



Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**WATCHING BRIEF:
AMEN CORNER
MOAT LANE
TOWCESTER
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

on behalf of Paul Smith Developments Ltd



Nigel Wilson HND AIFA

September 2005

ASC: 704/TML/2

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	TML	<i>Project no:</i>	704
<i>County:</i>	Northamptonshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Towcester		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	Towcester		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	SP 6938 4871		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	c.35m x c.15m		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Warehouse		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Demolition and residential development		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	South Northamptonshire Council		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	8/2002/1252/P		
<i>Client:</i>	Paul Smith Developments Ltd 44 West End Silverstone Towcester NN12 8UY		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Paul Smith		
<i>Telephone</i>		<i>Fax:</i>	-

Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Nigel Wilson	<i>Date:</i>	28 th September 2005
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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

Between July and September 2005, a watching brief was maintained on the re-development of a small plot at the junction of Moat Lane and Chantry Lane, Towcester, Northants. Previous evaluation work on the site had identified the presence of Roman and later features on the site protected by c.1.0m of modern overburden.

During the watching brief an area along the NW boundary of the plot containing a number of large pits was identified. These pits were not fully excavated due to the dangerous nature of the trench. Four linear features orientated NW-SE were also identified but not excavated. The only other feature recorded during the watching brief were the bottom 3 courses of a limestone wall, as the wall had a rough cut face and was dry bonded it is likely that it represents the footings for a more substantial wall. No artefacts to date any of the features were observed during the watching brief.

1 Introduction

1.1 Between July and September 2005 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at Amen Corner, Moat Lane, Towcester (NGR SP 6938 4871: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Paul Smith Developments Ltd, and was carried out according to a project design prepared by ASC (Rouse 2005), and a brief (Flitcroft 2005) prepared on behalf of the local planning authority (LPA), *South Northamptonshire Council*, by their archaeological advisor (AA), *Northamptonshire County Council Historic Environment Team*. The relevant planning application reference is 8/2002/1252P.

1.2 *Planning Background*

This watching brief has been required as a planning condition under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), in response to proposals for the construction of a residential development.

1.3 Setting

1.3.1 *Location & Description*

The site lies within the centre of Towcester, at the junction of Moat Lane and Chantry Lane at NGR SP 6938 4871, opposite St Lawrence's Church and to the rear of the market place (Fig. 1).

1.3.2 *Services, Buildings, Access, Etc*

The site was previously covered by a warehouse, access to which was from Moat Lane (Fig. 2). Chantry Lane borders the site to the south and east, while to the west, the surrounding area is a combination of residential and commercial buildings.

1.3.3 *Geology & Topography*

The soils of the area are of the *Fladbury 1 Association*. They are defined as *stoneless clayey soils, in places calcareous, variably affected by groundwater. Flat land. Risk of flooding*. The underlying geology is characterised as river alluvium (Soil Survey, 1983, 813b). The site lies at *c.90m AOD*.

1.3.4 *Proposed Development*

The proposed development comprises the construction of four dwellings.

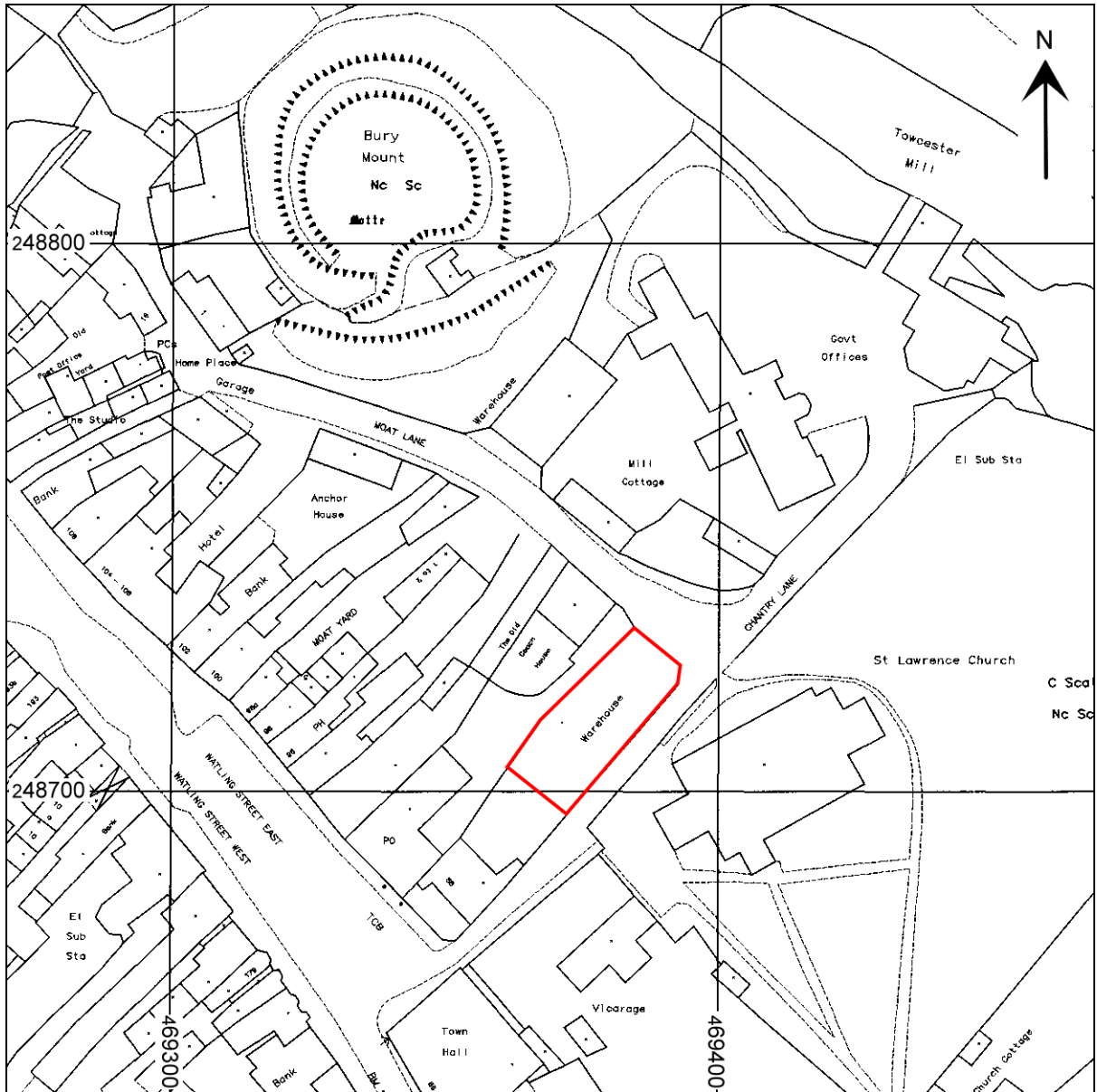


Figure 2: Site plan (scale 1:1250)

2 Aims & Methods

2.1 Aims

As described in the brief (Section 2, the aims of the watching brief were:

- To identify and make a basic record of archaeological remains revealed by development
- To ensure the long-term survival of the information contained in such remains through archaeological recording prior to their physical destruction, preparation of a report and deposition of a project archive
- To confirm the effectiveness of the foundation design in avoiding archaeological remains.

2.2 Standards

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

2.3 Methods

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 3), which required:

- A structured programme of archaeological observation, supervision and recording to be maintained during the development.
- For an archaeologist to be present during all groundworks for demolition/removal of existing buried foundations, excavation for new foundations, drainage etc.
- Provision to be made for the temporary suspension of development work if required by the archaeologist to enable the recording of identified archaeological features or remains.
- Provision to be made for up to 30 days' additional fieldwork, with appropriate provision for the additional analysis and reporting requirements.

2.4 Constraints

No constraints were placed upon the works. However the footing design was changed from open trenches to a ring beam, due to the depth of made ground encountered on the site. This change in design meant that only two short trenches were observed as opposed to the entire ground plan of the building.

3 Archaeological & Historical Background

- 3.1 Towcester is located on the site of the small walled Roman town of *Lactodorum*. The site at Amen Corner has the potential for the discovery of unrecorded archaeological features.
- 3.2 An abundance of prehistoric finds have been discovered in the area of Towcester. Notably, hand axes dated to the Palaeolithic and Neolithic have been discovered in the surrounding area (RCHM(E) 1982), and a barbed and tanged flint arrowhead from the area has been on display at the Ashmolean Museum. Several coins have been discovered as scattered finds, mainly Iron Age bronze coins from the North Thames Group (*ibid*). A Neolithic flint working site, including scrapers, points and cores was discovered beneath a Roman villa at Burcote, 2km south of the town.
- 3.3 With Towcester being located on the site of a previous Roman town, which lay on the Roman road now known as Watling Street, the major archaeological monument of the area is the Roman town of *Lactodorum*. Like most Roman towns, *Lactodorum* had extensive extra-mural settlements or suburbs on the roads leading from it.
- 3.4 Towcester was held during much of the Saxon period by the kingdom of Wessex, and was made a royal *burgh* in the early 10th century by Edward the Elder (Page 1930). The town retained this status beyond the Norman Conquest (1066) until the 12th century, when it passed to the earls of Arundel (Baker 1836). Its location at the junction of Watling Street and the Oxford - Northampton Road made it an ideal place for a market, and as such it prospered throughout the medieval period. To the north-west of the site is the motte of Bury Mount, probably constructed by the Crown in the 11th-12th century (RCHM(E) 1982). The only notable finds of Saxon date have been a long-cross brooch, from the former station site (TDHLS 1995), and a silver sword mount from the Hawkesmoor School area of the town. The current O.S. map (Explorer 207) records the presence of a mill mound, presumably of medieval date, adjoining to the racecourse buildings.
- 3.5 The lands of the parish of Towcester were enclosed in 1762 (Page 1930), and from the presence of ridge-and-furrow, much of the area appears to have remained in agricultural use from at least the early medieval period.
- 3.6 The excavation of two trial trenches on the site prior to the development clearly demonstrated that there was *c.* 1m of disturbed highly disturbed material overlying dense concentrations of Roman and medieval features.

4 Results (fig 3)

4.1 Two visits were made to observe groundworks likely to extend more than 1m below the ground surface. This was the depth at which preserved features were encountered during the evaluation. The natural soils of the area comprised of orange sand and gravel, the top of which was encountered *c.*900mm below the surface.

4.2 Footing Trench 1

The first visit made on the 18th July examined a *c.*24m of trenching against the NW perimeter of the site. The SW end of the trench was cut to a depth of over 2m through made ground, probably large refuse pits (Feature 100). No finds to date these pits were observed. Excavation was stopped in this area before reaching natural subsoil on the advice of the structural engineer who was concerned about the stability of the trench sides. As the trench progressed north eastwards a series of ditches were observed (features 101-104). These features ranged in size from 0.3 – 1.00m in width. Again on the advice of the structural engineer these features were not excavated. The north-easternmost feature comprised a limestone wall 0.25m wide and orientated NW – SE. Three courses of a dry bonded stonewall survived the upper course being *c.*1.05m below current ground level. The facing stones had been only roughly cut suggesting that the remains were a footing rather than a finished wall. Due to the narrow width of the trench the alignment was not clear but it seemed to run more westerly than the line of the current buildings on Moat Lane and the buildings fronting on to Watling Street East.

4.3 Footing Trench 2

The second visit made on the 16th September examined a 5.6m trench running parallel to Moat Lane. This trench did not extend below the 1.0m depth and as expected the profile comprised highly disturbed modern soils. No features or natural soils were observed.

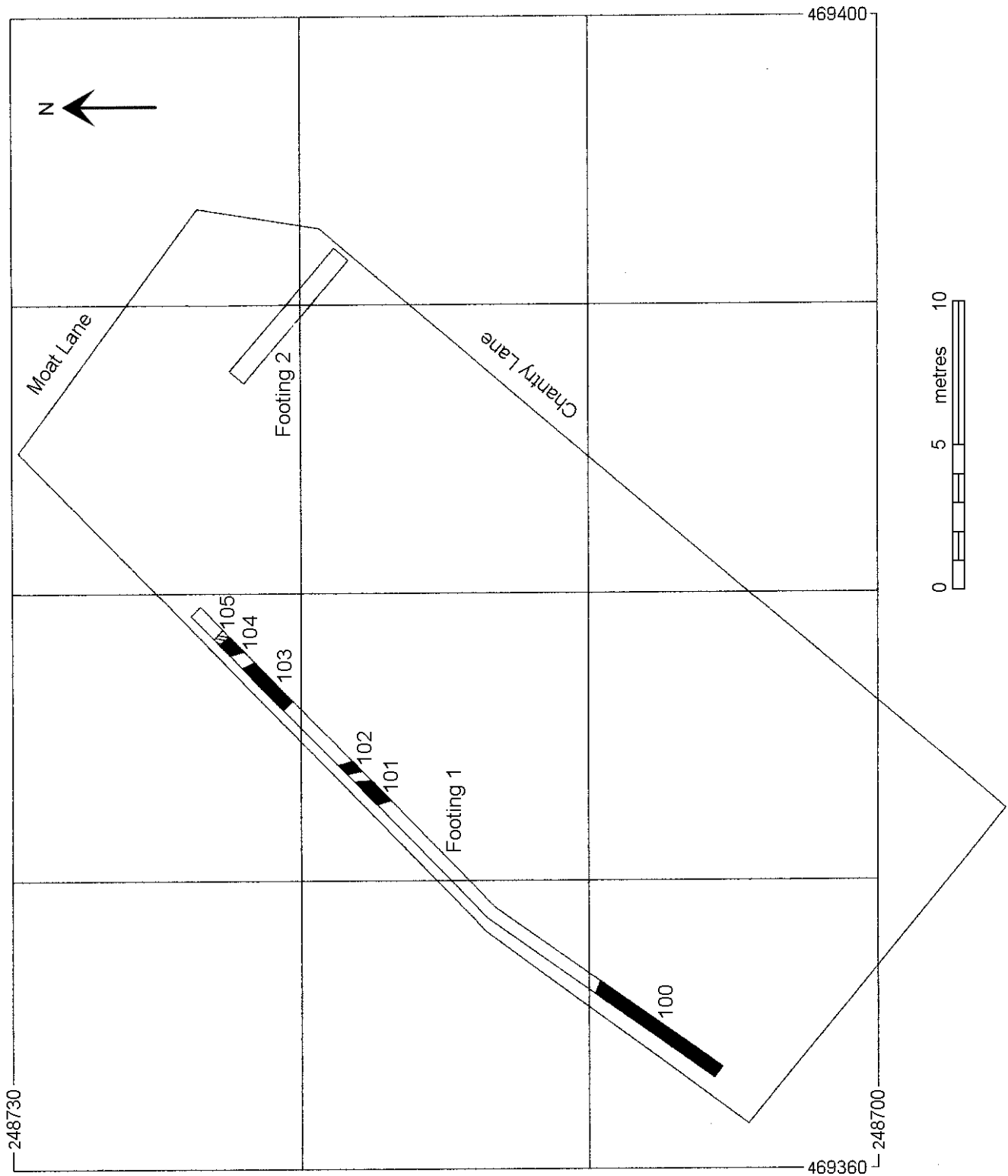


Figure 3: Observed footing trench locations (scale 1:200)



Plate 1: General view of footing Trench 1



Plate 2: Wall 105



Plate 3: Footing Trench 2 showing the depth of overburden

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The small walled Roman town of *Lactodorum* (Towcester) lay on a major road (Watling Street) to the northwest. It is likely that the site at Amen Corner would have been developed during the Roman period. The limestone wall observed during the watching brief and the presumed ditches may well relate to the Roman town. However without having larger areas to examine and supporting finds this cannot be confirmed.
- 5.2 After the Roman withdrawal from Britain in the early 5th century *Lactodorum* would certainly have become rundown if not totally deserted. However by the early 10th century we know that Towcester was once again a growing township with the granting of royal burgh status. This growth continued during the medieval period and it is likely that the site at Amen Corner was again developed, probably not disturbing the by then buried Roman remains. By the time the warehouse was built the Roman remains were sealed by *c.* 1.0m of accumulation.
- 5.3 The undated pits in the NW corner of the site probably date from the medieval or post medieval periods.
- 5.4 The evaluation and subsequent watching brief clearly demonstrates that significant archaeological remains from both the Roman and medieval periods survive in this area of Towcester. The fact that the Roman remains are covered by *c.* 1m of overburden, suggest that good levels of preservation can be expected on areas that have not been disturbed in recent years. Though often hard to recognise, it is possible that Saxon remains could also be found in central Towcester.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Paul Smith for commissioning the watching brief and his co-operation during a problematic build. We would also like to thank Myk Flitcroft of the Northamptonshire County Council Historic Environment team for preparing the brief and monitoring the work on behalf of South Northamptonshire Council.

The watching brief was managed by Bob Zeepvat BA MIFA, and Nigel Wilson and Nick Crank undertook the monitoring visits.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Initial Report
4. Site Monitoring Sheets
5. B/W prints & negatives
6. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be held at ASC's offices in Milton Keynes until such time as a Northamptonshire depository becomes available.

8. References

Standards & Specifications

Flitcroft M. 2005 *Site at Amen Corner, Moat Lane, Towcester. Brief for Archaeological Programme of Works*. Northamptonshire County Council

IFA 2000 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.

IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.

Rouse C. 2005 *Amen Corner, Moat Lane, Towcester, Northamptonshire. Project Design for Watching Brief*. ASC Ltd (Ref 704/TML/1)

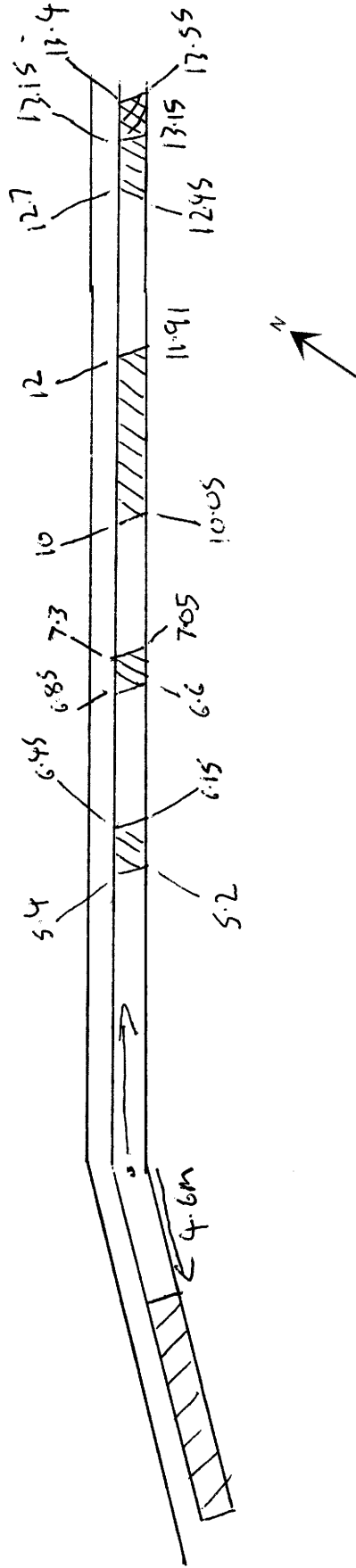
Secondary Sources

Baker G. 1836 *History and Antiquities of the County of Northamptonshire*, vii, 312-339.

Page W. (ed.) 1930 *The Victoria History of the County of Northamptonshire*. (London)

Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpندن).

TDLHS 1995 *Towcester: the Story of an English Country Town. Towcester & District Local History Society*. (Towcester)



Not to scale



A.S.C. LTD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD

Project: Amen Corner, Moat Lane Towcester		Project No/Code: 704/TML	Sheet: 2 of 2
		Date of visit: 16th September 2005	
Client/Developer Paul Smith Developments Ltd			
Contact: Paul Smith		Phone: 07980 917328	
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):	Start: 10.20am	Finish: 12.30pm	
Completed by: Nick Crank			
Development Type:			
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling
			Quarrying
			Pipelines
			Other (specify):
Site & weather conditions: Dry sunny			
Observations: Single footing trench excavated while in attendance. Trench =5.6 x 0.65 m 1.0m deep. Trench revealed consistent profile 0-450mm made ground Brick, tile and limestone Poorly sorted rubble in matrix of loose light brownish grey sandy loam. Occasional Transfer ware, Clay pipe fragments etc. 450-1000mm Backyard soil Dark brownish sandy loam Well sorted with occasional brick/ tile fragments Natural drift not revealed. No archaeological features observed. No pre modern artefacts recovered .			
Comments: Final visit:- Groundworks complete			

For sketch plan, use reverse

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Appendix 2: SMR Summary Sheet

SMR Record Number	Parish Towcester	Site Name Amen Corner
Date of Fieldwork July – September 2005	Grid ref. SP 69380 48710	Fieldworker ASC Ltd
Sponsor Paul Smith Developments	Activity Watching brief	
Landowner name/address: Paul Smith Developments Ltd 44 West End Silverstone Towcester NN12 8UY		
Finds location N/a	Finds Destination N/a	
Records location ASC offices, Milton Keynes	Records Destination Northants Depository when available	
Finds Quantity N/a	Records Quantity 1 box file	
<p>Summary of Results</p> <p><i>Between July and September 2005, a watching brief was maintained on the re-development of a small plot at the junction of Moat Lane and Chantry Lane, Towcester, Northants. Previous evaluation work on the site had identified the presence of Roman and later features on the site protected by c.1.0m of modern overburden.</i></p> <p><i>During the watching brief an area along the NW boundary of the plot containing a number of large pits was identified. These pits were not fully excavated due to the dangerous nature of the trench. Four linear features orientated NW-SE were also identified but not excavated. The only other feature recorded during the watching brief were the bottom 3 courses of a limestone wall, as the wall had a rough cut face and was dry bonded it is likely that it represents the footings for a more substantial wall. No artefacts to date any of the features were observed during the watching brief.</i></p>		