

Campbell Reith Hill

7/8 BROAD ST (MARKET WAY), READING, BERKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

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Approved by: 

Date: 24/10/01

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Introduction

In August, 2001, the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Campbell Reith Hill to undertake an archaeological watching brief on geotechnical investigations at 7-8 Market Street, Reading. Four geotechnical test pits excavated by Geotechnics Ltd were observed and recorded. Four pits which had previously been dug and left open were recorded at the same time.

The results of the watching brief are described below according to Test Pit number (see Figure 2 for location). Test Pits were numbered continuously, beginning with the previously excavated pits.

Background

The site was the subject of an archaeological desk-top assessment (OAU December 1996) which sets out the background in detail. The report concluded that:

The site is situated in the centre of the medieval street plan of medieval Reading just to the north of the likely Saxon core of the town. The area has produced occasional finds of prehistoric and Roman material although no site have been identified. Although it would appear that the site has suffered possibly quite extensive post-medieval disturbance it is likely that any undamaged areas of the site will contain medieval or possibly earlier deposits.

The existing market arcade buildings on the site were constructed in the 1960s, following the demolition of a Victorian market arcade. Buildings are also known to have existed on the site in the 17th and 18th centuries (OAU 1996: 4-5).

Aims and methodology

The aims of the watching brief was to record the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains exposed within the test pits.

The pits were excavated by hand by Geotechnics Ltd. Archaeological recording followed procedures laid down in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson, 1992). Each deposit encountered was allocated a unique context number and recorded on a *pro forma* sheet. Sample sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Each test pit was also recorded photographically in colour slide and monochrome print. Finds were retrieved and bagged by context.

Results

Test Pit 1 (Fig 3)

This pit was located within the north-western corner room of the arcade, adjacent to the Market Way passage. It was excavated to a depth of 2.40m and was sealed by context 100, a concrete floor 0.20m thick (this was found at every pit location). This floor covered 1m of modern make-up material (101) which contained a ceramic service pipe along its north-eastern edge. This make-up material also butted a brick-built flue or coal store, 102. Two probable pit cuts (105, 107) were visible in the sections of this trench and these contained large amounts of building material and oyster shell; the building material suggests a date no earlier than the 19th century. The pit 105 cut away part of pit 107 and of pit 114 which was recorded in the east-facing section (not illustrated). All three of these features cut through an earlier deposit of compacted red-brown clay sand material (109). This constituted the fill of two undated pit-like features (110, 111) which cut an earlier deposit of sandy mortar with flint inclusions (112). This deposit was located 1.20m below the present ground level - it may be either medieval or post-medieval but as no artefacts were recovered, the dating remains insecure. Natural gravel (113) was reached at 2m below present ground level, where it had probably been truncated by the medieval or post-medieval activity.

Test Pit 2

The location of this Pit was three rooms away from Test Pit 1, towards Broad Street, and revealed a similar sequence to that observed within Test Pit 1, with the concrete floor (200) overlying a make-up deposit (201) c 0.80m thick. This overlay the red-brown clay sand (202) located at 1m below the present ground level. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.83m without reaching the natural terrace gravels as observed within Trench 1.

Test Pit 3 (Fig.3)

Trench 3 was located on the eastern side of the arcade of Market Way. This again was covered by the reinforced concrete flooring (300) with c. 0.18m of make-up/in-fill (301) below. Context 301 sealed a layer of burnt material (302) over tiles and sand (303) which may represent a Victorian floor level preceding the 1960s construction. Below this was a thick make-up or dump horizon (304) which directly overlay and surrounded the truncated remnants of a flint and mortar wall (305) located 1m below present ground level; it was observed within the west-facing section and returned westwards in the north-facing section of the trench. A wall of this type could date to any time from the early medieval period onward, but again, no artefacts were recovered. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.60m, without reaching either the flint walls or the natural terrace gravels.

Test Pit 4 (Fig 3)

This test pit was located directly off the main service yard, two rooms to the south-west of Trench 3. Under the reinforced concrete flooring (400) were similar levels of make-up (401) to those found in Trench 3, to a depth of 1m below current ground level. These covered a 0.15m thick mixed deposit of lime mortar and sand (402), possibly relating to a levelling horizon or a disturbed surface. This in turn sealed the fill of a cut aligned NW-SE which formed a shallow, round v-shape in section, and was 0.45m wide at its base (403). The fill was a very compacted flint and sand mixture (404) with charcoal and occasional building material fragments. This feature cut a deposit of compacted buff coloured sand with occasional flint and charcoal inclusions, and some lime mortar (405). This corresponds to the lower archaeological levels in Trench 1, but again no artefacts were recovered and it can therefore only be classified as medieval or post-medieval.

Test Pit 5

Test Pit 5 was excavated in the same room as Test Pit 1, against the north-south external wall. It was excavated to a depth of 0.95m below the present ground surface (concrete floor 501) and no dating evidence was recovered. The pit revealed the concrete foundation to the wall at c. 0.40m below the concrete floor which was overlain by 0.60m of in-fill material (502) below the reinforced floor level. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

Test Pit 6

Test Pit 6 was located in the south-west corner of the Market Way arcade building, immediately adjacent to Broad Street. It was excavated to a depth of 2.35m through the rubble in-fill of an earlier basement. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

Test Pit 7

This pit lay south-west of Test Pit 4, in the adjacent room. The concrete wall foundation (705) of this corner of the building was located approximately 0.33m below the existing ground level (concrete floor 701), and had modern in-fill material deposited against it (703). The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.32m below the present surface level where a second level of concrete flooring (704) was encountered and the excavation ceased.

Test Pit 8

Test Pit 8 was located in the north-eastern corner of the arcade block and was excavated to a depth of 2.10m below the present surface level. Below the reinforced concrete floor (801) was a deep layer of rubble in-fill (802) which contained an iron pipe/service with a brick foundation. The brick off-set to the eastern wall was located at 1.55m below the level of the concrete floor and the pit was eventually abandoned at 2.10m depth. No archaeology was encountered.

Conclusion

Test pits 1-4 showed some surviving archaeological deposits from a depth of c 1m below ground level down to the natural gravel at c 2m (found in one trench only). The deposits found included a flint and mortar wall showing that there were former buildings on the site, but the activity cannot be dated any closer than to the medieval to post-medieval periods.

Pits 5-8 showed the presence of at least two 19th-century basements on the site (Test Pits 6 and 8, while Test Pit 7 showed disturbance to a considerable depth caused by the construction of the current building) and by a preceding structure. Test Pit 5 was too shallow to demonstrate the presence or absence of archaeological deposits.

The results of the watching brief can be combined with the 1960s foundation drawings (Figure 4) which show fairly extensive pad and beam foundations, presumably excavated down to the natural sub-strata. They also show a further basement area. In all, it is likely that at least 50% of the archaeological deposits on the site have been removed by later activity, while the archaeology that does survive is clearly heavily truncated.

The proposed new structure will be founded on either 1100mm deep pile caps resting on groups of 600mm piles, or on concrete bases bearing on the natural subsoil. Figure 4 shows the piled option, but the plan of the foundation base option is likely to be similar. In either case it can be seen from Figure 4 that many of the new foundations will impact on areas already heavily damaged by previous construction.

It is recommended that during construction the breaking out of any obstructions should be limited to the area of the foundations bases or piles (as applicable). An archaeological watching brief may be advisable on the central area of the site during construction work, depending on the final foundation plans and their predicted impact.

Bibliography

OAU December 1996 *Proposed redevelopment at Market Way, Broad St, Reading: archaeological desk-top assessment*, (unpublished report for Lyons, Sleeman and Hoare).

Wilkinson, D (ed.) 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (First edition, August 1992).



Figure 1: Site location plan.

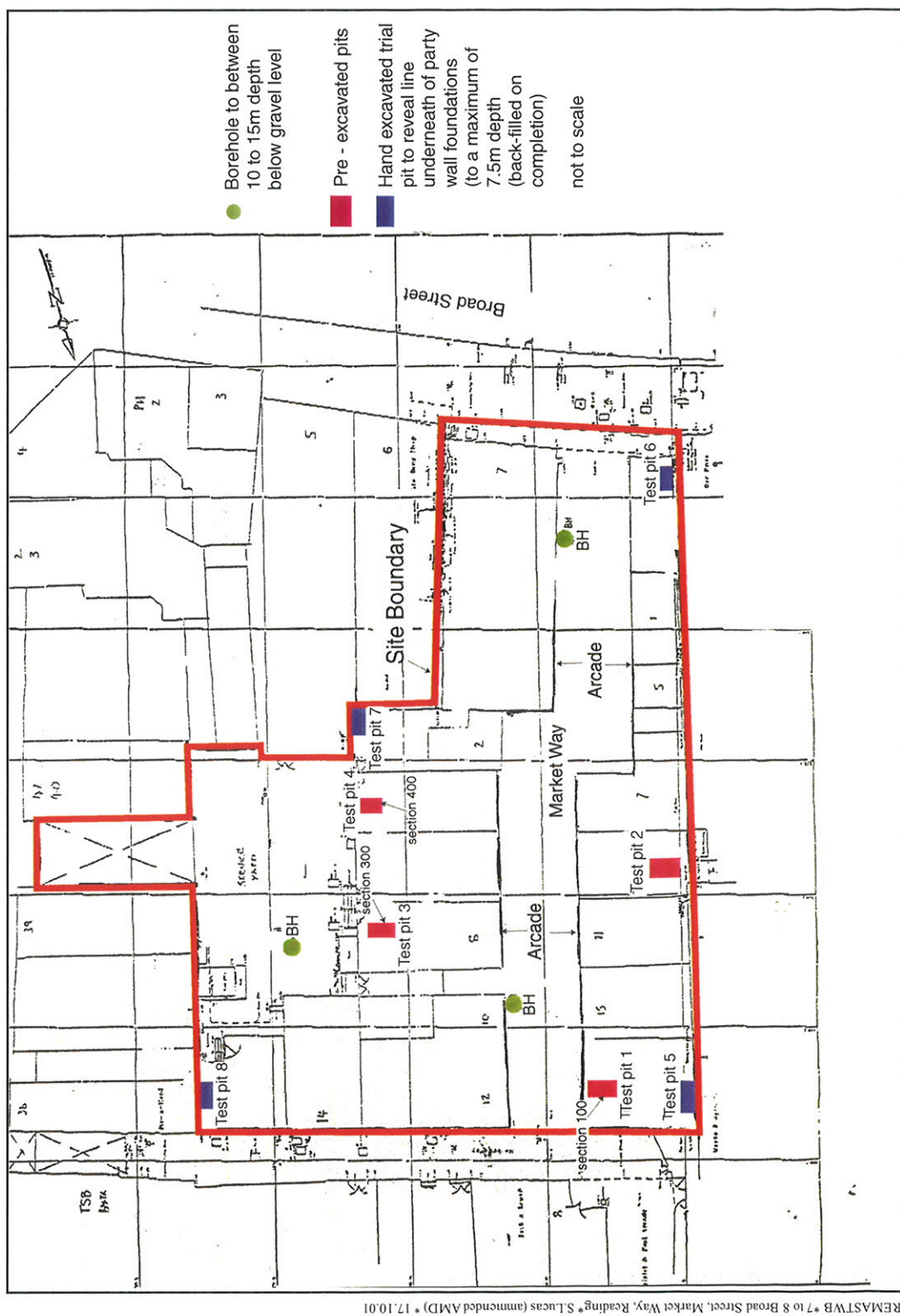
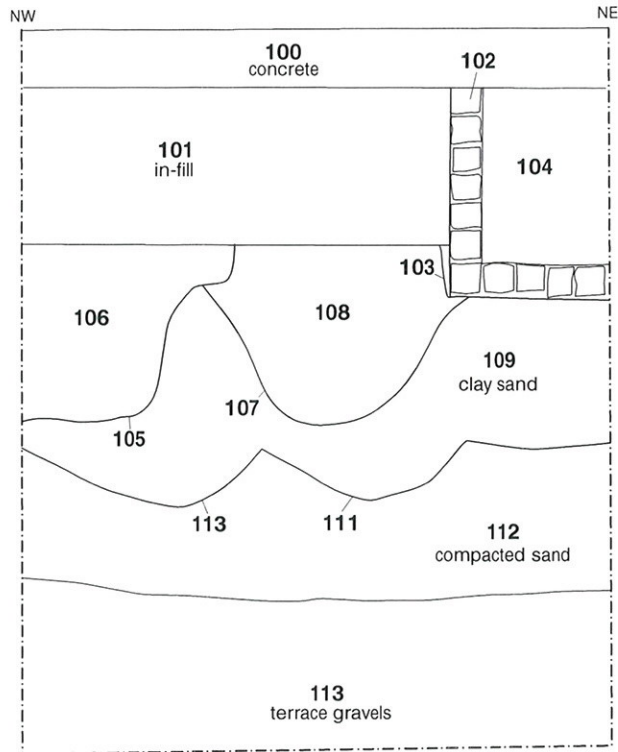
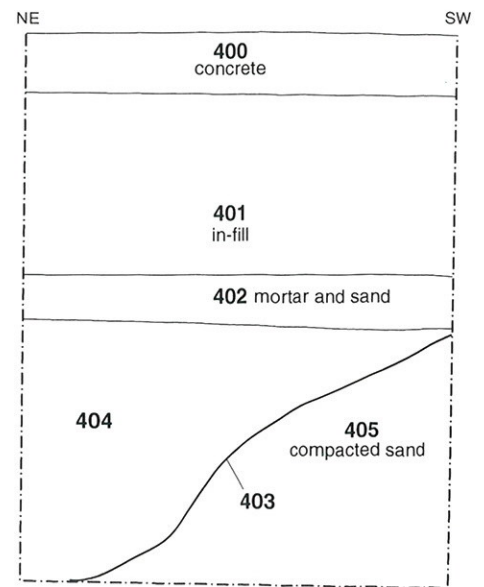


Figure 2: Location of Test pits.

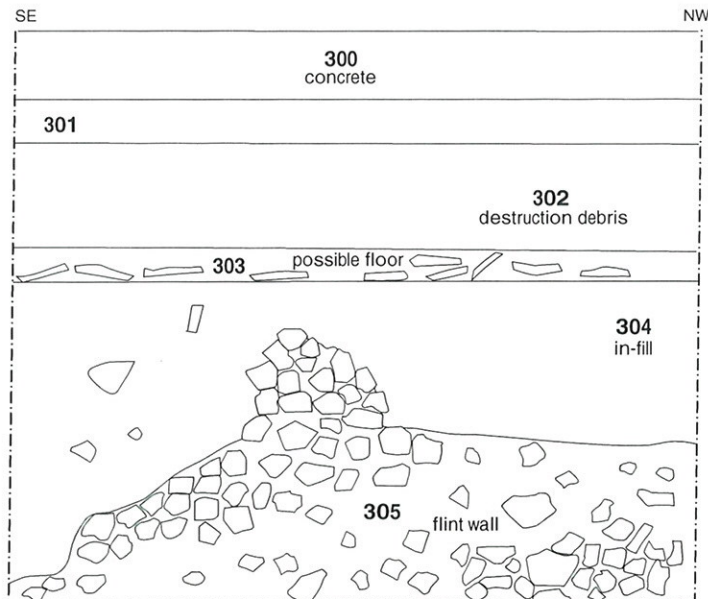
Section 100



Section 400



Section 300



0 1m

Figure 3: Trench sections.

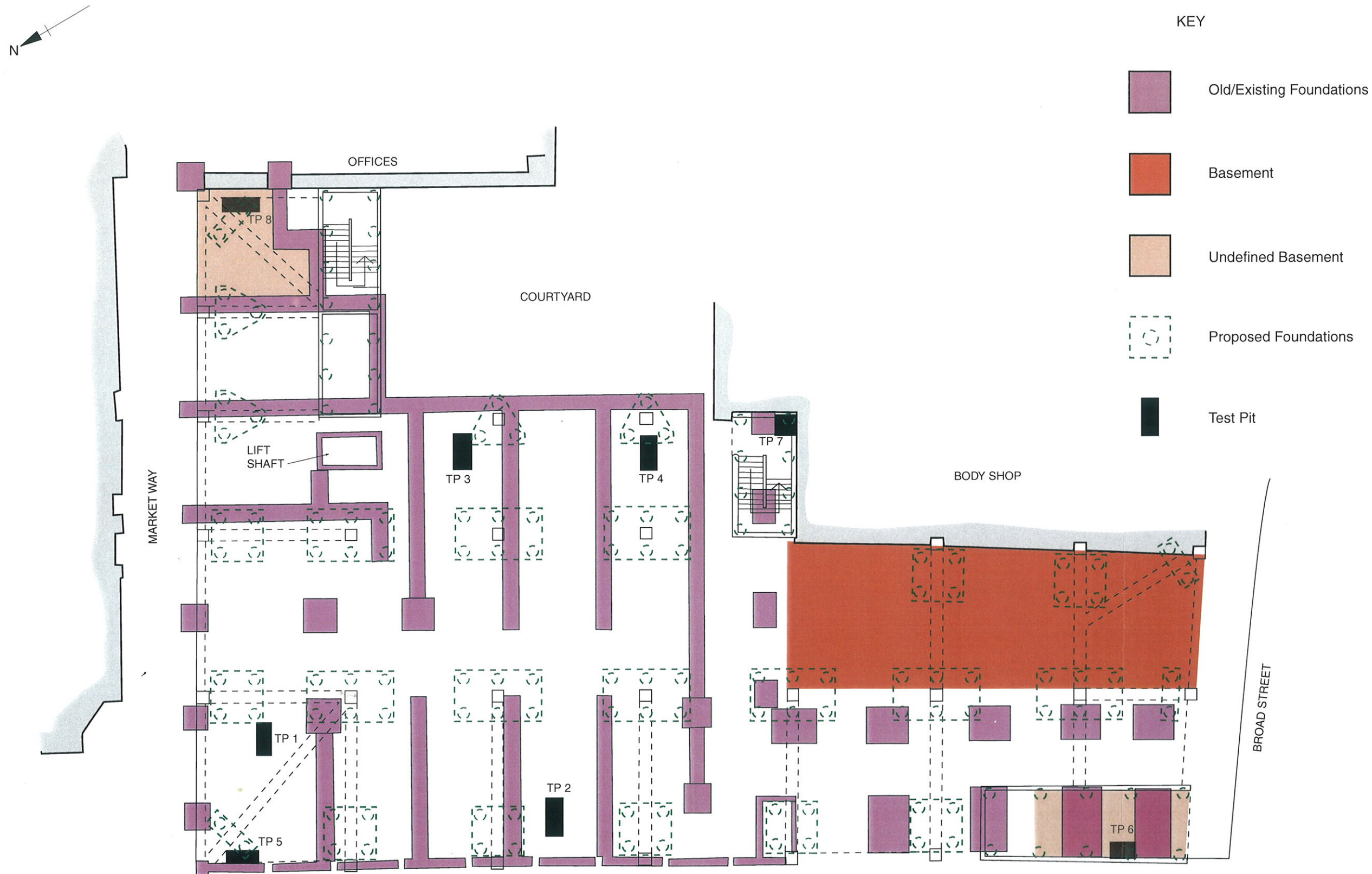


Figure 4: Old and Proposed Building Foundations and Test Pit Locations



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