

BELL LANE/NORTH STREET

THAME, OXON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

NOVEMBER 1988

Trench 4, in the area now used as a paddock, revealed a concentration of pits, ditches and small gullies (Fig.2: 4/4-4/15) which contained pottery dating from the mid-12th to mid-13th centuries. Some of these features are substantial, including pits up to 1.5m in diameter and ditches 0.8m wide and 0.6m deep. At its south-west end the trench was crossed by a stone wall (0.4m wide) of which only one course survived. (Fig 3). This wall had apparently formed part of a tile-roofed building, of similar date to the other features.

The most likely conclusion from the evidence summarised above is that the area sampled by Trench 4 was occupied in the medieval period. This has clear implications for the development of Thame which are discussed further in the conclusion.

Trenches 1 and 2 contained only isolated medieval features (one pit, two ditches, see Fig.1) while Trench 3 was blank. One of the ditches in Trench 2, which runs east-west, could represent a boundary behind the occupation area found in Trench 4 (above). Earlier evidence consisted only of a single sherd of bronze age pottery, found in a medieval feature, and an unstratified flint flake.

The last trial excavation, Trench 5, was excavated by hand in the garden of 105-106 High St, and therefore within the burgage plots of New Thame. This trench proved to lie just north of a stone building (15th century or later), the north wall of which was partially revealed. It survives to a height of 0.9m and the wall-top lies 0.3m below modern ground level. The remainder of the trench was taken up by a complex of deep intercutting pits dating mainly from the 16th to 19th centuries. These pits are up to 1.8m deep and have evidently destroyed nearly all trace of earlier activity. It is possible, however, that some small "islands" of medieval stratigraphy still survive.

CONCLUSION

Assessment of Results

On the evidence of this assessment, the site does not contain any well preserved vertical stratigraphy which could provide a sequence for either medieval or Saxon Thame. Evidence is limited to features cut into the natural subsoil (in the northern area) and intercutting pits (behind the High Street).

Despite these shortcomings, the evidence for medieval occupation in Trench 4 is of considerable interest. To the south of the site North Street is still lined with houses, and it now seems likely that in the medieval period these dwellings continued round the curve of the road. It is also true that North Street formed part of the main route which linked Thame Abbey (now Thame Park) with the Oxford to Aylesbury road, making roadside development even more probable.

*No evidence
seen that could
be dated with
any certainty*

*Agricultural
truncation*

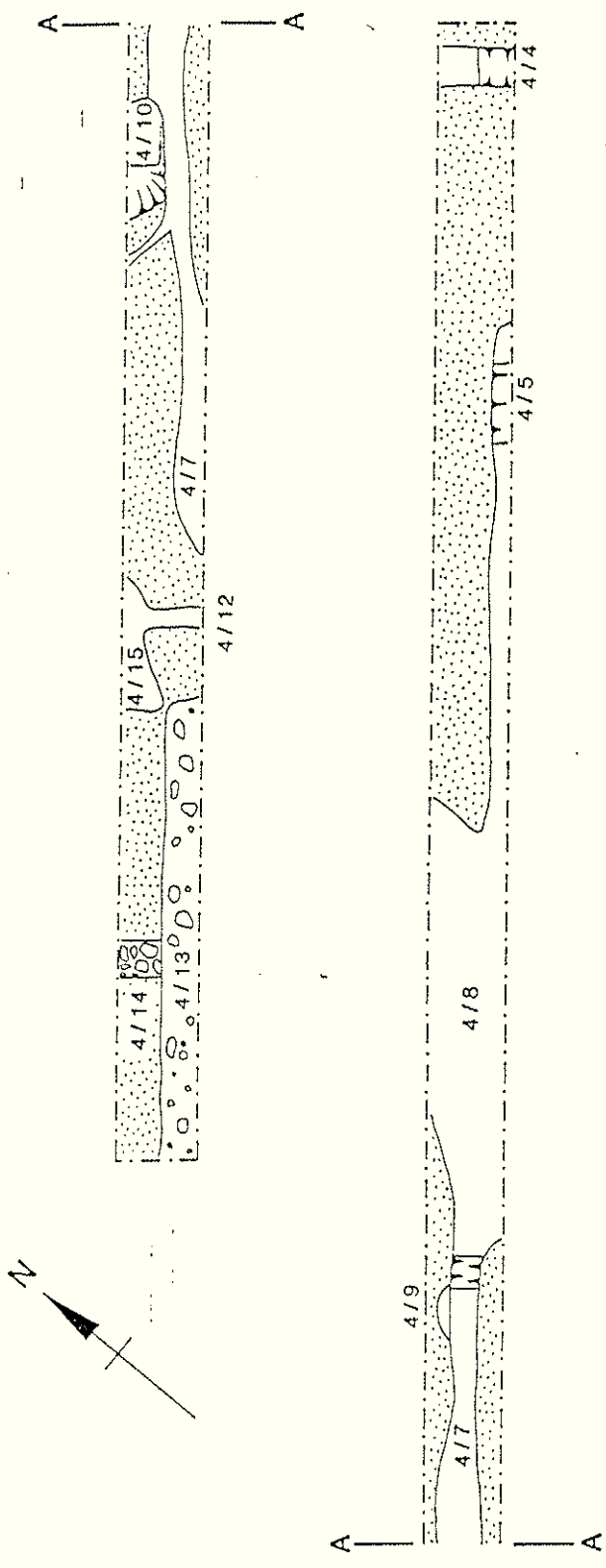
*Intercutting pits -
back plots, (bell line
+ crests?)*

v. shallow - back area

The occupation found in this area fronting North Street sheds new light on the customary ideas of how Thame evolved, on the basis of documentary sources (Rodwell K, 1974, Historic Towns in Oxfordshire) -see Fig 4. For this reason excavation of an area around the Medieval building discovered in Trench 4 and from it to North Street would increase our knowledge of the early development and growth of Thame and the character of the settlement in this part of the town. Further work should be carried out to establish whether the east-west ditch in Trench 2 marks a limit to the town in the 12th - 13th centuries.

For the piece of land behind 105-106 High Street it is not anticipated that development will go deep enough to damage any possible early medieval stratigraphy.

John Moore
David Wilkinson



BELL LANE, THAME

Fig 2

1:100

--- LIMIT OF EXCAVATION
 NATURAL SUBSOIL



BELL LANE, THAME

1:20

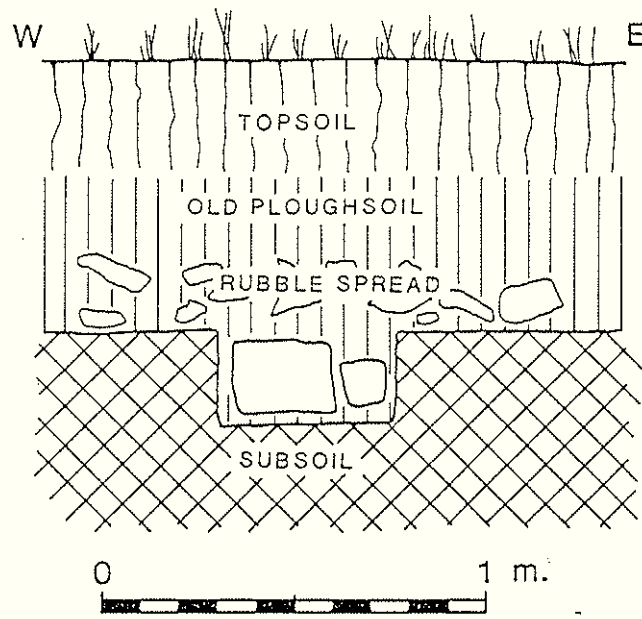


Fig.3 Section through wall 4/14

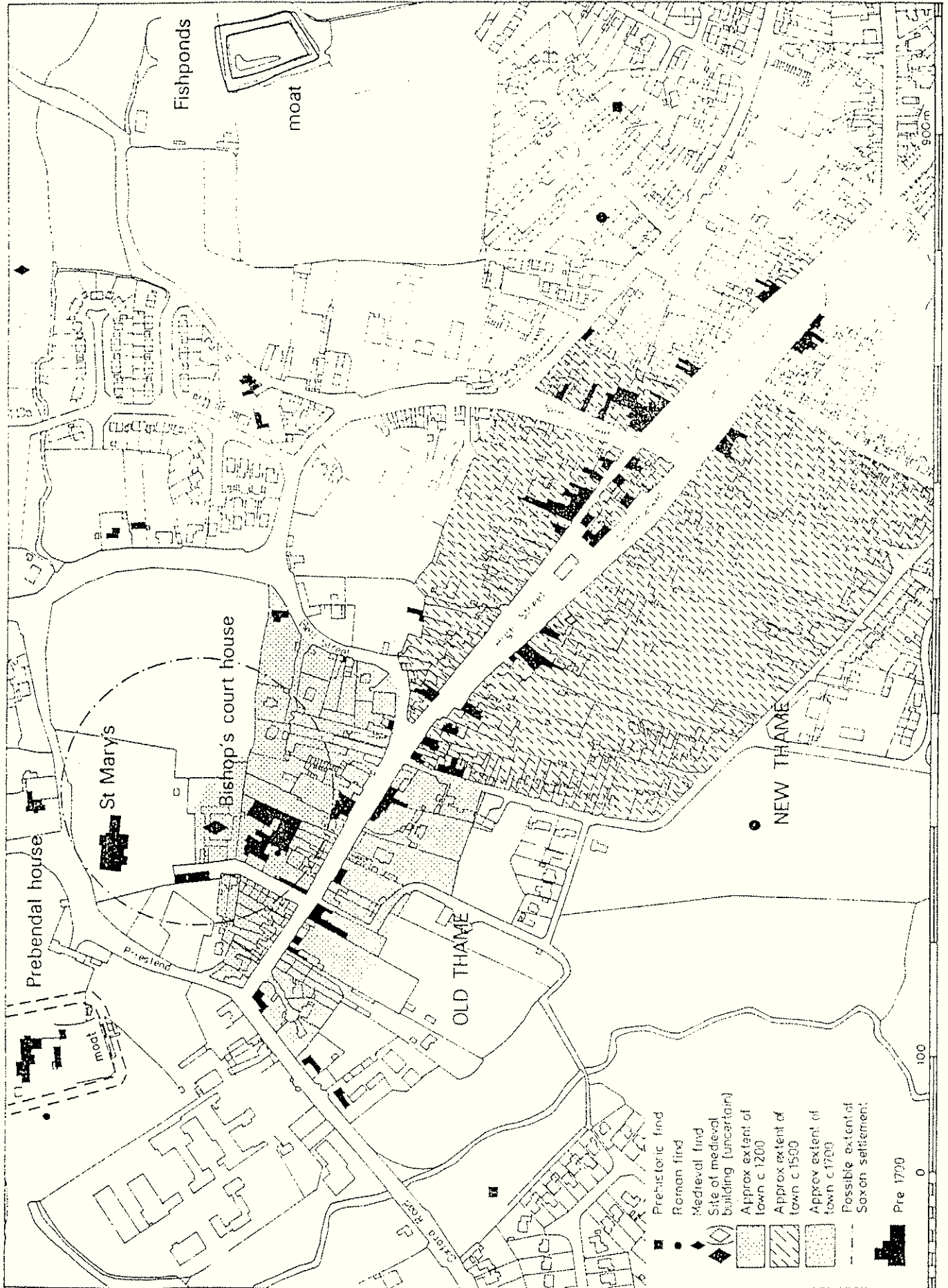
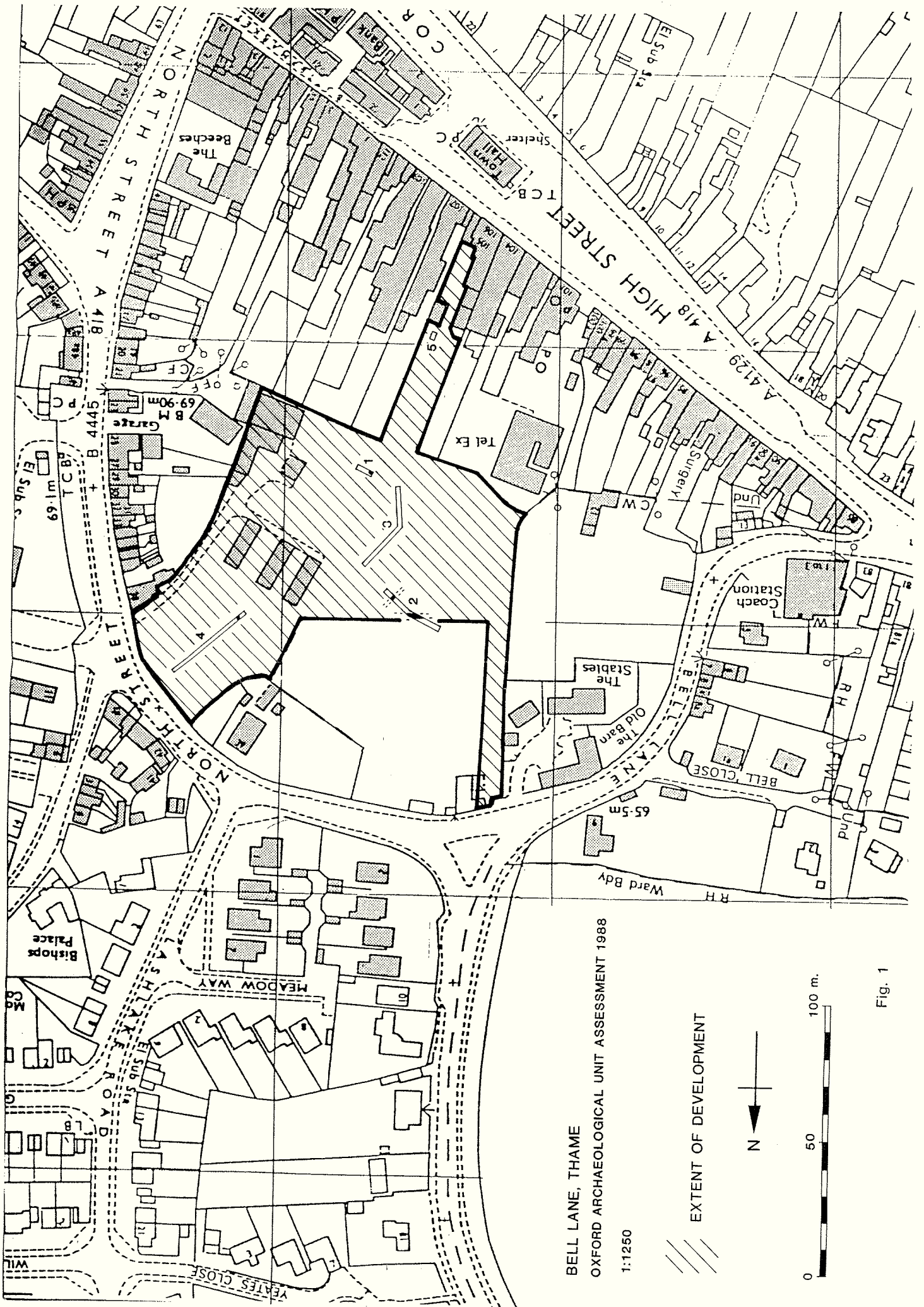


Fig 4 Historical growth of Thame



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EXTENT OF DEVELOPMENT

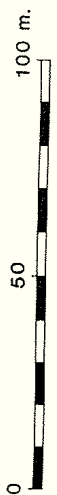


Fig. 1



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