

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

OF

LAND TO THE REAR OF

74 HIGH STREET, AMERSHAM,

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

(NGR SU 9546 9728)

On behalf of

Wallis Design Associates

January 2009

REPORT FOR Wallis Design Associates
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an evaluation on land to the rear of 74 High Street, Amersham. No archaeological remains were encountered.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site location (Figure 1)

The site is located on open land to the rear of 74 High Street, Amersham, Buckinghamshire at NGR SP 9546 9728 at an approximate height of 95m OD. Geologically the site is situated in an area of Clay with Flint overlying Middle Chalk.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application is being considered for the development of land to the rear of 74 High Street, Amersham. Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service (BCAS) has advised that a pre-application programme of archaeological works should be undertaken due to the site's potential for archaeological remains. BCAS prepared a *Brief* for the work recommending that the site should be investigated by trenching totalling 20m in length. A Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted and accepted which proposed a suitable methodology to satisfy the requirements of the Brief.

1.3 Archaeological Background

Amersham is recorded in the Domesday Book in which it appears as an agricultural settlement. In 1200 it received a grant of a market and fair and by 1262 was recognised as a borough.

Old Amersham retains many late medieval and post-medieval buildings, particularly along the High Street. The Royal Commission notes buildings in the area dating from 1600-1700 (RCHME 1912). Pevsner & Williamson (1994) note the eastern end of the High Street to be predominantly 16th century in date.

All buildings forming the frontage of the High Street on either side of the entranceway to No. 74 are listed. Numbers 66 and 68 are grade II, 17th century in date and re-fronted in the 18th century (CAS 1245709). Numbers 70 and 72 are also grade II, 17th century in date with later restoration (CAS 1245710). Numbers 76 and 78 are again grade II, late 16th or early 17th century in date (CAS 1245711). Number 80 is a grade II 18th century re-fronting of an older building (CAS 1245712). A row of five cottages, numbers 82 to 92, are all grade II having an 18th century re-fronting to the older buildings (CAS 1245713). 500m to the west on High Street is Drake's Almhouse built in 1657 and grade II* listed (CAS 4218). 18th century re-fronting can also be seen on a number of buildings within the vicinity including numbers 106, 108, 118, 120 and 122 The Swan public house, all are listed buildings. Some older out-buildings also survive on the plots such as the 17th century timber framed barn at No.2 The Worthies (CAS 124820).

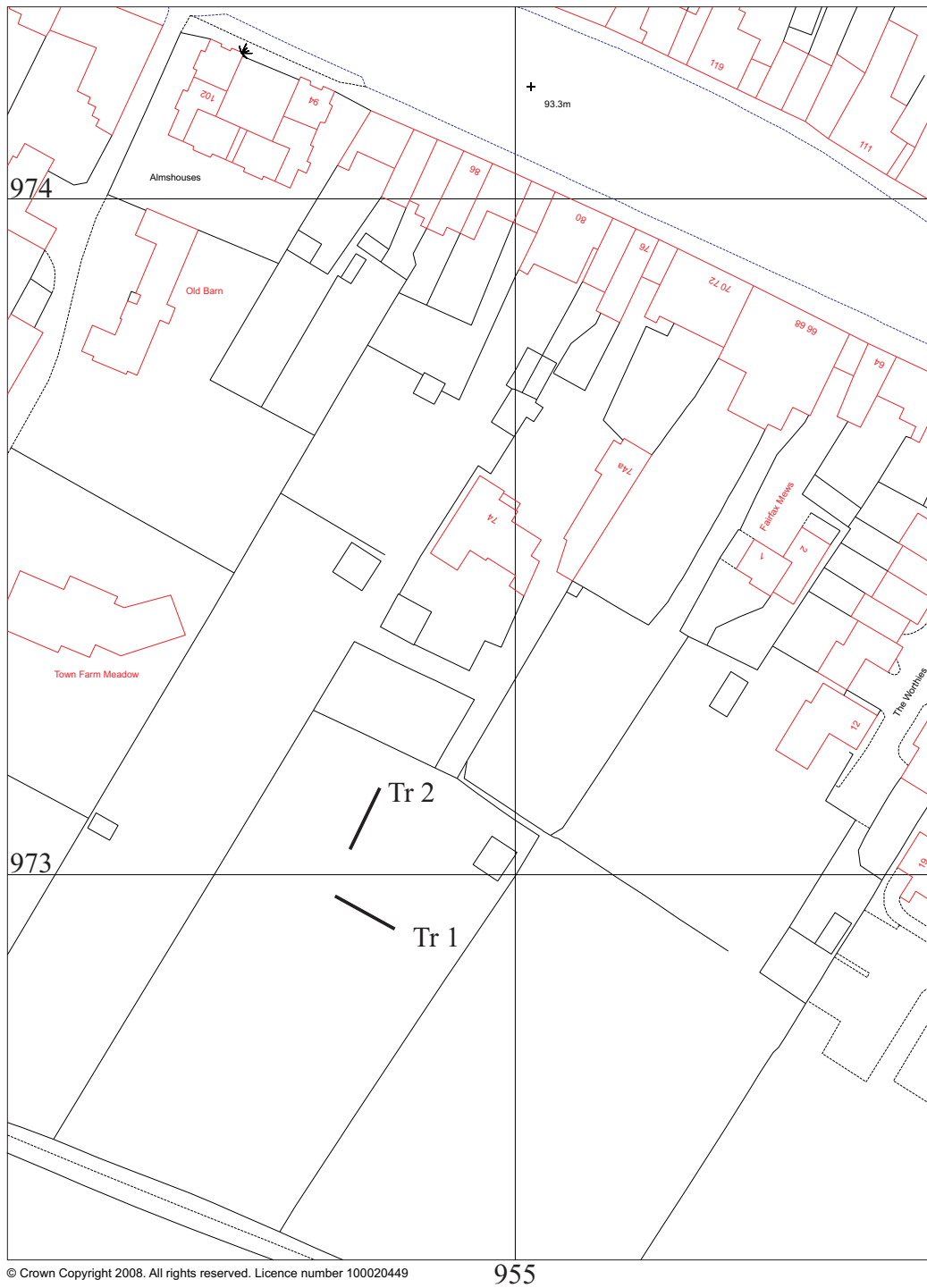


Figure 1. Trench location

The medieval tenements fronted on to the High Street, and their associated back plots have been noted for the potential for good preservation of archaeological remains. An evaluation 150m to the east along the street, at the Kings Arms public house, recorded a number of pits including one containing 13th-14th century pottery (TVAS 2001c).

The burgage plots are still clearly visible to the south of the High Street and each plot could be accessed from a back lane called the Common Platt which adjoins a more developed lane called The Platt (Hunt 2008).

An evaluation 200m to the southeast at The Platt revealed no archaeological remains (Foundation Archaeology 2001) a nearby evaluation in the same area located only post-medieval activity (TVAS 2001a). Further work in this area recorded that quarrying had taken place at an unspecified date, but likely to be post-medieval in date (TVAS 2001b).

A map associated with the sale of land in the area between the Earl of Bedford and William Drake in 1637 does not show the burgage plots; the area appears open with fields to the south. Jeffery's map of 1770 and Bryant's map of 1824 both show buildings along the high street but are of too small a scale to show any detail. Roque's map of 1760 depicts part of Amersham and shows the burgages plots behind the High Street, although not those associated with No. 74. These plots are shown in full on the Tithe map of 1838 and the plots are also evident on the 1st edition OS map of 1898.

Aerial photographs from 1947 show buildings along High Street and several plots running back from the road. It would appear that over time several plots had been joined with their neighbours to create wider divisions, a process that can be seen in many towns.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To aim to gather sufficient information to generate a reliable predictive model of the extent, character, date, state of preservation and depth of burial of important archaeological remains (and associated palaeo-environmental deposits) within the area of study.
- To determine the impact of the proposed development on any remains present.
- To make available to interested parties the results of the investigation.

Specific objectives in respect of this evaluation included the requirements

- Establish whether there is evidence for medieval or post-medieval activity in this area relating to occupation, property boundaries, domestic, commercial or industrial activities.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

In response to a *Brief* issued by BCAS a scheme of investigation was designed by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) and agreed with BCAS and the applicant. The work was carried out by JMHS and involved the excavation of two trial trenches across the site (Figure 1).

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* agreed with the BCAS. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (2001) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The trenching sample required was achieved through the excavation of two trenches, both 10m in length situated within the footprint of the proposed building. Both were 1.6m wide and was excavated by a 3 tonne excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. The resultant surfaces were cleaned by hand prior to limited hand excavation of any identified archaeological deposits.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. The trench was backfilled after recording.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. pit cuts; while numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Excavation Results

Both trenches encountered the same soil sequence (Fig. 2). The lowest deposit encountered was a stiff orange-brown clay with flints (1/03) and (2/03). This is related to drift deposits known in the area and thought to occur a little to the south (BGS 255, Beaconsfield). A sondage was dug into this deposit to ensure it was not a thin layer masking potential archaeology.

Above this was a greyish-brown silty-clay with small quantities of flints (1/02) and (2/02) that varied between 0.15m and 0.23m thick. It contained sparse charcoal flecking. The uppermost layer was a dark grey-brown clay loam (1/01) and (2/01) that varied between 0.2m and 0.3m thick. It contained the rare flint pebble with some charcoal flecks.

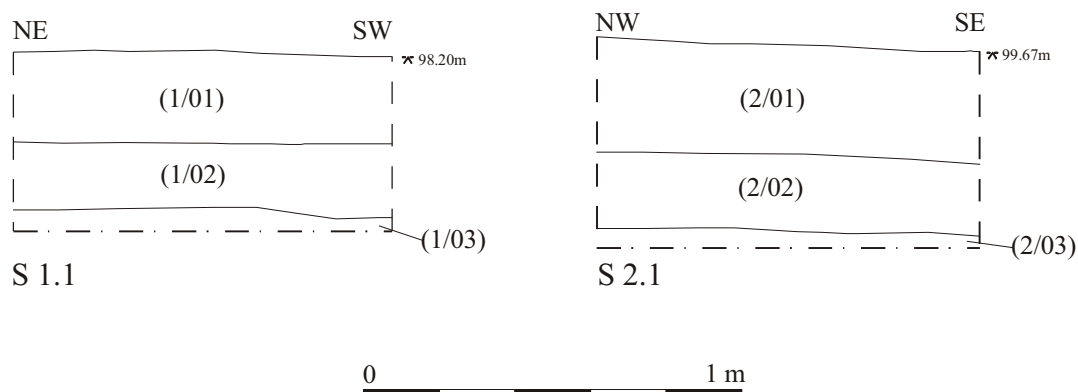


Figure 2. Sections

4.2 Reliability of Techniques and Results

The results are considered to be good. The work was undertaken during a period of dry weather on an overcast day. Geological maps were consulted onsite to help confirm the identity of the natural geology located.

5 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

5.1 Pottery

A few sherds of recent post-medieval pottery were noted within the topsoil (1/01) and (2/01). These were not retained, but have been identified on site using the coding system of the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit type-series (e.g. Mynard and Zeepvat 1992; Zeepvat et al. 1994):

PM25: *White Earthenware*. Late 18th – 20th century.

5.2 Environmental Remains

Due to the nature of the deposits encountered no environmental samples were taken.

6 DISCUSSION

No archaeological features were recorded.

The BGS 255, Beaconsfield map suggested that the area was on the boarder of the Seaford & Newhaven and Lewes Nodular Chalk formations. Upon excavation it became clear that a drift deposit of clay-with-flints known immediately to the south was also present in this area.

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TVAS 2001c *The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire: An Archaeological Evaluation*

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Appendix – Archaeological Context Inventory

Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 1			0.45	1.6	10		
1/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.25	Tr	Tr	Pottery	Modern
1/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty-clay	0.2	Tr	Tr		
1/03	Natural	Orange- brown clay w/ flint	-	Tr	Tr		
Context	Type	Description	Depth (m)	Width (m)	Length (m)	Finds	Date
Trench 2			0.5	1.6	10		
2/01	Layer	Topsoil	0.3	Tr	Tr	Pottery	Modern
2/02	Layer	Grey-brown silty-clay	0.2	Tr	Tr		
2/03	Natural	Orange- brown clay w/ flint	-	Tr	Tr		



Plate 1: Trench 1

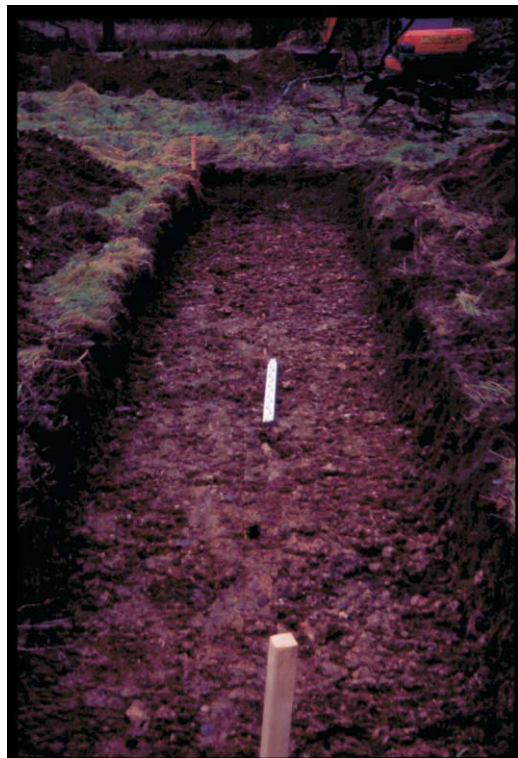


Plate 2: Trench 2