

THE HISTORY AND
ARCHAEOLOGY OF
CATHEDRAL SQUARE
PETERBOROUGH

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Cover: View of Cathedral Square in 2009, looking east from the tower of St John the Baptist,
towards the Cathedral Gateway

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1. Introduction

Background

Planning permission (Ref 08/1383/R3FUL) was obtained by Opportunity Peterborough to undertake improvement works in Cathedral Square, Peterborough as part of their Public Realm Proposals. The overall site covers approximately 0.8ha and is an open public square (centred at NGR TL 1910 9865; Figs 1.1 & 2.1). The centre piece of the development was the construction of a water feature composed of two triangular fountain arrays, to the east of the 17th-century Guildhall. The other major development was the demolition of the Corn Exchange and its replacement with the new St John's Square, incorporating a stepped grassed terrace to the west of the parish church of St John the Baptist. These works were undertaken by Osborne.

The programme included new stone pavements encompassing the areas of Cathedral Square, from the Cathedral Gateway in the east to Cowgate, Queen Street and St John's Square to the west. On the north side the development extended into Cumbergate and Exchange Street, and Church Street on the south side. The enclosed yard around the parish church of St John the Baptist was also opened up. The street improvement involved the removal of the current paving slabs, the diversion of telecommunication cables and other buried utilities, the excavation of new service trenches and drainage gullies, prior to the laying of new construction materials and paving.

A cultural heritage assessment of the site identified that the development could affect archaeological remains in the area (Finch and Jones 2008). Peterborough City Council Archaeology Service (PCCAS) requested a programme of archaeological evaluation comprising the excavation of a series of archaeological test trenches.

A specification was produced by CgMs Consulting based on the brief for the proposed evaluation (Ref 10358/08/02 October 2008) which was undertaken in two phases by Northamptonshire Archaeology between November 2008 (Burke 2008) and January 2009 (in this report), from which significant archaeological remains were identified, including medieval to post-medieval stone surfaces and stone buildings. This allowed PCCAS to make informed recommendations to the local planning authority regarding the nature of archaeological mitigation for the development of the proposed fountain array, for which a brief for archaeological investigation was produced.

The core of the archaeological excavation was carried out from March to May 2009 and was centred on the

trenches of the fountain array and related service trenches which were 1.0m to 1.9m below ground level. The overall development of the square was covered by a watching brief between July 2009 and August 2010, with general construction levels extending to 0.4m below current ground level. This was subject to modification in order to avoid disruption to utilities and service diversions, with deeper excavations for the new drainage and service trenches, to 2.0m deep.

The archaeological works conformed to the requirements of a specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA 2009) and based on the brief issued by the Peterborough City Archaeologist setting out the archaeological measures required to mitigate the impact of the development upon the archaeological resource (Robinson and Cassa-Hatton 2009).

Location and topography

The development area was centred on Cathedral Square, within the commercial centre of the city of Peterborough between the Cathedral Gateway to the east and Cowgate to the west, Church Street to the south and Exchange Street and Cumbergate to the north (Figs 1.1 and 1.2). It occupied an area of approximately 1ha, extending 200m east to west by 50m north to south. The street surfaces of the Square gently sloped down from Cowgate and Church Street in the west at 8.3m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) to the Cathedral Gateway at 7.7m aOD at the east end of the site. There was also a distinct rise in ground level from Church Street to the Queensgate entrance, Cumbergate and Exchange Street on the north of the development area at 8.8m aOD.

The Parish Church of St John the Baptist lies to the west of Cathedral Square and the Guildhall, with St John's Square (site of the former Norwich Union Building) to the west side. The north and south sides of the church are bounded by Exchange Street and Church Street respectively. The church was situated in a hollow, enclosed by a narrow, mostly level walled churchyard, set below the surrounding street level at 7.8m aOD. A clear differentiation in the street levels was visible with the churchyard 0.5m below Church Street, with at least a 1m drop from Exchange Street to the churchyard.

The underlying drift geology is believed to be river terrace deposits (sands and gravels) overlying Limestone Cornbrash based upon Oxford Clay and Kellaways Beds.

(<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>).

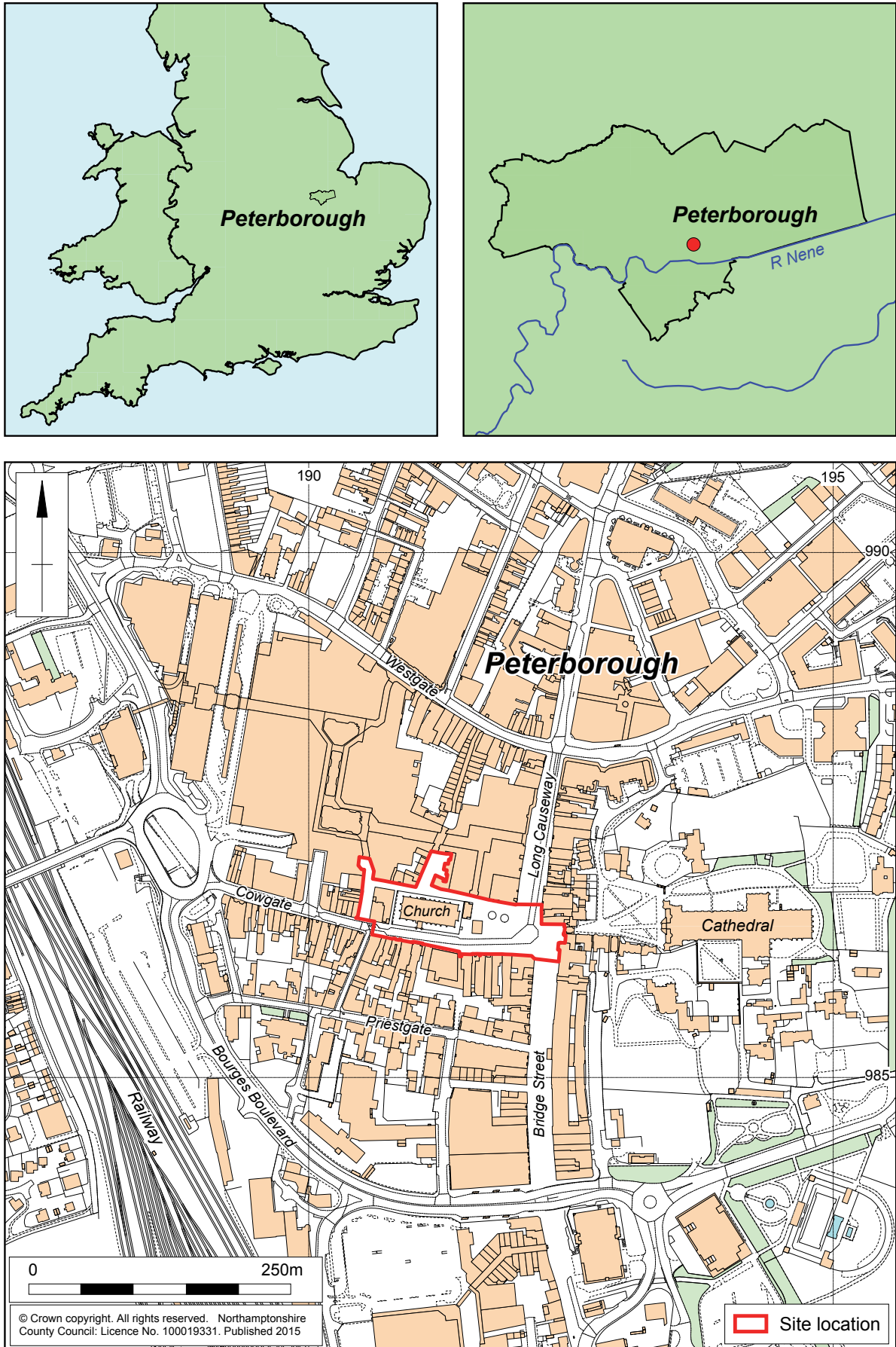


FIG 1.1: SITE LOCATION

Original objectives

The broad objectives were to provide detailed information regarding the date, character, extent and degree of preservation of all archaeological remains, and to define the sequence and character of activity at the site as reflected by the excavated remains; and to interpret the archaeology of the site within its local, regional, and national archaeological context.

The general investigative themes outlined by: *Research and Archaeology: A Framework for the Eastern Counties* (Glazebrook 1997; Brown & Glazebrook 2000), *Exploring Our Past* (English Heritage 1991), *English Heritage Archaeology Division Research Agenda* (1997) would also be considered.

Specifically, the investigative aims accommodated in the programme of archaeological work were to:

- Characterise and record the medieval and post-medieval market place, and street surfaces, including in-built features such as drainage gutters, decorative patterns, and partitions that relate to functional divisions;
- Analyse the construction techniques and materials used for the medieval and post-medieval market place, streets, and associated features;
- Identify record and analyse the buildings and structures that once occupied the market place. At various times covered crosses, whipping posts, moot halls, counting houses, bakeries and butchers' shambles have been noted in historic documents;
- Identify and characterise the activity that took place prior to the establishment of the formal market place;
- Characterise the pre-market place environment and an examination of the market place activities, and sanitation standards. Peterborough's regional market role was to be investigated through the analysis of palaeo-environmental evidence;
- Examine Peterborough's regional market role through analysis of artefacts.

Methodology

The purpose of the investigation was to provide a record of archaeological remains that could not be preserved *in situ* during the proposed development scheme. The investigation required pre-emptive excavation of the fountain array areas and targeted monitoring of construction groundwork by maintaining a watching brief during works in sensitive areas, and recording significant archaeological remains in detail where disturbance was unavoidable.

Works were undertaken with the close cooperation of the contractors, Osborne. The construction excavations

and works adhered to basic engineering requirements, but adapted to ground conditions, service locations, etc. encountered at the time of excavation. The approach to archaeological recording responded flexibly to such adaptations and targeted areas and deposits according to their vulnerability to damage and significance to the objectives. Where remains could be successfully preserved *in situ* through adaptations to construction design archaeological work was limited to noting the extent and character of preserved remains and monitored the phase of back-filling and consolidation.

The archaeological contractor liaised closely with the groundwork contractors in order to allocate recording effort efficiently and to avoid disruption to the construction schedule. Any exceptional finds or issues were brought to the attention of the Peterborough City Council Project Supervisor and Site Supervisor. The City Archaeologist was available to assist in field decisions about the necessary level of recording and preservation options.

The work was carried out in accordance to the Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IfA 2008, 2009 and 2010) and standards for both excavation and watching brief and finds work (IfA 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Recording followed standard Northamptonshire Archaeology procedures (NA 2006). An Updated Project Design was produced in 2012 to inform the final report (Morris and Yates 2012).

Fountain area excavation

The development included the construction of a fountain array comprising two triangular areas of 15 and 10 fountain risers, respectively. The fountain array is in Cathedral Square immediately east of the Old Guildhall and is fed by pipes from an underground pump room which was built in the disused public toilets north-west of the Old Guildhall (Fig 1.2).

The two triangular areas which encompassed the array of fountain risers, of 140m² and 115m², were excavated to 0.75m to 1.2m below ground level and were surrounded by a circuit of pipe trenches 1m to 2m wide and between 0.9m and 1.5m deep. The pipe trenches to feed the risers were excavated to 0.9m deep in corridors 0.70m wide. The fountain array was fed by a pipe trench c.20m long by 3m wide and 1.5m to 1.7m deep.

Detailed watching brief

The construction works comprised the removal of the current paving slabs, the diversion of telecommunications cables and other buried utilities, the excavation of drainage channels and gullies, and the deposition of construction materials and new paving. The works took in the whole of Cathedral Square, St John's Square, Church Street, Exchange Street and Cumbergate (Fig 1. 2).

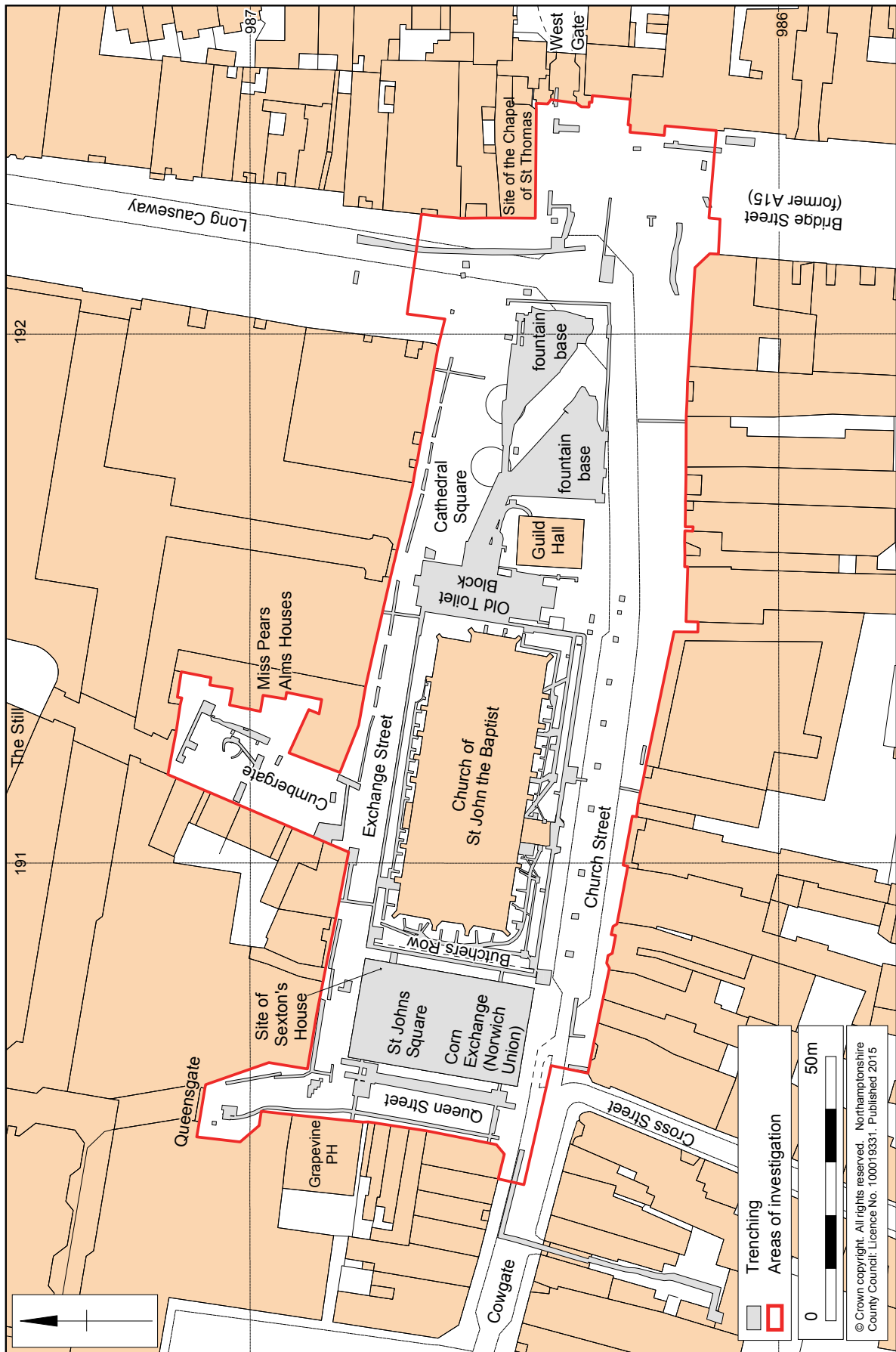


FIG 1.2: DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The construction excavations extended to about 0.40m below current ground level, but this was modified to lesser depths where necessary and feasible in order to preserve archaeological remains and to avoid disruption to utilities. The diversion and lowering of services and consolidation of soft spots required excavations of varying extents below the general 0.40m construction depth.

The first phase of works involved the excavation of two main drainage channels 0.75m wide, along Church Street

and Exchange Street. These were excavated to 1.0m and 2.0m below ground level. They are fed by smaller shallower gullies at 20m intervals. Approximately twenty holes 1.5m square and up to 2m deep were required for inspection chambers. The second element of the scheme was the construction of a pavement circuit 3m wide, around the perimeter of the entire central public realm area and the diversion of shallow services in this area. Deeper service exposure and diversion for the gas main was required at the east end of Cathedral Square, to the west of the Great Gate.