

**The Kings Arms, High Street,
Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for Mr John Jennison

by Sarah Coles

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code KAA00/60

May 2001

Summary

Site name: The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP7 0DJ.

Grid reference: SU 9566 9730

Site activity: Evaluation

Date and duration of project: 26th and 27th April 2001

Project manager: M John Saunders

Site supervisor: Sarah Coles

Site code: KAA00/60

Summary of results: Four post-medieval pits and one medieval pit were located.

Monuments identified: Five pits; four post-medieval and one medieval.

Location and reference of archive: The site archive is presently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR. It is anticipated that the archive will be deposited with Buckinghamshire County Museum Service in due course (Accn No. AYBCM: 2000.63), given that permission to deposit the finds is given by the landowner.

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Report checked by: Steve Ford 02/05/01 Melanie Hall-Torrance & Steve Preston 03/05/01
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by Sarah Coles

Report 00/60-3

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP7 0DJ (NGR SU 9566 9730) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Philip Tann of Herrington Associates, Rye House, 28 Easton Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 1NT, on behalf of their client, Mr John Jennison, The Kings Arms, Old Amersham. It comprises a third stage of a process to determine the presence/absence, extent, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains which may be affected by redevelopment of the area.

A planning application has been made to Chiltern District Council to refurbish and extend the property. As a consequence of the possibility of archaeological deposits being present on the site, which may be damaged or destroyed by groundworks, a programme of archaeological and building recording work has been requested by Mr A Kidd, Senior Archaeological Officer for Buckinghamshire County Archaeological Service. This had three components: an assessment of historic and cartographic sources (undertaken in November 2000; Saunders 2000); building investigation and recording (carried out in January 2001; Preston 2001); and field evaluation by means of trial trenching. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Notes, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990) and *Planning in the Historic Environment* (PPG15 1994). The field investigation was undertaken by Sarah Coles and Julian Newman on the 26th and 27th April 2001. The site code is KAA00/60.

Location, topography and geology

Old Amersham is within the valley bottom of the River Misbourne. The Kings Arms is situated on the south side of the High Street within a rectangular plot of land stretching back from the street front. The public house consists of a number of associated outbuildings, a paved area and rear garden, and a function room (the Harness Room). The central courtyard of the property, used as a car park, rises gently towards the grassed rear garden, which is at a higher level and accessed by three steps. The site lies on alluvium overlying hard white chalk with few flints (Upper Chalk) (BGS 1974) at a height of approximately 21m above Ordnance Datum.

Archaeological background

The archaeological and historical background of the site has been presented in the desktop study (Saunders 2000). In summary, Amersham was first documented in 1066 and granted the Royal right of market fair in 1200, with the market located along the high street. It is thought that the plot of land behind the Kings Arms was originally a burgage plot due to its rectangular shape. This theory is supported by cartographic evidence, e.g., the 1838 Tithe Map. The oldest part of the Kings Arms building dates to the 15th century, with later extensions in the 16th and 18th century. The building was first recorded as a public house in 1756 (Preston 2001).

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. These objectives were to be achieved by digging two 9m long trenches, positioned at right angles to each other to cover the footprint of the proposed development. The trenches were to be 1.2m to 1.6 m wide and dug, under continuous archaeological supervision, using a small tracked machine fitted with a toothless bucket. Where archaeological features were certainly or probably present the stripped areas were to be cleaned using the appropriate hand tools. Sufficient of the archaeological features or deposits exposed were to be excavated by hand to satisfy the aims of the brief. In addition, a single 1m x 1m test pit was dug, by hand, south-west of the garage, to the depth of the natural geology. The archaeological investigation was to be carried out in a manner that would not compromise the integrity of any archaeological features that might warrant preservation *in situ* or might better be excavated under conditions pertaining to full excavation. All spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Two trenches and one test pit were dug in the positions shown on Figure 3.

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

This trench was 8.3m long. The stratigraphy of the trench was uncomplicated; in summary it comprised a fine black turf/topsoil (50) overlying a mid-brown/grey subsoil (51, ?buried soil), which in turn overlay the natural geology – a yellow clayey gravel. The buried soil appears to have been buried in the 18th or 19th century, from the modern pottery that it contained.

Three features (pits 1–3) cut the natural geology. Both pits 1 and 2 clearly cut the buried soil layer (51) and pit 2 contained white china. They are, therefore, both clearly of late post-medieval date. Pit 3, however, was sealed beneath the buried soil and was only partially exposed within the trench. It was 1.1m deep, with a bowl-shaped profile. It contained a single fill (54) from which five sherds of medieval pottery were recovered. This pottery suggests a date for the feature in the 13th–14th centuries. The pit also contained a moderate collection of tile, and some animal bone and metal finds.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

This trench was 9.9m long. The stratigraphy in this trench was the same as that in Trench 1 and comprised topsoil (50) overlying a buried soil (51), above the natural geology. Two cut features (4, 5) were observed. One of these was a posthole (4) which lay beneath the buried soil (51). Despite being fully excavated, it failed to produce closely datable finds, although some of the brick/tile from it appears to be of late post-medieval date. Feature 5 was only partially exposed within the trench and may comprise a double posthole or a pit with several lobes. It produced pottery, glass, etc., and was cut through the buried soil (51). It is clearly of late post-medieval date.

Test pit 1

A test pit was dug to the north-east of Trench 1 to examine the stratigraphy in this location. The test pit was 1m square and revealed the same stratigraphy as the two main trenches, namely topsoil overlying a buried soil, above natural geology. No archaeological features were observed in this test pit.

Finds

Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The medieval pottery assemblage comprised six sherds with a total weight of 113g. All the material came from a single feature, pit 3 (54) in Trench 1. The wares are typical of the medieval pottery of Buckinghamshire and have been recorded using the coding system employed by the Milton Keynes Archaeological Unit (e.g., Mynard and Zeevat 1992; Zeevat *et al.* 1994).

Medieval Grey Sandy Ware (MK MS3), mid 11th – late 14th century. Five sherds, 65g

Brill/Boarstall Ware (MK MC9), c. AD 1200–?1600. One sherd, 48g

The group is most likely of 13th-century date.

Other pottery

Two large sherds of post-medieval stoneware and brown glazed post-medieval redware were recovered from the spoilheap of Trench 2.

Tile

Pit 3 contained a moderate volume of tile and c. 5kg was recovered from the excavated fill. The pieces recovered included peg tile.

Bone

A single short fragment of cattle-sized animal bone derived from Pit 3. This carried a possible butchery mark.

Metalwork

A complete iron nail was retrieved from pit 3 (54)

Struck flint by Steve Ford

A single struck flint was recovered from post-medieval pit 4 (55). It is not clear if this piece is of prehistoric date or is an accidental product of the use of flint nodules for walling in historic times.

Conclusion

The evaluation has only revealed a single deposit of archaeological significance, a pit of medieval date. The trenches have not revealed extensive or complex deposits, such as intercutting rubbish pits, or structural remains, such as walls and floors. Similarly, no great chronological depth to the deposits has been identified, with a single medieval pit as the earliest activity followed much later in time by pits and a posthole of late post-medieval date (19th century). The impression gained is that of light usage of this area to the rear of the property (in terms of below-ground deposition) in medieval and later times.

References

- BGS, 1974, *British Geological Survey*, 1:50000, Sheet 255, Drift Edition, Keyworth
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- PPG15, 1994, *Planning and the Historic Environment*, Department of the Environment Planning Policy and Guidance Note 15, HMSO
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- Saunders, J, 2000, The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire, an archaeological desk-based assessment, Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd, report 00/60, Reading
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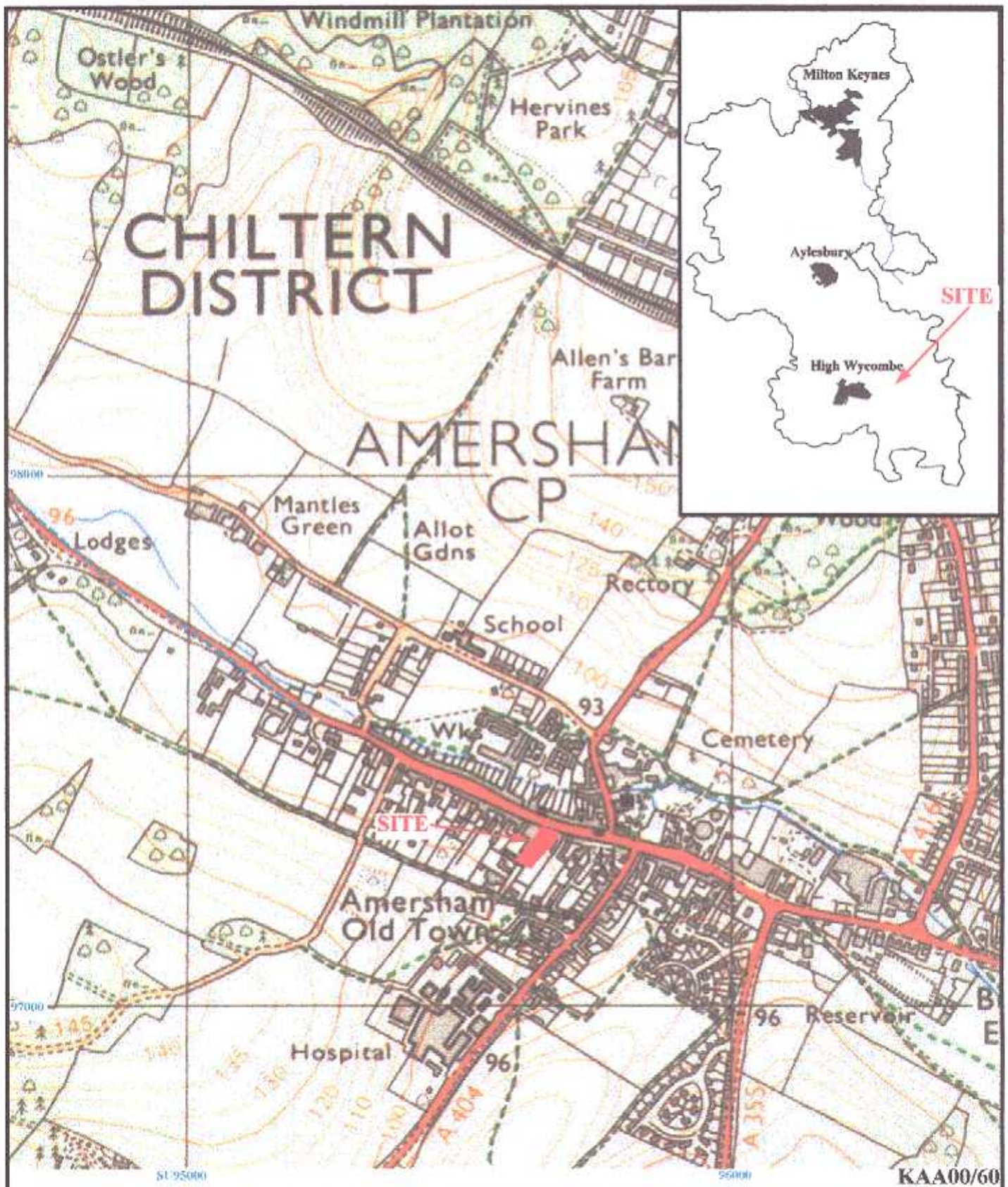
APPENDIX 1: Trench details

Om at south and west end

<i>Trench</i>	<i>Length (m)</i>	<i>Breadth (m)</i>	<i>Depth (m)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	8.30	1.40	0.55	0.30m of topsoil (50) over 0.25m of post-medieval buried soil (51) onto mid yellow clayey gravel (natural geology). Three pits were found in this trench (1-3) (Plate 1)
2	9.90	1.40	0.65 (W) 0.55 (E)	0.30m of topsoil over 0.10m of buried soil, onto mid yellow clayey gravel. Two pits were found (4 and 5) (Plate 2)
Test pit 1	1.00	1.00	0.45	0.30m of topsoil over 0.10m of post-medieval buried soil, onto mid yellow clayey gravel.

APPENDIX 2: Feature details

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Fill</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	52	1	Pit	Late post-medieval	Cuts buried soil 51
2	53	1	Pit	Late post-medieval	Cuts buried soil 51
3	54	1	Pit	Medieval, 13th century	
4	55	2	Posthole	Undated	Fully excavated, some brick/tile
5	56	2	Pit/double posthole	Late post-medieval	Cuts buried soil 51



The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham,
Buckinghamshire, 2000

Figure 1. Location of site within Old Amersham and Buckinghamshire.

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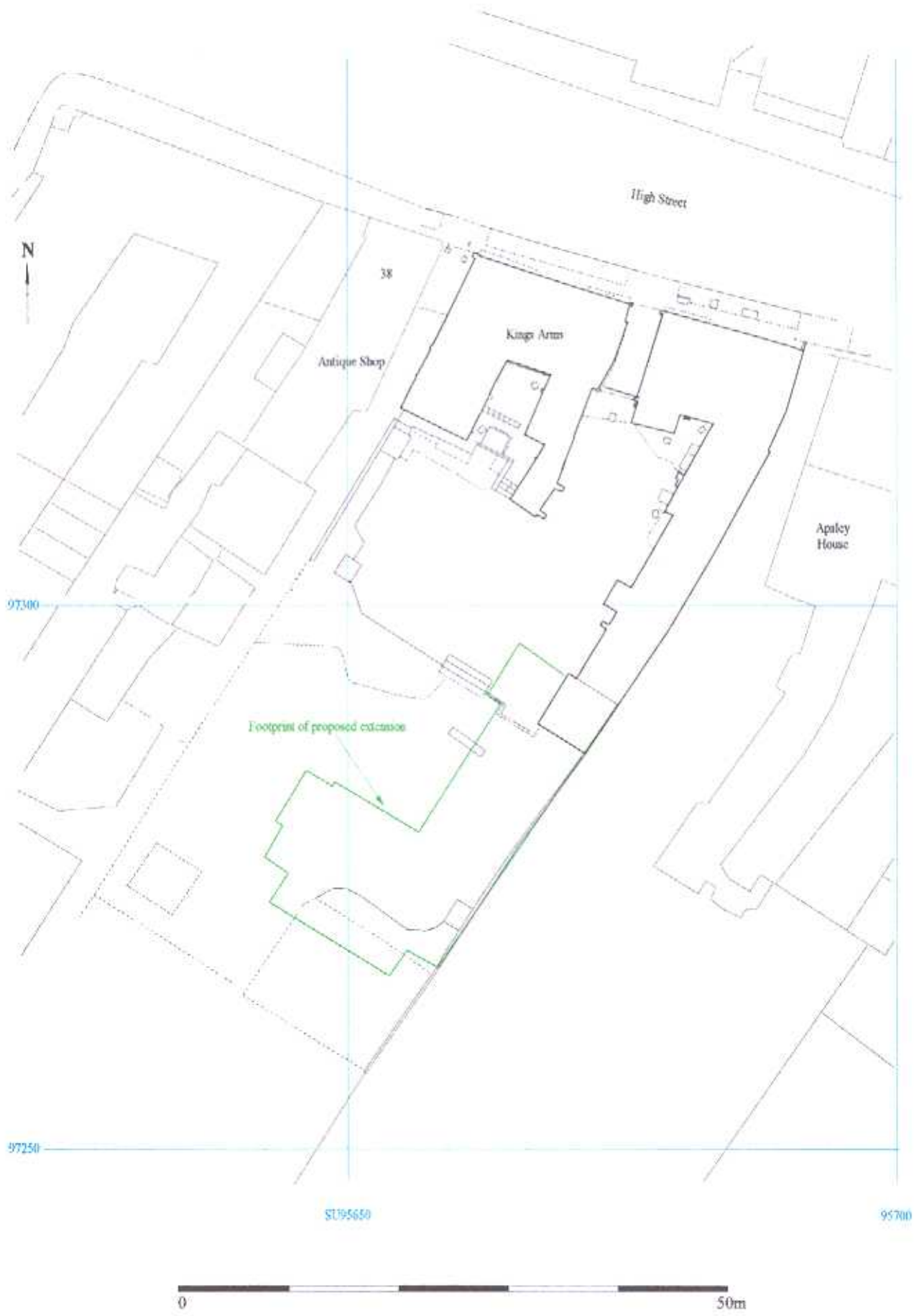


Figure 2. Location of site showing footprint of new building.

The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, 2001



Figure 3. Plan of trenches showing all investigated features.

The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, 2001

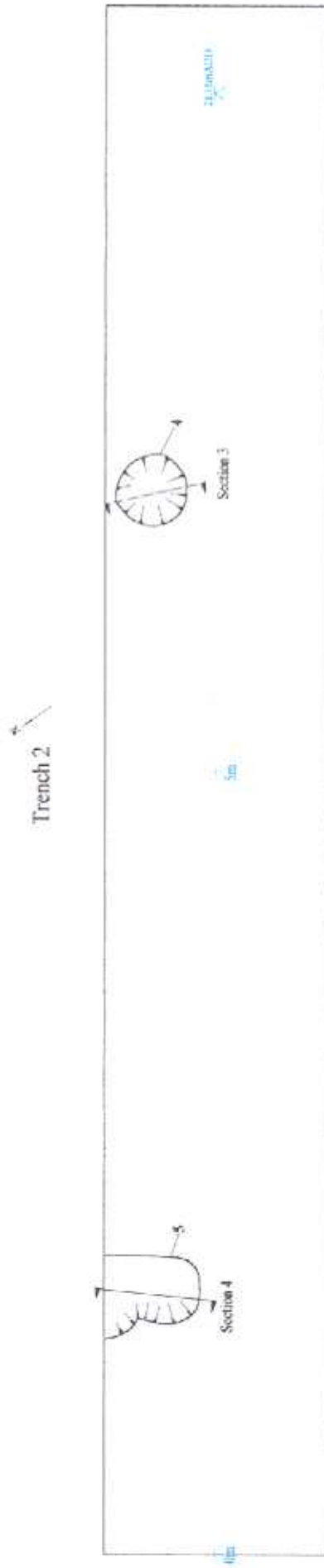
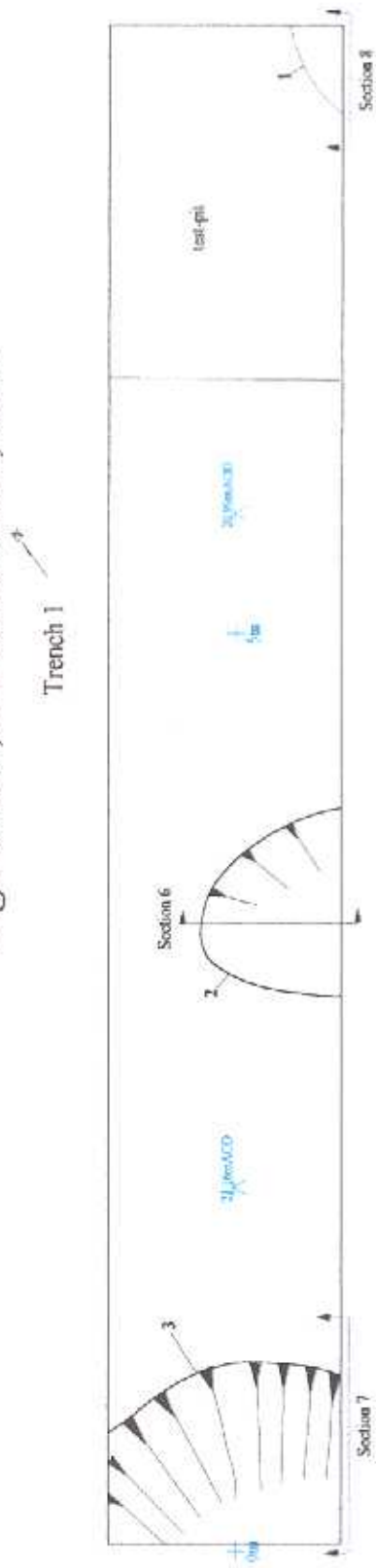


Figure 4. Plans of trenches 1 and 2 showing all investigated features.

The Kings Arms, High Street, Old Amersham, 2001

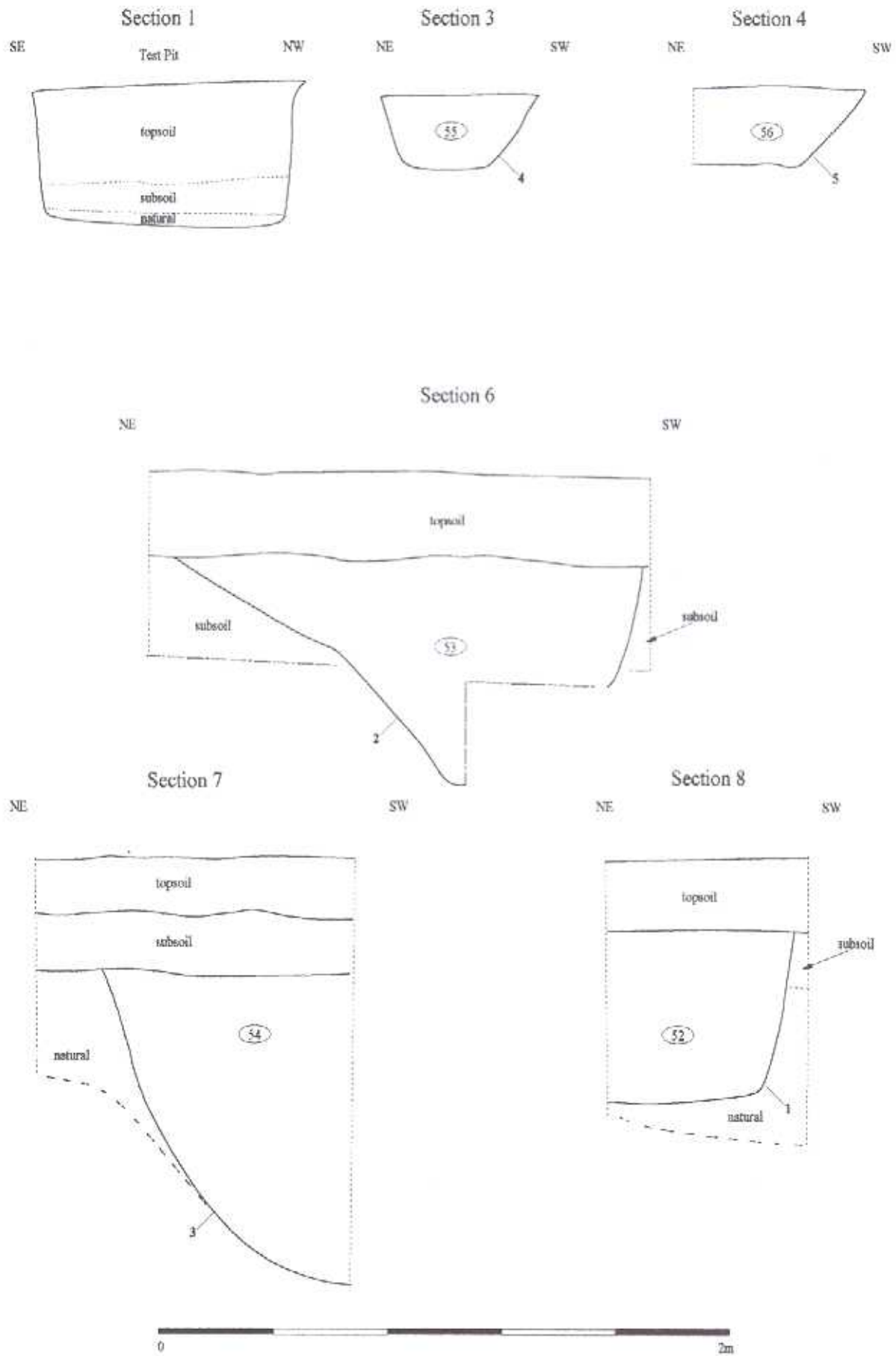


Figure 5. Selected sections.



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking north east, scales: 1m and 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 2 looking east, scales: 1m and 2m.