

A QUIETLY ACTIVE COMMUNITY

THE HISTORY OF THE KENNET CENTRE, NEWBURY



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Layout & design by Kenneth Lymer

Front cover: early 20th century view of Cheap Street/Market Street junction (by permission of West Berkshire Museum)

Back cover: modern view of Cheap Street/Market Street junction, with new cinema

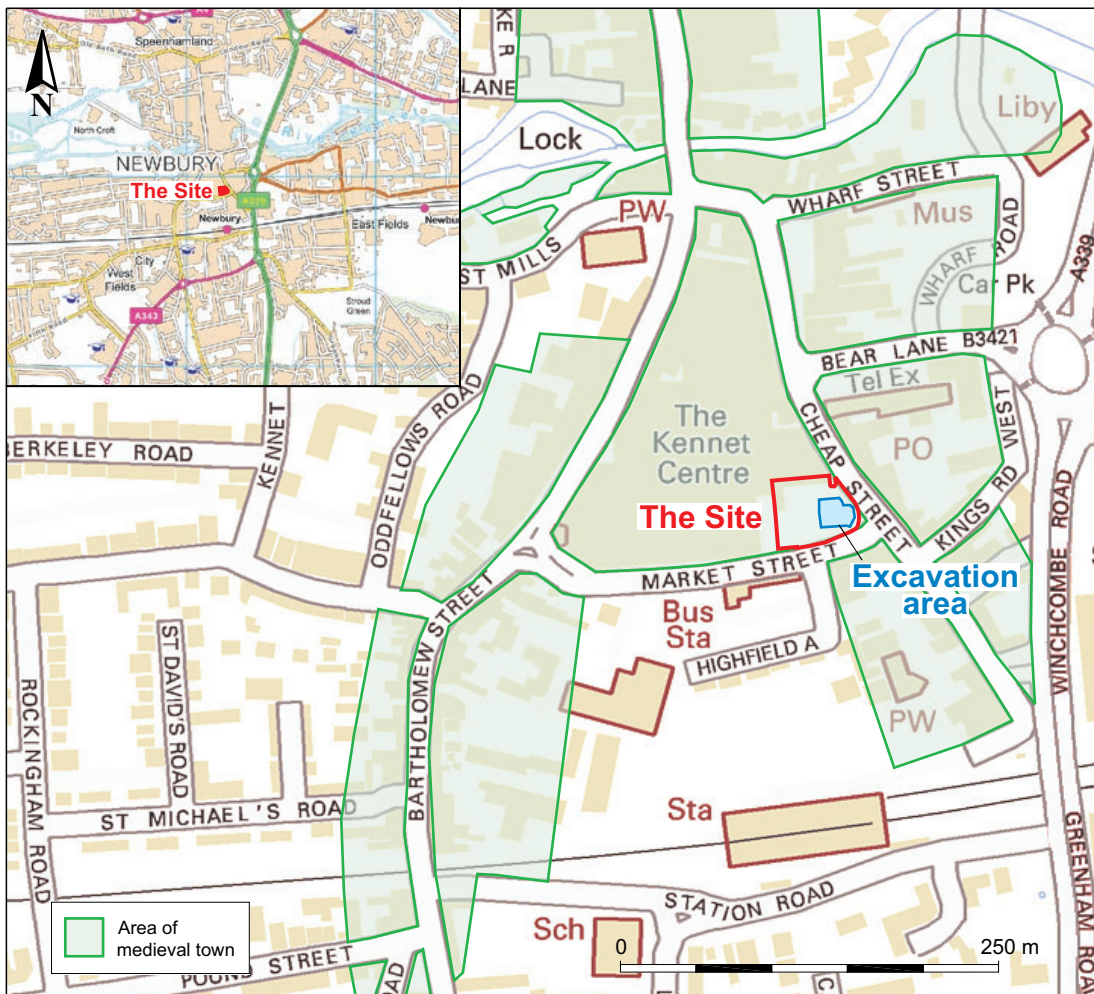
Summary

In 2007 and 2008 Wessex Archaeology conducted archaeological fieldwork in the centre of Newbury, prior to the redevelopment of a former car park into a cinema complex on the corner of Cheap Street and Market Street (NGR 447200 166920). The site occupies a sizeable plot on the southern edge of the historic core of Newbury, about 250 metres to the south of the River Kennet. Previous excavations within the medieval town have revealed sequences of activity from at least the 11th century, and it was hoped that this excavation would augment these results and confirm the general picture of a planned town in which development spread outwards from the area around the church and market place from the

late 11th century, extending down the Cheap Street frontage in the 13th century.

During the excavations, some medieval features were found, and one possible structure, dating to the 12th or 13th century. However, most of the evidence for buildings within formal property boundaries dates no earlier than the early post-medieval period (15th to 17th centuries), and most of the building plans recovered dated from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries.

A limited programme of documentary research and map regression has supplemented these results by confirming the broad dating for the site and linking the excavated evidence to known properties and, for the later period, known occupiers.



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Site location map

Historical Introduction

At the time of the Domesday survey of 1086, the area that became Newbury formed part of the manor of *Ulvritone*, held by Ernulf de Hesdin, although it is not known where the manor house lay. The town of Newbury ('new market town') was probably founded in shortly after the Norman Conquest as a planned market centre. It is surprising that it is not mentioned in Domesday, as it lies at the crossing point of the Oxford-Southampton route over the River Kennet, and the first documented use of the name (*Neoburiae*) is from 1080. The earliest settlement may have consisted of a small number of houses close to St Nicolas' Church (at the north-west corner of Bartholomew Street, and about 50 metres south of the River Kennet), surrounded by fields, and the market place (which is now confined to an area at the northern end of Cheap Street) may originally have extended westwards, towards the church.

Once established, the town developed quickly, and expanded southwards along Bartholomew Street (formerly called West Street) and Cheap Street. The burgage plots in between these two streets have a slight curve, suggesting that they may have been laid out on the strips of former open fields

(Astill 1978, 50). To the north of the market place and the crossing point of the river, Northbrook Street may have been a planned extension to the town; land reclamation was carried out along the eastern side in the 12th century, comprising long, narrow burgage plots running back to a stream forming the eastern boundary. These three streets, forming an inverted Y shape which still survives in the modern street pattern, comprise the historic core of the town, which at its greatest medieval extent, in the 13th century, extended southwards beyond the present site down St Mary's Hill (*ibid.*, fig. 17). This southern limit was not exceeded until the 18th century. It appears that the inhabited area of the town was never encompassed by town walls.

The medieval burgage plots of Newbury can still be seen in the modern layout of the town, along Bartholomew Street, Cheap Street and Northbrook Street. The burgage plots were often subdivided at a later period, and this subdivision can be seen on the 19th century and later maps of Newbury – the current site covers four such subdivisions.

After a possible decline in the late 13th and 14th centuries, from the 15th century onwards the town's prosperity was based on its production of wool and cloth, particularly the varieties called druggetts and shalloons. This trade declined during the 17th and 18th centuries, leading to increasing poverty, although other industries, such as silk and paper mills, and iron foundries, were established. At this time Newbury was still a predominantly agricultural town – in 1693 Celia Fiennes, a pioneering woman traveller who journeyed around England between 1684 and c. 1712, commented on its good corn market and the active trade of the town (VCHB iv). The open arable West and East Fields lay to the south of the built-up area, crossed by Bartholomew Street and Cheap Street respectively. These fields remained in their open furlongs until enclosure in 1846.

Burgages, tenements and messuages

*These are medieval land terms; a **burgage** was a town rental property, owned by a king or lord. This property (the **burgage tenement** or **burgage plot**) usually consisted of a house on a long, narrow strip of land, with the narrow end facing on to the street frontage. The term **messuage** is used in medieval and later legal documents, such as property deeds, to denote a house, including its associated outbuildings and adjacent land, with a similar meaning to **tenement**.*



The Market Place in the early 20th century

The trade of the town was stimulated again by the canalisation of the River Kennet as far as Reading in 1723 as the Kennet Navigation, and the opening of the Kennet and Avon Canal in 1810. William Mavor reported a considerable carrying trade in barges along the river and a large weekly grain market (Mavor 1808); this was still being described as the largest in the county in the middle of the 19th century, although by 1863 with the enclosure of the East and West Fields the agricultural life began to disappear. Mavor also recorded the presence of maltings, breweries, a paper mill and barge builders, and many small butchers who slaughtered pigs and cured bacon. Newbury was then a "genteel, rich and

populous brick-built town, pleasantly situated on the Kennet... It stands on a peaty soil, but is perfectly dry and healthy." The streets had been paved and lit a few years previously by public subscription, without the requirement of an Act of Parliament. In 1847 the railway reached Newbury, linking the town to London, which led to expansion southwards and along the line of the railway. Newbury remained predominantly a market town, however, despite the improved infrastructure. In 1924 it was commented "The great days of Newbury seem over for the present, but it remains a quietly active and prosperous little community" (VCHB iv).

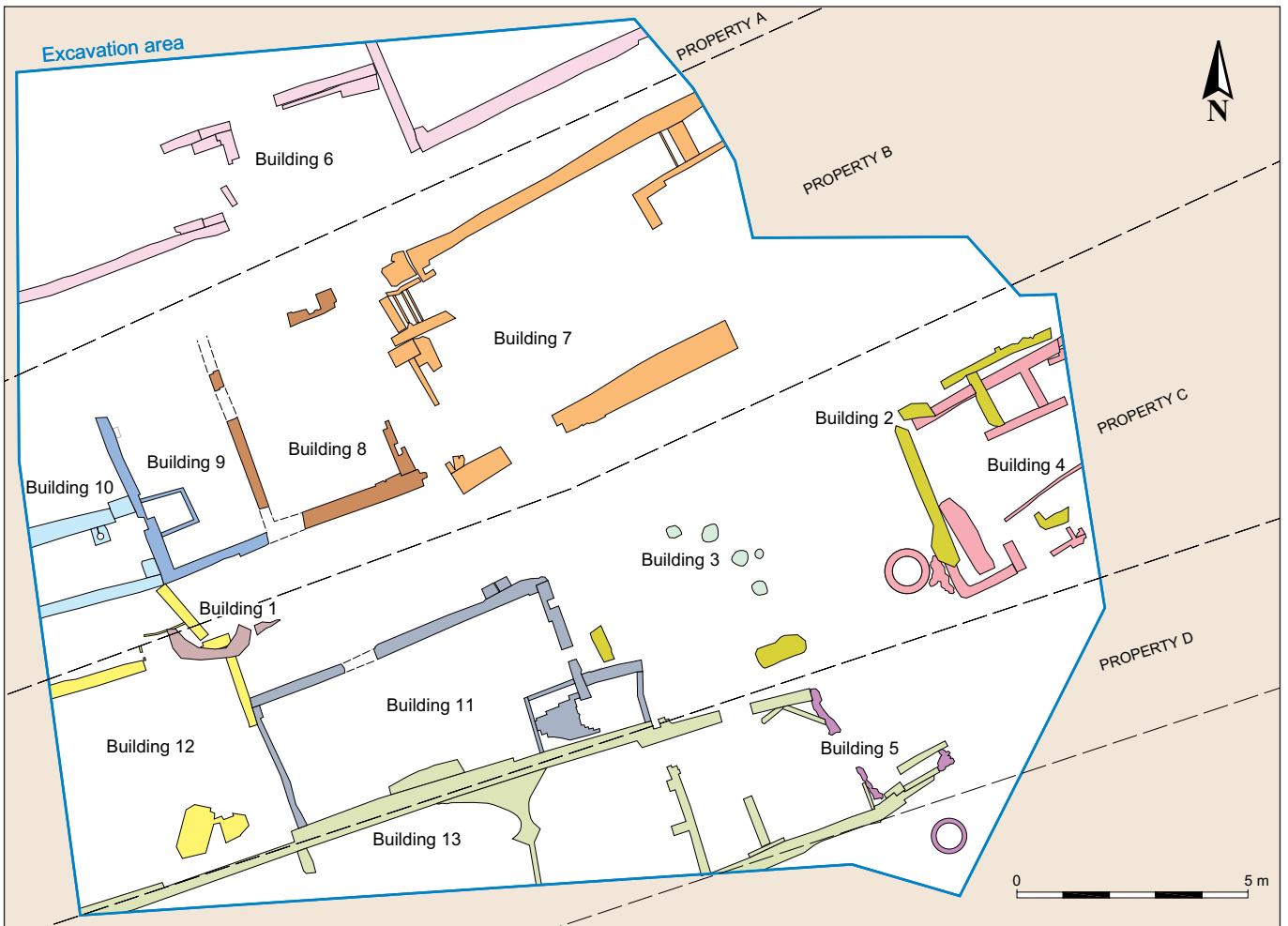
Archaeological Introduction

The Kennet valley around Newbury is rich in evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British occupation. Concentrations of Mesolithic flintwork have been found to the west of the town near Kintbury, and to the east at Greenham and Thatcham; Mesolithic flints have also been found within the town itself, and there have been sporadic finds of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age date. Roman coins and pottery have been found in the town, and a cemetery was uncovered in 1856 during construction of the railway sidings to the south-east of the town. From the Saxon period, various coins have been found, including one of Egbert (802–39) from Cheap Street.

Excavations were first carried out in the town centre in the early 1970s by the Newbury Museum Group, who dug two sites – 140 Bartholomew Street and 1 Market Place, and a structural sequence was uncovered on both sites dating from the 12th to the 18th century (Ford 1976; 1979). Larger scale excavations at 143–5 Bartholomew Street in 1979, and in Cheap Street on an adjacent site to 1 Market Place,

in 1981, largely confirmed this sequence (Vince *et al.* 1997).

A number of archaeological interventions were subsequently carried out in and around the historic core of Newbury, in the Market Place, Cheap Street, Bartholomew Street, Bear Lane and around the Wharf; these have provided ‘keyhole’ glimpses into the archaeology of the town, but have added little significant information on the development of the medieval town beyond ascertaining that it is unlikely that a castle stood in the area of the Wharf. This had been identified as the possible site of an Anarchy Period castle (Cannon 1990), belonging to the succession crisis of 1135–54, which was characterised by unsettled government and conflict between the supporters of King Henry I’s nephew King Stephen and his cousin Matilda (Henry I’s daughter), over who had the better claim to succeed to the English throne. Refining the chronology of the town’s development is a key research question that has been identified for Newbury (West Berkshire Archaeology Service 2006, 45–6).



Site plan showing Properties A–D and all buildings in excavation area



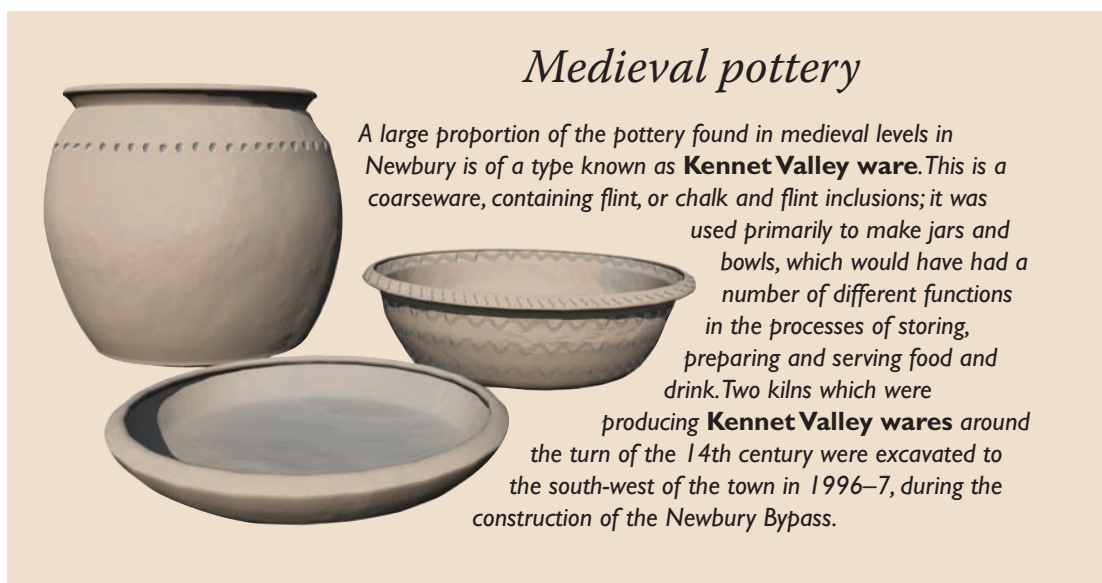
Overview of excavation area

From evidence obtained during previous excavations in Cheap Street, settlement along the western side of the street seems not to have been established until the 13th century, lagging slightly behind developments in Bartholomew Street, perhaps because the terrain was more marshy, which hindered construction. Certainly many of the earliest features excavated seem to have been related primarily to attempts to drain the area (Vince *et al.* 1997, 155). At the current site, an alluvial silt layer formed the earliest identifiable stratigraphic event, and incorporated pottery of 12th or 13th century date. Small dumps of gravel overlying the silt may have formed a pre-construction bedding layer; there is no dating evidence for the deposition of this layer, although similar examples of gravel dumping have been recorded elsewhere on Cheap Street immediately prior to mid 14th/early 15th century construction (*ibid.*, 92, 95). There is a deed of message (with abutments) for a property in Cheap Street from 1398 (BRO D/EBp T81).

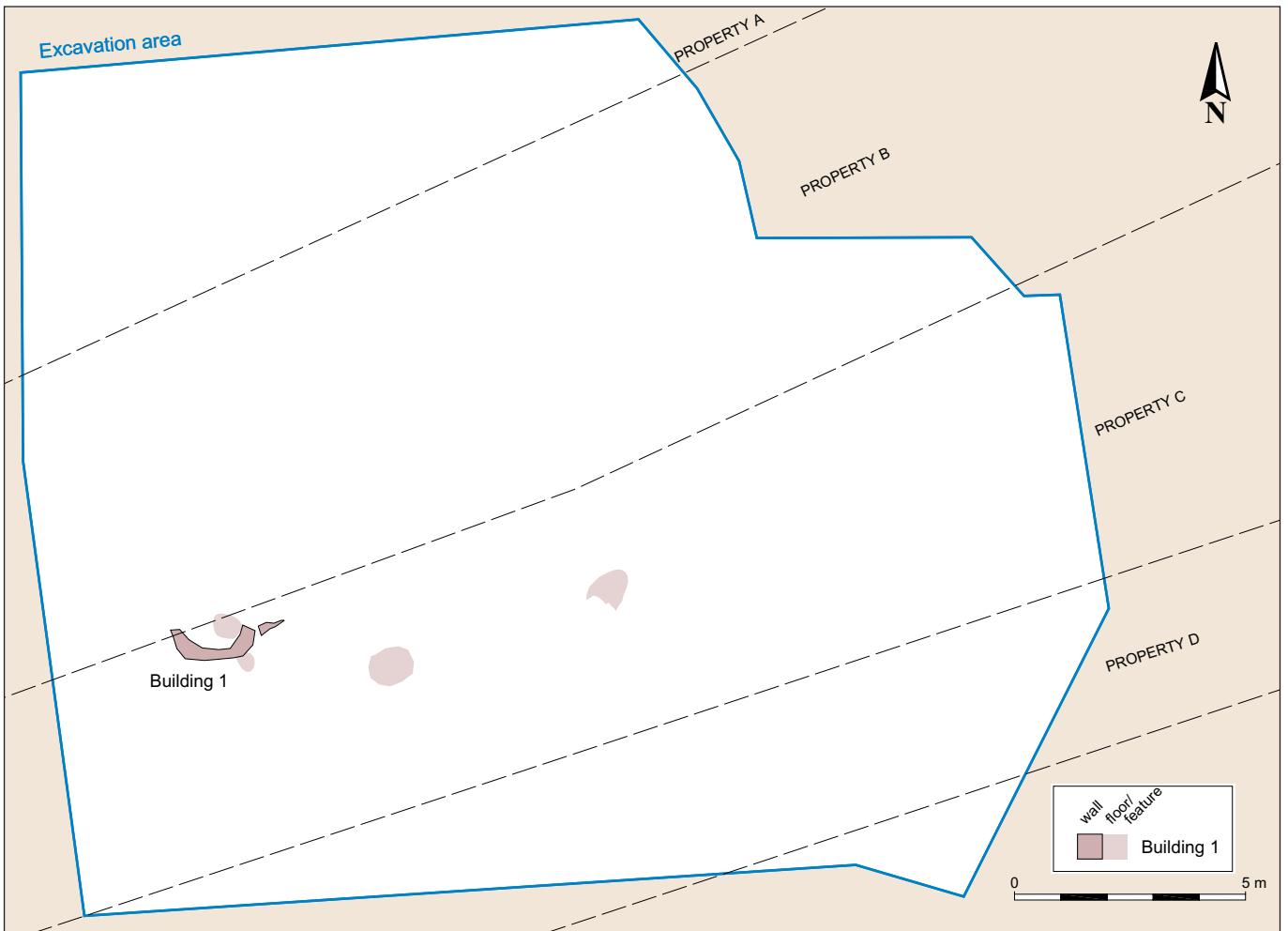
The site spanned four properties as identified from the early maps; these have been labelled as Properties A – D, running north to south, and these correspond to

Numbers 26 – 22 Cheap Street. Narrow access routes divided three of the properties – Gilbert Court between Properties A and B, and Falkland Place between Properties B and C. The initial phase of excavation covered the whole of the area exposed; further excavation then took place exclusively within Property C (No. 24 Cheap Street), and this is therefore where most of the archaeological deposits pre-dating the 19th/20th century were located.

The earliest structural remains on this site comprise a short length of mortar and flint walling, possibly originally circular or hexagonal in plan, towards the rear boundary of Property C (Building 1). The wall may be the footings of an outbuilding, and incorporated three sherds of 12th or 13th century coarseware pottery. Further pottery of a similar style and date came from an adjacent and probably associated pit, which yielded a number of sherds from a single jar. Following this phase of activity, the identification of a deep layer of an agricultural or garden soil layer across the site suggests that there may have been a period of perhaps two or three hundred years when there was no habitation of the site.



Reconstruction of Kennet Valley wares (jar, bowl and dish)



Medieval phase plan: Building 1 and pit 1305



Building 1, view from south

Early Post-medieval (*late 15th–18th century*)

The earliest documentary evidence for buildings on Cheap Street comes from the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), when a Chancery case was fought over a house in the street (TNA: PRO, C 2/Eliz/A7/30). According to a rental of Crown lands in 1609, 25 persons were paying rent for ‘intrusiones’ (e.g. ‘le shoppe’, ‘le porche’) in Cheap Street, usually of small size (VCHB iv, 138), and there are deeds surviving from properties on the west side

of Cheap Street from at least the beginning of the 17th century onwards (e.g. BRO D/ENm8/21 [1600]; D/ENm8/23/1–4 [1638–44]; D/EX 819/1/1 [1691]).

Some 17th and 18th century buildings survive along the eastern side of Cheap Street. For example, immediately opposite the site, No. 48 (Crowe’s House) is mid to late 17th century with an early Georgian front; while Nos. 49–50 are 17th century (one building had the date ‘AD 1637’ painted on the front), with an 18th or 19th century stucco front; all three properties had shop fronts added in the 19th century.

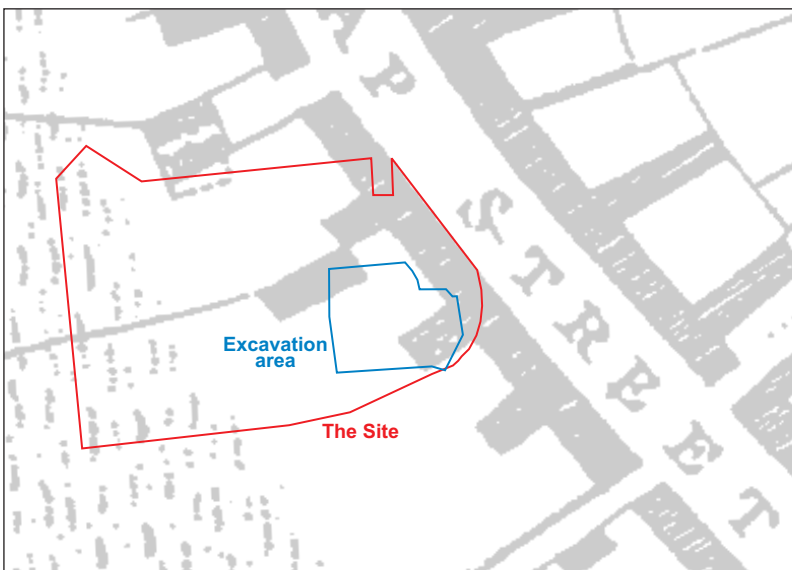
John Rocque’s map of Berkshire in 1761 and John Willis’s map of Newbury and its environs in 1768 (BRO PM 123) show that by the mid 18th century the Cheap Street frontage of the site was fully built up, as indeed was the entire length of the street from the Market Place southwards, with some outshot ranges projecting into the rear parts of the properties.

Between the 16th and the 18th century, the site is likely to have included several houses, fronting onto Cheap Street with long narrow burgage plots to their rear, containing yards and gardens, and it is likely that property boundaries established at this period (or earlier) survived into the modern period, reflected in the site subdivisions into Properties A–D. At this stage the east-west route of Market Street did not exist.

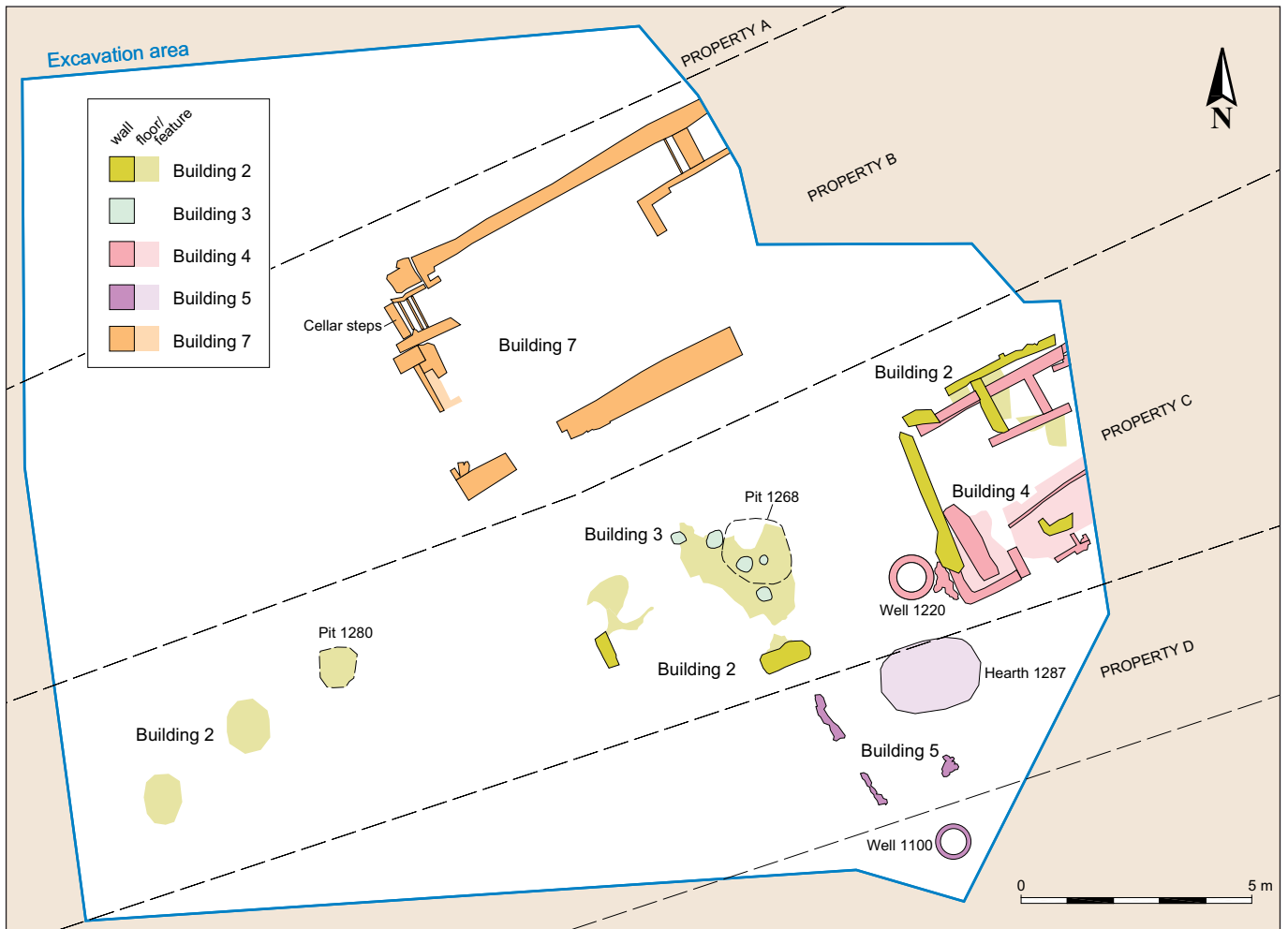
Within Property B, architectural details observed within the surviving building (No. 25) before its demolition in 1970, confirm an early post-medieval date; this is supported by anecdotal evidence. The building incorporated a two-storey red brick wing to the rear, in the western part of which was a room in which the Royalist Lord Falkland is reputed to have spent the night before the first Battle of Newbury in 1643; he was killed during the battle. Notes taken during demolition of No. 25 and the adjoining properties record that “the first floor room still retains its wood panelling: the corresponding ground floor room is now



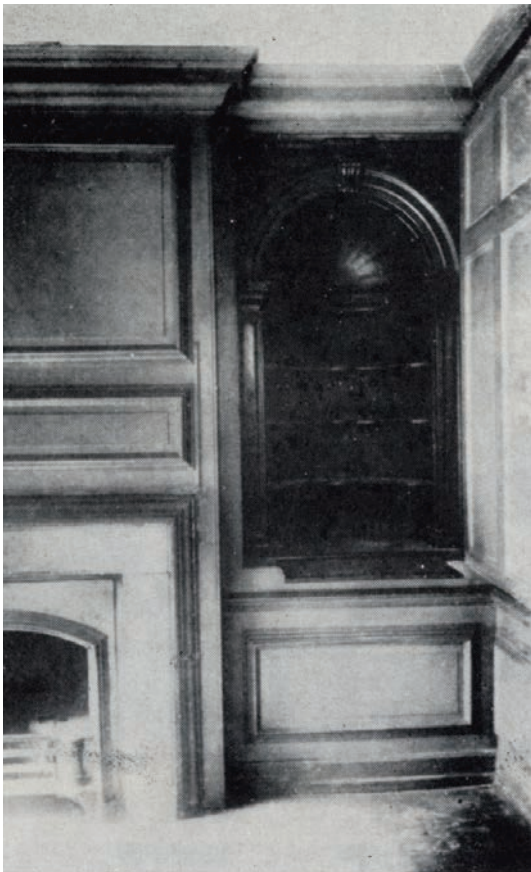
Detail of John Rocque's map (1761)



Detail of John Willis's map (1768)



Early post-medieval phase plan: Buildings 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7



View of No. 25 from south during demolition, showing brick wing

Detail of interior of No. 25: panelling, fireplace and cupboard



Pit 1280 from Building 2, view from north-west



Cellar steps of Building 7, view from north-west



Jetons

Jetons were reckoning counters used in medieval accounting and mathematical calculations. They were used in conjunction with checkerboards or cloths in order to record values and sums of money. Specialist tokens for this purpose were produced from the late 13th century onwards, and they were in widespread use from the 14th century until the late 17th century, when they were made redundant by the increasing spread of Arabic numerals. Nuremberg took over from Tournai as the main European centre for **jeton** manufacture in the 16th century. Prior to this, designs on **jetons** usually reflected those on contemporary coins, and **jetons** were often minted under government authority.



Property C, view from east

Pottery and other finds

The domestic refuse found within the rubbish pits in Property C tell us that the inhabitants had access to pottery and other goods from a wide range of sources, all readily available in a market town such as Newbury. Most of the pottery at this period came from the kilns on the Surrey/Hampshire border, including **Tudor Green wares (A)**, but there are also stonewares from London and Germany. The clay pipes (B) include one with the mark of Richard Sayer, who may have been working at East Woodhay in north Hampshire in the late 17th century. A fineware drinking vessel (C) of 16th or early 17th century date could have come from one of the glasshouses of northern England.



a store, which may have the rather fine panelling with arched alcoves shown in an old photo" (Coghlan unpub.). This rear wing corresponds to Building 7, which contained a cellar accessed by two sets of steps, one at either end of the wall adjacent to Gilbert Court. The steps at the north-west corner had been built over the top of a well, which was presumably fitted with a hand pump accessed via Gilbert Court; this is marked 'P' for pump on the 1880 OS map. Willis's map of 1768 shows no buildings to the rear of the street frontage in Property B, but it is possible that the rear extension shown in Property C/D can be identified with this building.

Three structural phases in Property C belong to this period. The first of these was a large building, or possibly more than one building (c. 12 metres by 4 metres in total), with internal divisions and associated floor surfaces (Building 2); to the rear of this were several rubbish pits. The foundations were variously formed of broken ceramic tiles, broken tile overlying flints, or just flints, in each case bound with clay, and presumably supporting a timber superstructure. The floor surface of Building 2 was later cut by a post-built structure (Building 3). Pottery and other finds from Building 2 suggest

a date range between the late 15th and 17th centuries.

Building 2 was superseded by the more complex construction of Building 4. It had foundations built of flint nodules and, as with Building 2, there were floor surfaces and internal divisions, although the room layouts are unclear. The backyard was filled with rubbish pits, including one that was over 1.4 metres deep and contained large quantities of pottery, animal bone and other domestic waste. Also found within the pit was a copper alloy jeton from Nuremberg, struck by Hanns Krauwinckel II, who was master at Nuremberg from 1586 until his death in 1625. Other finds from the pit have a broad potential date range of late 15th to early 18th century, apart from a single modern bottle, which may be intrusive here; the chronological mix suggests a series of deposits dumped within the pit from a separate source of refuse, perhaps a midden heap, rather than infilling over a lengthy period.

Flint and sandstone foundations in Property D (Building 5) were on the same alignment as Building 4 and may have been broadly contemporary; a sunken hearth lined with broken peg tiles was associated with this structure.



*Hearth 1287
from Building 5,
view from north*

Modern (19th/20th century)

The first main phase of coherent brick construction on the site has been dated to the early 19th century. By the time of the drafting of the 1839 Newbury Parish tithe map (BRO D/D1 89/1 & TNA: PRO, IR 30/2/95), there were buildings within Properties A, B, C and D, the layout of which corresponds to the archaeological evidence recorded. Building 6 within Property A (No. 26) belongs to this phase, and extensions and outbuildings were added

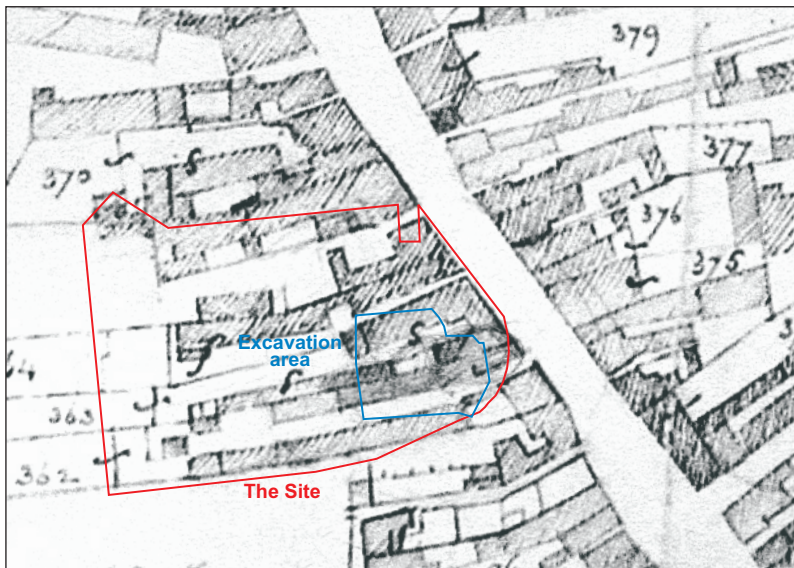
to the rear of the buildings in Properties B, C and D, including an underground vaulted chamber in Property C.

The 1839 tithe map and Davis's map of Newbury and Speenhamland in 1849 (BRO D/EX 295 P1) show the development of the back plots of the Cheap Street houses on the site with small cottages or tenements, including some access alleys later called Gilbert Court and Falkland Place. A brief review of the census returns suggests that these were occupied by working-class families.

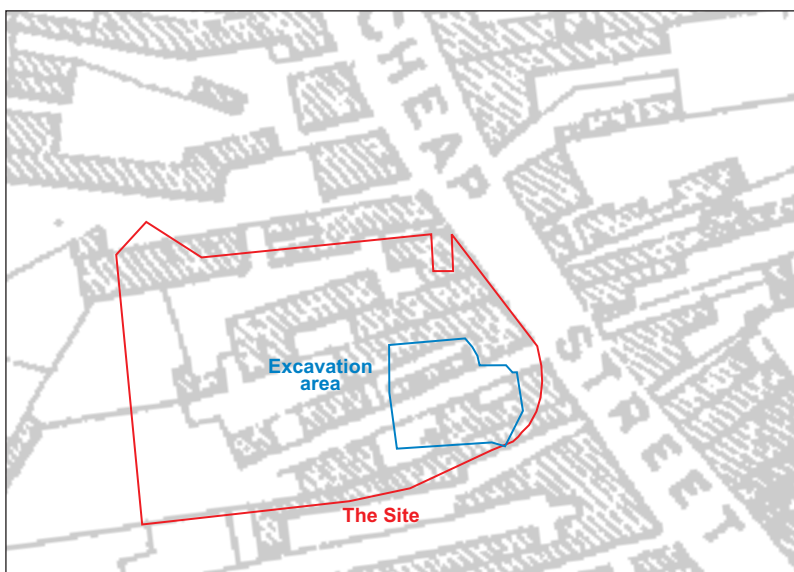
There appears to have been a boot and shoe maker living on part of the site in 1861 – in 1895 J. Walker, bootmaker, was occupying No. 24 (Property C), and Joseph Walker was still trading on the same property in 1933 (*Cosburn's Directory of Newbury and District*; *Kelly's Directory*). Offcuts of leather were found on the site of No. 24 (Building 4). The trade directories between the middle of the 19th century and the early 20th century show Cheap Street maintaining its character as a street of small shopkeepers – from bakers, grocers, corn dealers and milliners in 1844 to newsagents, confectioners, tobacconists and solicitors in 1915.

By 1830 there were five iron foundries in the town, including the Eagle Works founded in about 1790 by William Plenty to make agricultural implements. The works later diversified into making lifeboats and stationary steam engines, with a separate boiler works to the east of Cheap Street. Later in the 19th century the Eagle Ironworks occupied the north-west part of the site, while in the north-east part was a brewery (the Cheap Street or Diamond Brewery, which had closed by 1899).

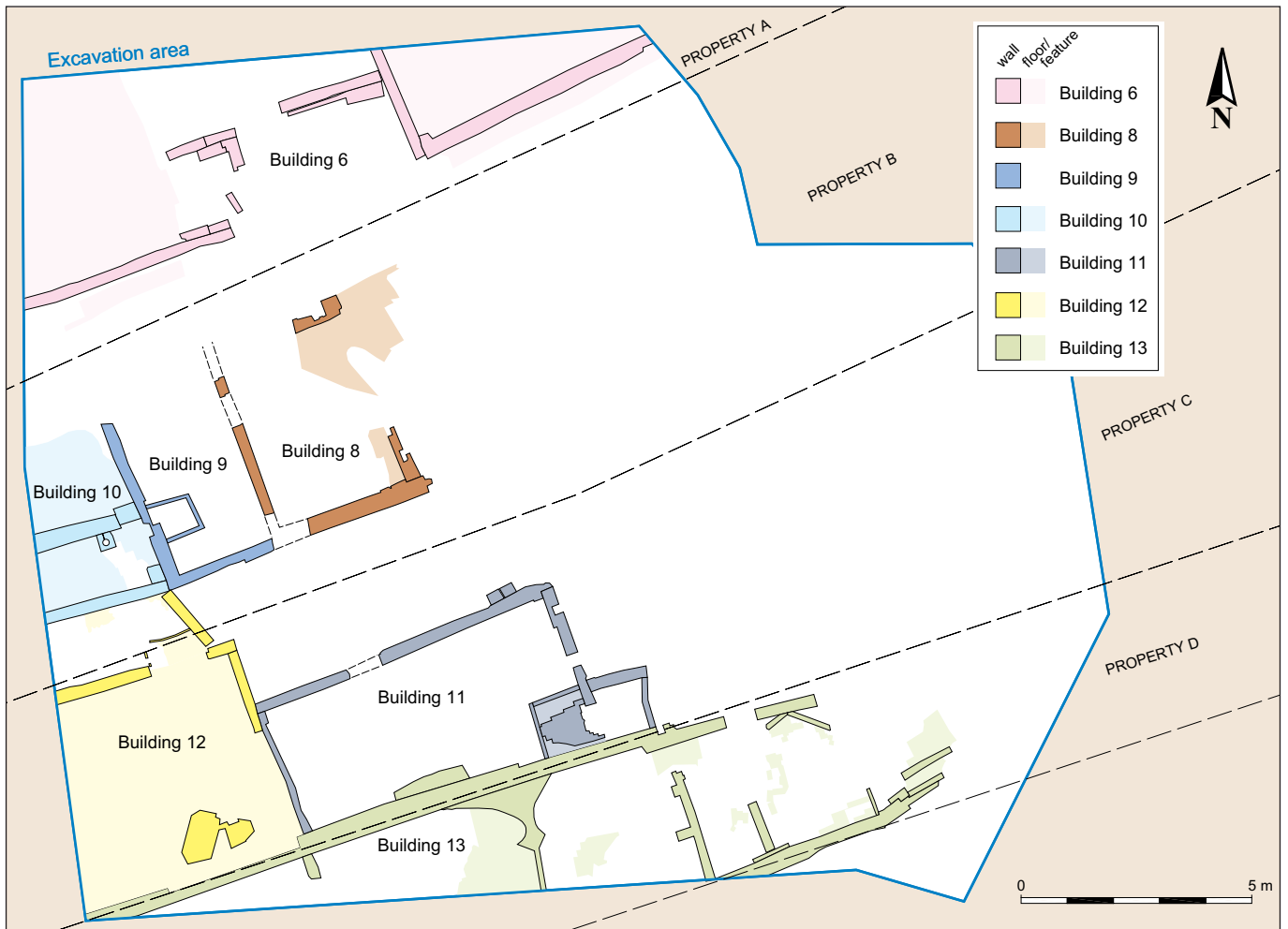
An extension of the Great Western Railway was built in 1847 across West and East Fields, with a station in the area to the south of the site. Market Street was laid out in the 1870s, partly along the pre-existing line of Mays or Mayors Lane, and was formerly called Newmarket Street and Cattle Market Street. The new street gave access to a new cattle market, which was built in 1873 on the site of the present bus



Detail of parish tithe map (1839)



Detail of Davis's map (1849)



Modern phase plan: Buildings 6, 8–13



Property D during evaluation, showing sub-divisions; Building 11 left, Building 13 centre and Building 5 (early post-medieval) right

Known occupants of No.s 21 to 26 during 19th century and early 20th century

Property	Street No.	1895	1915	1933
A	26	J. Johnson, confectioner	John Johnson, baker & grocer	Leonard H. Johnson, baker
B	25	J. Johnson, grocer		F.J. & C.E. Budd, dentists
C	24	J. Walker, bootmaker	Joseph Walker, bootmaker	Joseph Walker, bootmaker & dealer
D	23	<i>no evidence</i>	F. & J. Brown, tobacconists	<i>no evidence</i>
-	22	<i>no evidence</i>	James Brindley & Son, fishmongers	<i>no evidence</i>
-	21	James Dew, New Market Inn	George Edward Day, New Market Inn	Leonard Batting, New Market Inn



Cheap Street in the early 20th century

Shopping in Cheap Street

The trade directories published from the middle of the 19th century onwards list the inhabitants of Newbury by trade and by street, although it is only from the end of the 19th century that street numbers are given. Cheap Street clearly housed a variety of small shopkeepers and traders throughout this period; the lists below give a small selection to illustrate the changing character of the trade. A constant presence throughout was the inn (the New Inn, later the New Market Inn), and the Eagle Ironworks. There was a cinema at the northern end of the site in 1915.

1844

William Bailey, corn dealer
 William Garlick, butcher
 Richard Goddard, New Inn
 Joseph Newbery, beer retailer
 James & Edward Plenty, ironfounders and engineers (Eagle Foundry)
 Ellen & Charlotte Smith, milliners/dressmakers
 Sarah Westall, slopseller [ready-made clothes]

1876

R Bell & Co, drapers & general outfitters
 C Cooper, confectioner
 Robert Goddard, New Market Inn
 George Langton, boot and shoemaker
 Plenty & Son, Eagle Ironworks
 Josiah Rowles, dyer and fruiterer
 Mrs C Thomas, furniture broker

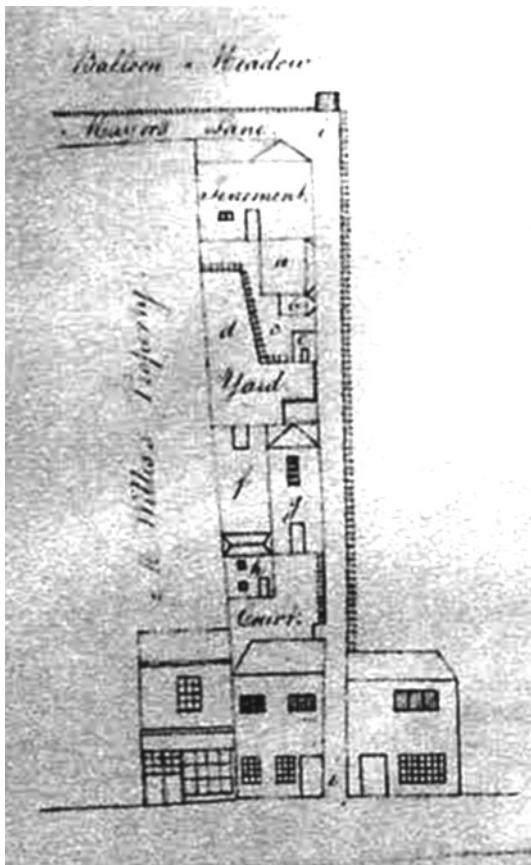
1915

Frank D Bazett, solicitor (No. 41)
 George Edward Day, New Market Inn (No. 21)
 Freeman, Hardy & Willis, boot and shoemakers (No. 43)
 Reuben Frank Jeffery, cycle agent (No. 66)
 Plenty & Son Ltd, engineers (No. 32)
 Charles Rogers, baker (No. 19)
 Mary Sanderson, hairdresser (No. 65)

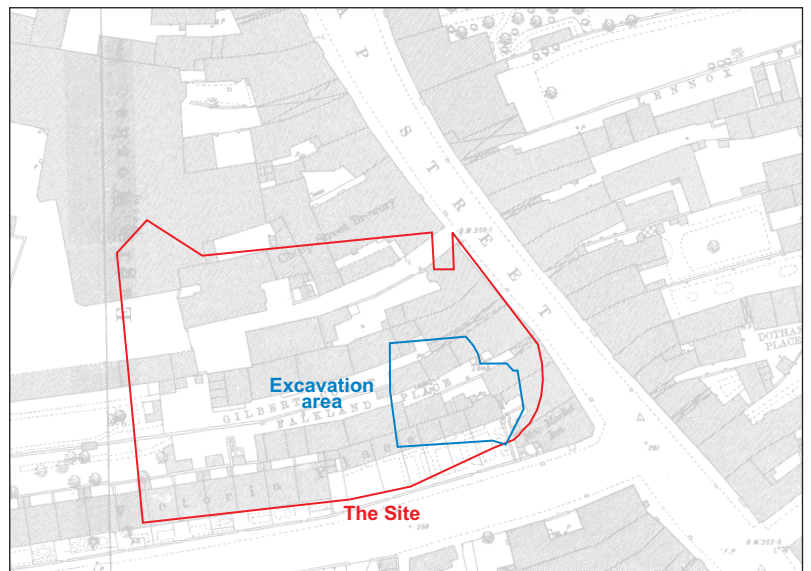
station. Rows of terraced houses and small cottages with gardens were built along the north side of Market Street, within the boundaries of the site, and named Victoria Place, probably after their builder. Property D was subdivided at this time to allow for the creation of these new properties, and there were changes to the existing building (Building 13, which is shown on the 1839 title map). The 1880 OS map shows that Building 13 was split up into five very small properties with front yards, although the rooms as excavated are tiny in dimension, around 4.7 by 2.2 metres, and seem more suited to use as workshops rather than domestic residences.

An inn had now been established on the north side of the Cheap Street/Market Street junction, on the south-east corner of the site. Formerly known as the Red Cow and the New Inn, and latterly as the New Market Inn, the site at No. 21 Cheap Street comprised two houses fronting Cheap Street, two back tenements, a yard and a well. This well was recorded just to the south of Property D, and was brick-built, with a 'beehive' profile.

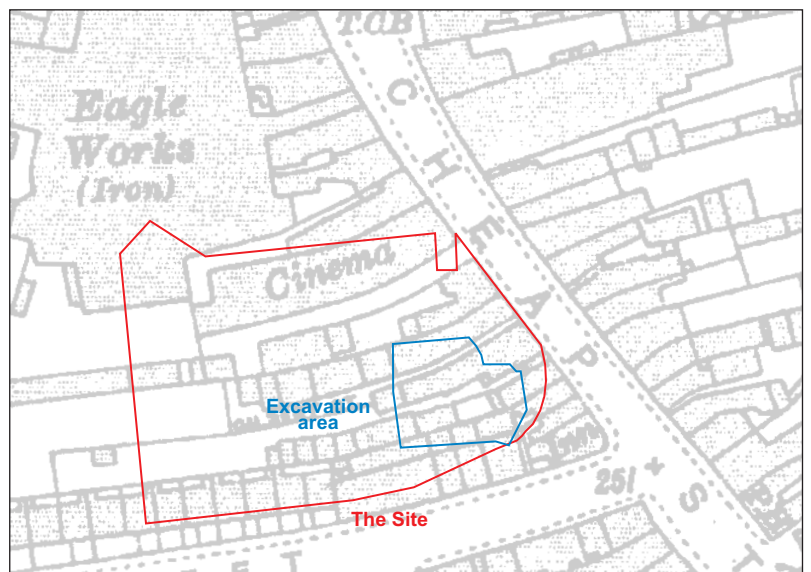
The east-west strip of land on the south corner of Cheap Street and Market Street, the opposite corner to the site, belonged to the St Bartholomew Hospital charity. The Coach and Horses public house fronted Cheap Street here. A measured plan and elevation of this site in 1839/40 gives an indication of the type of buildings likely to have been present on the site just to their north at this time. This property was sold by the municipal charities in 1921. It backed on to Balloon Mead to the rear, on the site of the later cattle market and bus station.



Detail of Elevation of 1839/4



Detail of Ordnance Survey map (1880)



Detail of Ordnance Survey map (1934)

The excavation on the site of the new cinema has shed some light on the development of the medieval and later town, although evidence dating prior to the post-medieval period is sparse. For the medieval period, the current site tends to confirm the picture suggested by previous excavations, that this part of the town represents a later addition to the original 11th century centre, and was probably used originally as agricultural land.

From at least the 16th century, we can see the development of properties fronting onto

Cheap Street, with long, narrow burgage plots to the rear; these can be seen on maps of the 1780s. The rear plots were increasingly used for the extension of the frontage buildings, and for outbuildings. By the 19th century, this was a largely working class area, supporting a number of small shopkeepers and traders, and the character of the street remained largely unchanged until demolition of the buildings at the southern end of the street, including those on the present site, in the 1970s.

Further Information

Abbreviations used in this report

BL	British Library
BRO	Berkshire Record Office, Reading
TNA: PRO	The National Archives, Kew (Public Record Office)
VCHB	Victoria County History of Berkshire

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Documents

- BRO D/ENm8/21, *Deed of messuage and garden on west side of Cheap Street 1600*
- BRO D/ENm8/23/1–4, *Leases of messuage on west side of Cheap Street etc 1638–1644*
- BRO D/EX 819/1/1, *Settlement of King's Head Inn on west side of Cheap Street 1691*
- TNA: PRO, C 2/Eliz/A7/30, *Edward Aprice versus John and Margaret Cordrey, case over a house in Cheap Street, Newbury*

Maps and views

- 17th century – small-scale map of Newbury and surroundings (BL Stowe MS 4456 f89)
- 18th century – views of Newbury from south (BL Additional MS 28676B ff 305, 306, 308)
- 1723 – map with Latin place-names by Stukeley (BL Additional MS 28676B f294)
- 1723 – A prospect of Newbury by Stukeley (BL K.TOP 7.36.1.a & Additional MS 28676B f300)
- 1761 – Map of Berkshire by John Rocque
- 1768 – Map of Newbury by John Willis (BRO PM 123)
- 19th century – views and plans of Newbury (BL Additional MS 28676B)
- 1839 – Tithe map of Newbury parish (BRO D/D1 89/1 & TNA: PRO, IR 30/2/95)
- 1839–40 – plans of Consolidated Municipal Charity property (BRO N/QA 12/1)
- 1849 – Map of Newbury and Speenhamland by Davis (BRO D/EX 295 P1)
- 1880 – OS map 1:2500 Berkshire sheet XLIII 1
- 1898 – OS map of Newbury from 1:2500 Berkshire sheet XLIII 1 (reprinted by Alan Godfrey Maps with introduction by Tony Higgott)

Useful websites

Berkshire Local History Association

www.blha.org.uk/cms/

(Website hosts various forums for discussion of aspects of Berkshire history)

Berkshire Record Office, Reading

www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk

Berkshire Record Society

www.berkshirerecordsociety.org.uk/

(Publishes scholarly editions of important documents on the history of Berkshire, held in the BRO and elsewhere)

Newbury Library

www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1505

Newbury.net

www.newbury.net

(Community website for Newbury, including section on history, and forum for old photographs of the town)

Trade Directories, Berkshire

www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/b1.asp

(Selected directories only available free on-line)

Victoria County History, Berkshire

www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue.aspx?gid=2

(The Borough of Newbury is included in Volume 4)



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