

**23/23a St. Mary's Street,
Wallingford**

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for

Ashbrook Homes Limited

August 1997

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by Adam Croney

Report 97/53

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at 23/23a St. Mary's Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (NGR SU 6072 8922). The work was commissioned by Mr. A. V. Sylvester of BDS, Windward House, Hollow Lane, Shinfield, Reading, Berkshire, RG2 9AB on behalf of their client, Ashbrook Homes Limited.

The development proposals are for the demolition of outbuildings, the construction of a two storey extension and the conversion of a remaining two storey section as part of the formation of four flats. A condition on the granting of planning permission (application no. P96/W0553) requires the implementation of a programme of archaeological investigation in the form of a watching brief, to observe and record any archaeological deposits revealed during groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, **Archaeology and Planning** (PPG 16, 1990). Oxfordshire County Council Archaeology Section, who advise the local planning authority with regard to archaeological matters, have highlighted the archaeological potential of the site, as it lies within the historic core of the town of Wallingford. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr. Paul Smith, Archaeological Officer for Oxfordshire County Council. The watching brief was undertaken by Adam Croney during July 1997 and the site code is MSW/97.

Location, Topography and Geology

Wallingford is situated on a gravel terrace by an important ford over the River Thames which lies to the east. To the south of the town the river flows through the Chilterns via the Goring Gap and its position has consequently made Wallingford a focal point for ancient routes such as the Ridgeway. Numbers 23 and 23a lie in the south-east quarter of the town on the east side of St. Mary's Street and to the north of New Road. 23a is a listed building. The development area lies on First (Flood Plain) Terrace deposits of Younger River Gravels (BGS, 1980).

Archaeological Background

Wallingford is mentioned in the Burghal Hidage, a late Saxon document compiled circa 919 listing defended strongholds in Wessex, and is surrounded by a rampart erected in the late 9th century as a defence against the Danes. Several chance finds of Saxon date have been made, some in the vicinity of the Market Place a little to the north of the development site. A pagan Saxon cemetery was also discovered to the south-west of the later town defences and a number of burials were excavated which are dated to the 5th and 6th centuries. The rectilinear street pattern would seem to have been laid out at the same time as the defences with the town divided into quarters by main streets running east-west and north-south. The site is located adjacent to the north-south route which originally lay about 30 m. east of its present course, although nothing is known about the buildings within the late Saxon town. Following the Norman conquest a castle was built in the north-west part of the town and from the reign of King John until 1385 it was used as a royal residence.

Earlier periods are attested by a number of finds in the vicinity including flints, a Bronze Age burial and Bronze Age metalwork from the river. Two Iron Age occupation sites lie to the south of the town and a number of late Iron Age coins have been found in the area. Finds of Roman pottery and coins from within the walled town and from land to the west of the Saxon defences are also numerous. There is therefore considerable potential for the discovery of archaeological remains from all periods in the vicinity of the site, especially those of Saxon and Medieval date.

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits revealed that may be affected by construction works. This would involve examination of the trenches for new foundations, areas of topsoil or overburden stripping and trenches dug for service runs. Spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

Results

Three trenches were monitored during the watching brief and their locations are shown on Figure 2.

Trench 1 was 3 m. long and positioned perpendicular to St. Mary's Street. It was dug to a depth of 2.9 m. and truncated the natural sand by 0.5 m. It was found to be filled with modern building debris which included tiles, bricks and 19th century bottles and pottery. Two brick walls were also present and these were set at right angles to one another. One wall was 1.3 m. long and made up of three courses and the other was 0.5 m. long and consisted of eight courses, three of which were removed during

excavation of the trench. The surface of the shorter wall was plastered on the side facing the street frontage. The highest course of this wall was 0.8 m. below the present ground surface. Nothing else of an archaeological nature was observed in the trench and no artefacts were recovered from the spoilheaps.

Trench 2 was similarly positioned but had already been backfilled at the time of the visit, making observation impossible.

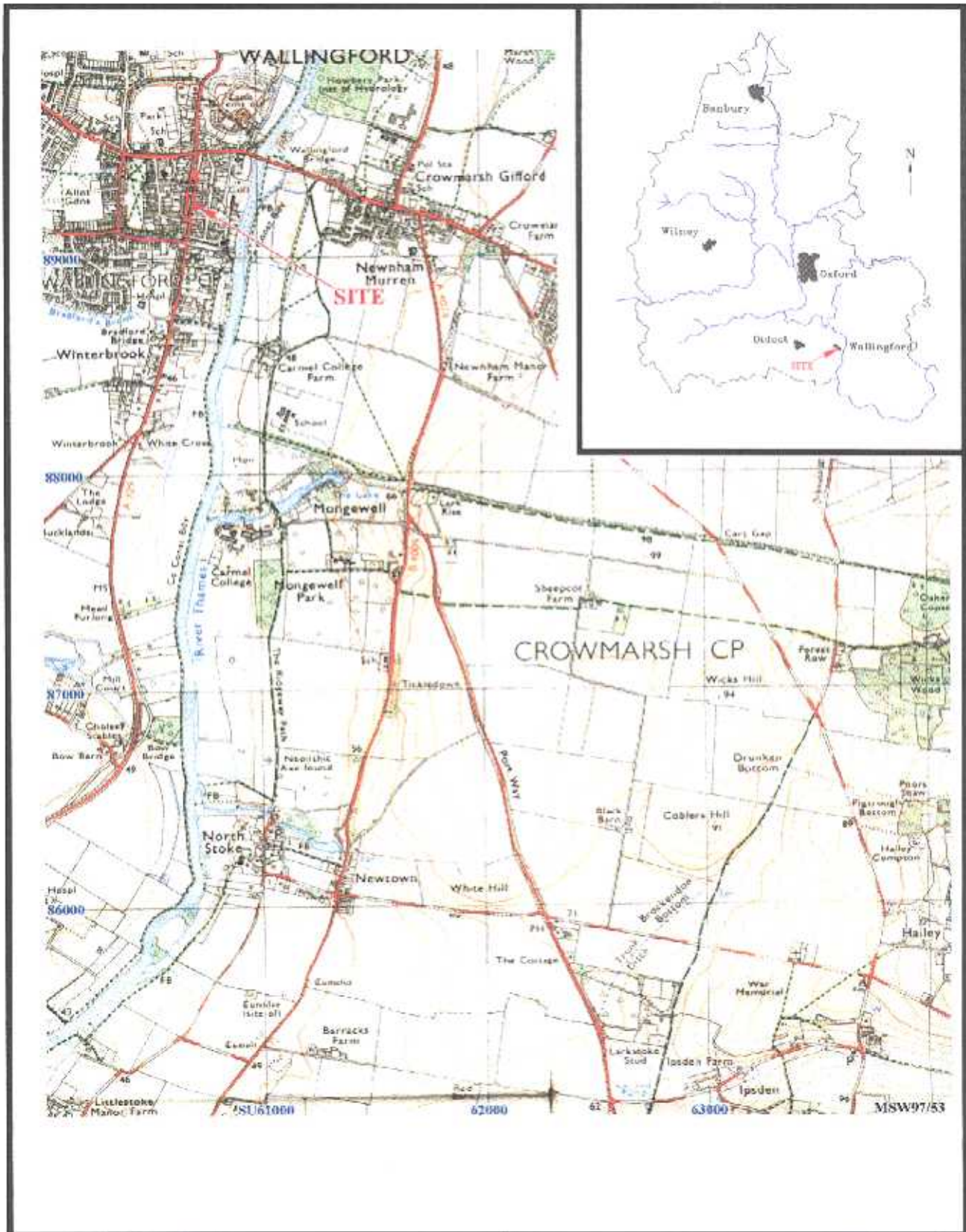
Trench 3 was located to the rear of the site and positioned parallel to St. Mary's Street. The stratigraphy comprised 1.2 m. of topsoil over a sandy clay subsoil onto natural sand. No archaeological deposits were present and no artefacts were recovered either from the topsoil or from the subsoil.

Conclusion

The only features observed in the trenches were the two lengths of brick wall in Trench 1. They would appear to be walls rather than foundations (due to the plastered surface of one of them) and possibly represent the remains of an earlier building situated approximately 2.5 m. south of the St. Mary's Street frontage. No dating evidence in the form of pottery was recovered from the vicinity other than the c. 19th century material which lay both above and to the west of the walls. From the observations made during the watching brief it would appear that minimal damage has been caused by the groundworks.

References

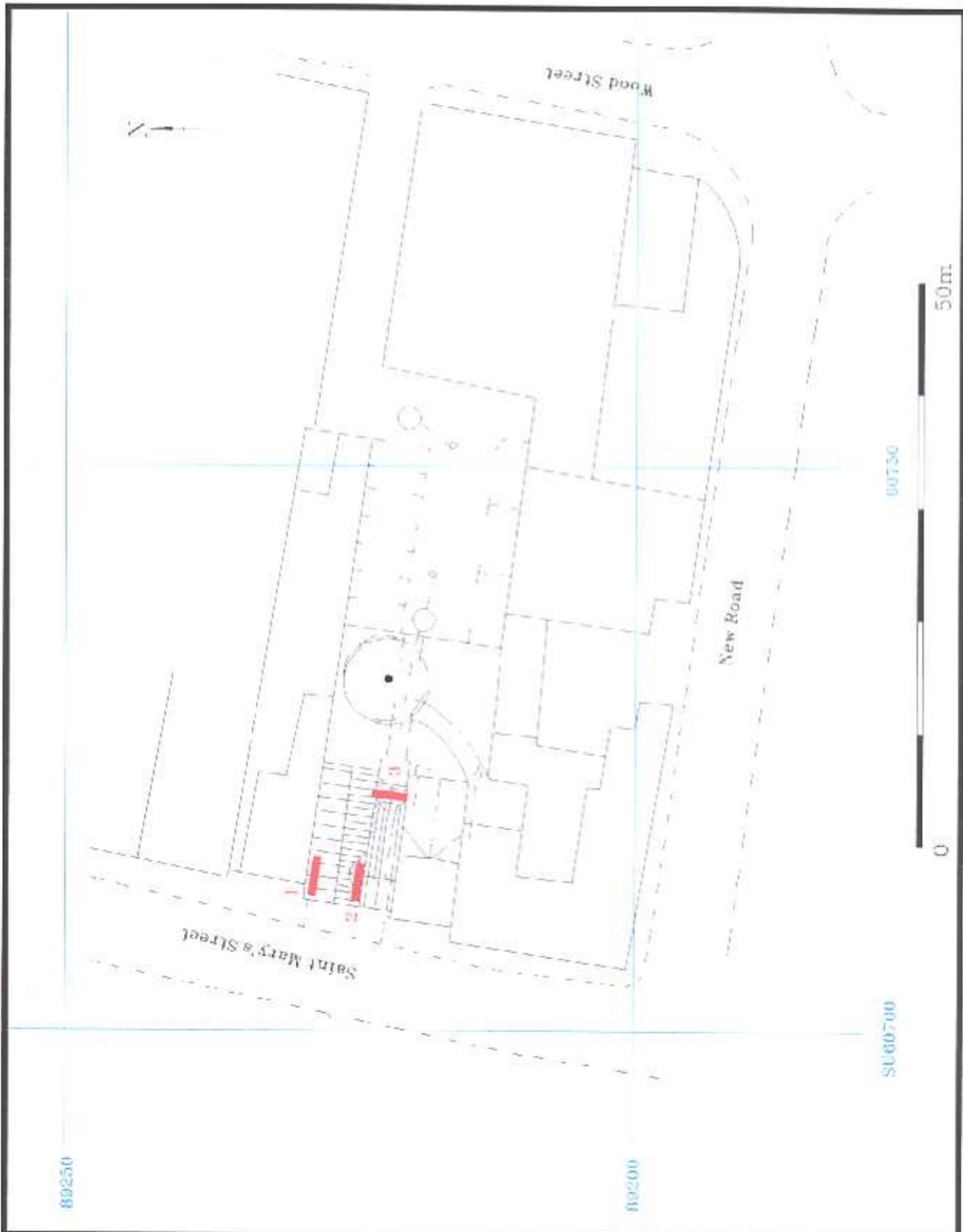
- BGS, 1980: **British Geological Survey**, 1: 50,000 series, Sheet 254, Solid and Drift Edition. Keyworth.
- PPG 16, 1990: **Archaeology and Planning**. Department of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16. (HMSO)



Saint Mary's Street, Wallingford,
Oxfordshire, 1997

Figure 1. Location of site within
Wallingford and Oxfordshire.





Saint Mary's Street, Wallingford,
Oxfordshire, 1997

Figure 2. Location of trenches monitored
during watching brief.

