of Acton Town Square. Fig 2 shows the approximate location of the features plotted onto a pre-construction topographical survey (Drawing no. ATS 01.02 Rev A, dated Feb 2006) supplied by London Borough of Ealing.

In the area of the town square immediately beside the west door of St. Mary's Church, the tops of two circular brick-lined features were revealed. The northernmost feature measured 0.90m in diameter and was at least 2.20m deep (see front cover, right). It was built of unmortared bricks, as headers laid on bed. Each brick was 220mm in length, 120mm wide and 70mm thick and although fairly crudely made, did not seem to be hand made. The base of the feature was obscured by modern brick and concrete rubble. There were two yellow stock bricks at the top of the feature, suggesting a later repair. This feature was located 4.60m due west of the west door of the church, and survived to a maximum level of *c* 24.10m OD.

At a distance of 0.90m to the south, a second brick-lined feature was observed (see front cover, left). The top was misshapen, so that it measured 0.80m north-south, by 0.50m east- west and was built of bricks as headers laid on bed without mortar. Each brick measured 220mm in length, 120mm wide, and 70mm deep. Modern brick and concrete rubble obscured the base of this feature; only the top 0.40m was visible.

Both features curved inwards at the top in a "beehive" shape suggesting that they may have functioned as either cesspits or soakaways rather than wells. The bricks suggest a date of late 18th century to mid-19th century, although the latter date is more likely. No primary fills were observed.

After recording and photographing, the features were lined with ‘terram’ a geotextile membrane, and backfilled with layers of protective sand, prior to being covered over.

4 Potential of archaeology

The watching brief exercise was limited to recording the features exposed, assessing their date and significance and ensuring that they were adequately protected prior to being backfilled and paved over.

The form of the bricks used in the soakaways suggests a construction date of late 18th to mid-19th century, with the latter part of that date range considered more likely.

Rocque’s map of 1746, although somewhat schematic, shows that there were buildings directly opposite the west side of the church, on the west side of what appears to be a narrow thoroughfare (Fig 3). The Ordnance Survey Map of 1874 (not reproduced here) shows buildings fronting onto King Street to the north and High Street to the south, with what appear to be associated open yard areas in the approximate area of the watching brief observations. It is possible that the soakaways were located here either in yards or possibly within outbuildings to the rear of these properties.

By the time of the Ordnance Survey map of 1893 (Fig 4), the buildings in the area of the present town square immediately to the west of the church were no longer present, indicating that the features must pre-date this.

Whilst the archaeological remains recorded during the watching brief are undoubtedly of local significance, there is nothing to suggest that they are of regional or national importance.

5 Publication and archiving

Information on the results of the excavation will be made publicly available by means of a database in digital form, to permit inclusion of the site data in any future academic researches into the development of London.

The site archive containing original records and finds will be stored with the Museum of London within 12 months of the end of the excavation.

In view of the limited potential of the material and the relatively limited significance of the data (Section 4) it is suggested that a short note on the results of the watching brief should appear in the annual round up of the *London Archaeologist*.

6 Acknowledgements

MoLAS would like to thank Luke Donald of London Borough of Ealing for supplying information relating to the site. The author would like to thank Neville Constantine and Carlos Lemos for producing the figures for the report.

7 Bibliography

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8 OASIS DATA COLLECTION FORM

8.1 OASIS ID: molas1-16030

Project details

Project name Acton Town Square Streetscape Project

Short description of the project recording two brick built soakaways

Project dates Start: 22-06-2006 End: 22-06-2006

Previous/future work Not known / Not known

Any associated project reference codes ATS06 - Sitecode

Any associated project reference codes ATS06 - Sitecode

Type of project Watching brief

Site status None

Current Land use Other 3 - Built over

Monument type SOAKAWAYS Post Medieval

Monument type SOAKAWAYS Post Medieval

Significant Finds BRICKS Post Medieval

Significant Finds BRICKS Post Medieval

Project location

Country England

Site location GREATER LONDON EALING ACTON Acton Town Square

Postcode W3

Study area 3.00 Square metres

National grid reference TQ 52000 18017 Point

National grid reference TQ 52000 18017 Point

Height OD

Project creators

Name of Organisation MoLAS

Project brief originator London Borough of Ealing

Project design originator MoLAS

Project director/manager Dunwoodie, Lesley

Project supervisor P. Cardiff

Sponsor or funding body London Borough of Ealing

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient LAARC

Digital Archive recipient LAARC

Entered by Cardiff (pcardiff@museumoflondon.org.uk)

Entered on 26 June 2006

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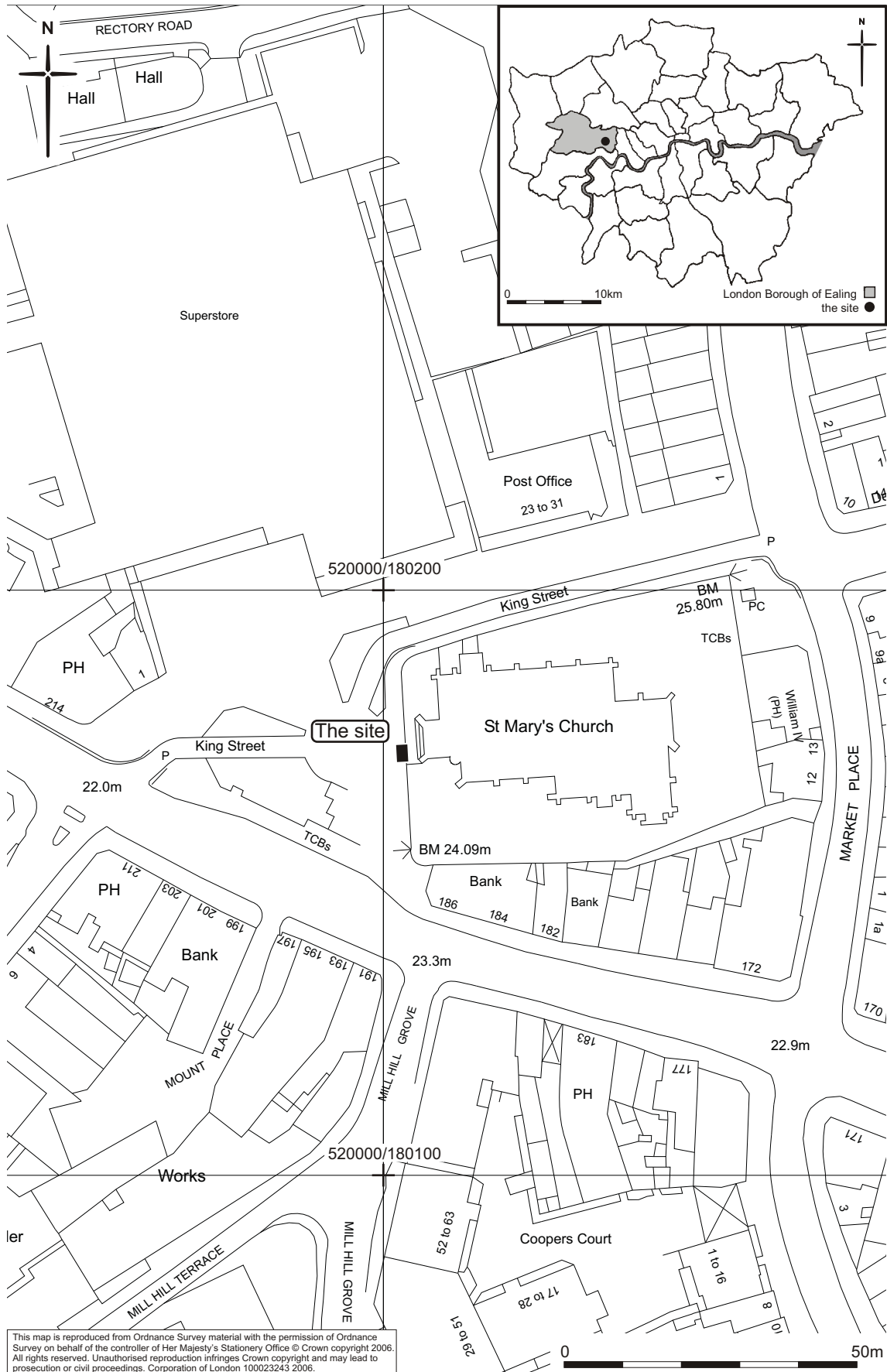


Fig 1 Site location

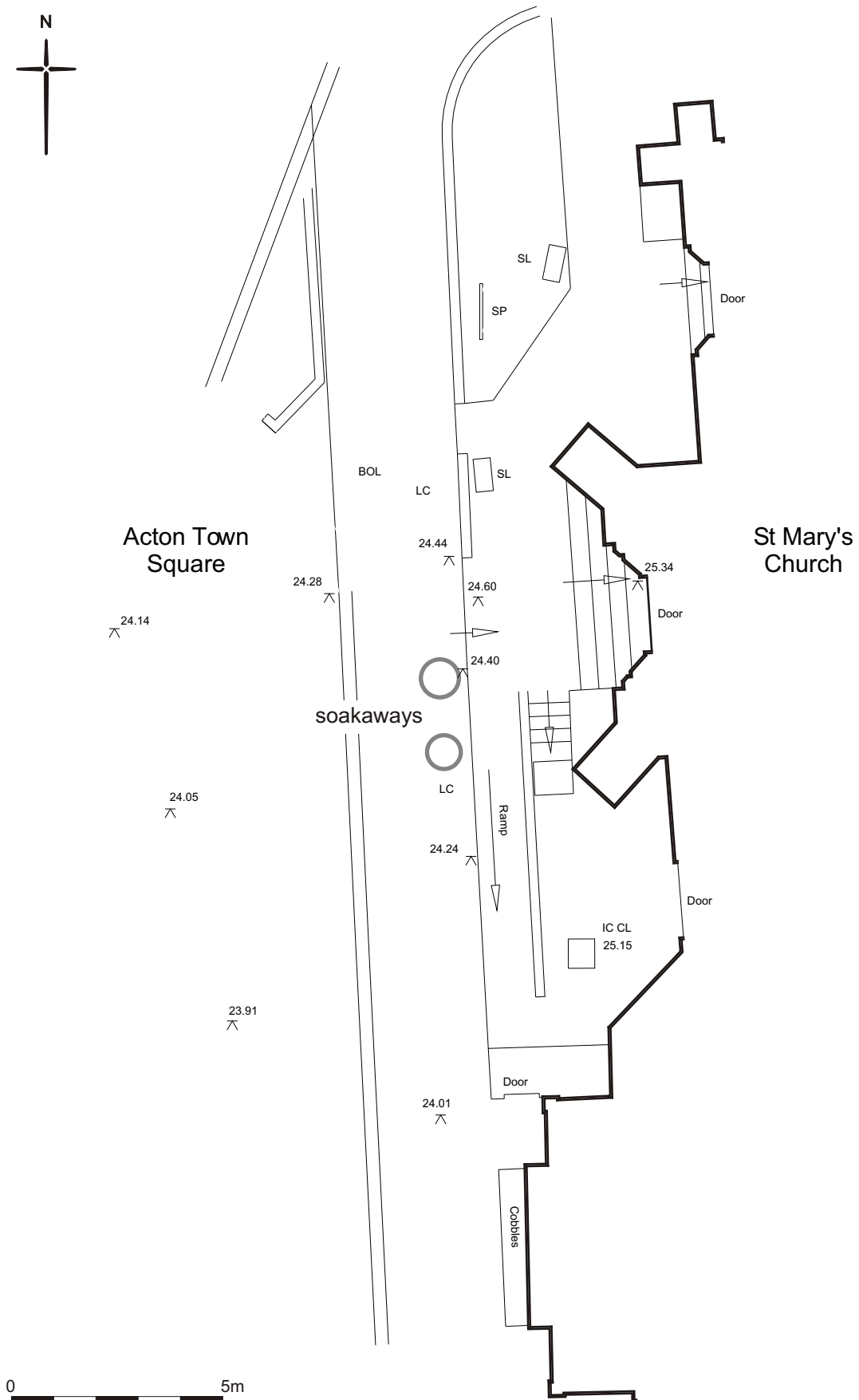


Fig 2 Location of features observed in the watching brief

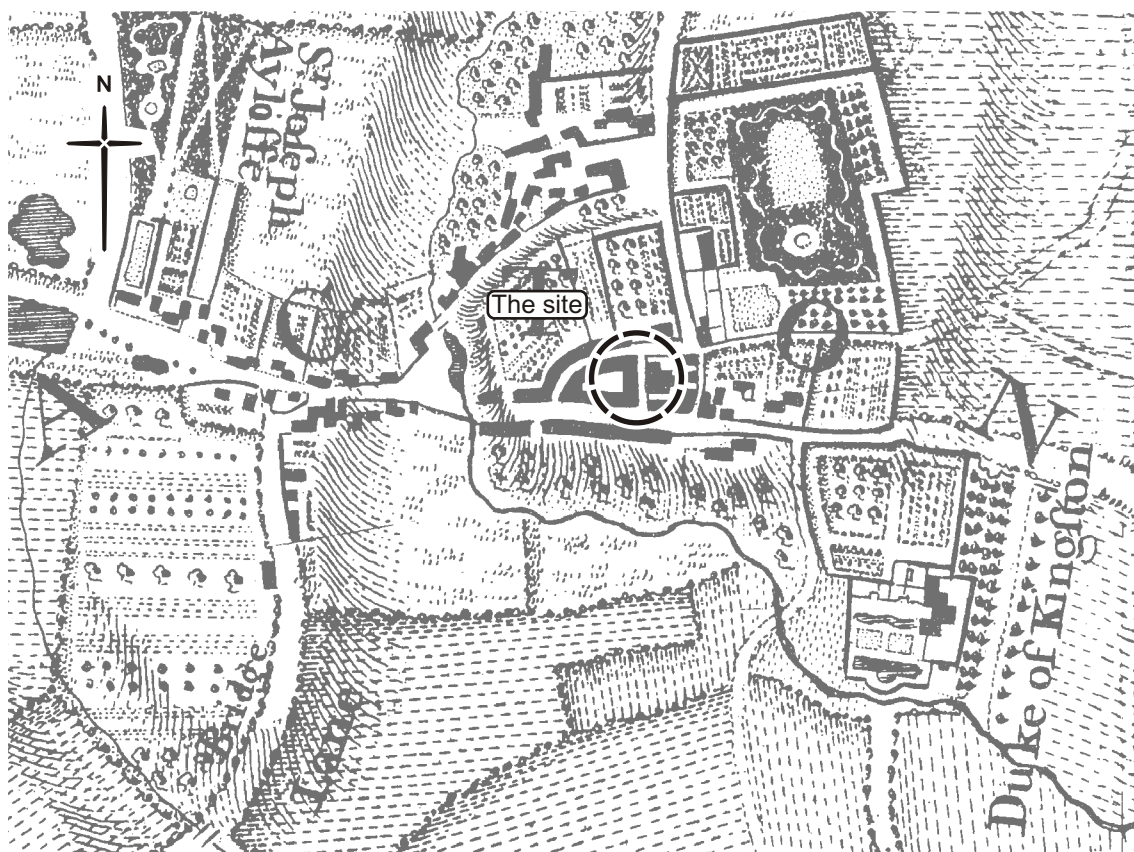


Fig 3 The area of the watching brief on Rocque's map of 1746

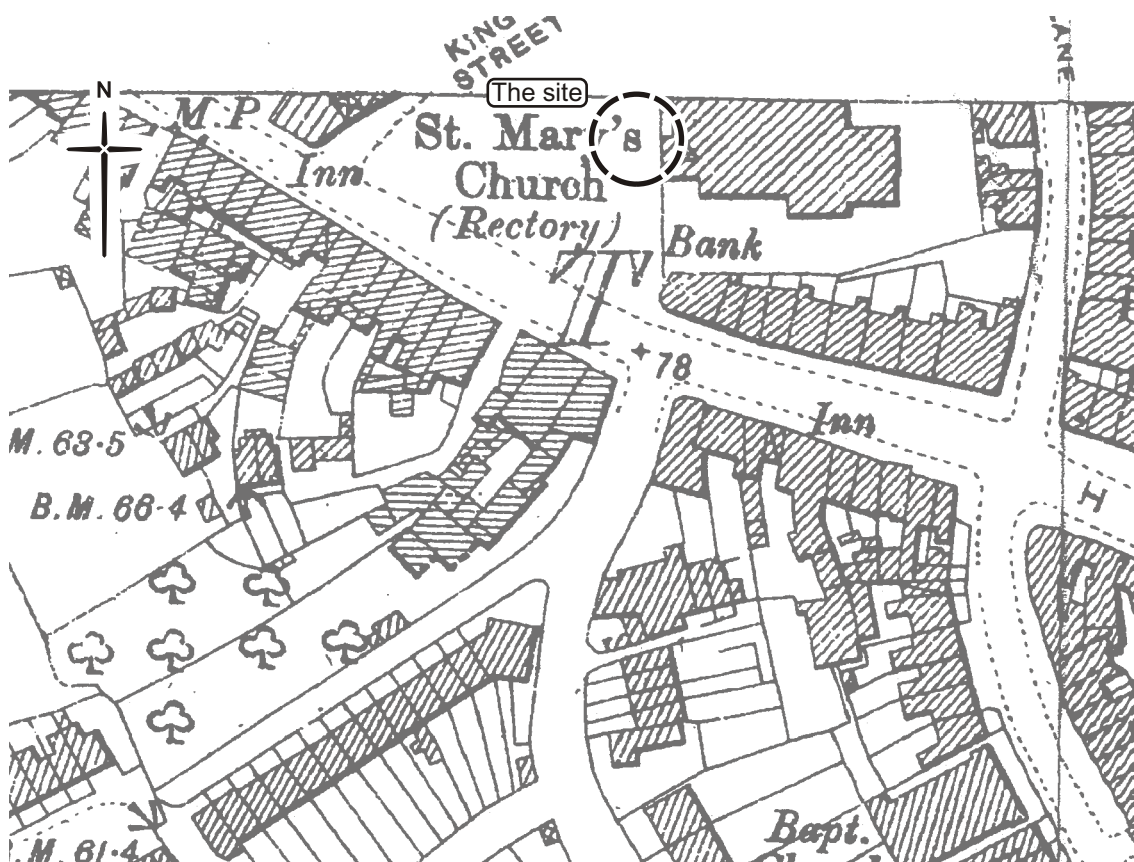


Fig 4 The area of the watching brief on the Ordnance Survey map of 1893