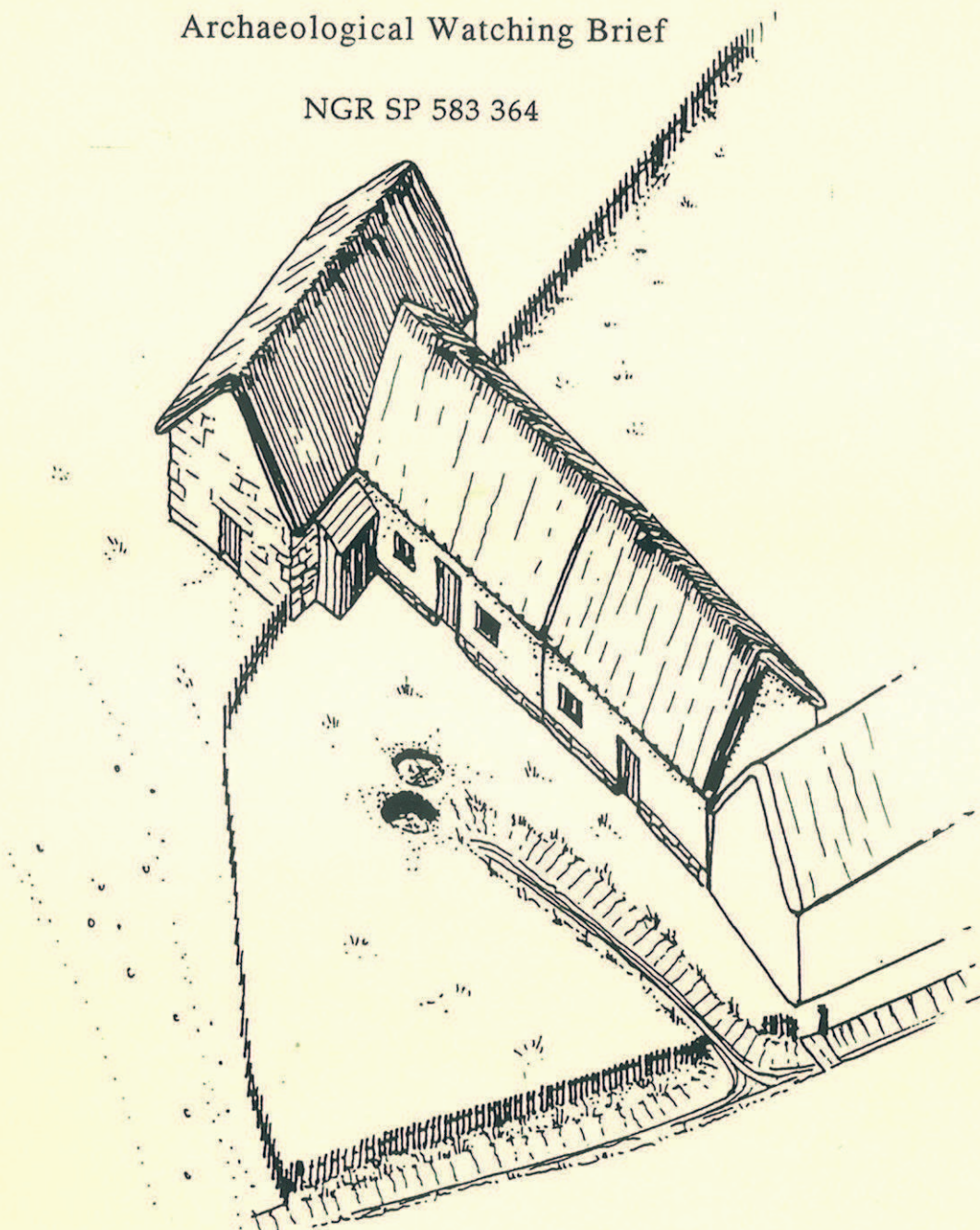


Tesco's development next to Brackley Castle Oxford Road, Brackley, Northamptonshire

Planning Application S940478P

Archaeological Watching Brief

NGR SP 583 364



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

November 1994

SUMMARY

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief next to Brackley Castle, Oxford Road, Brackley, Northamptonshire on behalf of Tesco Stores Ltd. Medieval walls and pits were seen on the NW and E of the site. Iron Age features were recorded in the N and centre of the site.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND (Fig. 1)

Brackley is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The Old Town is centred around the church of St Peter in the NE of the present town. A Norman castle was built to dominate the Oxford to Northampton road and now lies in the S of the present town. A settlement associated with the castle was founded with its own church (St James). A new town with a market square was laid out between the castle and St Peter's Church before 1173 and by 1202 it had its own Assizes. Lanes at right-angles to the Northampton to Oxford road (Bridge Street) have been identified in excavations by Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit (NAU).

Brackley Castle was probably built soon after 1086 and went out of use some time after 1173 when the estates of the Earl of Leicester, to whom the castle belonged, were seized by the Crown. An evaluation of the castle carried out by the OAU in 1991 located 11th- to 13th-century activity which may indicate the end of the castle's military function in 1230-40 when the castle was granted to the Hospital of St John. In the 16th century Leland noted that the ditches of the castle were still visible and surrounded by ruined streets.

An archaeological excavation on the N part of the site (to be covered by the store buildings) was carried out in 1981-2 by NAU and recovered two phases of a terrace of seven medieval houses (similar to those from The Hamel, Oxford, which are illustrated on the cover). The terrace of houses at Brackley had stone-lined cellars to the rear and fronted onto a metalled road presumably leading to a gate of the castle. The short lifespan of the site (around 100 years, information from I Meadows NAU) suggests a settlement dependent on the castle which also had a short life.

Topography

The development site lies either side of a tributary of the River Ouse and was, prior to the development, fairly flat. The height of the area of the Tesco store was around 105.5 m OD. The height of the area of the carparking and petrol station rose gently from around 106 m OD in the N, by the stream, to 108.6 m OD towards the ring road in the S.

STRATEGY

The strategy was to determine the level of preservation of archaeological features across the site, to recover medieval and earlier artefacts and to define the nature of archaeological features if possible. A section through the castle moat, on the W of the site, would have been an aim of the watching brief, but it was found that the line of the moat ran to the W of disturbance/foundation work associated with

the development and was thus not to be affected.

The impact of the development on the site was as follows. In the area of the store, the ground level was to be reduced by around 1 m, bases and wall foundations were to be excavated and the course of the stream (which is part of the Ouse) was to be straightened. In the area of the carpark, impact from landscaping was to be the removal of around 1.5 m of material. In the area of the petrol station, three petrol storage tanks were inserted underground.

Site visits were made on 1st, 4th, 12th, 15th, 18th, 19th, 23rd, 25th, 30th, 31st of August and on the 2nd, 6th, 9th, and 13th of September. In the area of the store, foundation trenches and area stripping to the N and E of the new building were monitored. The ground level was also reduced, but only to the top of the 1982 ground surface, over the area of the store under the loadbearing floor. Area stripping was inspected in the area of the carparking. Initial ground clearance in the area of the petrol station was walked over and the subsequent terracing was monitored.

The archaeological features revealed by area stripping and which were unexcavated by NAU (1981-2) were sampled by hand to determine their nature and to recover dating evidence. The features were planned at 1:50 and their sections drawn at scales of 1:20 where they were excavated. Few features were revealed in deep foundation trenches these were recorded as far as was practical.

RESULTS

Soils

The general soil type was a slightly clayey silt. The underlying subsoil was limestone brash over clay.

Archaeology

North of the Ouse

The N part of the Tesco store site had been covered with up to 1 m of modern dumping which had to be removed by the contractors as it was unsuitable for supporting the loadbearing floor. This dumping also filled the voids in the medieval features excavated by NAU.

Contexts 1-5, 9-20, 30, 31 and 35-37 were within the area of the NAU excavation (Fig. 2). In the area of 1-5, a wall possibly seen in the NAU excavations ran E-W. In the area of 9-20 were several small Iron Age features cut into a red brown silt which overlies the limestone brash and which had not been excavated by NAU. More, and slightly larger, Iron Age pits were seen in the area of 30, 31 and 35-37. These were surrounded by features obviously half-sectioned by NAU and backfilled with modern material. These Iron Age features did not appear on plans of the excavations provided by I Meadows of NAU.

East-West wall 5 was not clearly identifiable on the NAU plan. Iron Age pits 16 and 18 were accompanied by a slight possible N-S wall slot (20). Pit 14 was unexcavated by NAU but contained medieval pottery while pits 10 and 12 were later identified as NAU 1308? (partly illegible) and NAU 1130. Pit NAU 294? was also seen with wall NAU 1183? Pit 31 was adjacent to NAU 319 in an otherwise clear area. Pits 35, 36 and 37 were also not identifiable as NAU

contexts but lay in a blank area E of NAU 334 in NAU Tenement 2.

Contexts 6-8, 21-27 and 28-34 were to the S of the NAU excavations. In the area of 6-8 were ?two medieval pits one of which may have been the origin of a broken copper alloy buckle dated from around 1150 to 1450 which matches the dating of the pottery (late 12th- to 13th-century). Contexts 21-34 were a series of medieval pit fills which were cut by stone walls which may be similar to those seen forming cellars by the NAU further to the N. Wall 33 may be a continuation of NAU 683? a N-S wall in Tenement 2 although it lies slightly further to the W. It was cut into pit 29, the fill of which (28) contained medieval pottery ranging from c 850 to 1100 and late 13th-century in date. Wall 33 joined into wall 32 which formed three sides of a rectangle and was filled by 25 which contained pottery of 11th- to 13th-century date. Wall 33 continued S of the possible cellar on a line slightly further to the E than previously. Pits 22 and 24 lay to the NE of the possible cellar and contained pottery of 11th- to 13th-century date.

South of the Ouse

The area of the carparking had been truncated and was subsequently covered by over 2 m of modern dumping which was partly removed by the contractors for the Tesco development.

The area of the petrol station did not contain any archaeological deposits. The course of the Ouse was straightened but no archaeological deposits were present.

Finds

Medieval Metalwork Leigh Allen

One broken oval buckle frame made of copper alloy was found from the old topsoil (6). The offset narrowed bar is missing and there is a notch for the pin. It is virtually identical to that illustrated by Egan and Pritchard (1991, 68-70, fig.42, no.274) and dated from 1150 to 1400. The dimensions of the buckle were 27mm x 16mm x 4.5mm.

Prehistoric pottery assessment Alistair Barclay

Seven contexts (6, 15, 17, 30, 35, 36 & 38) produced approximately 30 sherds of Iron Age pottery. Nearly all of the sherds are manufactured from calcareous tempered fabrics with the exception of one small sand tempered sherd (context 6). Blinkhorn's assessment (Blinkhorn, in prep) of a larger group of material (1214 sherds) also notes the predominant use of calcareous tempered fabrics. In this region calcareous fabrics continue in use throughout the Iron Age period and this appears to be the case at Brackley (Blinkhorn op. cit.).

The assemblage contains only three feature sherds, comprising two flaring rims presumably from early Iron Age fine ware vessels (context 36 & 30), and a possible shoulder (context 38). Only context 36 contains a significant amount of material, including large sherds from coarse ware vessels, some with burnt residues, and the rim from an angular bowl/jar. The two rims indicate a possible early Iron Age date range for at least some of this material. However, for the remaining material only a broad Iron Age date range can be ascribed.

Medieval Pottery C Underwood-Keevill

A total of 53 sherds weighing 0.446 kg was recovered from excavated contexts. Fabric types were described and diagnostic sherds recorded in detail for each context, and these have been compared with fabric descriptions from Brackley Castle Lane 1981 (Blinkhorn P, in prep), Brackley Magpie Lane (Bown L, 1994 OAU evaluation and watching brief reports) and Brackley Castle (Underwood-Keevill, 1993 OAU evaluation report).

The range of fabric types consists of St Neots-type ware, Northampton T1 fabric dated from the mid 9th century to the 12th century, Shelly Coarseware, Northampton fabric T2 dated from the 12th century to 14th century (Denham, 1985, 48), Oxford Medieval ware Oxford fabric Y dated from the late 11th century to 13th century in Oxford (Haldon and Mellor 1977), and a range of sandy fabrics with varying amounts of fine white and clear quartz and iron ore and fine limestone which are equivalent to fabrics 1 and 4 and 6 at Brackley Castle Lane (Blinkhorn, in prep) and to the Grey Sandy ware decorated with single line rouletting noted from Brackley Castle (Underwood-Keevill 1993 OAU evaluation report) and a sandy fabric with occasional limestone from Magpie Lane.

Only a limited number of diagnostic sherds were present, 4 rims and 11 sherds with single line rouletted decoration. The rims were mainly in a sandy and fine iron ore with occasional limestone fabric, similar to fabric 4, all were short everted bevelled cooking pot rims. One rim was in fabric type T2 a rounded rim with incised lines on the rim top. Most of the rim types are difficult to date. T2 rim types in Northampton are dated late 11th century onwards and the bevelled rim types indicate a 12th-century date range. The presence of Oxford Medieval ware pitcher sherds with yellow green glaze indicates a late 12th-century to 13th-century date at least for contexts 6 and possibly 25.

The range of fabrics are local types, with the exception of the 2 sherds of Oxford fabric Y and one sherd of possible Olney Hyde fabric B from context 28. The sandy iron-rich and limestone fabric types 1, 4 and 6 are presumed to be local (Blinkhorn, in prep) and the single line rouletting from a probable pitcher also is a probable local trait. None of the local pottery has any glaze finish and the rouletting and the line detail on the coarse limestone rim are the only forms of decoration. Rouletting is normally evident on glazed tripod pitchers in Oxford fabric Y and dated to the late 12th century. It is possible that these sherds are 12th century in date. The fabric types and limited vessel types compare well with the other assemblages from Brackley. The only differences observable are the lack of late medieval material, with the exception of the late 13th-century Olney Hyde type sherd from context 28. There are no Brill/Boarstall type sherds or Nuneaton or Potterspury types, which are all present at Brackley Castle Lane. It is suggested that the majority of the assemblage could be described as being late 12th century, equivalent to ceramic phase 1 at Brackley Castle Lane.

COMMENTS ON THE RESULTS

Reliability of field investigation

The recording was mostly carried out after the contractors operations and only limited areas of the site were observed. However, this included almost all of the foundation trenches and area stripping.

The areas of the site which were seen were adequate to define the limit of medieval activity in the area of the Tesco store. Iron Age features were also recorded. The S part of the site had been affected by modern activity. No archaeological deposits were present in the petrol station area it is unknown if other archaeological deposits were present in the area of truncation.

The topography of the site has been changed by recent dumping. The Ouse was formerly in a more gently sloping valley. This was partly filled in by the modern dumping which levelled the site.

Overall Interpretation

The extent of medieval features observed is indicated in Fig. 2. There were no features seen further S than the two pits (6-8) observed towards the Ouse. The Iron Age features which were recorded were all present within the NAU excavation area.

The possible cellar to the S of NAU Tenement 2 was oriented E-W which may suggest an extra phase or alignment of tenements/properties.

The remainder of the site was either originally archaeologically barren (which was not determined from the watching brief) or has been truncated by modern activity.

The results are to be included in the NAU report on the 1981-2 excavations.

Mark Roberts MIFA
2 November 1994

APPENDIX

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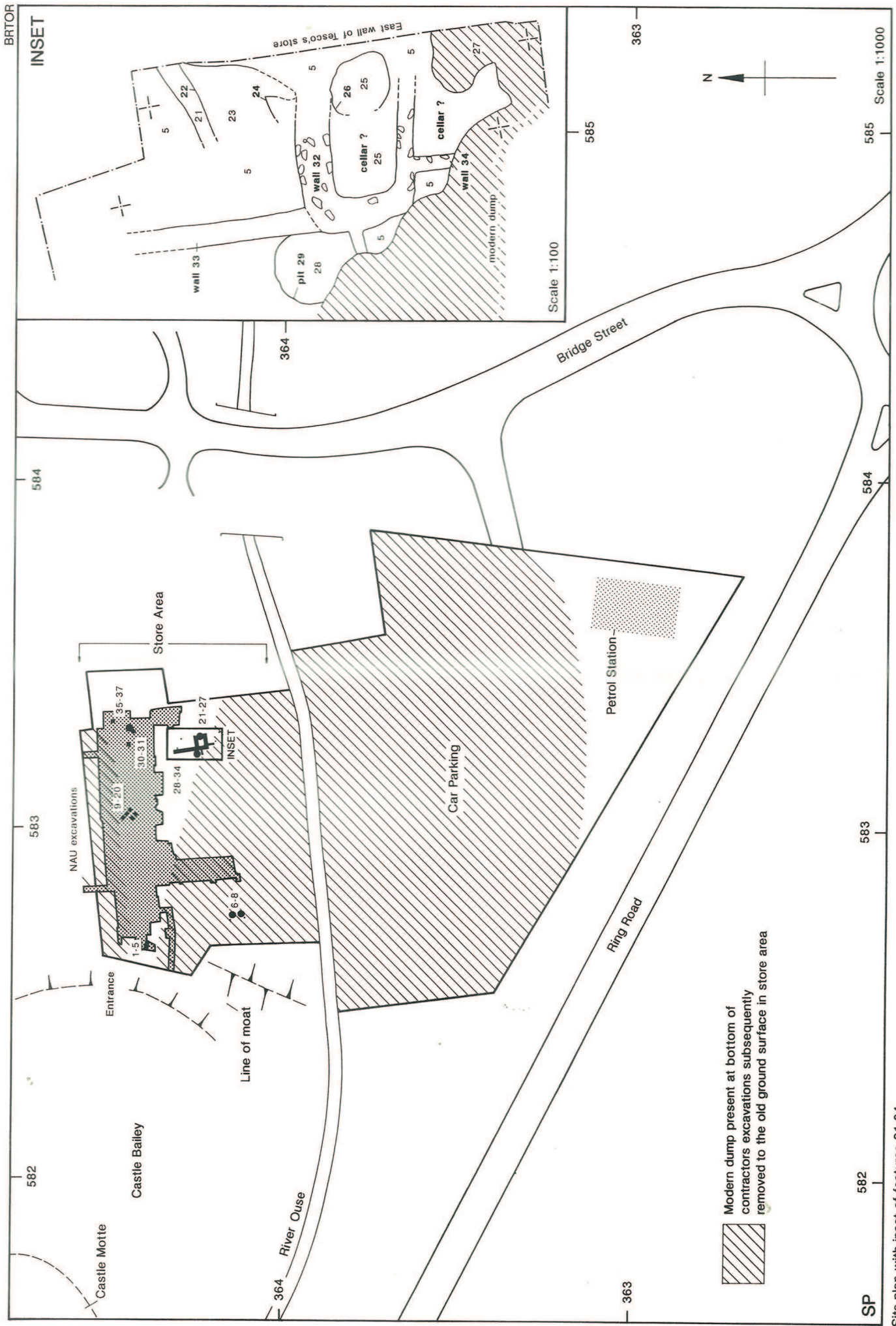
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Location of the site at Brackley, based upon the Ordnance Survey's first edition map

figure 1



SP

Site plan with inset of features 21-34

figure 2

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