

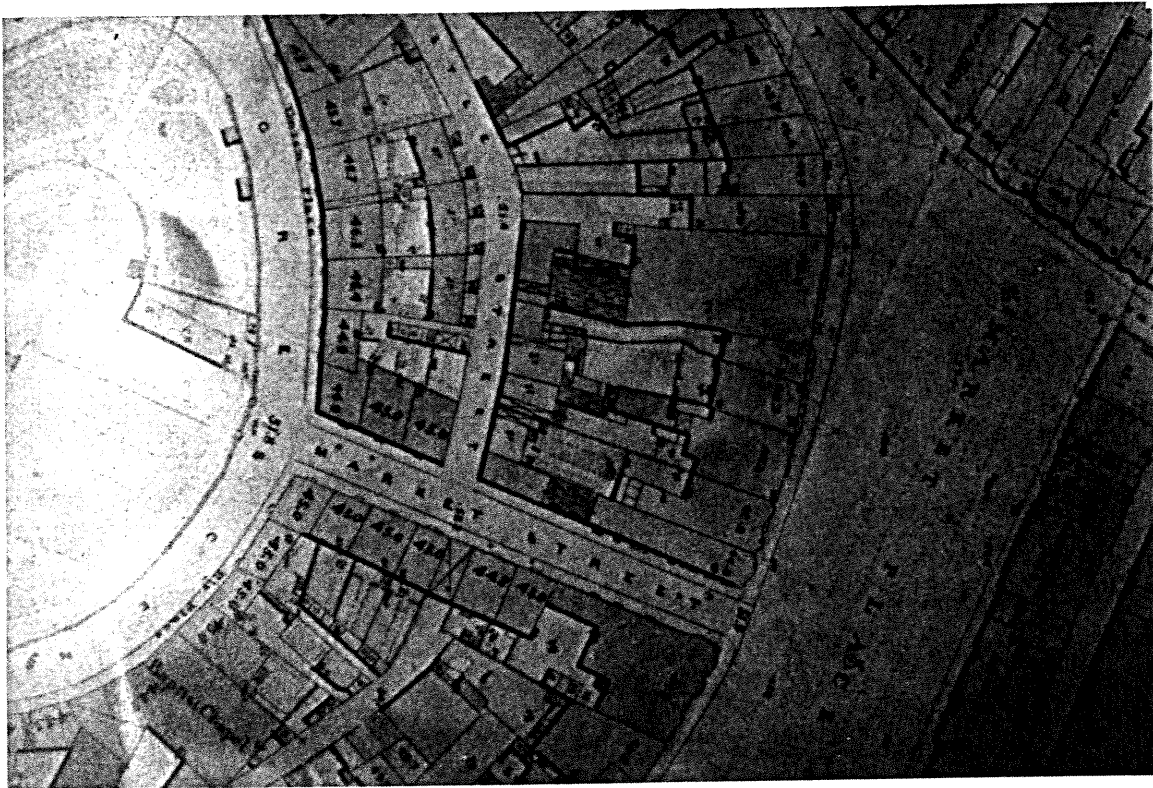
# WISBECH MARKET PLACE

An Archaeological Assessment and Historical Survey

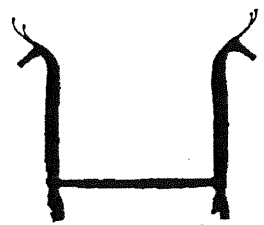
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Lesley A M Hoyland MA  
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Archaeology Section  
Property Department  
Shire Hall Castle Hill  
Cambridge CB3 0AP  
Tel. (0223) 317312



Report no. 47 *Public Health Map of 1853 showing Wisbech Market Place*



cambridgeshire  
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## ABSTRACT

*An archaeological assessment and historical report on the Market Place, Wisbech, was carried out on behalf of Fenland District Council by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Section between the 25 -29 November 1991. The work was commissioned prior to redevelopment and pedestrianisation of the site and its environs.*

*The aim of the investigation was to establish the presence, nature, age, and state of preservation of archaeology 0.35 - 0.40m below the modern tarmac disturbance, with some trial sondages to establish the depth of archaeological stratification on the site.*

*Three (2 x 2m) test pits were dug to a depth of 0.95m. These were positioned towards the west, middle and east end of the Market Place, so as to maximise coverage over the area and adequately sample the archaeology.*

*Test pit 1 was excavated to an approximate depth of 0.95m below the tarmac surface. Two substantial post-holes were found: these were possibly the remains of old pump foundations. In test pit 2 two distinct groups of features were found. Group 1 comprised a line of stake-holes, associated with a gully and post-hole. Group 2 comprised a sub-circular arrangement of stake-holes, associated with two post-holes. Both Group 1 and Group 2 were interpreted as former market stalls prior to the paving of the stallage area in 1811. The layer at the base of the test pit had evidence of post-holes and stake-holes cut into it. All the features were Post-Medieval in date, with a fragment of pottery from layer [153] possibly late Medieval reduced ware. In test pit 3 post-holes and gullies were indicative of former market stalls and associated activity prior to 1811. A square post-hole [122/124], possibly the remains of an old pump, was found. One of the layers found in a sondage, had a high organic content, and could well form the remains of Crab Mersh bank, which was dumped in the Market Place in the early sixteenth century.*

*From the above archaeological investigations it has been shown that in all three test pits the layers and features were Post-Medieval in date and often disturbed and not constituting problems with regard to the development proposals within this depth. It is suggested that no further archaeological work need take place in relation to the pedestrianisation proposals in the area of the Market Place.*

*Development work at the east end of the Market Place where the old Shambles and Shire Hall were situated, exceeding 0.40m below surface level and lying outwith the site of the infilled toilets should be monitored. Development exceeding a depth of 1 metre from the ground surface in the area of the Market Place may affect underlying remains and detailed discussions on the most appropriate action will have to be confirmed with the County Archaeology Office.*

*All material relating to the archaeological assessment and historical research is archived as WIS.MP91, and held by the CCC Archaeological Section, Shire Hall.*

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# WISBECH MARKET PLACE: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

## INTRODUCTION

The historical survey of the Market Place in Wisbech and its environs was commissioned by Fenland District Council as a component of the archaeological fieldwork undertaken in December 1991 (Fig. 1). The research aim was to summarise historical sources pertaining to the Market Place and those streets to be developed, namely High Street, Bridge Street, Union Street and Market Street.

The town of Wisbech is situated approximately 40 miles north of Cambridge, and the town centre is flanked on the west side by the River Nene and, until recently, on the east side by the disused Wisbech Canal (now the A1101/Falcon Road). The town was originally situated where the Wellstream joined the Wysbeck: the former was part of the Wisbech Canal, the latter formed part of the main outfall of the Great Ouse, and is now part of the Nene. The town also lies on the crossing of the A47 Kings Lynn to Peterborough, and the A1101 Ely to Long Sutton. The town has a long and venerable history, many facets of which can still be seen today (Fig. 2).

The 'New' Market Place is situated on the tongue of land bound by the two water courses, and north of the outer ditches of the former castle, whose topographical influence is still reflected in the fan-shaped distribution and wedge-shaped building plots bordering the south side of the Market Place.

## SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

There are various historical and cartographic records pertaining to the town of Wisbech, the most important of which are the Corporation Records dating from the inception of the Corporation in 1549 (see "Sources" below). There are also records from the Commission of Sewers reports who held authority under the Common Law, but who received recognition in 1427 from a statute from Henry VI. Other records prior to the founding of the Corporation are recorded in the Ely Episcopal Registers.

Most of the Corporation Records were referenced in the nineteenth century: Mr Jackson made an index and short descriptions of the records, and Mr Watson catalogued the entries in Jackson's volumes. Histories were written last century about Wisbech: they detail the main events of the town's history, transcripts of the records, and personal reminiscences.

There are no maps which show the entire town centre of Wisbech in any detail prior to 1830. A map of late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century of the castle (MIS/612:Wisbech Museum), gardens and premises shows Market Street, and houses on the south side of Market Place and High Street. Church Lane is shown with unmarked buildings to the west. Unfortunately there is no scale or title to the map.

Another survey of the castle estates (Ref.408/E6:CRO) is dated 1792 at a scale of 80 inches to the mile. This map is however less detailed than MIS/612 but shows the Custom House (later the Butter Market) and the entrance from Bridge Street to the High Street, although the Market Place is not shown.

The 1830 map by J. Wood (Wisbech Museum) is the first surveyed plan of Wisbech. It locates properties in the High Street and Bridge Street by a numbered key: the Customs House, the Girls Charity School in Lower Hill Street, the Chapel in Upper Hill Street, and the Rose and Crown in High Street are all listed. One small square feature is marked in the Market Place.

A detailed map of the town (Wisbech Museum) was undertaken in 1853 under the auspices of the Public Health Act 1848 (Fig. 3). It was surveyed by R.H. Dobson at 44 feet to the inch. Inns and other properties in the Market Place, High Street, Bridge Street, and Hill Street are named, and the Market Place is formally laid out with the locations of lamp-posts, SG (sewer grates), pumps and pavements shown. The map is tinted to show land-use. A smaller scale version of this map is held in the Cambridge Record Office, and has revisions edited by C. Mumford in 1867. The sewers which traverse the Market Place on this map are reflected in the position of modern services.

There seem to be no illustrations of the Market Place prior to the nineteenth century, and most of these are contained within the various histories of Wisbech written at this period (see "Sources" below). There were many photographs of the town taken from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, most notably by Samuel Smith in the early 1850's: these are held in Wisbech Museum.

## **MARKETS AND FAIRS IN WISBECH**

Markets in Wisbech have a venerable history as no charters exist for their inception, which may indicate a pre-Conquest date.

Since the Medieval period, there have been several distinct and economically important markets in Wisbech, selling products in their own separate market places. The Old Market place, described below, is still the focus of financial and banking activities in the town, and in 1930's it was still the focus of local farming trade. Until the 1950's some stalls were still set up on a Saturday.

The Timber market was held next to the Wisbech canal near the present day Norfolk Street. Lyson in 1808 notes that the timber came from Northamptonshire and was traded to the Navy in vast quantities.

The Horsefair in July was held at the north-east tip of the peninsula, at the confluence of the Wisbech Canal and the Nene, and the Butter Market was held in Bridge Street, but the most important market by the mid-nineteenth century was the Corn market, held behind the Old Market on the North Brink. By the 1840's over 250,000 quarts of corn was traded, making it the second largest corn market in England after Wakefield.

The right to hold the Trinity fair was granted to Wisbech in 1327 by Bishop Hotham and under the terms the fair lasted over nineteen days. Bishop Alcock's survey in 1492 - 1493 shows that a market was usually held on a Saturday (as in the present day), and that the Trinity fair had moved to become associated with the feast of Sts Peter and Paul, to whom the church was dedicated.

By the end of the eighteenth century five fairs were recorded: the Saturday and Monday over Palm Sunday for hemp and flax, the Monday and Saturday before Whitsun, the 25th of July was the Horse Fair, and the 1st and 2nd of August was for the sale of hemp. Lysons in 1808 also mentions a fair on the day before Lady Day and Lammas Day. In the 1930's fairs were held on the Saturday after the 14th of February, the second Thursday in May, the 25th of July, the first Thursday in August, and the third Wednesday in September.

## THE NEW MARKET

The earliest markets were held on the present site of the Old Market situated on the west bank of the Nene, and was probably under the influence of the Saxon manor on this side of the river (VCH, vol. 4, p.240, p.243-246). There are no specific records of when the market moved to its present "New" Market Place site, but it is likely to have moved soon after the Conquest, when the Normans built the castle in 1089. The market reflected in its geographical shift the new political power-base. The pattern of establishing the market near to the castle and the church has parallels in other towns, such as St Albans.

By 1221 we have the first references to the New Market: tenants in military service are listed and a William de Longchamp is noted as having "a messuage in the New Market thereto". The terrible floods of 1236 destroyed the Norman castle and the whole area around the Market Place was probably affected as the assessments of 1251 of tenants holdings were drastically reduced and de Longchamp's "messuage (was) destroyed by the sea".

The area covered by the present Market Place is certainly much smaller than its Medieval counterpart, as title deeds dating from 1471 refer to all the land from the bridge to the present Market Place as New Market. No streets are mentioned by name.

In 1492, the Terrier of Bishop Alcock shows that there were 115 tenants in the New Market Place as opposed to 32 in the Old Market, indicating how much the New Market Place was becoming the focus of the town.

With the inception of the Corporation of Wisbech in 1549 came the systematic recording of town affairs and it is from these detailed accounts and records that nearly all information about the Market Place and its environs comes, prior to the first map of the town made in 1830.

The public spirited Corporation paid accounts in 1549 "for the payving of the M-ket Place, and for raggestone, sand and workmanshippe of the same £17.2.2". Another reference in the same year refers to the presence of a Market Cross "for lead, tymber and workmanshippe of the crosse in the M-kett place £4.3.4" (trans. Walker and Craddock 1849). This market cross was reputedly built by John de Feckenham, a recusant held prisoner in Wisbech Castle, and died in 1585. The market cross was located at the west end of the Market Place and was replaced in 1765 by an obelisk (VCH, vol. 4, p.263).

With the church defining the eastern end of the Market Place, the castle moat to the south and the Market cross defining the western edges, the subsequent development of the Market Place seems to focus on this east-west axis, and its bounds contained by these physical and psychological limits.

One significant reference to events in the Market Place is contained in a report to the Session of Sewers of 1570 concerning Crab Mersh Bank: "which bank from Crabmersh gate was decayed in Bishop Goodricks time, and part thereof carried (by consent of the Bishop) for the pavement of the market place in Wisbeche, and part by Mr Wm Bloomfield, for the making of a windmill there" (Corp. Rec. i). Bishop Goodrick was in charge of the diocese between 1534 and 1554: the above reference mentions the bank was decayed at this time but it is less clear exactly when the bank was redeposited in the Market Place. Since the Market Place was first paved in 1549, it could be that material was deposited at this time, the bank earth forming a level foundation. The reference to a windmill is also interesting as the present Market Place was frequently referred to as Market Hill (the present day Hill Street was formerly known as Ship Lane), indicative therefore that in former times it may well have formed

slightly higher ground relative to its surroundings, than it does at the present time. This account has important archaeological implications: if the material was dumped on the Market Place it could seal any early archaeological remains on the Market Place site. The depth to which the deposit was laid down, and whether the area was levelled, or cut into, prior to dumping is not recorded. If either had occurred they would significantly affect the nature and extent of any archaeological remains, which could pre-date the establishment of the market at this site.

The next major work undertaken in the Market Place was in 1591 when an order was issued by the Corporation for the erection of the Butchers Shambles on the Market Hill and the placing of stalls there for the butchers. Unfortunately, contemporary records say nothing about the construction, building details or exact location of the Shambles. All our information comes from writers collating information well after the event of the demolition of the Shambles in 1811. It is therefore likely that the nature of the Shambles, and the adjacent Shire Hall which was demolished at the same time, may have been altered and modified through the centuries, and for this reason the Shambles and the Shire Hall will be discussed below with the discussion on the general improvements to the Market Place in 1810 - 1811. There is a Corporation accounts for the purchase of 20,000 tiles in 1591 which may have been related to roofing the Shambles, but little else is recorded apart from routine maintenance and repair work. A market house is recorded as being repaired in 1614, and seems to have been rebuilt on a more substantial scale near the river, probably on the site of the Butter Market (VCH, vol 4, p. 263). In 1595, the shambles cost £107.7.00. and were let at an annual rent of £7.10.00 (Corp.Recs iii).

There is however, an indirect reference to a building which was generally thought to be much older than the buildings around it. Watson, interviewing a 94 year old citizen in 1827 records that in Butchers Row (the space between the Shambles and the houses opposite on the south-west side of the Market Place ) there was a very old building with "some rude carved work in front, on wood, which seemed to be a man felling an ox, and other devices, with an inscription in Saxon characters, unintelligible" (Watson 1827: p312). This building was also demolished in 1811 but the fact that it is so distinctly different than the rest of the Shambles of the late 18th / early 19th century (and yet with a carving of a man felling an ox - a butcher?) may indicate remnants of an earlier phase of the Shambles.

There are many accounts in the Corporation Records of sundry repairs to the wells and pumps in the Market Place, which must have supplied not only the traders but the townfolk as well. In 1638 "the towne bailiff was appoynted to pay unto William Harvie his bill of laying out in reparaire of the backside and getting uppe the pump on the Markett Hill and other layings out £3.17.0" (Craddock and Walker 1849) and in 1640 the well or pump on the Market Place had to be repaired. A well was ordered to be cleaned and ropes and buckets provided in 1661. Another paving of the Market Place was undertaken in 1665 and the well was "disannulled". Later in the same year a pump is ordered for the well in Market Hill and in 1676 a new pump was erected and supplied by a new well.

The records of 14th of April 1680 indirectly mention the old Shire Hall, which was demolished at the same time as the Shambles in 1811. Exactly when the building was erected is obscure and there are no records to indicate it was built by the Corporation. The record refers to the letting "to Robt Squire the shope under the Shire house" for 13 shillings per annum. As with the Shambles the only account of the actual structure is from Watson (1827), and the above account would suggest that the building was of two storeys, the lower used for commercial purposes.

The Market Place received upgrading in 1683 with an order to pave the street near the Shambles and that a well and pump be constructed at the east end, providing the neighbours contributed £7. Other sanitation works are recorded in 1753 when a



substantial iron grate was laid down " where the Crying stone lately stood, in the Market Place for carrying of the waters". This implies that the crying stone, where the town crier made his announcements (and which Watson in 1827 noted as positioned near the Rose and Crown in High Street ) had at one time been situated in the Market Place.

Another paving of the Market Place "at the expense of the town estates" occurred in 1764, and in the following year a pump was moved, its new position uncharacteristically detailed: "upon the Market Place ....from the place where it is now stand and be set down opposite or nearby opposite to Mr Jim Massingale(?) seven or eight feet from the water way opposite the said." Both the 1753 and the 1764 records show that open sewers ran through the Market Place at this time.

In 1765, the town bailiff was instructed to erect four dials on the obelisk in the Market Hill: it replaced the old Market cross at the west end of the market and it is not entirely clear whether the obelisk had been erected earlier than this date. The obelisk, removed in 1811, was designed by Burgess: from an ink drawing made by Burgess, Gardiner (1898) states there appeared to be 32 feet high with no inscription but had an urn place at its top and its pedestal much blackened "by bonfires, which, in those days, were kindled near its base, when public rejoicings took place". There are also references in a private diary held in Wisbech Museum of abusive inscriptions and an effigy which were placed there after a robbery in 1770 (VCH, vol 4, p263). Gardiner (1898) cites the location of the obelisk (and by implication the old market cross) as facing Messr Dawsons door (present day No. 28 Market Place), slightly off-centre to the main axis of the modern Market Place.

In 1772 a repair order for the engine house on Market Hill was sent out: this is peculiar in that there are no other references to an engine house in the New Market Place but there are many which refer to the building and repairs of the engine house in Old Market. There are other repairs ordered in 1775 when the obelisk and a pump in the Market Place had to be repaired.

One of the most dramatic and significant changes seen in the Market Place must have been the Improvement Act of 1810 which introduced the "taking down and removing the Shambles therein, for paving, cleansing, lighting the said Town". Under this Act, the Corporation resolved in 1811 "that the Town Bailliff do cause the obelisk standing in the Market-place to be sold by auction as now standing, and to be taken down, and that he request the magistrates to give an order for the taking up and removal of the cage and stocks adjoining the old shambles" (Craddock and Walker 1849). Prior to this, there had been a footpath next to the shops which was bordered by posts but with no chains between them. The Market Place was also paved at this time and in 1849 Craddock and Walker described it thus: The Market Place "forms a parallelogram of 380 feet by 94, of which 310 by 37 are appropriated to the stallage, and the rest as thoroughfare. The stallage portion is slabbed on the portion intended for passengers, and cobble-paved where the stalls stand. It was completed in this form in 1811 at a cost of £1170" (Craddock and Walker 1898 p436). A photograph of the Market Place taken in 1857 by Samuel Smith clearly shows the distinctive arrangement of the cobbles and flagstones, as well as contemporary street furniture (WM 049: Wisbech Museum). Much of the distinctive character of the Market Place must have been lost when the new developments took place and the Shambles, Shire Hall and obelisk were removed.

As has been noted above, there are almost no references to the Shambles at any period apart from the notes that Watson made in 1827 when collecting the reminiscences of elderly townfolk. Butchers Row was the name of the alley formed between the Shambles and the houses opposite on the south-west side of the Market Place. The house with the carved frontage was here. Gardiner (1898) refers to the evaluation of the Shambles carried out by several interested parties prior to their demolition, and he quotes a sketch and notes from the diary of the grandfather of a Mr Forster. These

show the Shambles as a rectangular building with a smaller rectangular lean-to at its north-east corner, with its long axis running north-south at right angles to the main building. It lay adjacent to, and east of, Shire Hall. The Shambles is described as being a wooden building roofed with grey slate and formed a covered market with posts supporting a large chamber over it. Gardiner (1898) notes that the diary included the dimensions of posts, beams, rafters and boarding but mentions no other architectural details. This upper storey was used for corn storage and was reached by a broad stepped external ladder. The butchers stalls occupied the covered area below. Until the early nineteenth century, poultry and eggs were sold from trestles at the side of the Shambles facing Mr Oldham's shop (present No. 29 Market Place). There are records of a temporary portable structure being erected for the sale of poultry, eggs and butter after the Butter Market was demolished in 1856 (Gardiner 1898 p.112) The Shambles and Shire Hall had been in poor repair at the time of demolition - valuations ranged from £217 to £400 - and for some time prior to demolition there were only three shops left in the Shambles.

Gardiner (1898) also describes the Shire Hall as a one storied building with a semi-octagonal end. The principal door was in the central division of this semi-octagon with semi-circular headed windows at each side with the pillory sitting on the flat roof. The building faced Messr Dawson's shop (present No. 28 Market Place) with its side towards the Ship Inn (present No. 40). This description states that it was one-storeyed, but this is at variance with the letting in 1680 of a shop below the Shire Hall, implying at least another storey. There may be several ways to interpret this: the name "Shire house" may have referred to the upper storey of the Shambles, it have referred to an earlier building, possibly not at this present location, or that the flat roof of the Shire Hall as it was described in 1811, may indicate that it did at one time have more storeys, which were later pulled down thus leaving the curious flat roof. The fact that the pillory was here also indicates reasonable access which again could indicate that there was formerly another storey.

The stocks, cage and pillory were all centred around the Shambles and when they were removed, punishments were meted out on a wagon drawn up at one of the corners of the Market Place (Gardiner 1898). The Market Place has also been the scene of many civil celebrations: a dinner to celebrate peace was held there in August 1814, and in 1837 over 4000 people sat to dinner to celebrate Queen Victoria's coronation. In 1865 a platform was erected in the middle of the Market Place, and the central lamp-post converted into a fountain to celebrate the first piping of water from Marham springs to the citizens of Wisbech. Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee was again commemorated in grand style in the Market Place with dinner, and a tea-party for around 2500 children.

In 1900 further developments took place in the Market Place: the cobbles were covered in asphalt surrounding Market Hill and the remaining area was given a new coat of tar and gravel. Further repairs were made in 1910.

In 1964, recommendations were made for the removal of the disused horse-trough situated at the west end of the Market Place and which had been erected to the memory of the Jackson family. General upgrading of the street furniture was also called for as well as the removal and re-siting of the lamp-posts. The horse-trough was duly replaced by low bollards at the High Street and Church Street ends of the Market Place and it was also recommended that the telephone kiosks and postboxes be situated towards the public toilets at the east end of the Market Place (Ann. Report Wisbech Soc. 1964). The locations of these public toilets is very unfortunate: because they lay at the east end of the Market Place and were built underground, they may well have destroyed any trace of the old Shambles and Shire Hall if they encroached upon their location.

In 1987 the Horsefair and Church Mews development was undertaken over an 8 acre site to the north of the Market Place. The development comprises a supermarket and

21 shop units as well as a new bus station. The scheme was completed in 1988. There was unfortunately no archaeological monitoring of the development.

## **HISTORICAL SURVEY OF AREA AROUND MARKET PLACE**

The Market Place has been discussed in a separate section: in reality of course the area immediately around the Market Place forms an integral part of its function and position within in the town. The discussion below will highlight some of the historical aspects of High Street, Union Street, Hill Street and Market Street (Fig. 3).

Market Street is the most recent of the streets to be formally planned. It was built by J. Medworth in 1813 when, as owner of Wisbech castle, he developed the castle estate into the present day Crescent properties. An untitled and undated map, probably from the end of the eighteenth century, shows the proposed lay-out of the Crescent with Market Street clearly marked. It is interesting to note that this would have been the first direct access route from the castle to the Market Place: previous access seems was via the north-west gate towards Bridge Street, and the south-east gate past the Church. Walker and Craddock (1849) note an inscription in Market Street, now gone: "The entrance to this street from the Market Place is the freehold property of Mr Joseph Medworth of Bermondsey, purchased by him at £400 for the accommodation of the town of Wisbech". Under the 1810 Improvements Act, the houses and street were regarded as private property and therefore outwith the Corporation's concern: Watson in 1827 remarks that Market Street had only recently been paved and gravelled.

### ***BRIDGE STREET***

Bridge Street was the former site of the Butter Market. In 1688, a wooden shelter was erected near the bridge, although two years later it is recorded as being in great disrepair due to bad workmanship (VCH, vol 4, p.263). The 1792 Castle estate map shows the site of the Butter Market as the Customs House. The Butter Market building was erected at the foot of Bridge Street in 1801: it was a rectangular building comprising an upper storey supported by open arches, and with a hipped roof. This building was demolished in 1856, a portable and temporary wooden framework being erected in the Market Hill where eggs and butter were sold. Gardiner reports that the situation was still as such in 1898. The site of Butter Market is where the Clarkson memorial now stands. Gardiner (1898) mentions that the vaults under Mr Exley's premises (No. 4 Bridge Street) are supposed to have originally connected with those from the castle. Interestingly enough, these vaults are not on the listed building records and it may be that this building had been redeveloped prior to their compilation.

### ***HIGH STREET AND UNION STREET***

The date for the emergence of the modern street pattern around the Market Place is not clear, but the map of Castle estates in 1792 shows Bridge Street and High Street, with houses marked between the Castle boundaries and the High Street and Market Place. There are many old buildings in both Union and High Street and Gardiner (1898) states that there are vaults under the premises of Mr Broadberry (No. ? Market Place), Mr Leach (No. 26 High Street) and Mr Oldham (formerly Mr Dieppe) at No. 29 Market Place. The latter premises was recorded as having a three bayed groined vault, although only one survives to the present day. It is Medieval in date, and it has been speculated that it formed the undercroft of the old Guild Hall, whose exact site remains unknown, but was probably in the Hill Street/High Street/Union Street area (VCH, vol

4, p255). It is interesting to note that the premises mark the modern junction of Market Place and Union Street.

There are few Corporation records which relate specifically to High Street and Union Street. The latter was widened under the 1810 Improvement Act. Watson (1827) states that in the 1740's the High Street was partially paved with cobbles next to the houses. In 1756 the centre of the Street was paved with large cobble stones, with a gutter running down the centre of the street. He also quotes reminiscences of Mr J. Stanroyd, a 94 year old senior resident in the town who remembered that prior to 1810, the streets were covered in "loose silt" (similar to the layers seen in the Market Place test pits) and during the winter planks were laid down, due to the mud. An open sewer ran on the north side of the High Street with three little bridges across it: posts edged the sewer and were used for tethering horses. Next to the Rose and Crown the open sewer was covered with flagstones upon which three steps were raised and fronted by a small wall three feet high: it was here that the Town Crier made announcements, the dias thereafter called the Crying Stone.

One of the oldest buildings in Wisbech is the Rose and Crown Inn (No. 25 Market Place), which is recorded under its older name of the Horn and Pheasant in 1475.

### ***HILL STREET***

This street was originally divided into Lower and Upper Hill Street until the 1950's when the modern, all-inclusive name of Hill Street was adopted. Formerly it was known as Ship Lane, and was probably renamed in 1825 when a schedule for Ship Lane/Hill Street is listed in the Corporation Records.

In 1681 a tunnel and grate was laid down in Ship Lane, and in 1714 a well and pump was sunk there. It has been suggested that the Guild Hall stood in Hill Street, perhaps where the Town Hall, and later the Grammar School were situated (VCH, vol 4, p.255).

In 1814 the girls school was built in Lower Hill Street and was closed in 1928: in 1953 the building was being used as auction rooms. The first recorded post office was established in Upper Hill street in 1793, where it remained until 1851. No. 17 Hill street was the Food Office until the late 1950's, and there was a fire station in Lower Hill Street until 1932 (VCH, vol 4, p261).

The Town Hall was here until the new one was built on North Brink in 1810 -1811.

Gardiner (1898) remarks that a windmill stood at the end of Upper Hill Street where a Mrs Hampson lived (location not known) and photographs of the High Street looking towards the Market Place, taken by Samuel Smith in 1854, show the windmill sails appearing above the rooftops in the background.

# WISBECH MARKET PLACE 1991 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

## SUMMARY

*The aim of the investigation was to establish the presence, nature, age, and state of preservation of archaeology 0.35 - 0.40m below the modern tarmac disturbance. Three (2 x 2m) test pits were dug to depth of 0.95m. In test pit 1 two substantial post-holes were found: these were possibly the remains of old pump foundations. In test pit 2, a line of stake-holes (Group 1) was found, possibly associated with a gully and a post-hole. A sub-circular arrangement of stake-holes (Group 2) were associated with two post-holes. Both Group 1 and Group 2 were interpreted as former market stalls prior to the paving of the stallage area in 1811. Some green glazed pottery fragments from layer [153] may be late Medieval in date. The layer at the base of the test pit had evidence of post-holes and stake-holes cut into it. In test pit 3 post-holes and gullies found were indicative of former market stalls and associated activity prior to 1811. A square post-hole [122/124], possibly the remains of an old pump, was found. One of the layers found in a sondage, had a high organic content, and could well form the remains of Crab Marsh bank, which was dumped in the Market Place in the early sixteenth century.*

## INTRODUCTION

An archaeological assessment of the Market Place, Wisbech, was carried out on behalf of Fenland District Council by the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological Section between the 25 -29 November 1991. The work was commissioned prior to redevelopment and pedestrianisation of the site and its environs.

The aim of the investigation was to establish the presence, nature, age, and state of preservation of archaeology 0.35 - 0.40m below the modern tarmac disturbance, with some trial sondages to establish the depth of archaeological stratification on the site. This information would aid Fenland District Council in ensuring that subsequent development would not damage archaeological remains.

## LOCATION

The 'New' Market Place is situated on the tongue of land bound by the two water courses, and north of the outer ditches of the former castle, whose topographical influence is still reflected in the fan-shaped distribution and wedge-shaped building plots bordering the south side of the Market Place.

The Market Place itself is enclosed by buildings on all sides with access to High Street and Union Street on the west side, and Hill Street to the north, and towards St Peter and St Paul's Church on the south-east.

## PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

There has been no formally recorded fieldwork prior to the Market Place assessment in 1991, although interested individuals have briefly recorded their findings during the redevelopment of some Market Place properties.

Entries in the Accessions Book of Wisbech Museum show that pottery from the demolished premises of Messrs. Dawbarn (No. 19 - 21 Market Place) was deposited in the Museum in 1928. The pottery is recorded as being found six feet below the surface during demolition. Two entries are recorded: one describes an earthenware jug with brown glaze and frilled decoration on the underside of the rim, the other relates to five pottery fragments comprising two necks of Bellarmine jugs, one neck of a stoneware jug, probably German, a jug without neck or handles but with dark brown mottled glaze, and part of a two-handled vase with neck and handles missing, and a very dark brown glaze. The descriptions above indicate that the pottery is early Post-Medieval in date.

In the Annual Report of the Wisbech Society for 1956, Mr J.E. Bridges reported finds from the site of Mr Keightley's building (No. 15 - 17 Market Place). Specimens of broken pottery were found as well as leather shoes, slim fitting with long pointed toes and still bearing holes bearing the stitches. Amongst the pottery recorded was slipware and smooth dark, almost black, glazed Babylon ware from Ely, indicative of the early sixteenth century. An early fifteenth century gilt spur was also found. Bridger also reports finding a wall and evidence of the extensive moat. The approximate location of these finds is towards the rear of the south-west wall at No. 17. The bulk of the assemblage showed coarse domestic ware of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Unfortunately there are no further references the wall or ditch found here.

The Accessions List of 1983 records a fragment of slipware pot with brown glaze yellow trailed slip glaze was found from the site of the Mermaid public house (No. 37 Market Place). The pottery is Post-Medieval in date, but no other information is given except the donors name.

It is unfortunate that there was no systematic recording brief of these, and other more recent developments which have been undertaken in and around the Market Place, as more detailed and structured recording may well have yielded fascinating information on the development of the heart of the town.

## METHOD

Three test pits were dug, each 2 x 2m, and the top 0.15 - 0.20m was stripped by Fenland District Council's contractors. The test pits were located on the car park hard-standing in the middle of the Market Place with vehicular access to the Market Place being from Union Street, High Street and Church Street.

There were several constraints which had a direct bearing on the work. Throughout the whole time the car park was still being used and work patterns and methods of soil disposal had to be made accordingly. The test pits were opened on the Monday afternoon, the spoil being deposited on a 3 x 3m fenced off area next to each test pit within one of the adjacent parking lots. This was the only place to deposit spoil and by the end of the assessment, the situation had become critical due to spoil overflow. There was also a tight work schedule because the market square is used for the Thursday and Saturday markets: test pit 3 had to be completed by Wednesday

afternoon, the other two test pits by Friday afternoon, so as to allow for the District Council time for backfilling and consolidation.

The choice of location for the test pits was restricted by the number of modern services traversing the Market Place, as well as modern disturbance at the east end of the Market Place where two underground public conveniences had been situated (Fig. 4).

## FIELDWORK

### Test Pit 1

Test pit 1 was located at the north-west end of the Market Place car park. The tarmac and upper 0.15 - 0.20m of the test pit were both mechanically stripped.

Below the tarmac, a flint cobble surface [77] could be seen in the south and west sections only, and [75], a yellowish-orange sand and gravel make-up layer containing medium and large sized pieces of angular stone, could be seen in all sections and running very thinly under the cobbles in the south facing section.

In the north and west facing sections, below [75] and cutting [02] was feature [76], a matrix of closely compacted dressed granite blocks, square in shape, the cut having very straight, friable and almost vertical sides.

Layer [02], was a very loosely compacted, dark yellowish brown silt with much brick and ash fragments, and containing much Post-Medieval pottery, bone, iron and bronze fragments, and pieces of glass. This layer lay below [75] and was cut by [76].

Layer [03] lay below [02] which extended over the whole test pit and comprised a dark yellow-brown mottled silt with fragments of brick, ash and occasional shell. It was 0.15 - 0.28m thick, thinning slightly towards the west. During excavation it appeared that this layer was cut by numerous features: on excavation these disappeared to form the one homogeneous layer. Hence layer [03] was very thin and patchy and similar to layer [05] below.

Layer [05] lay across the whole test pit, was dark greyish brown silt with brick and pottery fragments, shell and iron fragments and was approximately 0.3 - 0.39m thick.

Layer [05] was excavated by mattock to reveal layer [64], a light yellowish brown silt which decreased in thickness towards the east. Red and green tile fragments, bone and one Post-Medieval creamware pottery fragment were recovered. Two small stake-holes were cut into [64]:

*Stake-hole [65]:* round in shape with a diameter of 0.06m and 0.16m deep filled with a dark brown clayey silt with grit inclusions [66].

*Stake-hole [67]:* circular in shape with a diameter of 0.07m and 0.18m deep, with slightly concave sides tapering towards the base. The fill [68] was dark brown clayey silt with grit inclusions.

Layer [69] lay below [64] at a depth of 0.75m from the tarmac surface, and comprised a dark brown silt with some grit inclusions, but which only had a maximum depth of approximately 0.03m and which decreased in thickness towards the southern end to the pit. Fragments of tile, bone, shell, and Early Post-Medieval pottery were found.

Below [69] was layer [70], a light greenish-yellow deposit of firmly compacted silt into which was cut *stake-hole* [80], a circular feature 0.06m in diameter with straight sides and a concave base 0.15m deep.

Layer [70] sat on top of layer [71], a light brownish-grey clayey silt with a maximum depth of 0.10m and containing fragments of brick. Two post-holes were cut into [71] (Fig 5):

*Post-hole [72]:* a square-shaped feature with the circular post-pipe still extant. Post-pipe [73] contained a very soft, moist dark grey silt containing bone, yellow slip and green glaze pottery. The post packing was a light greyish 0.25m deep. Both post-pipe and post-hole were defined by thin rusty brown coloured deposits, probably iron-panning, and therefore indicative of waterlogging.

*Post-hole [74]:* a rectangular post-hole (0.12 x 0.15m) with the circular post-pipe still extant. The post-pipe was 0.13m in diameter, with fill [82] a dark grey moist silt containing brick and bone debris. Again the cuts of the feature were defined by thin iron-pan staining.

Layer [70], lying 0.85m below tarmac surface, was stripped down to show layer [71]. In the limited time available it was possible to demonstrate that [71] was separated from [83] by a very straight cut interface, running east-west approximately 1.06m south of the northern trench edge and across the whole of the test pit.

[83] was a dark yellow mottled silt layer, very moderately compacted. Some oxidised and reduced pottery was found. About five flat large limestone fragments lay embedded in [83] and [71] and lay across their interface. Because of constraints on time, no more was able to be firmly established, but last minute investigations showed the stones were not structural nor seemed to form any kind of surface. The test pit was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.95m below the tarmac surface (Fig. 6).

## **Test Pit 2**

This test pit lay in the middle of the Market Place car park, approximately 28m west of the entrance to Horsefair.

This was mechanically stripped down to a depth of 0.20m. Beneath the tarmac was a layer of yellow sand 0.05m thick [11] which spread over the southern half of the test pit only, and a layer of brick sitting on top of concrete slabs [14] which spread over the northern half of the test pit only. This layer cut [11] and [12], the latter being a yellowish-brown silty sand rubble layer seen in the east facing section only.

Underneath [12] and [14] lay [13], a yellow silty sand which lay slightly thicker in the section towards the east side of the trench. This layer ran across the whole of the trench.

Below [13] was layer [37], a yellowish brown silty sand which starts 0.17 - 0.30m from the eastern section and extends across the trench reaching a maximum depth of 0.10m, sloping towards the east. Some brick, tile fragments, clay pipe and pottery was found.

Layer [101] was beneath [37], a brownish yellow silty clay which started 0.10 - 0.17m from the northern section and sloped southwards to a maximum depth of 0.08m across the whole despite.



From [101], many stake-holes, a post-hole and gully were cut from this layer into layer [40] below.

*Gully [104]:* was a flat bottomed feature running NW - SE, with the eastern side gently concave and with its western edge lying under the southern section. The feature ran the full length of the trench to a depth of 0.22m. It had two fills: [102], a brown silt with frequent grey mottling and containing a white stoneware pestle, fragments of clay pipe and fragments of a press-moulded white stoneware salt-glazed plate. This lay above fill [151] a yellowish brown silty sand. The gully cut layers [40] and [103].

*Post-hole [35]:* a square feature with sides 0.35m with a very flat base and vertical sides 0.55m deep, filled with a yellowish brown silty sand with many clay pipe, brick and tile fragments, some bone and one iron nail. The feature cuts layers [103] and [105].

There were many stake-holes cut into layer [40] at a depth of 0.40m below the tarmac: these features have been detailed below, and for ease of discussion they will all be subsequently included in the term Group 1, given that they are all probably the result of one particular episode (Fig 7).

*Stake-hole [15]:* sub-circular feature (0.10 x 0.05m) with pointed base 0.07m deep with steep sloping sides, and cut layer [105].

*Stake-hole [16]:* a sub-square post-hole 0.04m wide and 0.03m deep with a flat base and vertical sides. There was some charcoal in the fill [39].

*Stake-hole [17]:* sub-circular edges 0.08m in diameter, and 0.10m deep with a pointed base, the sides sloping towards the north.

*Stake-hole [18]:* sub-circular with a diameter of 0.05m with vertical sides and a flat base 0.07m deep. The fill [92] contained two fragments of earthenware.

*Stake-hole [19]:* sub-circular with a diameter of 0.06m and 0.10m deep with a flat base and vertical sides. Fill [93] contained some fragments of brick.

*Stake-hole [20]:* circular with a diameter of 0.06m, vertical sides with a flat base 0.10m deep. The fill [94] contained a dark brown silty sand fill with many charcoal flecks.

*Stake-hole [31]:* circular with 0.04m diameter and 0.04m deep with a flat base and vertical sides.

*Stake-hole [32]:* circular with a diameter of 0.04m and 0.08m deep with vertical sides and a flat base.

*Stake-hole [33]:* sub-circular with a diameter of 0.06m with steep vertical sides and a flat base 0.10m deep. One fragment of Post-Medieval creamware was found in fill [97].

*Stake-hole [34]:* circular 0.04m in diameter with flat base 0.07m deep.

*Stake-hole [99]:* sub-circular feature, 0.04m in diameter.

Group 1, [35] and [104] were all cut into layer [40], a fairly compact yellowish brown silty sand which covered the whole of the test pit, thinning to about 0.03m in depth towards gully [104]. The layer contained fragments of brick.

Layer [40] was matted down to show layer [103] covering the whole of the test pit: it was a very dark greyish brown silty clay which thinned slightly where it was cut by the gully [104]. It contained abundant tile, brick, shell, and bone with much green patination. The pottery included salt-glazed ware, Cistercian ware and green glaze ware.

Below [103] was layer [105], a dark brown silty clay with tile, one iron nail, two flat pieces of limestone, some green patinated bone and three jaw bones with teeth. The pottery included green glazed reduced wares.

Layer [148] lay below layer [105] and was a dark yellowish brown silty clay containing brick and tile fragments and abundant charcoal and shells. Many stake-holes were cut into this layer: they are described below and will subsequently be referred to as Group 2 (Fig 8).

*Stake-hole [106]:* a sub-circular feature with a diameter of 0.08m, with a pointed, wedge-shaped base and straight sides 0.12 - 0.15m deep. One partially oxidised unglazed pottery fragment came from fill [107].

*Stake-hole [108]:* circular and 0.06m in diameter with vertical sides and a flat base 0.06m deep. An oyster shell and a sherd of buff earthenware with internal brown glaze was found in the fill [109].

*Stake-hole [110]:* a sub-circular feature 0.05m wide.

*Stake-hole [132]:* a square feature 0.09m wide.

*Stake-hole [134]:* square with sides 0.04m and with a conical and slightly concave base 0.06m deep. Tiny fragments of bone, charcoal and brick were present throughout the fill [135].

*Stake-hole [136]:* circular with a diameter of 0.06m, with a rounded concave base 0.03m deep, and with slightly concave sides. One bone fragment and an oyster shell came from the yellowish brown silt fill [137].

*Stake-hole [138]:* square with sides 0.05m in length, with concave sides and a very narrow, rounded base 0.11m deep. Tiny fragments of limestone were found in the dark brown/brown silt fill [139].

*Stake-hole [140]:* square feature with sides 0.03m, with a rounded base 0.05m deep, with fairly straight sides and angular corners that become more rounded towards the base. The compact dark yellow brown silt [141] contained fragments of crushed brick and mortar.

*Stake-hole [142]:* square feature with sides 0.04m, with a very narrow and rounded base tapering to a point 0.15m deep. The fill was dark brown/brown silt [143].

*Stake-hole [149]:* square with slightly bowed sides 0.05m, well rounded base with slightly concave sides and a very well rounded base 0.11m deep. The fill [150] was a loosely compacted dark brown silt.

Both [144] and [146] were cut into layer [152], a dark brown and fairly compacted silt with orange mottles and abundant charcoal inclusions. Finds included reduced wares with greenish yellow glaze, cream and black slip. The layer lay directly below [148].

*Post-hole [144]:* circular 0.30m in diameter, with shallow sloping sides and a flat base. The fill [145] was a dark yellowish brown silt, quite compact, with shell, pottery and animal bone.

*Post-hole [146]:* circular with a diameter of 0.30m with steep vertical sides and flat base. Fill [147] was a yellowish brown silt containing mussel shells and oxidised pottery.

When [148] was removed by mattock, some medium sized limestone fragments became apparent, corresponding to a very indistinct feature with fill very similar to [148]. To clarify matters a box section, 0.32m wide and 0.8 - 0.9m long and 0.60m east of the south-west section, was cut through [148] and [152]. A gully could be seen cut through [152] in the resulting south-facing section and the base of the feature could be seen cutting [153]. Two small stake-holes were also found cut from [152] (Fig 9).

*Gully [159]:* the feature ran east-west across the box section, its north edge forming the northern limit of this. The north side was steeply sloping and concave, the south side having a more gentle concave slope. There were about three medium sized pieces of flat limestone sitting on top of the feature fill. The base of the feature was seen clearly in plan cut into [153]. Charcoal was very abundant in the dark grey brown silt [160], which contained bone and one brick fragment. Due to limits on time the full extent of the feature could not be established.

*Stake-hole [161]:* circular with 0.05m diameter and had very straight sides with a very rounded base 0.09m deep. The dark brown silt [162] had small inclusions of brick and bone.

*Stake-hole [163]:* part of this feature lay under the eastern edge of the box section. It was circular with a diameter of 0.05m with straight steep sides, and was 0.12m deep when not fully bottomed. The fill was a very loose greyish silt fill [164].

Because of constraints on time it was decided to excavate a sondage over the southern half of the trench to establish the archaeological potential of layers below [152]. Layer [152] was matted down to layer [153], a moist and loosely compacted greyish brown silt containing very small rounded pebbles, with large patches of grey and orange mottling interspersed throughout. It lay across the whole of the sondage, being slightly thicker towards the north. It contained red brick, bone and slag. Pottery from the interface of layers [153] and [154] included one possible late Medieval reduced ware with olive green glaze.

Layer [154] was the layer at which excavation stopped 0.95m below the surface of the tarmac: it was a yellowish brown silt with many stake-holes and post-holes cut into it, and these were very quickly planned before backfilling commenced (Fig 10).

The depth of archaeological stratification is shown in Figure 11. Two cut features [156] and [158] were seen in the east-facing section (Fig. 12).

## Discussion

The stake-holes comprising Group 1 had a linear distribution running north - south across the test pit and seemed to relate to post-hole [35] as they centred on to post-hole [35]. They do not appear to run beyond the post-hole. Gully [104] lies immediately to the south of [35] and the edges are almost touching. Group 1 and post-hole[35] could therefore be contemporary with gully [104], given the close spatial relationship between the [35] and [104], or more probably, [104] is later than Group 1 and [35], and could have destroyed any evidence of other stake-holes running south from [35].

The stake-holes comprising Group 2 are very probably contemporary with each other. There is a general sub-circular shape to their distribution, and may relate to the post-holes lying to the immediate south-west of the Group, post-holes [144] and [146].

Group 1, Group 2 and the post-holes and stake-holes cut into layer [154] are probably the remains of market stalls prior to the improvements of 1811. The features are likely to be Post -Medieval in date, although a fragments of olive green glazed reduced ware from layer [153] may indicate a late Medieval/early Post-Medieval date.

### Test Pit 3

Test pit 3 was located 11m east to the entrance of the Horsefair precinct, on the tarmac hard-standing of the car park. The test pit was stripped mechanically down to approximately 0.20m and thereafter dug by hand.

In section below the tarmac could be seen large rounded flint cobbles [117] to a depth of 0.12m below the tarmac surface. The layer immediately below was [26], a dark brownish silt with dark ashy patches. This layer could be seen in all the sections 0.08m thick.

Layer [26] lay over a very disturbed layer of brick and mortar within a dark brown silty matrix [21], and over a similar layer [22] which had substantially more brick and mortar present than [21], and contained Post-Medieval pottery and a bronze token.

In plan, there seemed to be a very sharp interface between [21] and [22] running east-west across the test pit, 1 - 1.2m south of the northern trench edge; at this stage it was not possible to determine the stratigraphic relationship between the two.

Layers [21] and [22] were stripped off by mattock to reveal two layers beneath which respected the interface noted above in the same manner: thus [23] lay directly below [22] and [118] lay below [21]. Layer [118] was a vivid yellowish-brown silt, mildly compacted and [23] was a yellowish brown silt with green mottling, friable and mildly compacted, into which features were cut. No features were seen cutting [118], nor did it show mottling, usually indicative of waterlogging or high phosphorus content.

The features described below were all cut into [23] (Fig 13):

*Stake-hole [25]:* square in shape 0.09m wide with a pointed base 0.2m deep and vertical sides, with a dark yellowish brown silty fill [25], containing small fragments of brick, ash, and one fragment of bone.

*Features [52] and [56]:* these features were sectioned as separate features but became the one feature on full excavation. The gully ran approximately east-west across the northern edge of the trench, its northern side running under the section. The fill [51]/[55] was a dark yellowish brown silt, becoming more firm towards its western

extent, and containing brick and charcoal fragments, bone including a jaw and a horn, pottery and a piece of slag.

*Gully [122]:* cut gully [52]/[56] at its western end. Only the butt end of the feature was apparent as it ran north-south, and under the north section. The gully was filled with a dark yellowish brown silt [121] containing small fragments of limestone and bone, some with green patination.

*Stake-hole [116]:* cut by gully [52]/[56]. It was sub-circular 0.09m in diameter, with concave sides and a slightly pointed base 0.05m deep and was cut by gully [52]/[56]. The fill [115] was light grey-brown silt, mildly compacted containing one fragment of bone.

*Gully [54]:* ran east-west across the test pit, its western edge butting against the interface of [23] and [118], with its north edge cutting [23]. The feature had slightly convex sides 0.09m deep becoming more straight towards the west. The gully ended 0.11m west of stake-hole [25] in a rounded butt-end. It had a slightly rounded base.

*Stake-hole [114]:* was cut by gully [54]. The stake-hole was an ellipse shaped approximately 0.08m in width and had vertical sides on the east and west sides, with the south side sloping westwards. A fragment of flat limestone was situated at the face of [54] and [114]. A bronze pin was found in the mid-yellowish brown silt.

*Post-hole [58]:* was elliptical in shape, lying north-west/south-east and 0.4 x 0.2m in length, with vertical sides 0.16 - 0.18m deep, with the west side slightly sloping. The southeast edge was cut into [118], the northeast into [23]. The dark brown fill [57] contained limestone fragments at the base of the feature as well as oyster shell, tile and bone.

Once the features had been recorded, [23] was removed by mattock to reveal [125], a layer of dark brown silt of variable cover and extending from the east side of [54] to the west of [56] and towards the north side of [25]. Much bone came from this layer.

Below [125] lay a medium yellowish brown silt [126] with dark green, slightly clayish mottles 0.01 - 0.03m in size. Feature [122] and [124] were cut into this layer (Fig 14).

*Post-hole [122]:* was 0.48m square edges, with vertical sides and had a flattish base 0.21m deep. An inner square feature [124] was cut into the base of [122] and was not noticed in the fill of [122] until this point.

*Post-hole [124]:* square, with slightly bowed edges 0.28m wide, with vertical sides 0.21m deep with a stepped base cut into an iron pan flecked grey silt.

Due to the constraints on time for excavating the test pit, a sondage 1.18m long and 0.52m wide, running north-south, was cut from the south east corner of the test pit. Unfortunately the sondage could not be extended further to investigate the interface between [23] and [118] because of the dangers of working in such a confined space with heavy tools when other features were being worked on.

Below [118] was a dark grey brownish silt [59] 0.08m deep and 0.60m below the surface of the tarmac. Occasional chert pebbles were part of the fill and some pottery included buff fabric slipware and reduced dark green glaze.

Layer [119] lay below [59], a dark grey silt, mildly compacted, with some organic plant matter lying in the lower regions of layer on the eastern side of the sondage. The deposit was damp and contained numerous shell types, bone fragments and yellowish green glazed pottery, possibly late Medieval in date.

Layer [120] was the last layer to be excavated in the sondage and because of constraints on time it was sampled in order to establish dating evidence. This was a mottled vivid yellowish-grey silt layer and contained bone and slip dipped pottery. The layer was not bottomed, and the sondage reached a depth of 0.95m below the surface of tarmac, 5.280m AOD.

## CONCLUSION

The archaeological assessment of the Market Place in Wisbech showed without doubt that there is evidence of former activity on the site. The limited area which was opened during the assessment, coupled with the fact that the brief was to establish the presence and state of preservation of the archaeology, has meant that interpreting the evidence has been challenging. Nevertheless, the discussion below represents an attempt to put the assessment results into a wider perspective, and where possible to interpret some of the features found with regard to the historical development of the Market Place. These interpretations may well change in the light of future archaeological work.

In test pit 1, the flint cobbles [77] and angular dressed stone [75] are remnants of the 1811 paving of the Market Place and demonstrate the area where the cobbled stallage area gave way to the flagged access ways. The dressed angular and square dressed granite blocks of [76] are probably mark the foundations of the Jackson horse-trough. The direct evidence for the interpretation of the square post-holes [72] and [74] is more limited but could indicate the former positions of pumps.

In test pit 2, the line of stake-holes and post-holes comprising Group 1 are probably the remains of market stalls prior to the improvements of 1811. The sub-circular arrangement of Group 2 can also be interpreted in this light, as can the post-holes and stake-holes cut into layer [154] at the base of the test-pit.

Test pit 3 was sealed by tarmac and the cobbles from the 1811 Improvement Act and therefore all the features found would pre-date this event. The interface between [21] and [22], and [23] and [118], was caused by the 1811 improvements as this interface lies directly where a change in surface paving materials is shown on the Public Health map of 1853. The gullies and post-holes cutting layers [23] are probably the product of market stalls and associated activities. Post-holes [122] and [124] are a little more difficult to interpret although they may indicate the position of a former water pump. It would be interesting to speculate on the more unusual aspects of layer [119], whose matrix was markedly different from other layers in the test pit. Layer [119] was a dark grey silt with a large amount of organic plant matter, noted by the excavator as possibly some kind of reed-like material, towards the base of the layer: it was markedly moist and contained numerous cockle, mussel and oyster shells. The pottery included reduced wares, some with yellowish green glaze.

The nature of this deposit is such that its origins seem to be substantially different from the other deposits in the test pit and it is possible to suggest that this dark organic layer could be the vestiges of Crab Mersh Bank, part of which was deposited in the Market Place in the early part of the sixteenth century.

It is unfortunate that the modern service trenches and infilled modern toilets at the eastern end of the Market Place precluded the excavation of test pits in this area which is the presumed position of the old Shambles.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above archaeological investigations it has been shown that in all three test pits the layers and features were all Post-Medieval in date and often disturbed.

It was established that the top 0.30 - 0.40m below the modern surface contained Post-Medieval material and features and therefore would not constitute any problems with regard to the development proposals within this depth. In the author's opinion, it is suggested that no further archaeological work need take place in relation to the pedestrianisation proposals in the area of the Market Place.

Development work at the east end of the Market Place, where the old Shambles and Shire Hall were situated, which exceeds 0.40m below the surface level and lies outside the area of the infilled toilets should be monitored. Development exceeding a depth of 1 metre from the ground surface in the area of the Market Place may affect underlying remains and detailed discussions on the most appropriate action will have to be confirmed with the County Archaeology Office.

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Wisbech 1820 - 1920: Manpower Services Commission project in conjunction with Cambridgeshire Libraries.

### Maps referenced in Historical Survey:

Plan of Castle estates, detailing southern edge of the Market Place. Untitled and undated, but probably late eighteenth century/ early nineteenth century. Held in Wisbech Museum (MIS/612).

Plan of Castle estates and premises, surveyed by J. Watte in 1792 at a scale of approximately 80 inches to the mile. Probably drawn up prior to sale of estate. Held in the Cambridgeshire Record Office (408/E6).

First survey of the whole town of Wisbech by John Wood in 1830. Copies held in Wisbech Museum.

Plan of Wisbech by F. Utting in 1850. Held in Wisbech Museum.

Detailed plan of the town part of Wisbech surveyed in 1853 by RH Dobson, under the Public Health Act of 1848. Shows the Market Place in detail. Held in Wisbech Museum.

The town of Wisbech by Charles Mumford in 1867, reduced from the 1853 Public Health map, and with revisions. Held in the Cambridgeshire Record Office (1040/P1).

### Miscellaneous

Accessions Book of Wisbech Museum, photographs and illustrations held in the Wisbech Museum Collection.



## APPENDIX 1

### LISTED BUILDINGS IN AND AROUND MARKET PLACE

There are many buildings in and around the Market Place which are of architectural significance (Fig. 15). The gazetteer below outlines all the Listed Buildings in the development area, and summaries are given of their architectural details, some of which may infer that earlier structures stood on the site of more recent buildings.

From the Listed Buildings records, a tentative suggestion for the emergence of the modern layout of the Market Place can be made. The former George Inn (No. 35 Market Place) was established in the early 1500's, and the former Mermaid Inn (No. 37 Market Place) is seventeenth century. No.29 Market Place has a Medieval vault and the Rose and Crown (No. 23 and 24 Market Place) has a brick vault with possible earlier material and a small lamp niche and blind arcades. No.5 Market Place has a seventeenth century basement with ovolo moulded ceiling beam, as has No.6 Market Place. It is therefore possible to infer that the present pattern of streets around the Market Place existed at least from the early seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century this pattern seems to have been consolidated.

The information given below is summarized from the Listed Buildings data-base held in the Cambridgeshire County Council Conservation Section of Shire Hall, Cambridge.

### MARKET PLACE

No.	List No.	Period	Description
5	6/84	C17 , C18, late C19, C20	Brown brick C18 shop with C17 basement and forecourt, possibly covered in C19. C17 ovolo moulded ceiling beam in basement with brick stair to C18 brick storehouse.
6	6/85	C18, early C19.	Brown brick shop C18 with ovolo moulded ceiling beam to basement, C17, with original brick steps to street.
8	6/86	early C19, early C20	Red brick, early C19 shop with early C20 shop on ground floor.
9	6/87	early C19, mid and late C20	Brown brick early C19 shop, modern shop at ground level.
10	6/88	early C19, mid C20	Brown brick early C19 shop, with art deco butchers shop fittings.
11	6/89	early and mid C19, late C20	Grey Gault brick early C19 shop with mid C19 windows.
12	6/90	early C19, mid C20	Brown brick early C19, now modern shop
13	6/91	early C19, mid C20	Brown brick, early C19, now two shops at ground floor level rebuilt in mid C20 in yellow brick.
14	6/92	early C19, late C20	early C19, now modern shop.
21	6/93	late C18, late C20	Local amber brick, late C18, interior completely modern, now shop.

22	6/94	late C18, late C20	Brown brick, late C18 and now modern shop.
23 and 24	6/95	early C17, mid C19	The Rose and Crown Hotel. Timber framed, rendered, local brick. Early C17 coaching inn, refronted mid C19. Early C17 building over carriageway and casement window with 1601 in relief and horn and pheasant applied motif. Vaults are extensive but within curtilage of building, brick tunnel vaults possibly with earlier material and original walls including a small lamp niche and blind arches.
25 and 26	6/96	early C18, early and late C20	Brown brick, rendered. Early C18 shops, refronted c.1930.
rear of 27	6/272	late C17	Warehouse to the rear of No. 27, local brown brick. Late C17 two storey building, formerly candlemakers workshop. Original C17 oak roof. Survey of cellars 19/02/90 - no further information.
27 and 28	6/97	late C18, mid C20	Brown and red brick early C18 pair of shops, with modern shops on the ground floor.
29	6/98	Medieval, late C18, mid and late C20	Brown brick, late C18 with modern shop at ground floor. Remains of Medieval three bayed vault in semi-basement, two bays destroyed when shop floor lowered, one bay intact with moulded ribs springing from stone corbels with finely carved centre boss. Illustrated and described by Walker and Craddock (1849).
31	6/100	mid C19, late C20	Yellow gault brick, now shops.
32	6/101	early C18, late C20	Brown brick, now modern shop
35	6/102	late C15, late C20	Formerly the George Inn. Timber framed and rendered and jettied onto the street with a brick undercroft. Original window with hollowed chamfered mullion to undercroft. Now a shop.
37	6/103	C17, early and late C20	Formerly the Mermaid Inn, timber framed, with rendering. Comprises two C17 building periods, refronted in the C20. Now a shop.
38 and 39	6/104	early C18, early C19, late C20	Brown brick C18 shops with possible C19 facade altered in C20. Rear extends over Mews.
40	6/105	mid C19	Gault brick. Formerly the Ship Inn now a shop. Annexed to No. 41 Market Place.
41	6/106	late C18, mid C20	Red brick. Late C18 building annexed to No. 40.

42, 42A and 43	6/107	early or mid C18	Red brick. Early to mid C18, altered. Now a shop.
44 and 45	6/108	late C18, late C20	Late C18 building in local brown brick, altered. Modern shop on ground floor.
46	6/109	early C19, late C20	Brown brick, early C19. Modern shop at ground floor.
52	6/110	early C18, C19, late C20	The Globe Inn. Brick, altered and extended on both facades at ground level.
53	6/111	late C18, late C20	Brown brick, rendered. Late C18 shop, altered. Now modern shop.
54	6/112	early C19, late C20	Early C19 shop in brown brick. Now modern shop.

## BRIDGE STREET

No.	List No.	Period	Description
op No 4	6/9	early and mid C19	Wine vault on central island in Bridge Street, possibly C18 or earlier. Entrance surrounded by concrete wall. Mentioned in Gardiner (1898) regarding the proprietor Mr Exley, and possible passage to Castle vaults.
N/A	6/8	Clarkson Memorial, late C19	Neo-Gothic memorial to Thomas Clarkson, slavery abolitionist.
1,2 and 3	6/6	late C19	Post-office built in 1887 in French Medieval domestic style.
7 and 8	6/7	C16, late C17, early and late C19, late C20	Two shops originally timber framed and jettied, possibly late C16 or earlier. No. 8 interior has stop moulded floor joints.

## HIGH STREET

No	List	Period	Description
1	6/45	early C18	Early C18 brown brick building with modern shop at ground floor.

11	6/46	early C18, late C20	Brown brick, early C18, with modern shop at ground level.
12	6/47	late C18/ early C19, late c20	Painted local brown brick, modern ground floor shop.
18	6/48	early C18, late C19/ early C20, late C20	Early C18 shop possibly refronted in the early C19.
19	6/49	early C18, late C19/ early C20, late C20	Local brown brick, early C18 shop.
23	6/50	early C18, mid C19	Early C18 shop refronted in brick in C19.
24	6/51	early C19, late C20	Local brown brick, early C19 shop.

### UNION STREET

No	List	Period	Description
9	6/261	C16, C18, late C20	Formerly the New Inn, C18 with altered street facade and timber framed rear wing C16.
10	6/262	mid or late C19, early C20	Brown brick C19 shop
11	6/263	late C18, mid C20	Late C18 brown brick shop, possibly refronting an earlier building.

### HILL STREET

No	List	Period	Description
1	6/52	early and mid C19	Originally a Girls School, built by the Burgesses of Wisbech in 1814.
7, 9, and 11	6/53	late C18, late C20	Terrace of three houses c.1800 in local amber brick.
12	6/133	early C18, C19, C20	Originally the Albion Inn, and possibly C18 refaced in the C19 with a modern shop.
17	6/54	mid C18, C19, C20	Mid C18 house of local brown brick. Formerly known as Dickens Tavern, now Dickens Inn.
19	6/55	late C18	Late C18 house of local brown brick.
26	6/59	mid C18. C19, early C20	Mid C18 house and shop of local brown brick.
27	6/56	Late C18	Late C18 house of local amber brick
28	6/60	early and late C19, late C20	Early C19 house of local brown brick.

- |    |      |                            |   |
|----|------|----------------------------|---|
| 29 | 6/57 | mid C16                    | Originally the old Grammar School, built in C.1549 when the land was acquired. Rear wing was added in c.1585, and functioned as a Town Hall until 1810. Interior has fine C16 moulded beam. |
| 30 | 6/61 | early C19                  | Early C19 corner shop of local brown brick.   |
| 31 | 6/58 | mid and late C19, late C20 | Club house built in c.1860 for Jonathan Peckover.   |

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people contributed towards the archaeological assessment, and thanks are due to Fenland District Council for all their help during the fieldwork, to Simon Bray, Steven Williams and Gary Haley for all their hard work and good humour on site, and to Dr G Wait for initial preparation for the fieldwork on my behalf.

Many thanks are also due to the staff at Wisbech Museum for all their help and advice, in particular Curator Mr. Devenish, the Librarian Mrs Rayment, and the Steward Mr Bell. The staff of the Cambridgeshire Records Office were, as always, very forthcoming with help and advice which was much appreciated.

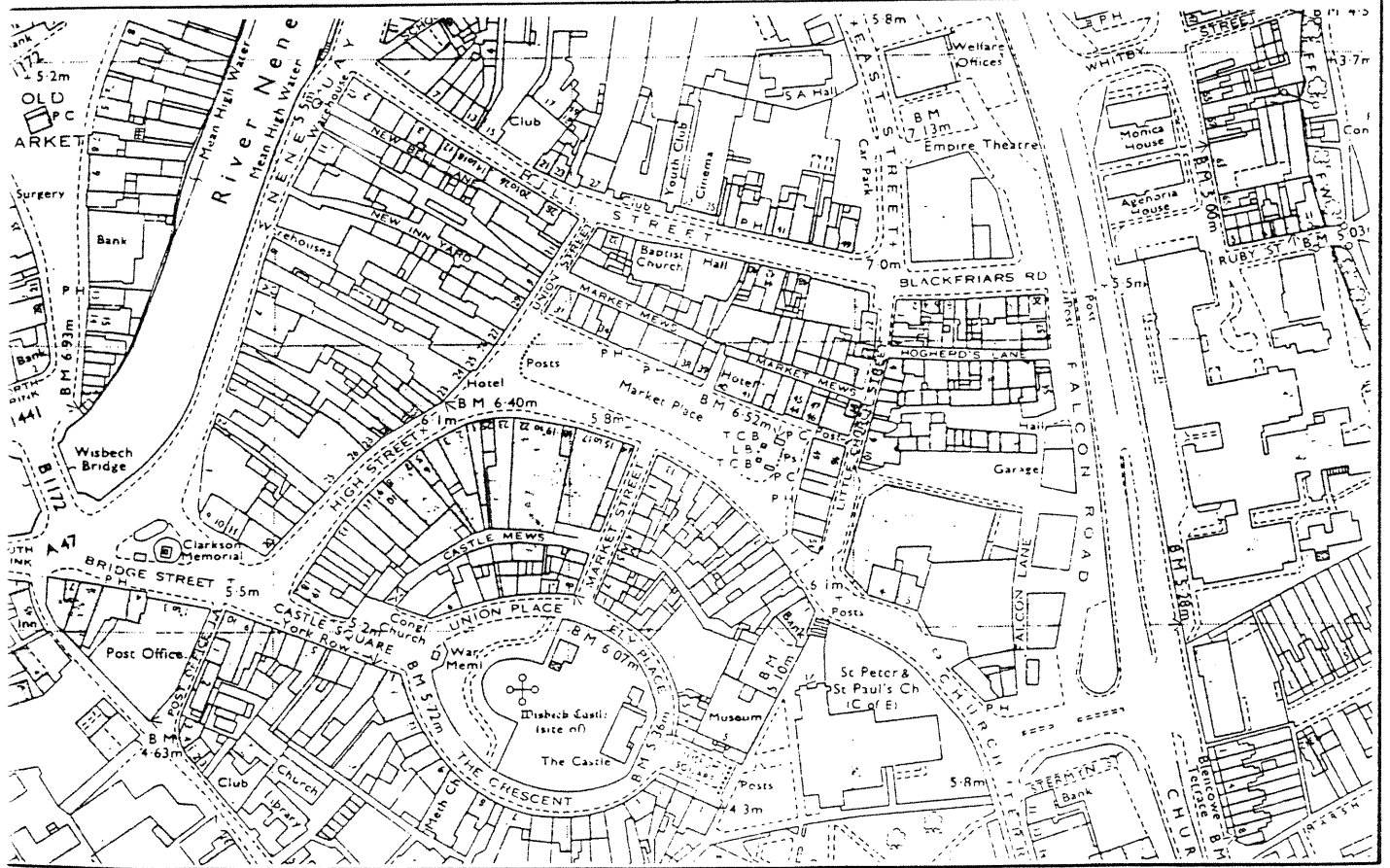
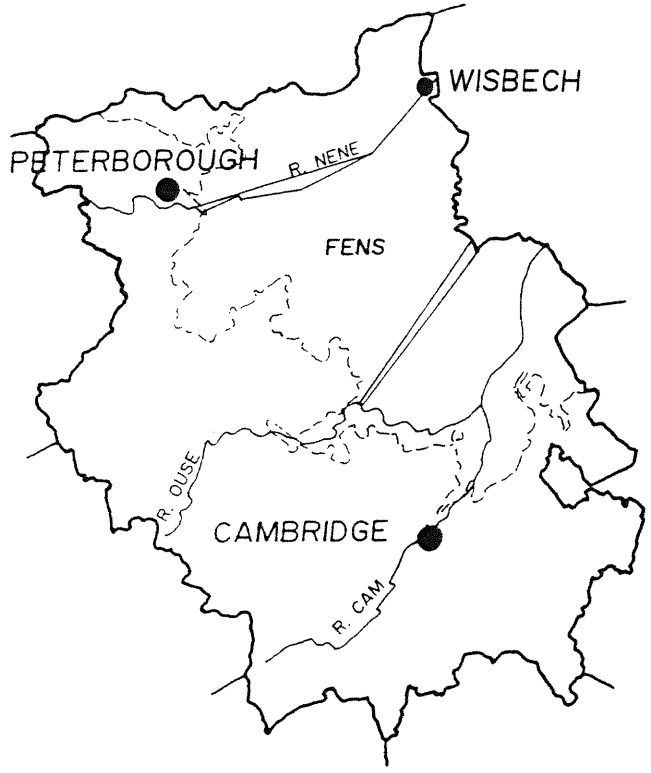
Information about the listed buildings was compiled from the records held in the Cambridgeshire County Council Conservation Section at Shire Hall, and many thanks are due to Mr J Hurst and Mr C Godfrey for all their help.

To the proof readers and to Ruth Pelling for the illustrations, many thanks.

A



B



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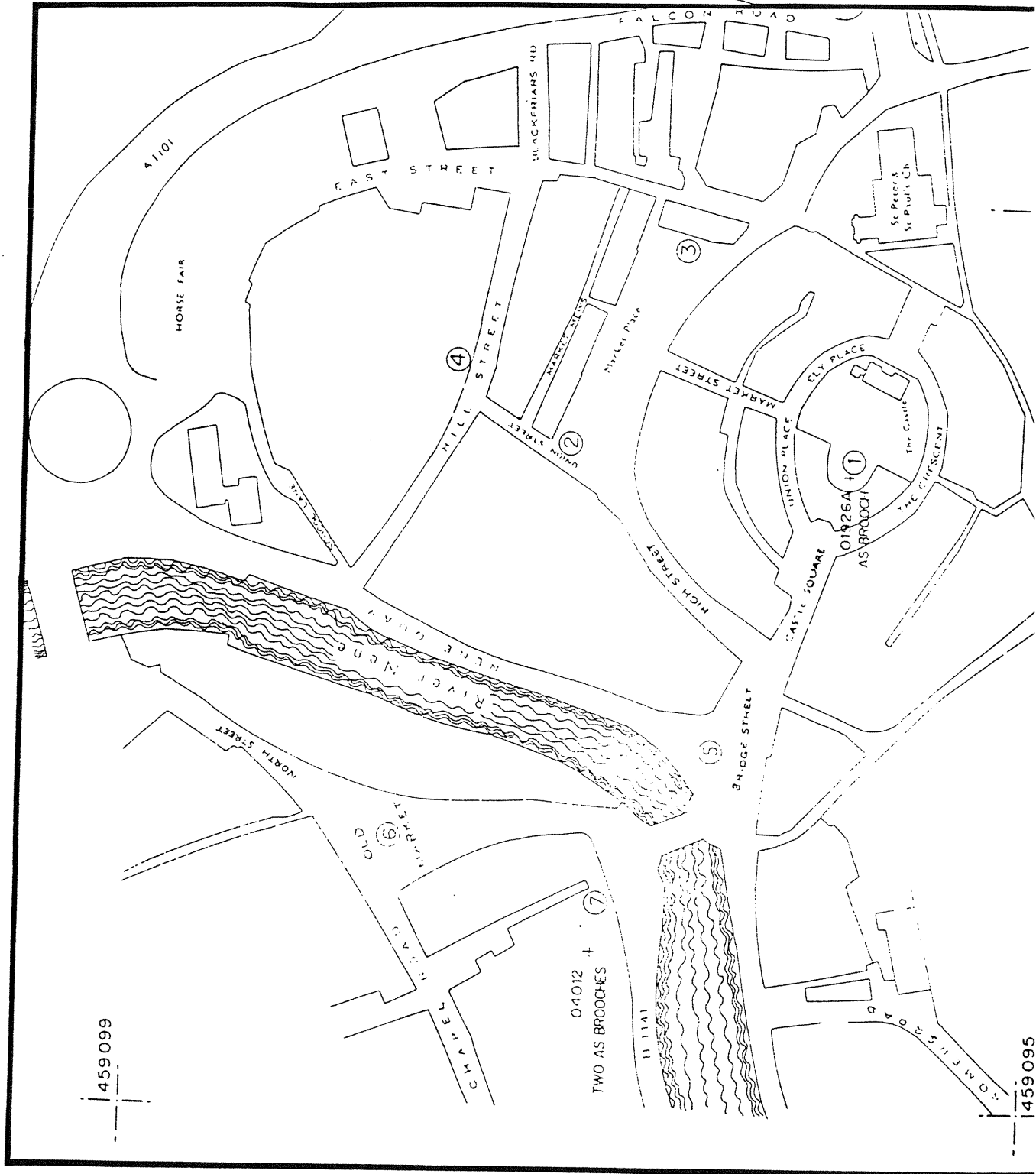
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# WISMP '91

## LOCATION OF SITES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL INTEREST

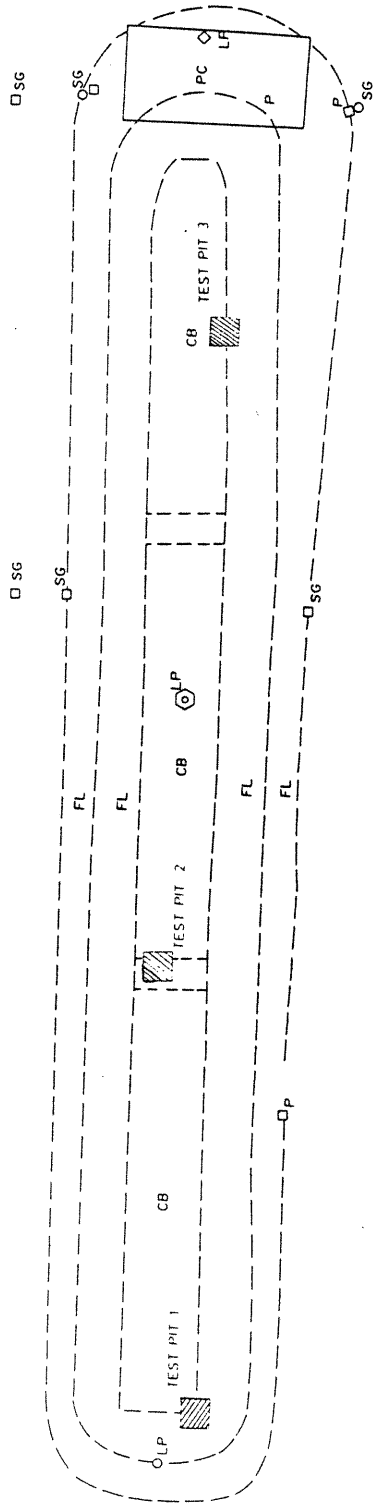
- ① SITE OF FORMER CASTLE
- ② SITE OF FORMER MARKET CROSS  
& OBELISK
- ③ SITE OF SHAMBLES
- ④ SITE OF FORMER GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
& TOWN HALL
- ⑤ SITE OF BUTTER MARKET
- ⑥ SITE OF OLD MARKET PLACE
- ⑦ SITE OF CORN MARKET





WISMP '91

OVERLAY OF PUBLIC HEALTH ACT MAP OF 1853



- P PUMP
- SG SEWER
- LP LAMP - POST
- PC AREA DISTURBED BY 20th cent. PUBLIC TOILETS
- CB COBBLED AREA
- FL FLAG STONES



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OVERLAY OF PUBLIC HEALTH ACT MAP OF 1853

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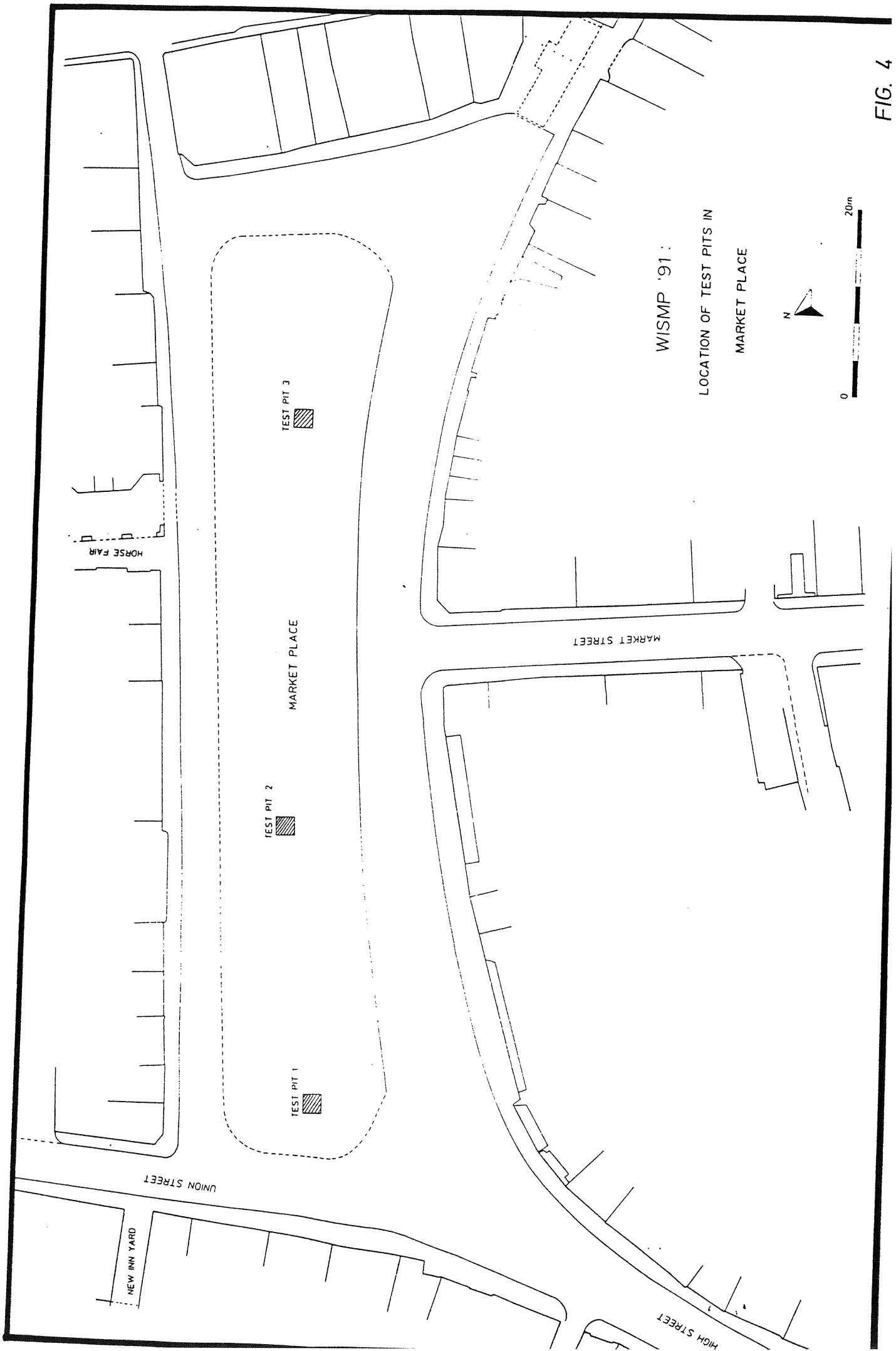
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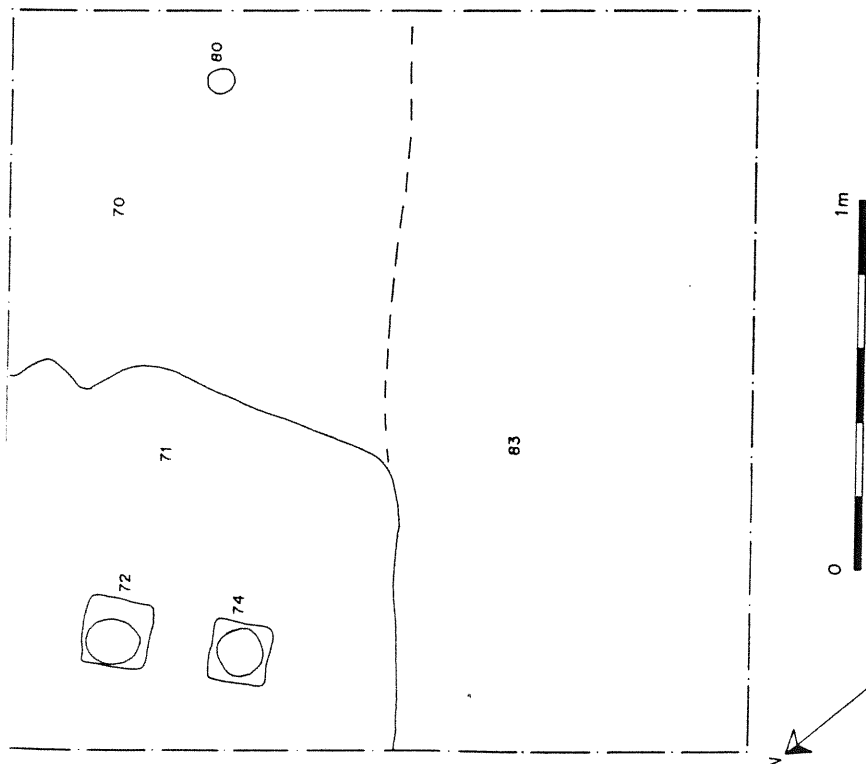
FIG. 3



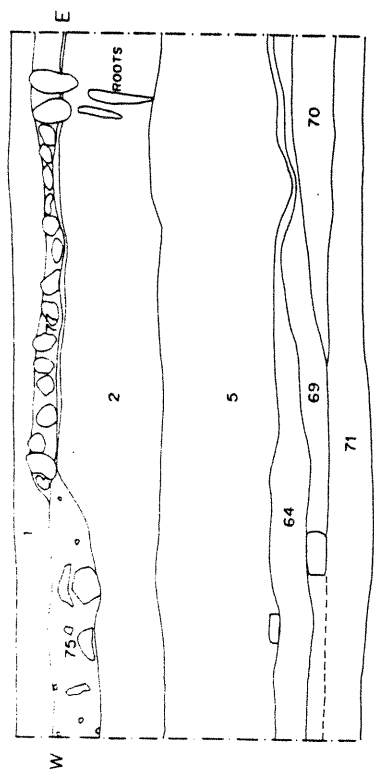
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LOCATION OF TEST PITS IN  
MARKET PLACE



FIG. 4



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TEST PIT 1  
SOUTH FACING SECTION



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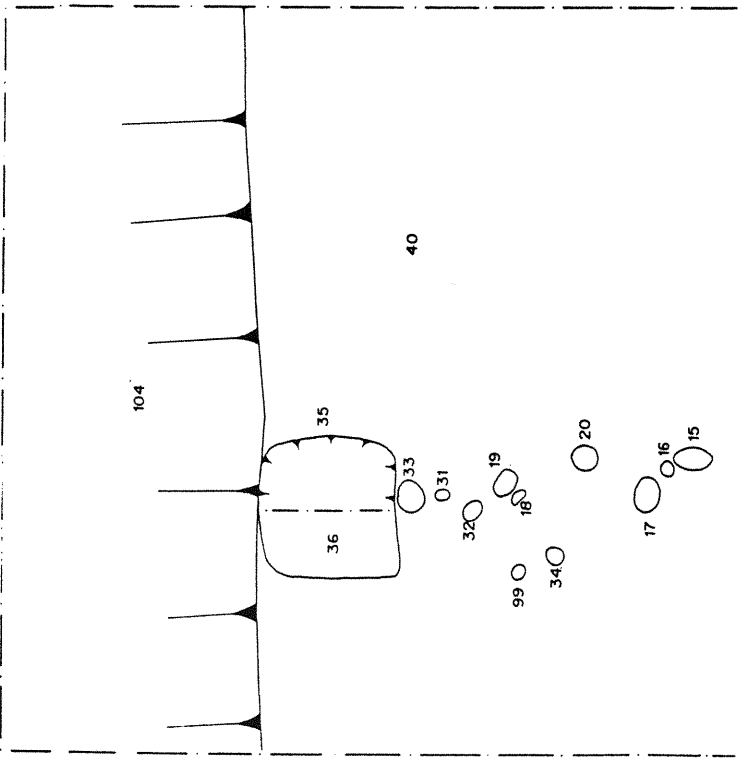
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PLAN NO: 5, 6

WISMP '91

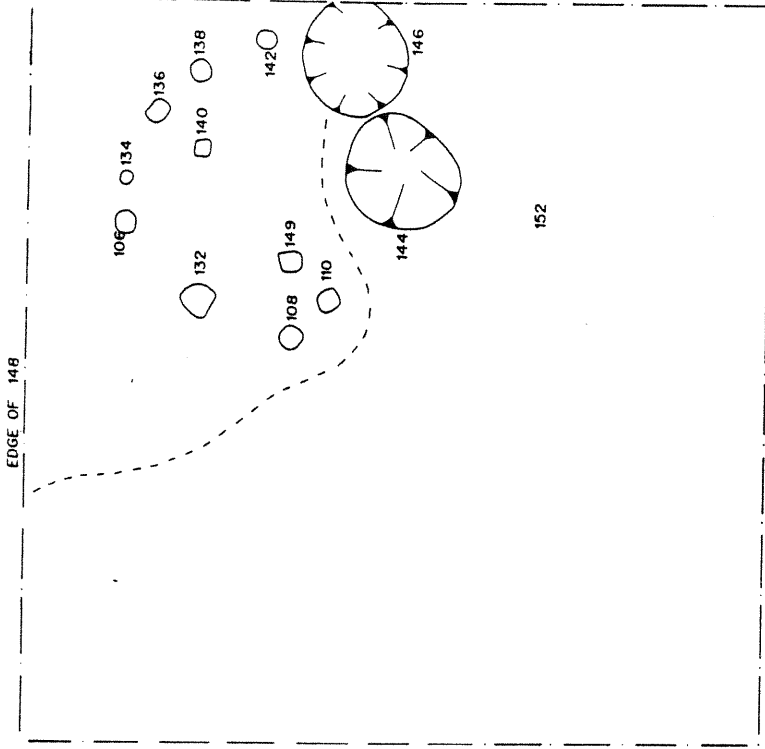
FIG. 5: TEST PIT 1: PLAN OF POST-HOLES [72] & [74]

FIG. 6: TEST PIT 1: SOUTH FACING SECTION



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TEST PIT 2  
GROUP 1, [104] & [35]

FIG. 7.



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TEST PIT 2  
GROUP 2, [144] & [146]

FIG. 8



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FIG. 7 : TEST PIT 2 : PLAN OF GROUP 1 POST HOLES

FIG. 8 : TEST PIT 2 : PLAN OF GROUP 2 POST-HOLES

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PLAN NO: 7, 8

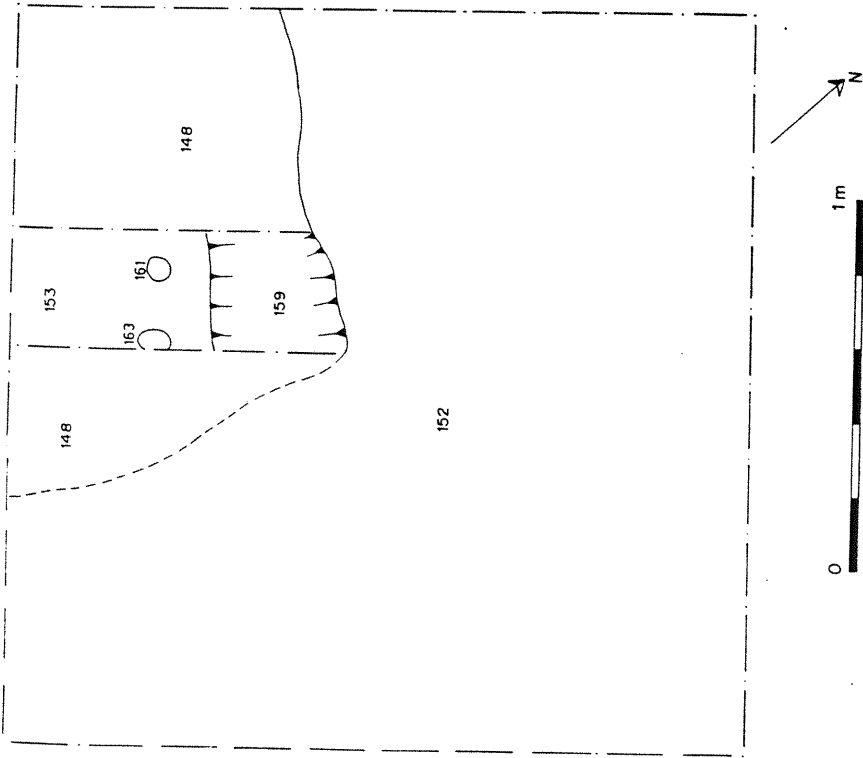


FIG. 9 : WISMP '91  
TEST PIT 2

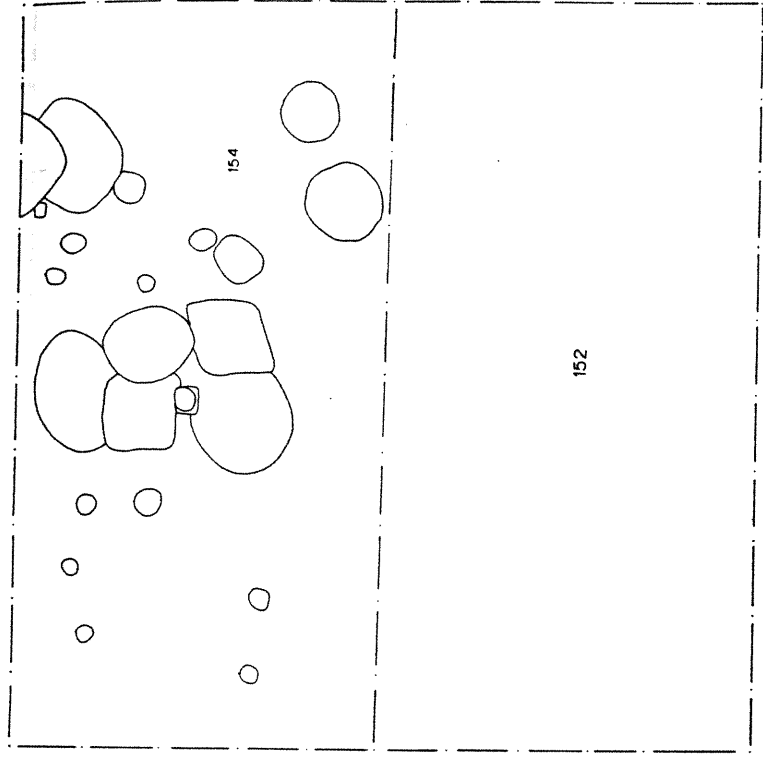


FIG. 10 : WISMP '91  
TEST PIT 2  
UNEXCAVATED FEATURES CUTTING  
LAYER 154



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TEST PIT 2 : PLAN OF BOX SECTION THROUGH [148] & [152]  
TEST PIT 2 : PLAN OF [154]

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PLAN NO: FIG. 9 , FIG. 10

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TEST PIT 2  
NORTH FACING SECTION

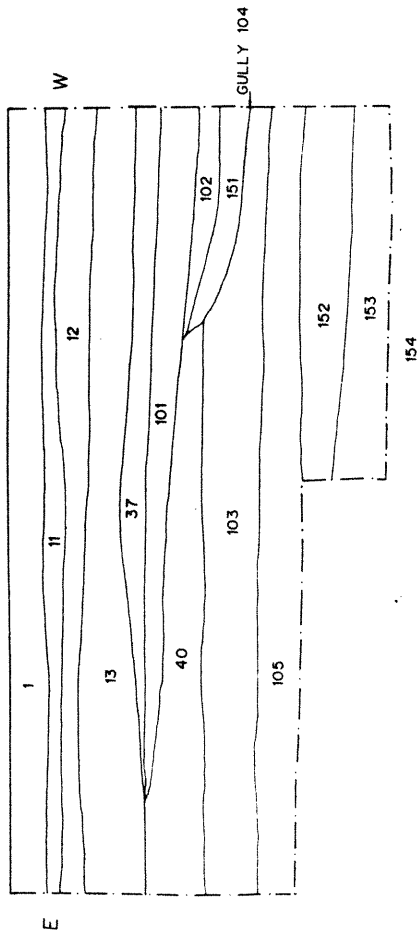


FIG. 11

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TEST PIT 2  
EAST FACING SECTION

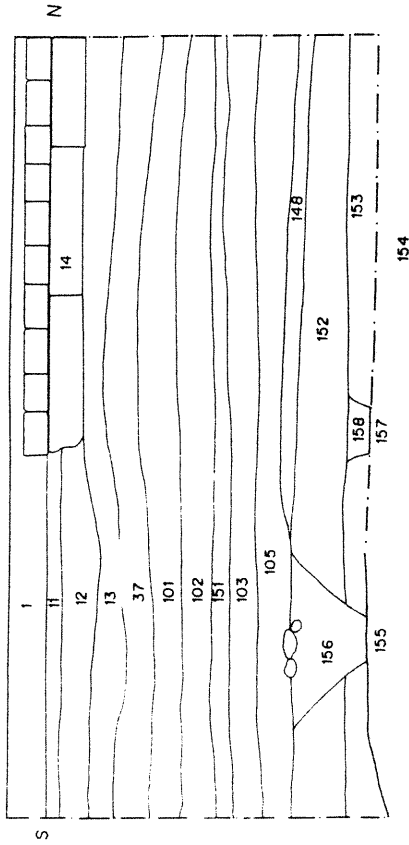


FIG. 12



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FIG. 11 TEST PIT 2 : NORTH FACING SECTION

FIG. 12 TEST PIT 2 : EAST FACING SECTION

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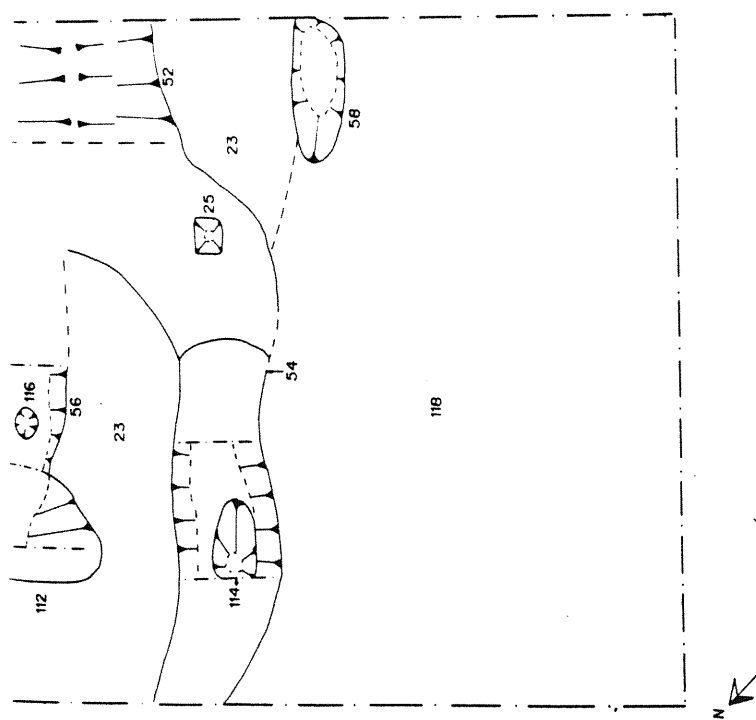


FIG. 13 WISMP '91  
TEST PIT 3  
FEATURES CUT INTO [23]

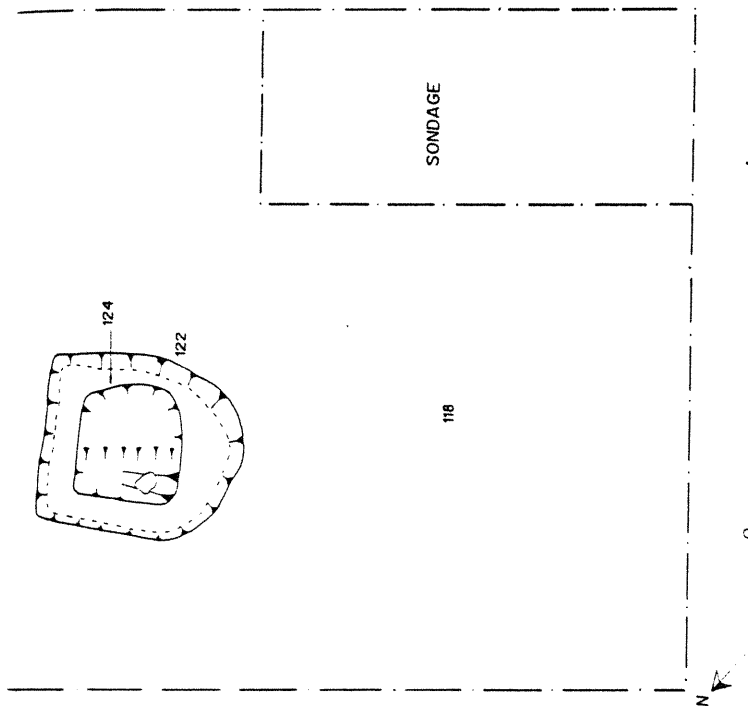


FIG. 14 WISMP '91  
TEST PIT 3



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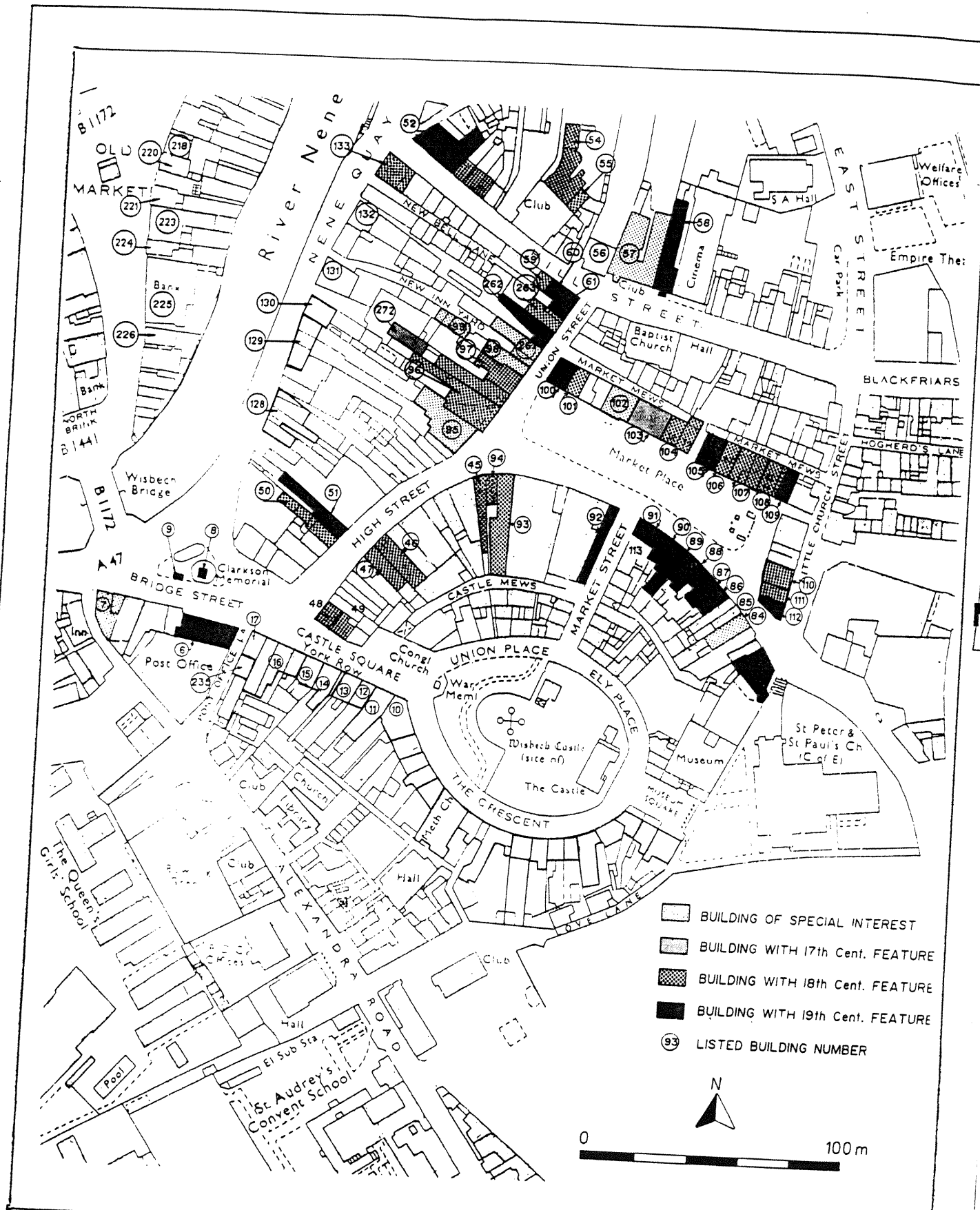
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FIG. 13 TEST PIT 3 : FEATURES CUTTING [23]

FIG. 14 TEST PIT 3 : POST-HOLE [122/124] & SONDAGE

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