Observation of works at Fish Hill Square, Royston, Hertfordshire, 2011

Keith J Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Siân U O'Neill

North Hertfordshire District Council

Museums Service

Archaeological Report 37

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Introduction

This report deals with a small scale watching brief carried out during enhancements by the local authority, North Hertfordshire District Council, to Fish Hill Square, in the heart of the historic market town of Royston (Figure 1). Lying at the bottom of a slope, drainage has long been a problem in this area, with heavy rain occasionally causing flooding to the properties on the north side of the square. As part of the redevelopment, it was therefore proposed to install an attenuation tank beneath the square to collect storm water and manage its drainage more efficiently during wet weather. The installation of the tank would necessarily involve the excavation of a deep pit to hold it, which would require archaeological monitoring, given its location in one of the town's two medieval market places.

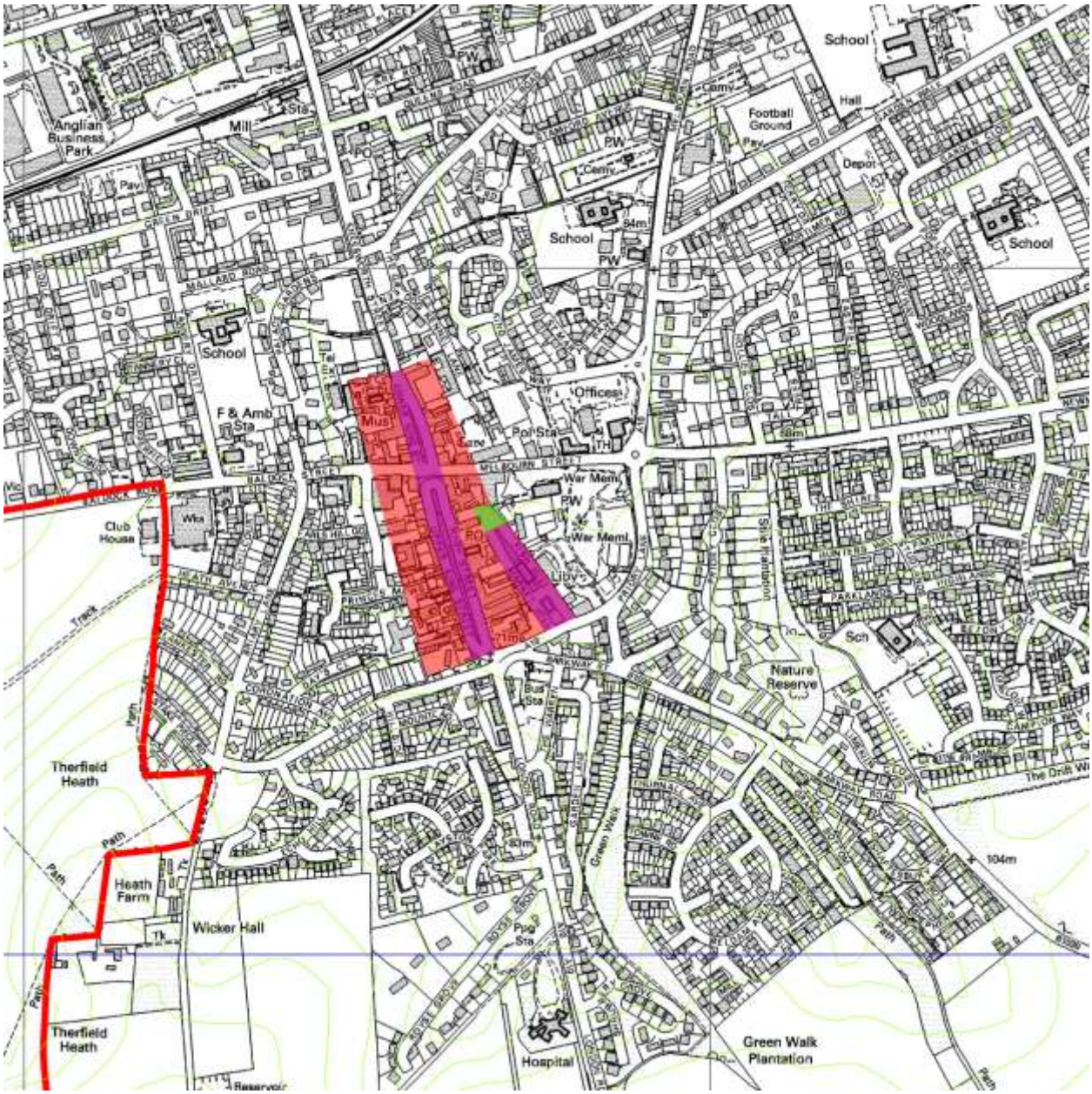

Figure 1: Central Royston (1:10,000)
The extent of the late medieval town is highlighted in pale red, the medieval market places in purple and Fish Hill Square in green.

Royston

Royston is a settlement first recorded in 1163×84 as *Crux Roys*; the earliest recorded use of the present form of the name dates from 1286, when it was written *Roiston* (Gover *et al*. 1938, 162). The parish church of St John the Baptist is the oldest surviving building in the town and parts of it date from the thirteenth century. Other notable sites and finds include the site of a medieval hospital in Baldock Street, the site of a medieval cemetery in Briary Lane, a seventeenth century royal hunting lodge in Kneesworth Street and Royston Cave, an artificial cavern decorated with numerous carvings, dating to the medieval period. The Cave is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The site lies to the south-east of the crossroads that formed the focus of the historic town of Royston. It is at the northern end of Fish Hill, a street that ran along the western boundary of the town's Augustinian Priory, founded in the 1170s or 80s by Eustace de Merc (Kingston 1906, 12). A petition to move the western wall of the precinct in 1224 probably dates the present alignment of the street and highlights its former presumed importance as a through route (Plowman 2008, 175).

The town's principal medieval market, which was established in 1189, lay along High Street and Kneesworth Street, to the west of Fish Hill. Almost parallel with Fish Hill, but converging with it towards the north, is Market Hill, which appears to have been part of a secondary market area, perhaps for livestock. The two roads now meet at Fish Hill Square, a name that had originally been used informally and was adopted officially as part of the present development, although the demolition of buildings between the two streets (a row of tenement cottages to the north, fronting Market Hill, and the Jubilee Fire Station to the south, fronting John Street) occurred in 1960. The effect has been to create an open area in front of the former Court House (now Old Court House, Dish Restaurant), built in 1849 on the site of a tinker's shop, behind which stood a "farm homestead" (Kingston 1906, 202).

Geology

Royston lies on the Upper Cretaceous deposits of the Middle Chalk, a rock that consists mainly of white chalk, with no distinctive units other than Melbourn Rock, which occurs at its base (Catt 1978a, 28-9; Hopson *et al.* 1996, 43). It is of Turonian date (between about 90,500,000 and 89,000,000 years ago) and formed from the bodies of microscopic marine creatures that lived during a period when southern Britain lay beneath a shallow tropical sea, known as the Tethys Sea; at the time, Royston lay at a latitude of around 35° north (the present latitude of Algeria, Tunisia, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and so on). South of Royston, the chalk is between 95 m and 100 m thick; there is a large exposure of the rock in the bypass cutting to the east of the town (Hopson *et al.* 1996, 43). It has not been possible to subdivide the rock into distinct units other than Melbourn Rock at its base, although the lowest 10 metres above the Melbourn Rock consists of rock characterised by large numbers of fossil shells, above which are some 75 to 85 m of chalk with sparser fossils, with occasional thin layers of marl.

Beginning about 60 million years ago, the chalk underwent uplift, producing an eastward regional trend of about one degree, raising it above sea level and resulting in a period of erosion in the Late Palaeocene (58.7-55.8 million years ago). A marine transgression during the Early Eocene Ypresian stage (55.8-48.6 million years ago) then levelled out the surface of the chalk and a subsequent transgression during the Late Eocene (37.2-33.9 million years ago) laid down the London Beds, which consist of a thick dark grey clay up to 90 m thick. These were then largely removed during a further period of erosion, which once again exposed the chalk surface throughout most of North Hertfordshire, leaving only isolated pockets and bands of clay on the southern and eastern slopes of the Chilterns.

The Reed Marl, only 0.10 m thick, outcrops at the top of the hill and is exposed in a pit at Royston School (Hopson *et al*. 1996, 51), while at the bottom, there are outcrops of Melbourn Rock. Both are regarded as formations within the Middle Chalk. Melbourn Rock is its basal bed and is distinguished from it by its hardness, and off-white colour and blocky nature; it is characterised by a lack of fossils. Although hard, it is not a good building stone, its use restricted to rubble blocks between shaped quoins, for which it was occasionally quarried (Hopson *et al*. 1996, 121).

Chalk has been used in the production of clunch, a building material formed by mixing chalk slurry, clay and straw, whose durability was limited and depended on keeping the material dry by plastering and roofing (Wilmore *et al*. 1925, 13; Hopson *et al*. 1996, 120). A similar material, cob, was also produced in the Middle Ages and early post-medieval period, using clays mixed with chalk and straw (Pevsner & Cherry 1977, 417); it is likely that a similar material was used during the Roman period. This suffers from the same limitations as clunch. Use of clunch and cob ceased in the nineteenth century as brick became more widely available. The use of chalk rock was generally restricted to infill between more durable materials.

The chalk is also a source of flint, particularly in its upper layers, which occurs locally both as nodules and as tabular flint. It was also used as a building material in churches during the Middle Ages, although it is not now exploited; it was widely used in prehistory for tool manufacture and shafts found at Blackhorse Road in Letchworth Garden City may have been dug as flint mines (Moss-Eccardt 1988, 47). Chalk has also been used in the production of cement, plaster and mortar, especially the marly deposits from the Lower Chalk, as they are highly silicaceous and contain alumina, requiring only minimal additions of clay. Uses of the lime produced from roasting chalk have included building materials, as fertiliser and as whiting powder, for which the Middle Chalk is particularly suitable (Wilmore *et al*. 1925, 13).

The chalk is an important aquifer containing generally potable – albeit extremely hard – water with dissolved calcium bicarbonate (Hopson *et al*. 1996, 129). It varies seasonally, with a maximum around March and a variation of up to eight metres recorded at Kimpton between 1964 and 1989. As an aquifer, it is extremely susceptible to periods of drought.

Superficial geology, soils and land use potential (Figure 2)

The oldest surviving glacial deposit is the Chalky Boulder Clay, which overlies the Middle Chalk, from which it derives its principal erratic; it is also a source of flint (Catt 1978a, 32). The subarctic periglacial conditions of much of the later Pleistocene caused considerable heaving of the chalk, with seasonal flushes of meltwater creating solution features known as dolines, which can range from a few millimetres across to fifty metres in diameter (Hopson *et al.* 1996, 124). Solifluction resulted in the redistribution of slope deposits and was perhaps the source of gravel fans. There is also a little löss (loess), sometimes incorporated into solifluction deposits, but also occasionally overlying the chalky boulder clay (Catt 1978a, 34).

These basic deposits were the source of the soils that formed in the late and post-glacial periods. Changes in the climate and natural vegetation together with human induced alterations have led to constant development of the soils. Most of those based on the Middle Chalk belong to the rendzina (or rendsina) and pelosol types, although there are also pockets of leached argillic brown earths and alluvial soils. Royston is dominated by rendzina soils, with areas of brown calcareous pelosols to the west and south.

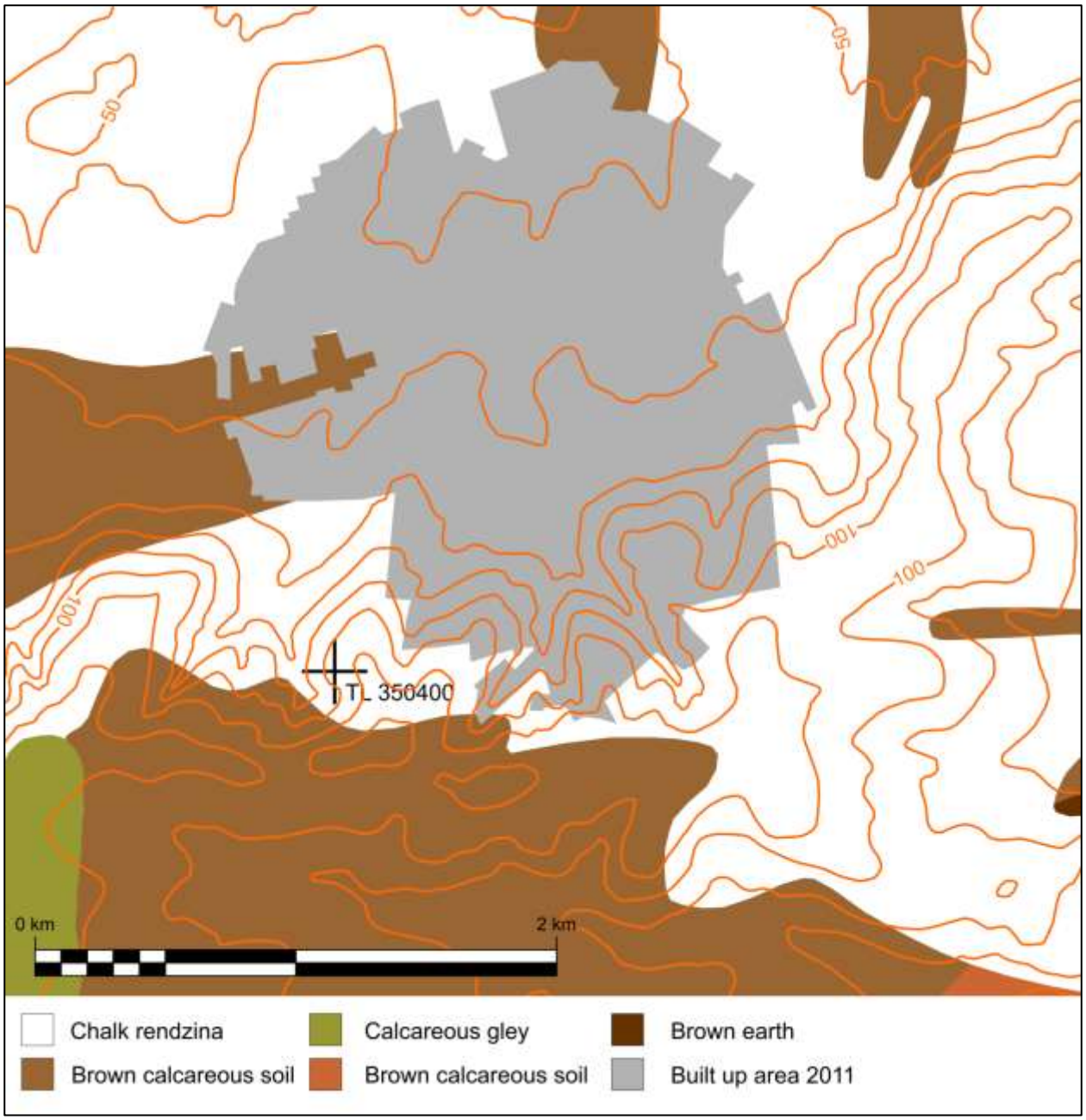

Figure 2: soils (1:25,000)

Rendzinas are generally shallow (less than 0.25 m in depth) and tend to occur directly above the Middle Chalk (Davis *et al.* 1992); their high pH value is a result of calcium saturation from dissolved chalk (Catt 1978b, 36). One – Mull rendzina – has developed from the vegetation that first colonised the exposed chalk, whereby the decay of organic material is comminuted by soil fauna and stabilises into a light, crumbly dark brown or black soil (Cornwall 1958, 92). The second type developed over thin deposits of löss and is characterised by a silty texture and a more greyish-brown colour. The pre-cultivation vegetation of these soils would perhaps have been beech woodland in areas where they were relatively deep and moist, and lime tolerant shrub and grass species in drier areas. Such soils may have been attractive to early farmers because of their ease of cultivation and high initial fertility; indeed, those of the first type can only be shallow ploughed, as deep ploughing incorporates shattered chalk bedrock. However, they are easily depleted of potassium, a number of other trace elements and organic content, and they are rapidly parched in drought conditions. This can lead to a loss of soil structure, deflation and

erosion by wind or water. Limbrey (1975, 180) has suggested that the present thinness of rendzinas is in part a result of their over-exploitation by early farmers.

Calcareous pelosols occur in pockets and are the principal soil type to the south of the rendzina types, where they formed on the chalky boulder clay glacial tills south of the town, where they occur as a calcareous brown forest soil (or brown calcareous earth) characterised by a heavy clay to clay loam texture (Cornwall 1958, 105). Their high pH content is derived from the frequent chalk erratics in the till (Catt 1978b, 36). These soils are generally deeper than the rendzinas and their clay content ensures a better retention of moisture and nutrients. Because of this, they are more suitable than the rendzinas for long-term cultivation and are the most favoured soil type for arable (Davis *et al*. 1992, 41). However, they are harder to work than rendzinas, as a greater input of labour is necessary to prepare them for first cultivation and to maintain their fertility. In areas where drainage is poor, though, they can have a tendency to wetness.

Like many areas of early agriculture, the Royston area has easily worked soils, mostly suitable for long-term exploitation. There is certainly no difficulty in producing surpluses of basic crops using prehistoric type techniques on these soil types and the surrounding hills are ideal for sheep and other pastoral

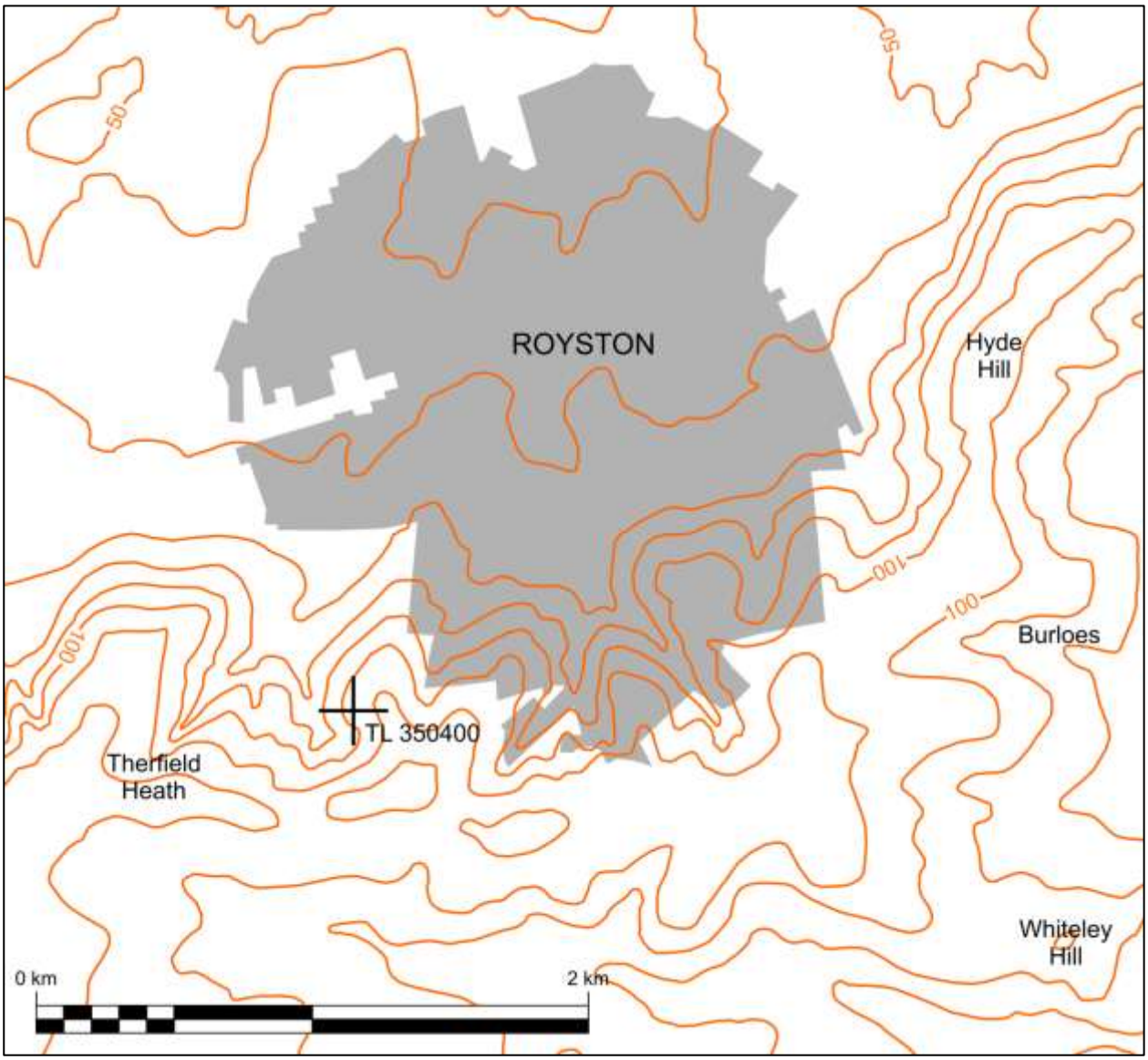

Figure 3: topography (1:25,000)

farming. It is no coincidence that Domesday Book (Morris 1976) shows this area to have been densely settled, intensively farmed and wealthy in the later eleventh century.

Topography

The town lies in a slight embayment at the foot of the hills that form the north-easternmost extension of the Chiltern Hills (Figure 3). The underlying geology affected the formation of the landscape during the Pleistocene glaciations, with harder rocks (such as the Melbourn Rock at the base of the Middle Chalk) creating shelves in the escarpment (Doubleday 1951, 16). Royston sits on one of these shelves near the base of the slope. Above these shelves, the scarp tends to be concave, whilst the plateau, on the Upper Chalk, has given rise to a rolling character on the gentle dip slope. Successive glaciations rounded off the valleys and these were followed by renewed down-cutting. The clay capping of the plateau creates a run-off for ground water, with the effect that almost every valley in North Hertfordshire contains a stream, although those around Royston are all dry; it is unclear if they carried streams in the past.

To the south-east of the town, the hills reach an elevation of 116 m above sea level on the B 1039 Barkway road and over 120 m on Therfield Heath, to the south-east of the town. To the east of the town, a narrow ridge rising to over 100 m above sea level at Hyde Hill extends north main line of hills northwards and creates the slight embayment in which the town developed.

The A 10 (the former Roman Ermine Street, the main road between London and York until the middle of the eighteenth century) enters the town from the south via a dry valley, while another carries the B 1039 from Barkway. The Icknield Way (followed by the A 505 through the centre of Royston until the late 1970s, when the northerly bypass was built) runs along the foot of the scarp, until climbing the ridge at Hyde Hill to the east of the town.

Most of the historic core lies on relatively flat ground between the 60 and 70 m contours. The land rises to the south and most of the medieval thoroughfares on the Hertfordshire side of the town run against the contours, uphill away from Icknield Way, which was the only historic road to run along more or less level ground.

Archaeological Data

Although Sir Henry Chauncy (1700, 1) says of Hertfordshire that *"there is scarce one County in England that can shew more footsteps of antiquity*", the statement is hyperbolic and was no doubt written to please the elite dedicatees and readers of his work. Similar statements can be found in the early histories of virtually every county, inspired in part by the rise of a new landowning class whose position depended more on wealth than on ancestry but who were keen to stress the legal ties of their current possessions to a more ancient and aristocratic past. Nevertheless, the first historian of the county was well aware of the county's ancient landscapes and monuments. Royston in particular is located within an area rich in archaeology and has been described as having one of the most important prehistoric landscapes in southern England.

During the nineteenth century, Royston and its surrounding countryside were the focus of considerable antiquarian activity (Stevenson 1981a, 39). In 1821, Reverend Dr William Webb (1775-1856), Master of Clare College, Cambridge and Vicar of Litlington from 1816 until his death, discovered and excavated a Roman cemetery in a field known as Heaven's Walls at Litlington. His publication of the discoveries was illustrated with watercolours by his wife, showing the groups of finds from each grave pit in detail. Richard Cornwallis Neville (1820-1861), the fourth Baron Braybrooke, excavated a number of barrows at

Five Hill Field in the parish of Melbourn, in 1847. Neither Webb nor Neville undertook any work in the town itself.

More important were two antiquaries who lived in Royston: Joseph Beldam (1796-1866) and Edmund Brook Nunn (1833-1904). Beldam was prominent in the abolitionist movement from 1826 until slavery was completely eradicated from the colonies (Stevenson 1981a, 40), acting as unpaid counsel for the Anti-Slavery Society. His booklet on the Royston Cave proved so popular that five editions were published between 1858 and 1904, and his posthumous paper on the Icknield Way contains important observations on the Mile Ditches west of the town. Nunn investigated the barrows on Therfield Heath, the Mile Ditches, Roman cemeteries at Kelshall and Guilden Morden and the villa in Litlington associated with the cemetery discovered by William Webb (Stevenson 1981b, 38). His collection of antiquities from these investigations formed part of the collection of the town's first museum, housed in the Royston Institute (now the Town Hall), of which he was the first curator. After his death in 1904, his entire estate, including the archaeological collection, was auctioned; some of the antiquities are now held in various museums, including North Hertfordshire Museums Service.

In the twentieth century, O G S Crawford (1934, 216) drew attention to the Mile Ditches, the course of which had been lost to the north since Webb's day and which was partly rediscovered through a pioneering use of aerial photography, and published an overview of the prehistoric landscape on Therfield Heath (Crawford 1936, 97). The long barrow on the Heath was re-investigated by C W ('Fred') Phillips in 1935, adding detail to the observations of Edmund Nunn.

An Extensive Urban Survey of Royston was carried out in 2001 as part of English Heritage's national programme of such surveys (Smith & Ransom 2001). It provides a useful summary of what was known about the archaeology of the town at the time, but as it is now over a decade old, subsequent fieldwork in and around the town has modified some of its conclusions.

Prehistory (before *c* 100 BC)

There is some earlier prehistoric material from the area (Smith & Ransom 2001, 2), but none is known from the immediate vicinity of the site. Five *petit tranchet* type flint axes of Mesolithic date (*c* 10,500-4000 BC), now in Hertford Museum and the British Museum, are recorded as having been found in Royston, but their precise findspot is unknown (HHER 6462). Other examples from North Hertfordshire have generally been found on higher ground and it is possible that they derive from Therfield Heath and surrounding areas rather than from the town itself. A Maglemosian bone harpoon, also in the British Museum and recorded as from "Royston Cambs.", is probably the same as one found at Barrington (Cambs), some 10 km distant, and sent to Sir John Evans in 1890 (HHER 1729; Jacobi 1987, 176).

There are several finds of Neolithic (*c* 4000-2500 BC) material allegedly from the town, although none has a secure context. A fragment of a flaked flint axe and a fragment of a polished flint axe, both in Barnet Museum, are said to be from Royston, but their precise findspots are unknown (HHER 823; HHER 1042). Two flints scrapers and an indeterminate 'implement' are also recorded without a detailed findspot (HHER 578). The Neolithic long barrow on Therfield Heath (HHER 40) is the only upstanding example in Hertfordshire, surviving to a height of 3 m, sloping down to 2 m at the western end (Figure 4). It was excavated by Edmund Nunn in 1855 and again by C W Phillips in 1935 (Phillips 1935, 103). The primary burial at the east end consisted of an inhumation, with a secondary cremation burial above it; the mound also produced Bronze Age, Iron Age (HHER 145) and early medieval material (HHER 1629; Stevenson 1979, 40). What was originally suggested to be a causewayed enclosure at New Farm, Melbourn, north-east of the town (Taylor 1977, 18), is now interpreted as a Neolithic henge or

Figure 4: Therfield Heath barrow cemetery, looking south (1991)

hengiform monument (Cambs HER 03195). Westell (1931, 26) conjectured that in a county so rich in flint, the Royston area may well contain Neolithic settlements, but none has so far been identified.

No material of definitely Bronze Age date (*c* 2500-750 BC) has been identified in the town; a socketed bronze axe described as being found at 'Litlington Mills, Royston' (HHER 580) is almost certainly from Litlington (Cambs), 4.5 km north-west of the town. A group of Bronze Age round barrows survives on Therfield Heath, five of which are directly associated with the Neolithic long barrow (Figure 4). They are typically located on the edge of the higher ground, where they can be seen against the skyline from the valley below. Because of this, it is likely that the settlements associated with them were located either on the low-lying ground around Royston and Litlington, or on the plateau to the south, although there is so far no evidence to suggest where they were sited. There are also records suggesting that a barrow once existed within the town, near the railway station (Hertfordshire HER 1734), but has now been destroyed virtually without record (Smith & Ransom 2001, 2). The material recovered from it included coins and other objects suggestive of an early medieval date, but these could derive from secondary interments.

The Icknield Way is generally supposed to be a long-distance prehistoric route of at least Iron Age and possibly Neolithic date, which ran from the Thames valley to Norfolk (Ashworth 1998a, 2; Pevsner & Cherry 1977, 17); it has been described as "*the spine of England*" and as "*the oldest road in Britain*" (Icknield Way Association 2009). A number of prehistoric monuments survive along its line, many of which have only been recognised since the development of aerial photography for archaeological purposes in the 1930s (Crawford 1936, 97). These include a number of Bronze Age round barrows, some of which lie close to Royston (Westell 1931, 27). However, Susan Harrison (2003, 18) has cast considerable doubt on the status of the Icknield Way as a long-distance pre-Roman route and it is unlikely that it existed locally until the Late Iron Age. Aerial photography, in particular, has been instrumental in demolishing the notion that there is an unusual density of prehistoric sites along its supposed route.

There is very little evidence from the Early or Middle Iron Age (*c* 750-100 BC) in Royston (Smith & Ransom 2001, 2). The Mile Ditches (HHER 2207; Cambs HER 03353), which lie about 2 km west of

Royston, consist of three silted ditches with their southern end around the 95 m contour close to a round barrow on Therfield Heath and run parallel for about three kilometres north-north-west toward Bassingbourn Springs, east of Limlow Hill (Burleigh 1980, 25; Figure 5). The only primary dating evidence recovered from the 1978 excavation was a radiocarbon determination from a horse mandible found beneath the primary silts of the western ditch, 2040 ± 80 bp (HAR-3845, Cal BC 263 - Cal AD 127 at 2σ), which dates only the last cleaning of the ditch. It has been suggested that systems such as these may have been used to define territories controlled by hillforts such as Wilbury Hill and Arbury Banks; more recently, they have been linked with the growth of the *oppidum* at Baldock, which became a well established Roman town (Burleigh 1995, 10).

Figure 5: the Mile Ditches, west of the town, under excavation by North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society in 1978 (© North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society)

The Late Iron Age and Roman periods (*c* 100 BC-AD 411)

A total of six Iron Age coins is recorded as being from 'Royston' in the Oxford Celtic Coin Index (online at http://finds.org.uk/CCI/; Figure 6), with three others in the North Hertfordshire Sites and Monuments Record; none has a precise provenance. Three are local ('Eastern Kingdom') types: LM 826.1 is a gold stater of Cunobelin (van Arsdell 1989 type 1925.3; Cottam *et al*. 2010 type 2774), found before 1905, CCI 99.0883 is a silver unit of Cunobelin (van Arsdell 1989 type 2055.01; Cottam *et al*. 2010 type 2873) found by a metal detectorist in 1998, CCI 00.0377 is a silver unit of Cunobelin (van Arsdell 1989 type 2053.01; Cottam *et al*. 2010 type 2876) found by a metal detectorist in 1999, LM 826.2 is a bronze unit of Cunobelin (van Arsdell 1989 type 1971; Cottam *et al*. 2010 type 2918), found in 1894, LM 826.3 is another bronze unit of Cunobelin (van Arsdell 1989 type 2093.1; Cottam *et al*. 2010 type 2963) found before 1905, and CCI 04.2291 is a gold quarter stater of the Trinovantes (van Arsdell 1989 type 1623.01; Cottam *et al*. 2010, type 2529) found by a metal detectorist in 2004. Two are of Westerham type, now attributed to the Catuvellauni and therefore also of local origin, but formerly thought to be Atrebatic: CCI 68.0760 is a gold stater (van Arsdell 1989 type 200.01; Cottam *et al*. 2010, type 2430) found in 1925 and now in the British Museum, while CCI 02.0255 is another of the same type found by a metal detectorist in 2002. One is Icenian, CCI 99.2032, a silver half unit (van Arsdell 1989 type 661.01; Cottam

et al. 2010 type 1624) found by a metal detectorist in 1999. The lack of information about their findspots makes interpretation of these coins difficult, but they are evidence for activity in the area in the century before the Roman conquest of AD 43. This is confirmed by the equally poorly located discovery of other Late Iron Age material from the area. This includes an imported girth beaker from 'the neighbourhood of Royston' (HHER 146), although 'imported' in this instance merely means of non-local manufacture.

Figure 6: Iron Age coins in the Celtic Coin Index (not to scale)

Equally little is known of Roman activity in the town, despite its location at an allegedly important crossroads (Ermine Street, now the A10, runs north to south and Icknield Way, now the A505, runs west-south-west to east-north-east). This might indicate that the junction was not as important as generally thought, as Susan Harrison's (2003, 18) work suggests, or it may be that the existence of a poorly-known settlement at Arrington Bridge/Wimpole Lodge (Cambs HER 03157 & 08384; Smith 1987, 181), only 9 km to the north along Ermine Street, was a barrier to the growth of a sizeable community at Royston. Numerous smaller Roman sites are known from places close to the later town, including a number of finds of Roman date in Litlington and Kelshall, the former connected with the villa discovered there in the early nineteenth century (Crawford 1936, 103; Smith & Ransom 2001, 2).

Nevertheless, Romano-British material has been found in and around the town. There is a scatter of material suggestive of occupation to the south-west of the town centre, west of Briary Lane (HHER 1489; Smith & Ransom 2001, 3), more than 500 m from Fish Hill Square. There is also a quantity of material collected by antiquaries as being from 'near Royston' and it is possible that most of these finds derive from the same general area extending west towards Therfield Heath. The thinly scattered nature of the material is suggestive of finds scattered across fields during manuring by the owners of a farmstead rather than a substantial villa or nucleated settlement.

It is possible that Royston Cave, well known for its medieval religious carvings, originated as a denehole around this time. These features are believed to have been dug as chalk quarries from the Late Iron Age onwards and although their principal distribution is around the Thames Estuary, in Essex and Kent, there are examples known in Hertfordshire, including one discovered in 2011 at Chells, Stevenage (pers. comm. Jonathan Hunn). There are also examples from France, where they are known as *catiches*, sometimes found in chains of linked chambers, each with its own entrance through the dome.

The Early Medieval Period (AD *c* 411-900)

There is very little substantial archaeological evidence dating from the early medieval period in Royston, as in Hertfordshire generally, and of what there is, much has been overlooked in favour of the more obvious prehistoric and later medieval remains (Semmelmann 1998, 2). Though very few Anglo-Saxon sites have been recognised in Hertfordshire, a large number have been recorded in Cambridgeshire (Semmelmann 1998, 8), and a little early medieval material has been found within and around Royston.

Secondary interments in the Round Barrows on Therfield Heath and burials in Kneesworth Street and Briary Lane (Westell 1938, 89) have been thought to be evidence for settlers in Royston at this time, perhaps even on the site of the medieval town (Semmelmann 1998, 3). The burials on Therfield Heath are within the later parish of Therfield and may relate to the origins of settlement there. On the other

hand, those discovered at Briary Lane may be of later date, as John Moss-Eccardt recorded some later medieval burials in this area in 1959 that appear to have been interred in the grounds of the Hospital of SS John and James (HHER 1738). It is unclear if those recorded by Westell were closely associated with the knife of Anglo-Saxon type. The possibly secondary interments in the destroyed round barrow east of Kneesworth Street lay in the parish of Kneesworth and may therefore relate to the origins of that settlement. There is no need to postulate a contemporary settlement around the crossroads in the centre of the medieval town to account for any of these potentially early medieval burials.

The High Medieval Period (*c* 900-1350)

It is not until the High Medieval Period that there is any definite evidence for extensive settlement at Royston. The earliest written records of the place are dated 1184 and although archaeological evidence for human activity exists in the area before this, it is only with the growth of the medieval town that definite settlement evidence is available. Indeed, F John Smith (1983, n.p.) has conjectured that the lack of readily available water close to the crossroads was the main reason for the absence of an early settlement, although a similar situation at Baldock did not prevent the growth of an important Late Iron Age and Roman town there.

Figure 7: St John's Church, the former Priory church, March 2007

The Priory and its church are the best survivals from the medieval town (Figure 7). Although much obscured by later alterations, these buildings still possess some of their monastic architecture (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 20), such as a pier with four quatrefoil sections with keeled diagonal shafts and complexly moulded arches (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 282). The nave and aisles of the present church are the altered remains of the conventual quire, quire aisles and chancel, the tower having originally been

central to the church (Doggett 2002, 155). The original nave would have extended much farther to the west, probably to the position of the present western gate of the churchyard. Although the only other original feature dating from the thirteenth century appears to be the piscina in the chancel of the church, other contemporary fragments can be recognised, including the piers in the north arcade and the tracery in a modern desk, which show the reuse of older materials (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 282-3).

The town that developed around the Priory appears to have been focused on the crossroads of Ermine Street and the Icknield Way, with the majority of early buildings clustering along High Street, King Street (formerly Back Street) and Kneesworth Street (Smith & Ransom 2001, 3). Although the early buildings themselves do not survive, archaeological evidence for markets in this area does. Douglas Plowman (2008, 102) suggests that the two market sites, one on Market Hill (where the current market is held) and the other along High Street, may have been separated to encourage differing commercial activities. The development of the west side of High Street and the resulting creation of King Street shows an increasing reliance on more permanent structures, typical of market infill in later medieval towns, whereas Market Hill may have been used more for livestock fairs and other activities requiring open space. These spaces can be recognised as late as the eighteenth century (Newman 2007, 4).

The Late Medieval Period (*c* 1350-1550)

The late medieval period is represented largely through surviving buildings, as little buried archaeology of the period has been identified in the town; these survivals can hint at broader developments in the morphology of the town. For instance, a two-storeyed fifteenth-century timber framed building with a jetty on the High Street has been thought to show that stalls were still being used in the market at this time (Smith 1992, 145). Buildings such as these would have been visually imposing and displayed their importance by dominating the entire market area. As the prosperity of the town grew at this time, thanks to its favourable location and thriving market, the first inns were constructed. Of particular note is The Bull Inn on High Street, which is the oldest known in the town, predating 1520, and although it now has a Victorian frontage, remains largely preserved internally (Johnson 1970, 174).

The most famous archaeological feature in the town probably also dates from this period, although earlier origins have also been proposed (Ashworth 1998a, 8). Royston Cave, likely to have been decorated between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, is said to be a site unique in Britain and probably in the world (Beamon 1992, 246). It lies around 70 m north-west of Fish Hill Square. It consists of an artificial subterranean chamber carved from the chalk bedrock and decorated with engraved figures and unusual symbols of late medieval style (Beamon 1992, 1; Ashworth 1998a, 9; Figure 8). The cave was discovered by accident in 1742 and the only finds recorded from its initial excavation included a human skull, some decayed bones, a small slipware drinking cup and a piece of plain brass (Beamon 1992, 10-2). A pipeclay seal found a little later is of dubious relevance to the date of the monument, as pipeclay was not used in Britain for the production of fired clay objects between the end of the Roman period and the later sixteenth century. Scrapings of the wall have been analysed and found to contain traces of pigment on the carvings, confirming early reports that they were once coloured (Ashworth 1998a, 8).

Numerous incompatible suggestions have been made about the use of the cave. Soon after its discovery, William Stukeley suggested that the carvings were made by one Lady Roisia, whom he supposed to be the eponym of the town and who he believed used the Cave as her chapel, where she was subsequently interred (Stukeley 1743, 45; 1746, 40). Arguing with Stukeley, Charles Parkin (1744, 13; 1748, 36) proposed that the carvings were of Anglo-Saxon date and that it had been used as a burial place for Saxon royalty. Joseph Beldam, the local antiquary, believed that it was used during the

Crusades as Christian oratory, although he suggested that it was originally a Roman burial shaft (Beldam 1858, 53-4). Sylvia Beamon (1992, 1) has suggested that the Cave was used for devotions by the Knights Templar and may have been constructed in imitation of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (Beamon & Donel 1978, 47); this is currently the most popular view of its origins. Some have seen the symbols as pagan rather than Christian, or, at least, as depicting Manichaean heretical views (e.g. Pennick 1983), a viewpoint that has found resonance with modern, erroneous, views about the beliefs of the Knights Templar. More recently, Joanna Mattingly (2007) has proposed that the carvings were made by prisoners in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Figure 8: Royston Cave in 1996, looking up to show the shape of the dome

The form of the cave is not entirely without parallel, as has been claimed, though: it has already been noted that bottle-shaped chalk quarries appear to have originated in the Late Iron Age and to have continued to be created as late as the medieval period. Quarrying for the construction of the Priory late in the twelfth century would provide a plausible context for the creation of the cave. Documentary evidence shows that there was a hermitage in the town *c* 1506, which was purchased by the lord of the manor, Robert Chester, in 1540; if the Augustinian canons had indeed created the cave as a quarry, they may well have continued to use it, adapting it late in the fifteenth century for use as an anchorite's cell. The function of the cave remains unclear and, although new suggestions are often made, it is unlikely that a definitive answer will be found.

There are unconfirmed reports that a second (or even third) potential cave has been identified in Melbourn Street. The first of these dates from 1984, when the *Cambridge News* carried a story on 18 May about a "*underground researcher*" who, using "*new secret techniques*", claimed to have located two similar caves, said to contain bones and to be supported by central pillars; nothing further was reported about this alleged discovery. In February 2008, a ground probing radar survey was carried out

as part of the filming for a television series, *Quest* (*Royston Crow* 21 February 2008). The series, which promotes a Masonic conspiracy theory about the origins and alleged post-1312 survival of the Knights Templar (http://www.knightstemplarquest.com/THE_CENTRE_OF_THE_WORLD.html), was never aired on terrestrial television in the UK but went straight to DVD release. In view of the sensationalist nature of the programme, considerable suspicions should be cast on the reliability of its claims for a second cave although, if an Iron Age, Roman or high medieval date for the origin of the known cave as a quarry be accepted, then it is possible that others exist in the vicinity. These rumours and unverified reports of unspecified prospecting techniques are tentatively collated by the Historic Environment Record (HER 13430). If other chalk quarries do exist, it is unlikely, though, that they will be decorated in a similar way to the known Cave.

The post-Medieval Period (since AD 1550)

In the post-Medieval period, as the town began to expand once more, the character of Royston changed significantly. Ermine Street was turnpiked between Wadesmill (Herts) and Caxton (Hunts) in 1663, the first such road to be turned into a commercial enterprise permitted to collect tolls from travellers at points along its route, paying for its upkeep. It was followed in 1710 by the Royston to Wandesford Bridge (south Cambridge) Turnpike, now the A10 between Royston and Cambridge, and in 1769 by the Icknield Way, now the A505, increasing the volume of through traffic (Johnson 1970, 105). In 1829, the Corn Exchange was established (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 284) and it is thought that very shortly after this, the associated Cattle Market may have been formally housed within a more permanent wooden structure (Newman 2007, 11). By 1837, there was a gas supply within the town, from which a column guided gas holder survives, alongside two of the engineers' houses dated 1872 and *c* 1890 (Johnson 1970, 86-8). Malting was a particularly productive industry from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries and developed from a cottage industry to large factory scale production by the eighteenth century; a weatherboarded building on the north side of Fish Hill Square appears originally to have been a domestic scale malting. Most of the malted barley was exported to larger centres for its wider use (Smith & Ransom 2001, 7). One mill is still in working condition today, and is currently manufacturing soya products for Cereform Ltd (Johnson 1970, 173-4).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a series of cottages was built along Market Hill, which have since been demolished (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 284). Observations as part of the Town Centre Enhancement Scheme between 1994 and 1997 by the Heritage Network showed that cottages such as these fell out of use and that cellarage from this date was similarly abandoned in the early nineteenth century (Ashworth 1998a, 17). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, building frontages were replaced numerous times, although often leaving the back of original buildings intact (Ashworth 1998a, 17; Johnson 1970, 175).

There was an early nineteenth century "*vogue for yellow and white bricks*" (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 59), which were made from gault clays containing enough lime to counteract the usual reddening effects of iron. They are known in Bedfordshire as Arlesey Whites (Ashworth 1998a, 4) and in Cambridgeshire as Cambridge Gault Bricks, a product of the Ely brick-making industry (Lucas 1993, 158); the latter source is more likely in Royston (Figure 9). The use of such materials, alongside the growth and industrial changes, would have made the town almost unrecognisable within the space of 100 years. Nevertheless, the town maintained many of its medieval features throughout this time of change (Plowman 2008, 182).

Figure 9: Cambridgeshire gault bricks in the 1926 refronting of 6-8 Melbourn Street, formerly the White Horse Inn

The immediate vicinity of the site

One archaeological feature was recorded during the observation of work carried out in John Street during the Town Centre Enhancement Scheme of 1994-5, consisting of a single posthole (Ashworth 1998b, 6). An isolated feature such as this is impossible to date or interpret: it could have held a structural element, part of a fence or a free-standing post. In September 2002, before the construction of retirement apartments by McCarthy and Stone in Fish Hill, Foundations Archaeology carried out an evaluation and subsequent area excavation. The site had historically been used for livestock auctions. A nineteenth- or twentieth-century cellar and a post-medieval pit containing animal bones were the only archaeological features recorded on the site (Hood 2002, §7.1).

An evaluation was carried out by the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust in Jepps Lane in September 2002. The only stratigraphy recorded dated from the nineteenth and twentieth century, with no earlier deposits or features surviving, a curious phenomenon that is common across the town. The excavators concluded that there had been "*extensive previous truncation of the site, with the natural chalk bedrock present at a very shallow depth below a thin levelling deposit of recent date*" (Sutherland & Wotherspoon 2002, 19).

An evaluation at the old cattle market site that lay between Fish Hill and Market Hill to the south-east of the Corn Exchange revealed no deposits or features earlier than the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century (Newman 2007, 3). Indeed, the earliest deposits were thought to have been formed by natural erosion, which was halted when the permanent cattle market structures were first erected, perhaps around 1829 (the date at which the Corn Exchange was built).

Sites recorded in the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record

Most archaeological discoveries are collated and indexed in databases formerly known as Sites and Monuments Records, but now more generally known as Historic Environment Records. Compiled initially from Ordnance Survey record cards that had been maintained by local "correspondents" (represented in North Hertfordshire by W P Westell, curator of Letchworth Museum from 1915 to 1943), these databases often contain duplicated information, material of dubious value and data that cannot be precisely located. Nevertheless, they form the first basic record that should be consulted for localised archaeological information.

The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Unit records 34 sites and monuments within 100 m of Fish Hill Square (Table 1: Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record). They form a typical group of small town sites, relating mostly to commercial activities in the town from the Middle Ages to the present. It is notable, though, that the majority of the recorded archaeology is of post-medieval (and especially 19th and 20th century) date, with little surviving stratigraphy of medieval date.

Number	NGR	Name	Summary description
16	TL 356406	Medieval town of Royston	The settlement grew up around the Augustinian Priory; two hospitals were created by the early thirteenth century. After the dissolution, royal patronage by James I influenced its growth. Until 1897, the boundary between Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire ran along the middle of Baldock Street and Melbourn Street.
30	TL 356406	Royston Cave	Artificial cavern hollowed from the chalk bedrock at an unknown date, rediscovered accidentally in 1742. The lower walls are covered in predominantly religious carvings, stylistically medieval.
2724	TL 355406	The Roysia Stone	A glacial erratic boulder with a socket in its upper surface, reputed to be the base of a cross erected in the twelfth century. It has been moved several times; its earliest recorded location, *c* 1610, was in Melbourn Street near the Clock House and Prison House.
2726	TL 355406	Site of Hospital of SS John and James	Probably founded by Richard Argentein *c* 1224, becoming a free chapel in 1486. Suppressed in 1547 and sold as a private dwelling house on Baldock Street.
5447	TL 355406	Site of Phillips or Royston Brewery	18th-20th century brewery established in 1725, almost completely rebuilt *c* 1960. A 19th century red brick building and an 18th century brewers' house remain. Occupied in 1960 by Barratt & Co, confectionery manufacturer.
7165	TL 355407	Malting, Kilnhouse Yard	Former malting in 19th century yellow brick, now offices. The kilnhouse has been rebuilt, complete with cowl, with only the lowest six courses of the original surviving.
10895	TL 355407	Possible remains of King James's palace	A watching brief on town centre enhancements in 1997 observed archaeological features beneath the traffic island in Kneesworth Street, including a brick wall, part of a tiled floor, a burnt area and a cobbled surface.
11276	TL 356407	Site of Friends' Meeting House	Tombstones at the back of houses on the east side of Kneesworth Street mark the site of the Quaker meeting-place. They were established in the town in 1655.
11278	TL 355406	Site of toll booth	A toll booth, incorporating the town stocks, existed in 1341. Its precise location is unknown, although it is likely to have been near the crossroads.
11290	TL 355407	The Coach and Horses	A timber-framed building of two-and-a-half storeys with a later rear wing. First referred to in 1760, when it was known as The King's Head.

11297	TL 356407	Site of old Butter Market	The Butter Market stood in the middle of the Icknield Way, over the site of Royston Cave. Its date is unknown but it was still open in the 1880s. It may be the same building as the social services centre known as Katherine's Barn.
11299	TL 356406	Congregational Chapel	A chapel built in 1843 at the north-eastern corner of John Street to replace the old Meeting House in Middle Row dating from 1706 that burned down in the fire of 1841. Demolished in the 1960s.
11307	TL 355407	Former Old Crown Inn	First mentioned in 1537 and possibly rebuilt in 1628. Located between Kneesworth Street and Lower King Street. Sometimes known as the Crown and Commercial Hotel; demolished in 1929. By 1793 it was operating a coach service to the Four Swans, Bishopsgate Street, London.
11308	TL 356407	The Crown and Dolphin Inn	First documented as The Dolphin in 1537; by 1750 it was operating a coach service to the Catherine Wheel, Bishopsgate Street, London. The licence was not renewed after 1916, although the post holding the inn sign survives.
11310	TL 355406	Site of The Tabard or Talbot Inn	First recorded in 1537; it had accommodation for twenty horses in its stables, located behind the former Post Office. The end building in Middle Row, south of The Cross. It seems to have closed in 1806.
11313	TL 356407	Former White Horse public house	A late 16th or early 17th century building with a projecting central gable above a carriageway leading to the rear yard. A plastered shop front was inserted into the eastern wing in the 19th century and refronted in Cambridge White bricks in 1926. The licence had lapsed by 1938. The entrance to Royston Cave is now from a door in the carriageway.
11314	TL 356406	The Tarry House Inn	A 16th or 17th century house with two storeys and attics with an 18th century brick frontage (now pebble dashed) and 20th century shop front. It is not known when the licence was given up.
11317	TL 355407	Palace outbuilding	A 16th century timber-framed jettied house with wooden door frame and open roof with moulded trusses. Much altered internally.
11318	TL 355407	Palace kitchen	A 15th century timber-framed building jettied to the east and west; the rear jetty has four beams projecting for 4 feet, probably to form a bridge to a range to the east. The frame has close studding and there are traces of a first-floor hall. Converted into the privy kitchen for King James's Hunting Lodge.
11320	TL 355407	Palace guard house	An early 15th century timber-framed building, with an original window with chamfered wooden reveals. Converted into the guard house for King James's Hunting Lodge. Refaced with lath and plaster, casement windows inserted and the chimney rebuilt in brick in the early 18th century.
11324	TL 355407	Former malthouse	Former malthouse in Baldock Street. Listed in Pigot's *Directory* of 1832 but not marked as such on the Ordnance Survey 25 in map of 1897-1901.
11325	TL 356406	6 High Street	A late 16th or early 17th century probably timber-framed building. Much altered in the 19th century. Painted slate front with tiled roof.
11326	TL 356406	21 High Street	A 16th century timber-framed building with stucco facing to the ground floor and channelled plaster on the first floor. Altered in the 19th century, with sash windows and machine tiled roof. Modern shop front.

11327	TL 356407	2/3 Kneesworth Street	A late 16th or early 17th century timber-framed house, originally the pantry of a neighbouring house in Melbourn Street, occupied by Prince Charles during the reign of James I. Modern shop front.
11328	TL 355407	16 Kneesworth Street	A 16th or 17th century two storey timber-framed building with colour-washed brick to the ground floor.
11330	TL 356406	4 High Street	A late 16th or early 17th century probably timber-framed building with colour-washed rendered exterior and 20th century shop front.
11340	TL 356407	Site of pillory	The town pillory stood to the east of the prison house and Royston Cave. It disappeared towards the end of the 18th century and was replaced by stocks in both counties. The Hertfordshire stocks stood near the top of Market Hill until they were moved lower into Fish Hill in 1723.
12628	TL 355407	Post-medieval occupation, 3-5 Lower King Street	An evaluation in 2003 revealed evidence for a nineteenth-century stable demolished before 1897, sealing postholes of late 18th/early 19th century date. A brick-lined well was probably located inside the main house.
12629	TL 355406	Medieval burgage plot, north of 37 Upper King Street	Fossilised boundaries from a burgage plot part of the endowment of the Hospital of SS John & James, possibly laid out to generate rent. Used as a yard or garden since at least the early 17th century.
12690	TL 356407	Rear of 5 Kneesworth Street	The yard contains two earlier 19th century timber-framed structures with later brick infill and a late 19th century open shelter incorporating an earlier red brick wall. Possibly stabling for 7 Kneesworth Street (The Crown and Dolphin public house).
13430	TL 356407	Possible cavity, Melbourn Street	At least three people, using a range of prospecting techniques, have suggested the presence of a deep cavity in the chalk about 70 m east of the Cross. Its nature is unknown, but may have points of similarity to the nearby Royston Cave.
13682	TL 355407	13 Kneesworth Street	A 19th century frontage and 20th century shop front may conceal an earlier building. Groundworks to the rear in 2008 exposed an earlier chalk floor.
15913	TL 356406	17-19 High Street	Brick house of two storeys and attic, with a turret of *c* 1700.
16285	TL 356407	Rear of 4 Kneesworth Street	Two timber-framed buildings accessed by a covered passage. Built in the late 16th or early 17th century with reused materials and incorporated into King James I's palace complex. Subsequently associated with The Crown and Dolphin public house. A well in the yard was backfilled in the late 19th century.

Table 1: Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record

None of the sites recorded in the Historic Environment Record is actually within Fish Hill Square and few are immediately adjacent to it. This is a result of a lack of fieldwork in the Square rather than a true lack of archaeological remains.

North Herts Museums Records (not also in Herts HER)

No sites additional to those recorded by the Historic Environment Record as being within 100 m of Fish Hill Square are listed in North Hertfordshire Museums Service's records. However, there are references to several Iron Age coins that complement others listed in the Celtic Coin Index (above).

Buildings

The National Heritage List for England records 46 Listed Buildings within 100 m of Fish Hill Square (Table 2). It should be noted that 1015594 and 1102013 are separate entries for Royston Cave, while 1174467

and 1347651 are subdivisions of a single eighteenth-century building in High Street. Only one of these buildings, 1102059 (2 Fish Hill) actually fronts Fish Hill Square (Figure 10).

Number	NGR	Address	Summary description	Gr
1015594	TL 35638 40702	Royston Cave	Artificial bottle-shaped cavern carved into solid chalk bedrock.	-
1102010	TL 35612 40720	4 Melbourn Street	Late 19th century red brick front. Two storeys and attics.	II
1102013	TL 35629 40711	Royston Cave	Artificial bottle-shaped cavern carved into solid chalk, lit by grating in pavement.	I
1102014	TL 35630 40692	3 Melbourn Street	17th century, altered. Two storeys.	II
1102015	TL 35640 40694	6-8 Melbourn Street	18th century red brick front. Two storeys, carriageway to left.	II
1102036	TL 35611 40735	2 & 3 Kneesworth Street	Late 16th or early 17th century house, altered front. Two storeys, modern shop fronts. Pantry of King James I's palace complex.	II
1102037	TL 35594 40768	7 Kneesworth Street	17th century or earlier, rough plaster front. Two storeys. Red brick gabled back wing.	II
1102038	TL 35589 40774	9 Kneesworth Street	15th century hall house, altered red brick front. Two storeys, 19th century shop front. Privy Kitchen of King James I's palace complex.	II*
1102041	TL 35566 40778	18 & 20 Kneesworth Street	16th or early 17th century. Massive central brick chimneystack. Two storeys and attics.	II
1102042	TL 35562 40791	22 Kneesworth Street	Early to mid 19th century, brick with plaster render. Three storeys.	II
1102049	TL 35576 40746	1 & 3 Lower King Street	18th or early 19th century, pebbledashed. Two storeys.	II
1102050	TL 35551 40767	17 & 17A Lower King Street	Early 19th century brick. Three storeys.	II
1102052	TL 35545 40723	7 Baldock Street	19th century brick. Two storeys; carriageway arch left of centre.	II
1102056	TL 35540 40692	4 Baldock Street	Early to mid 19th century, gault brick. Three storeys. Former workhouse.	II*
1102059	TL 35652 40623	2 Fish Hill	17th century, timber framed behind modern brick. Two storeys and attics.	II
1102061	TL 35614 40684	4 High Street	16th or 17th century, probably timber framed, hidden by pebbledashed front. Two storeys, first floor oversailing. Modern shop front.	II
1102063	TL 35624 40649	18 & 20 High Street	17th century, timber framed with pebbledashed frontage. Two storeys, 19th century shop front.	II
1102064	TL 35627 40641	22 High Street	16th or 17th century, timber framed, with 18th century brick front.	II
1102066	TL 35602 40659	11 High Street	Early 19th century brick. Three storeys.	II
1102067	TL 35607 40650	13 High Street	Late 18th century brick, with 19th century upper floor. Three storeys.	II
1102068	TL 35616 40596	25 High Street	19th century brick frontage.	II
1102072	TL 35646 40621	2 John Street	Mid 19th century, gault brick. Three storeys, modern shop window.	II
1102073	TL 35590 40603	Barns adjoining 41 King Street	17th century or earlier, timber framed and weatherboarded. One and two storeys.	II
1174467	TL 35624 40655	14 & 16 High Street	18th century brick front with 19th century shop front. Two storeys; one building with 12 High Street.	II
1174490	TL 35638 40634	26 High Street	18th century pebbledashed front. Two storeys, recessed shop front.	II
1174499	TL 35642 40604	30 & 32 High Street	Early 19th century, brick with stucco frontage. Three storeys, first floor cast iron balconettes.	II

1174508	TL 35599 40671	7 & 9 High Street	19th century yellow brick. Three storeys, modern shop front.	II
1174519	TL 35613 40623	17 & 19 High Street	19th century front to older building. Two storeys and attics, 19th century shop windows.	II
1174570	TL 35641 40620	1 John Street	Earlier 19th century whitewashed brick. Three storeys.	II
1174576	TL 35589 40626	37 King Street	17th or early 18th century, timber framed, plastered external walls. Two storeys.	II
1174630	TL 35586 40787	13 Kneesworth Street	19th century front, possibly earlier behind. Two storeys and attic. Reputed part of King James I's palace complex.	II
1174748	TL 35622 40716	6 & 8 Melbourn Street	16th or early 17th century, refronted 1926 in gault brick. Two storeys, central carriageway, 19th century shop front.	II
1174788	TL 35635 40694	5 Melbourn Street	Late 18th or early 19th century front, red brick. Three storeys, late 19th century shop windows; pargetting to west side elevation.	II
1295665	TL 35573 40761	16 Kneesworth Street	16th or 17th century, timber framed above brick ground floor. Two storeys.	II
1295729	TL 35610 40607	23 High Street (Barclay's Bank)	Late 19th century 'Tudor' red brick with stone dressings. Two storeys and attics.	II
1295740	TL 35620 40667	10 High Street	Early 19th century pebbledashed brick. Three storeys, modern shop front.	II
1347640	TL 35577 40747	14 Kneesworth Street (The Coach and Horses Inn)	17th century, timber framed, altered. Some modern pargetting. Two storeys and attics. Modern half timbering to south side elevation.	II
1347646	TL 35546 40778	13 Lower King Street	18th century red brick. Two storeys.	II
1347648	TL 35521 40720	9 Baldock Street	Early to mid 19th century, brick. Two storeys.	II
1347649	TL 35614 40688	2 High Street	Early to mid 19th century front. Two storeys, 19th century shop windows. Rounded corner.	II
1374650	TL 35615 40678	6 High Street	16th or 17th century, timber framed, altered. Painted slate frontage. Two storeys, modern shop windows.	II
1347651	TL 35621 40662	12 High Street	18th century front, cement rendering. Two storeys and attics, modern shopfront. One building with 14 and 16 High Street.	II
1347652	TL 35632 40622	26A & 28 High Street	Early 19th century, brick with cement rendering. Three Storeys.	II
1347654	TL 35617 40617	21 High Street	16th century timber framed, altered. Two storeys and attics, 19th century shop front to right.	II
1347658	TL 35598 40593	41 King Street	Early to mid 19th century yellow brick front. Two storeys, arched carriageway to right.	II
1347678	TL 35586 40782	11 Kneesworth Street	15th century timber framed. Two storeys, first floor oversailing on wooden brackets. Former guard house of King James I's palace complex.	II*

Table 2: Listed buildings with 100 m of the development

Excluding the two listings for Royston Cave, the 44 buildings form a fairly typical group for a small market town with medieval origins. There are two fifteenth century structures, four or five sixteenth century, ten seventeenth century, seven or eight eighteenth century and twenty nineteenth century. Some structures listed as nineteenth or eighteenth century probably conceal earlier origins, while others that are not listed will include eighteenth and nineteenth century structures, if not earlier. Nevertheless, the pattern is reasonably clear: in the core of the town and therefore away from nineteenth century and later urban expansion, the majority of buildings date from the nineteenth century. This suggests that this was the period of the town's greatest prosperity; conversely, the number of eighteenth century

buildings is curiously low, which may indicate a relatively unsuccessful economy during that century, standing in marked contrast to Baldock, where the majority of Listed Buildings are of this date.

Figure 10: 2 Fish Hill, a seventeenth-century timber framed building refronted with colour-washed brick

Documentary Data

Medieval origins

The first mention of *Crux Roaisię* ('Rohesia's Cross'), as the town was originally known, relates to the foundation of the Priory of Augustinian Canons (Canons Regular or Blackfriars), dedicated to Saints John the Baptist and Thomas of Canterbury. Although the foundation charter itself is lost, a surviving charter dated 1184 and signed by Lucius III (pope 1181-5) identifies Eustace de Merc of Stibbington (Hunts) (*c* 1125-after 1186), Lord of the Manor of Newsells in Barkway, as the founder (Kingston 1906, 12).

Although it is generally assumed that the town developed following the foundation of the Priory, Karin Semmelmann (1998, 15) has suggested that the location of the site at the crossing of two routes that are thought to date from prehistoric and Roman times makes it likely that a settlement would have developed around the crossroads before the High Middle Ages. She argues that the town was not

recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086 either because it was too small or because there was an administrative error owing to its liminal position on the boundary between two counties.

However, the foundation of a Priory of Augustinian Canons does not necessarily indicate that there was a nucleated settlement in Royston at the time: the contemporary Augustinian Priory at Little Wymondley was founded (and remains) in a purely rural setting (Farris 1989, 143). Moreover, the lack of archaeological evidence for earlier settlement in and around the core of the medieval town suggests that it was indeed a new development around the time that the Priory was founded. Nevertheless, the original Canons of the Priory are said previously to have established a chapel and burial ground between 1164 and 1169 (Redstone 1912, 264); this may imply that a community for it to serve already existed around the crossroads that formed the core of the town.

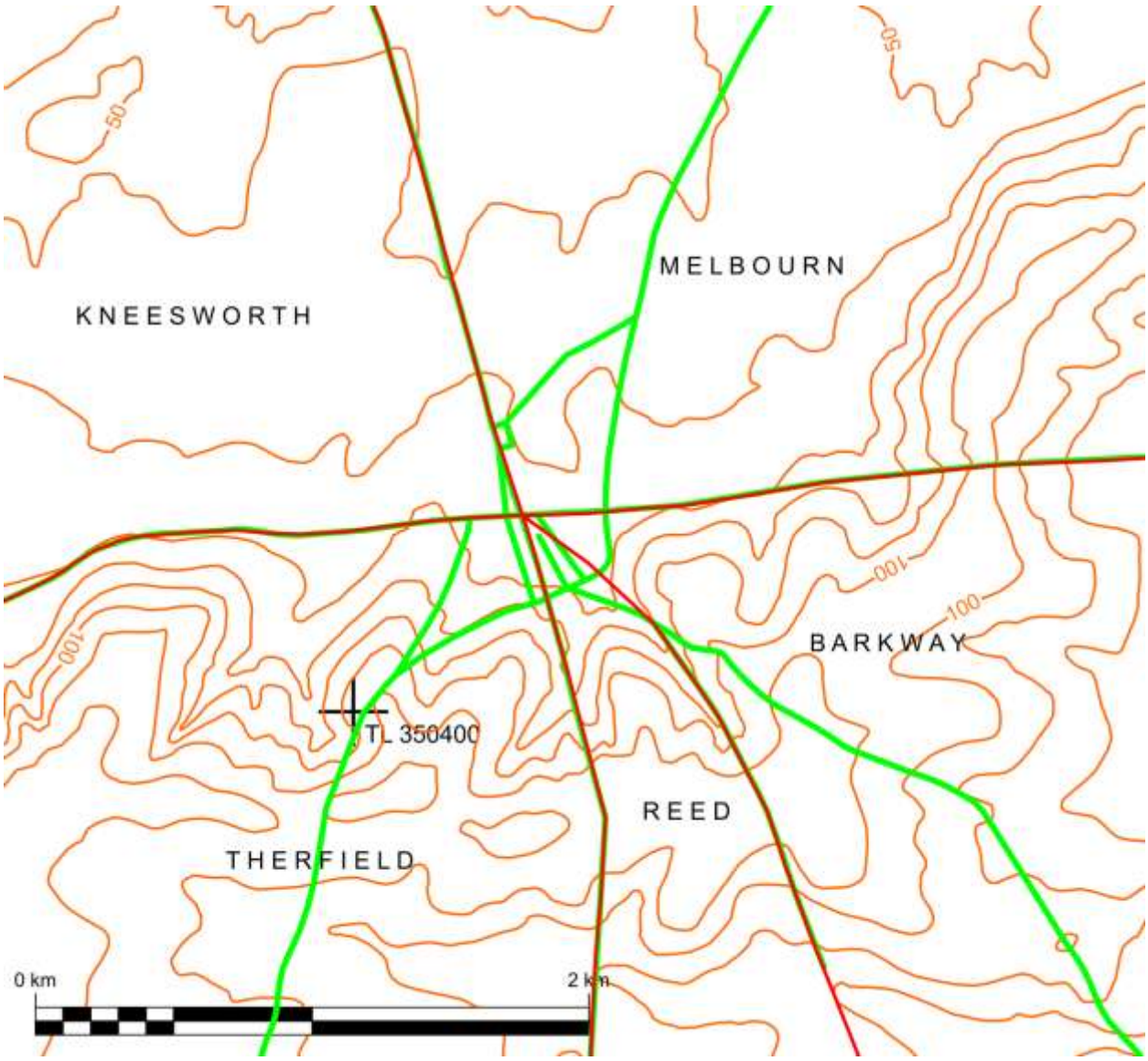

Figure 11: medieval parish boundaries (red) and roads (green)

Ralph de Rochester, the nephew of Eustace de Merc and his successor as Lord of the Manor of Newsells, issued a confirmation charter of the foundation, believed to date between 1184 and 1187: "*in the place where the said Sir Eustace built a certain chapel for his three chaplains, with Gods assistance [Sir Ralph] erected a church, and in order that he might be able to obtain the grace and consolation of the seven*

gifts of the Holy Spirit, he had instituted therein seven religious men of canonical discipline" (quoted in Kingston 1906, 13).

A third charter, dated 9 November 1189, lists other benefactors to the Priory and the grant of a fair during Whitsun and a weekly market on a Wednesday (Kingston 1906, 15; Redstone 1912, 254; Ashworth 1998a, 2). Around this time, documentary evidence also points to an expansion of Ermine Street, the well established Roman road, perhaps to create the elongated market place that can be recognised today (Bailey 2008, 51). In 1252, Henry III granted the Prior the right to a second fair, to be held on the Vigil and Feast of St Thomas of Canterbury (6-7 July), the co-patron of the Priory church (Redstone 1912, 254).

It has been suggested that the commercial activities of the Priory in the early thirteenth century had a significant effect on the layout of central Royston (Plowman 2008, 186). During the thirteenth century, a new triangular market place was constructed to the east of Ermine Street between Fish Hill and Market Hill as the original is believed to have become too overcrowded (Bailey 2008, 51), perhaps when the Priory was extended in 1224 (Plowman 2008, 174-5). Terry Slater (2008, 77) suggests that the unusual placement of this secondary market place was to keep profit within the parish of Barkway, where the Priory was located, as the original market place, along Ermine Street, lay on the boundary between Therfield and Reed. These market places and other areas in the town would have been dominated by the Priory, which derived revenue from their control (Smith 1992, 140). By 1340, there was a '*tolbothe*' in the highway, perhaps at the principal crossroads, which would have provided an additional source of income for the Priory and which was also the site of the medieval town's stocks (Redstone 1912, 259).

The settlement grew across five separate parishes (Barkway, Reed and Therfield in Hertfordshire, Melbourn and Kneesworth (united with Bassingbourn since 1966) in Cambridgeshire: Figure 11), although the town was regarded as a distinct vill in its own right in the Lay Subsidy of 1307 (Redstone 1912, 253). Its position straddling the county boundary made it a difficult community to police. Although the Priors had jurisdiction in both counties, they seem generally to have avoided pursuing criminals and were even the victim of theft in 1314 (Redstone 1912, 259). There is said to have been a disastrous fire in the town in 1324 (Redstone 1912, 259), a common occurrence in places where timber framed buildings were crowded into relatively small areas.

Two further religious institutions were also established in Royston during the High Middle Ages: the Hospital of St Nicholas *c* 1200 and the Hospital of SS John and James *c* 1224 (Redstone 1912, 255; Ashworth 1998a, 2). Both were ecclesiastical leper hospitals, the former on the Cambridgeshire side of the boundary and the latter on the Hertfordshire side (Beamon 1992, 62). On 2 January 1213, the Hospital of St Nicholas was granted the right to hold a fair on the Eve and Translation of St Nicholas (8-9 May), which was extended to include the Morrow (10 May) in 1236 (Redstone 1912, 254). The hospital of St Nicholas had ceased to exist by 1359 and that of SS John and James was suppressed in 1547 (Redstone 1912, 255; Ashworth 1998a, 2).

The Knights Templar were involved in a number of disputes with the Prior and it has been thought that they owned a property in the town, although this appears to be an error for a house belonging to the Knights Hospitallers based at Shingay. The assertion that there was a Templar Preceptory at Shingay (e.g. Beamon 2010, 91) is incorrect and derives from a footnote in the Victoria County History (Redstone 1912, 254 note 37): the house at Shingay was founded 1144×54 as a Hospitaller Preceptory (Wright ed. 1982, 124). The Templars did have houses at Denney, Duxford and Great Wilbraham, as well as a church at Wendy, donated to them *c* 1170.

As there is no evidence that the Templars who came into conflict with the Prior over market tolls (Redstone 1912, 254) were based in Royston, they were probably from Baldock, under the control of the Preceptory at Temple Dinsley (Reddan 1914, 445). They claimed universal exception from such tolls and disputed the Prior's right to collect them in 1199. The case dragged on into the following year, when the Prior was required to return 37 shillings taken from them for stallage (the fee for erecting a market stall). Later, in 1254, the Master of the Templars accused the Prior of falsely imprisoning and beating several of his men who had come to do business in the market. These disputes with the Templars were part of a pattern of disturbances in the market and imply no special relationship between the order and the town's market. Indeed, it is clear that the Priors, who had jurisdictional rights over the town, were lax at maintaining law and order.

In the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* of 1291, the town's markets and fairs were assessed at £9 13s 4d, a not inconsiderable sum (Redstone 1912, 254). There is a great deal of evidence for commercial activity before 1291, which suggests that urban development may well have occurred earlier than implied by the tax records and perhaps even before the foundation of the Priory. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that this would have been as early as 1086, when the Domesday survey was compiled. On balance, the development of a community around the crossroads is most likely to have happened during the second half of the twelfth century.

Late medieval (*c* 1350-1550)

Throughout the late medieval period, a number of disasters hit the town (Kingston 1906, 18; Plowman 2008, 173). It is said to have been "*burnt down by fire*" a second time (Kingston 1906, 34) in 1405, in 1461, it was ransacked by Queen Margaret's forces after the second battle of St Albans and in 1537, the Priory was dissolved (Beamon 1992, 63). Despite this, the town continued to prosper, to the detriment of other newer markets such as Chipping and Buckland, which could not compete with the already established markets, as well as the long established market town of Ashwell (Williamson 2008, 40-41). It is likely that this is because of Royston's location in the transport network and the fact that the Priory had been such an important religious site within the region (Bailey 2008, 52). At the dissolution, the market was said to be occupied by about fifty shops, leased to different owners (Redstone 1912, 255).

Post-medieval (since 1550)

After the Priory was dissolved on 9 April 1537, Royston was united within one parish by Act of Parliament in 1540, albeit still in two separate counties (Redstone 1912, 253). This would have allowed the town to develop more naturally, and although the town was further united under a single vestry in 1781, the duplication of civic officers, churchwardens and overseers continued until the end of the nineteenth century. It was not until 1897 that the whole township was made a part of Hertfordshire (Redstone 1912, 253).

The conventual buildings of the Priory were purchased by Robert Chester in 1540, who converted them to domestic use between this time and 1551, when he entertained Mary de Guise on her journey from Scotland to France there (Smith 1993, 23; Doggett 2002, 16). His initial alterations created an irregular building that was the only single-winged gentry house of the period in the area (Smith 1992, 63). In 1578, it was inspected by surveyors seeking stopping places for Queen Elizabeth I and was described as *"a very unnecessary hows for receipt of her Ma^{t}; yt standing adioyning to the Churche… not having any pleausant p'spects any way",* with five chambers noted as *"yll"* on plans (Smith 1992, 63). However, it was not until *c* 1580 that extensive alterations were undertaken to convert the building properly to

domestic use (Doggett 2002, 16). It is tempting to see these as a response to the insult delivered by the queen's surveyors.

The town's economic prosperity increased and by the mid nineteenth century it was almost self-sufficient with numerous fairs, markets and developing industries (Smith & Ransom 2001, 6). As late as 1677, legal proceedings from Hemel Hempstead show that portable stalls were in use on the High Street (Smith 1992, 146). Whereas in the late medieval period, Royston had been a linear settlement, focused on the High Street, Kneesworth Street and King Street, the post-medieval settlement expanded enormously (Smith & Ransom 2001, 3). This may be due partly to the loss of the former parish boundaries and the late and post-medieval relaxing of manorial restrictions, allowing urban growth to proceed more organically.

By the later sixteenth century, the town had developed a reputation for the quality of its barley and malt: on being told that the Spanish would not send wine to England, Elizabeth I allegedly declared "*a figge for Spaine, so long as Royston will afford such plenty of good malts*" (Kingston 1894, 186). In 1598, it was described as *"a market famouse for corne"* (John Norden *in* Kingston 1906, 5) and this was still the case in 1829, when the Corn Exchange was built (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 284). The market house followed a few years later, around 1836.

With such vibrant commercial activity within Royston and its favourable location at the crossroads of two important routes, it is not surprising that it was named "*a very fit receptacle for traveilers that from the north partes have recourse to visit London"* (John Norden *apud* Kingston 1906, 5). It is therefore unsurprising that Royston has been described as *"a town of Inns"* in which *"scarcely a building in the older parts of the town ... has not at some time been either an Inn or a malting"* (Kingston 1906, 200).

By the seventeenth century, Royston was clearly a wealthy town with accommodation for travellers on the route between London and Edinburgh, made more important by the union of the crowns of England and Scotland in 1603. It was also considered a good place to stay for extended periods. King James I spent much time hawking and hunting in Royston, having passed through after the death of Queen Elizabeth I to take up the crown of England (Westell 1931, 104). The eastern part of his hunting lodge on Kneesworth Street, now known as The Old Palace, has been largely preserved. After the execution of Charles I, it was described by the Earl of Pembroke, who claimed it as his own, as *"consisting of three bays of brick building, 50 feet long by 20 feet wide containing the king's bedchamber, a drawing room and stoole-chamber, with three lower with cock lofts above them"* (Ashworth 1998a, 13).

By the middle of the seventeenth century, there were numerous inns in the town, the earliest known being The Bull Inn, which can be dated to before 1520 (Ashworth 1998a, 3; Johnson 1962, 14). It was home to the Petty Sessions until 1850, when they were moved, much against the wishes of the magistrates, to the new country courthouse (Redstone 1912, 255). By 1772, there was stabling for over a hundred horses at The Bull (Johnson 1970, 174) and this and The Chequers, established around 1618, survive on High Street, although the frontages have since been rebuilt (Johnson 1962, 15; Johnson 1970, 174). The former Red Lion Inn, also on High Street, was the meeting place for the Royston Club, an influential political and social institution established before 1689 and disbanded in the middle of the eighteenth century (Redstone 1912, 255). On 22 March 1734, another major fire devastated the town (Redstone 1912, 259).

Figure 12: the earlier Fire Station and The Cage before demolition in 1897 (© Royston Museum)

In the wake of the royal patronage of the town, a number of public buildings were built near its centre. In 1716, the first public school in the area was established on Fish Hill (Redstone 1912, 255), which by the early nineteenth century was being referred to as the Old Parish Room or Vestry Room and was used for legal proceedings (Kingston 1906, 181; Figure 12). Between this time and 1897, when the building was demolished to make way for a new Fire Station, it was commonly referred to as The Cage, a lock-up where criminals would be imprisoned whilst awaiting trial (Kingston 1906, 185; 200). Demolition of the building exposed a datestone of 1718 (Smith & Ransom 2001, 25). The original Fire Station consisted of two lean-to buildings on the western side of the Cage, which were demolished at the same time as it. The stocks, which had previously been relocated from their medieval site in the '*tolbothe*' to the top of Market Hill, were moved to Fish Hill, next to The Cage, in 1793 (Kingston 1906, 27; 201). The Jubilee Fire Station that replaced The Cage and the earlier Fire Station cost £207 7s 6d, including equipment (Kingston 1906, 185). It and the tenement buildings between it and Jepps Lane were demolished in 1960 (*Royston Weekly News* 26 August 2010, 12).

In 1827, a new infants' school was built on the east side of Market Hill (Redstone 1912, 255). The building was demolished in the early twentieth century to make way for a new public library (Smith & Ransom 2001, 25). In 1830, the Corn Exchange was built next to an unofficial cattle market using Caleb Hitch's Patented Interlocking Brickwork (Pevsner & Cherry 1971, 284). The cattle market itself was then formalised and, like other fairs still existing in the town, continued to prosper. Following yet another disastrous fire in 1841, a new thoroughfare, John Street, was built to connect the northern end of Fish Hill with the High Street; in the north-eastern corner of its junction with Market Hill, a Congregational Chapel was built in 1843 (Redstone 1912, 255). It was an imposing building with a neo-Classical façade (Figure 26) demolished in the 1960s for a brutalist style supermarket (Ketteringham 1992, 37), now

known as Roysia House and occupied by offices and the SG8 nightclub on the west side of Fish Hill Square. A Sunday School was also built in the 1840s, on the north side of Jepps Lane at the back of the church and is now the Masonic Hall. In 1849, the County Court (Figure 28) was established, although Royston did not come under the jurisdiction of one county, Hertfordshire, until 1897 (Kingston 1906, 202; Ashworth 1998a, 3).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the town was described as "*handsome, thriving, and improving*" (Crawley 1880, 137), although a planning report by Professor Barry Lewis in 1974 criticised it for a lack of shopping facilities, in a "*limbo not knowing whether to turn to Cambridge or North Hertfordshire*" (*Cambridge Evening News* 16 July 1974). Although this is something of an unfair assessment, the town does still look to Cambridge for its principal shopping facilities whilst being administratively part of North Hertfordshire. A reflection of the town's independent spirit is evident in its retention of a town council (technically a parish council) after the local government reorganisation of 1974, the only North Hertfordshire town to do so.

Figure 13: the Roysia Stone, on a late twentieth-century base

Placenames

Two explanations for the origin of the name of Royston have been proposed. The more generally accepted of the two is that it is a contraction of Rohesia's Town (actually Old English *tūn*, 'enclosed farmstead'), which is itself is related to *Crux Roaisię* ('Rohesia's Cross'), the earliest recorded name of the settlement, first attested in 1184 (Chauncy 1700, 180; Gover *et al.* 1938, 161). Early historians related the story of a woman named Roise (or Rohesia and other variations of the name), who placed a

cross at the important crossroads of Ermine Street and the Icknield Way (Gover *et al.* 1938, 162). There is no further information on the woman herself, though she has been mistakenly identified as Rose, the wife of Eudo Dapifer (Redstone 1912, 253). The cross itself has long been lost, although a socketed base which is thought to have held it still exists and is now displayed on a low pebble plinth in the centre of the town (Figure 13; Beamon 1992, 3).

The form of the name with *-ton* is first attested in 1286 (as *Roiston*), only two years after the first mention of *Crux Roaisię*, while reference to the cross continued until the fifteenth century (Gover *et al.* 1938, 162). It thus appears that the two names were used in parallel and it would be instructive to learn if there is a distinction between the two usages. Might one have been used for the Priory and the other for the town, for instance? Is it also possible that the *-ton* ending ought in fact to be read as *-ston*, for 'Rohesia's stone', referring to the base, which has survived the loss of the presumably wooden cross it once held?

The second, rather improbable, suggestion is that the town was named after the prehistoric archaeology of the local area. Nathaniel Salmon (1728, 4) invoked a supposedly ancient Danish tradition known as *roiser*, involving the construction of a burial mound over the ashes of the dead as a possible source for the derived name Roeys or Royes. However, the word does not exist in Danish, the claimed authority of the Danish scholar Ole Worm (1588-1654) notwithstanding, and it appears to be a fanciful explanation by an eighteenth-century historian not noted for accuracy and known to indulge in wild speculations (Stephen Doree (1991, 211) has called his work "*slapdash*").

The street names Fish Hill and Market Hill attest to their original function as the town's second market place, established in the early thirteenth century. Although it has been suggested that this new market focused on the sale of livestock (Plowman 2008, 102), the name of Fish Hill is presumably an indication of one of the principal products traded here.

Cartographic evidence

Dury and Andrews (1766)

Andrew Dury and John Andrews's map (Figure 14), first issued on 1 May 1766, is part of a large-scale survey of the entire county at a scale of 1.95 inches to the mile (approximately 1:35,000). It gives an indication of topography, marks field boundaries and streams, and colour codes significant boundaries. In rural areas, though, field boundaries appear to be vastly simplified (Ruston 2004), while a close inspection of the detail raises the suspicion that much of that detail is invented or at best conventionalised. Of course, the purpose of the map was as a depiction of the roads of the county and it was never intended to show the same sorts of details as maps focusing on individual towns, but it should clearly be used as a guide to urban layout and growth with some caution.

Figure 14: Dury & Andrews's map (1766)

Its depiction of the town shows Ermine Street as the principal north to south route and labels *Icknield way* as such. The separation of High Street and King Street is exaggerated. Interestingly, there is a lost road, diverging west from Ermine Street south of the town, roughly in the position of the hospital and entering the town along its eighteenth-century western edge, close to the modern Princes Mews. Fish Hill and Market Hill are badly truncated, perhaps partly by the need to make the church symbol large; the symbol obscures what appears to be the continuation of Fish Hill northwards to join Melbourn Street. It does, however, highlight the somewhat peripheral position of these market areas in the town.

Andrew Bryant (1822)

As with Dury & Andrews's map of more than fifty years earlier, Bryant's (Figure 15) is a map of the whole county, published on four sheets as a scale of around 1½ inches to the mile (1:42240). Little is known of the map-maker, whose first name is not even certain; he ignored previously published maps, including the first edition Ordnance Survey one inch to the mile (1:63360) maps, and undertook a completely new survey of his own. In doing so, he produced the most accurate map of the county published up to that time, its conventions closely resembling those of his contemporaries, including the Ordnance Survey (Ruston 2003).

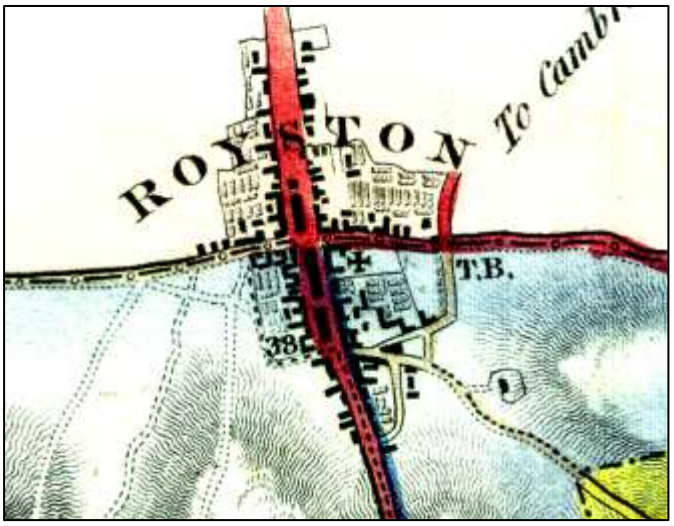

Figure 15: Bryant's map (1822), twice actual size

Bryant's map does not show the road linking Ermine Street with the earlier line of Princes Mews shown by Dury and Andrews, instead showing this road as coming from the direction of Therfield and, further south, linking with the continuation of Briary Lane that was the earlier road between Therfield and the town. His depiction of the relationship between High Street/Kneesworth Street and King Street is more realistic than Dury and Andrews's, but there is no depiction of Fish Hill or Market Hill as thoroughfares, while a boundary is shown to run from the south edge of the churchyard all the way west to High Street; this makes it clear that by 1822, at least, Fish Hill did not extend north to Melbourn Street.

Ordnance Survey

The Ordnance Survey developed from the military survey of the Scottish Highlands, following the 1745 Jacobite revolt, and the subsequent Triangulation of Great Britain, started in 1783. In 1790, the Board of Ordnance began a general survey of Great Britain, starting from the south coast and working northwards. The first one inch to the mile (1:63,360) map, showing Kent, was published in 1801, with other parts of southern England following over the next twenty years. In the 1840s, a start was made on a six inch to the mile (1:10,560) series, to complement that already completed for Ireland, but in 1854 the survey was upgraded to a scale of 1:2500. The early one-inch maps show no more detail than Bryant's and will not be examined here.

The most useful of the early Ordnance Survey maps to show Royston is the First Edition (1887) 1:2500 map (Figure 16). This series was published in county sets, so the Hertfordshire map ignores the town north of Baldock Street and Melbourn Street. This is the first map to show Fish Hill and Market Hill in any detail; it labels the County Court building and the two schools, and shows the site of Fish Hill Square as occupied by five properties and gardens. The photograph of the earlier Fire Station makes it clear that

the two south-westernmost rectangles are not gardens, unlike the three to the north, but the double-bayed Fire Station; it also wrongly subdivides The Cage into two properties. This map is the first to show John Street and, although it does not name it, Jepps Lane.

Figure 16: Ordnance Survey First Edition 1:2500 map (1887)

It also shows the complexity of property boundaries to the north-west of Fish Hill and Market Hill. While the medieval burgage plots of High Street are, to a certain extent, still visible in the later nineteenth century pattern of pattern of boundaries, no such patterning is visible in most of the area between Fish Hill and Melbourn Street. Several possibilities may be suggested. One is that this area lacked burgage plots because Melbourn Street was part of a through route that was not properly incorporated into the layout of the medieval town. It is also possible that, as previously suggested, Fish Hill and, possibly, Market Hill originally extended northward to Melbourn Street and that the confused pattern of boundaries in this area is a result of later haphazard infill of a formerly open space. Another possibility is that these property boundaries reflect the development of Jepps Lane and Church Lane, the latter presumably after the dissolution of Royston Priory.

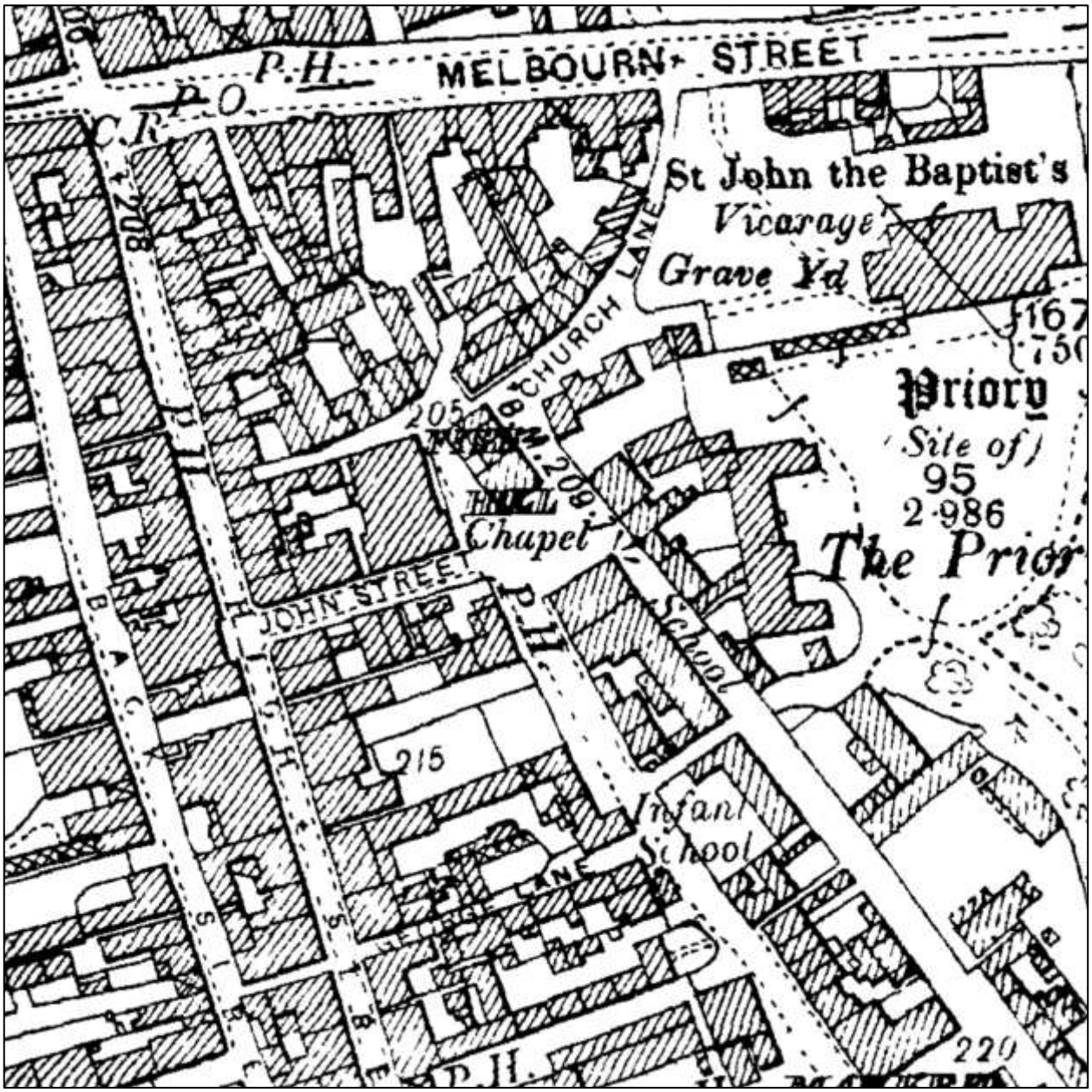

Figure 17: Ordnance Survey Second Edition 1:2500 map (1898)

The Second Edition (1898) 1:2500 map (Figure 17) shows the whole town, following the alteration to the county boundary in the 1890s. It also shows that The Cage and the old Fire Station had been demolished to make room for the Jubilee Fire Station in 1897. Apart from this, there is little evident change in this part of the historic town centre.

After 1911, photographic enlargements to 1:1250 were made of the 1:2500 series maps for many urban areas and this became the standard scale for urban mapping from the new series of large scale maps produced from the 1920s on. After the Second World War, the old County Series of large-scale maps was discontinued, as new maps were based on the National Grid, which had been developed from 1936, when a completely new triangulation of Great Britain was started. The National Grid maps were designed to fit within the grid, not political boundaries. The establishment of the grid, based on a different ellipsoid model for the shape of the Earth, permitted a reference system for locating places with considerable precision.

Mapping is currently performed most efficiently using a Geographical Information System (or GIS), in which digital data can be manipulated, combined and filtered to create custom mapping without the need for paper copies. North Hertfordshire District Council now produces maps of this type for all its needs; the system also has a database of historic mapping, which was used to produce the 1:2500 maps reproduced above.

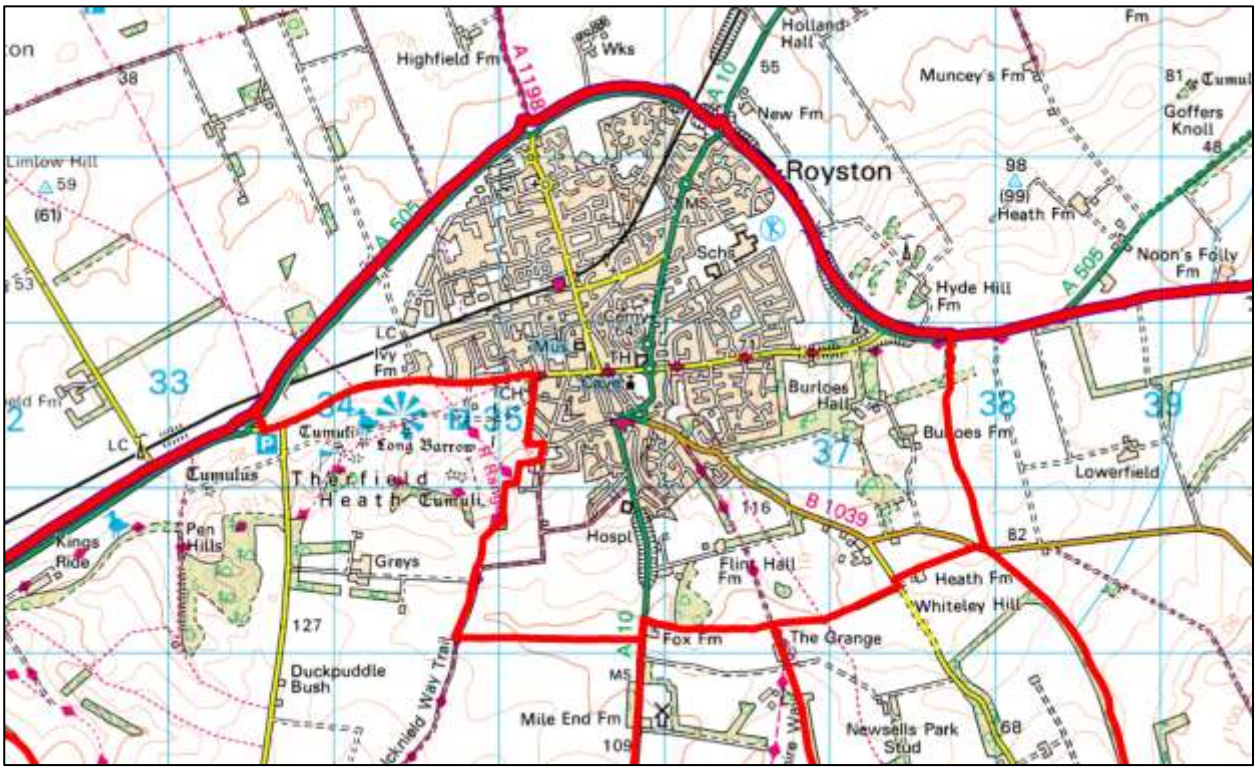

Figure 18: Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map (2011)

The current (2011) 1:50,000 map reproduced here (Figure 18) has a GIS overlay showing the current parish and county boundaries within North Hertfordshire. This map clearly shows the enormous growth of the town since Bryant's map of 1822, particularly to the north. In part, this is because the railway lies on this side of the town, but it is also because the land is flatter in this area and easier to develop.

Photographic evidence

A number of historic photographs for the area of the development exist, most of which were taken to show the Jubilee Fire Station and therefore are more recent than 1897. Others tend to show Fish Hill Square only incidentally as part of a view focused on some other place or as a generalised townscape.

The earliest photograph of the area identified by the writers is dated *c* 1870 and shows a view from the centre of Market Hill looking north-north-west (Figure 19). In the centre of the picture, part of the façade of the 1843 Congregational Chapel on John Street is visible, with other lost buildings in the foreground. Although this does not show any detail of Fish Hill Square, the image nevertheless conveys something of the character of the mid-Victorian town. The lack of people is a result of the long exposures needed for photographic exposures at this time: unless people stood still, they would not register on the plate.

A photograph showing The Cage and the earlier Fire Station has already been reproduced (Figure 12, *above* page 26). This shows The Cage to have been a roughly square brick building with a hipped old tile roof, door to John Street and two (blocked) windows to the first floor. This may have been an alteration

Figure 19: Market Hill *c* 1870 (after Ketteringham 1992, 54)

when the Parish Rooms were converted to a lock-up or it may date the photograph to a time when the building was derelict before demolition in 1897. The old Fire Station can be seen to consist of two gabled brick structures with wide doors for (presumably) two fire engines; the northernmost of the two seems to have been slightly broader than the southern.

The Jubilee Fire Station appears to have been photographed frequently, sometimes with its staff. The photographs vary in date from the early twentieth century to the 1950s. One (**Error! Reference source ot found.**) shows the crew with a horse-drawn engine; the horses were hired from Lodgsons, a company running horse-drawn cabs from the railway station to the centre of the town, and the photograph shows one of the Lodgson brothers in the driving seat. A maroon would be fired to alert both the volunteer fire fighters and the contractors that horses were needed, and they would bring the horses to the Fire Station; in 1927, the first motorised Fire Engine, a model by Martin Cultivator Co., was delivered to the brigade (Smith 1983, plate 61; Ketteringham 1992, 19-20).

The new building was larger and more elaborate than the shed-like structure it replaced (Figure 20). Like the earlier building, it consisted of two bays with gables facing the street, although it now faced John Street and the County Court rather than Market Hill and the Congregational Chapel. It was of Cambridge Gault brick, with darker (red brick?) quoins and detailing around the doors, windows and two horizontal bands. The roof was tiled, with two bands of a contrasting (darker?) colour, a central bellcote at the front between two pitched roofs, open on all four sides, with an arched opening at the base for drainage and a socket for a flagpole set in front of it and a steeply pitched roof.

Set into the left (west) gable was a datestone commemorating the construction of the Jubilee Fire Station, while the right (east) gable contained a stone recording the discovery of the datestone for the former Parish Rooms (later known as The Cage). It has not been possible to read the details of the inscriptions on the published copies of the photographs, although the first line of the left hand stone

Figure 20: the Jubilee Fire Station, date unknown (© Royston Museum)

Figure 21: the fire crew in front of the Jubilee Fire Station (1897×1914; after Ketteringham 1992, 18)

reads ERECTED and the bottom line probably reads 1897; the second and third lines of the right hand plaque read UPON THE SITE OF THE OLD PARISH, while the sixth (bottom) line reads 1718.

A later photograph (Figure 23), probably dating from the 1950s to judge from the vehicles parked in front of the Jubilee Fire Station shows that a tower had been added to the northern end of the right hand (eastern) part of the building. The tower appears to have been of wooden construction and its upper part was louvered. It was topped by a pyramidal roof. It may have been for drying hoses after use; it is curious that a view from the church tower, dated *c* 1900 (not reproduced here), shows this tower when it is clearly absent from other early photographs, which suggests that it was added soon after the construction of the Jubilee Fire Station.

The rear wall of the three tenements to the north of the Jubilee Fire Station is also visible in this photograph. They each have a door opening into the street, with no yard area, and a single window above. A second photograph (Figure 22), probably contemporary with this, shows the three properties in a derelict condition, their upper storey sash windows (two groups of 2×3 panes each) partly smashed and the windows in the doors (3×3 panes in each) completely smashed. This may date both this photograph and Figure 20 to a time immediately before the demolition of the buildings in 1960. The properties can be seen to be of (red?) brick, with a hipped slate roof, of two and a half storeys (Figure 12, which depicts the Market Hill frontages of the buildings before 1897, shows that there were low windows immediately below the eaves). There were separate chimney stacks for each property with no chimneypots. The buildings were devoid of any decorative elements, indicating their lowly status, although the small gardens at the front of the properties, facing Market Hill, had low brick walls topped with iron railings.

An early twentieth century view along the eastern end of Jepps Lane towards Church Lane

Figure 23: the Jubilee Fire Station, probably 1950s (© Royston Museum)

Figure 22: the rear of the tenements, probably 1950s (© Royston Museum)

Figure 24: Jepps Lane in the early twentieth century (after Ketteringham 1992, 57)

(Figure 25) shows the north wall of the northernmost tenement. It shows that the entrance to Church Lane was narrow, confirming the impression conveyed by the nineteenth-century large scale maps (Figure 16 and Figure 17), and that the north wall of the block was featureless. There is a metal bracket on the north-west corner of the tenement block, which appears to support a gas light, although the detail is not altogether clear in the photograph.

Figure 25: Royston from the air in the 1920s (after Smith 1983, Plate 1)

There is an early (1920s) aerial view of the town from the south-west, reproduced as a picture postcard (Figure 24). Although taken at some distance from Fish Hill Square, it is possible to recognise the south front of the Jubilee Fire Station (arrowed), largely because of the presence of the neoclassical façade of the John Street Congregational Chapel, although no details are visible. The tenements are hidden by the Chapel, although some of the buildings on the east side of Fish Hill are visible. The principal interest of the photograph is in showing how development of the town had barely begun to the north of Baldock Street and Melbourn Street, other than along Kneesworth Street and how the former 'Palace' buildings dominate the area to the north-east of the crossroads. Almost thirty years after the town had been brought into a single county, there were still differences in growth between the two halves.

The northern end of Market Hill and the northern side of John Street were dominated by the Congregational Chapel until its demolition in the 1960s (Figure 26). The main body of the building was of brick, with two rows of sash windows, account for the four northernmost bays; the fifth, southern, bay projected beyond the sides of the brick part of the building and consisted of a massive neoclassical façade, possibly of stone but more likely rendered, with a plain triangular pediment supported on two Ionic columns, with three doors to John Street and three widows above. There were iron railings and gates to the street frontage.

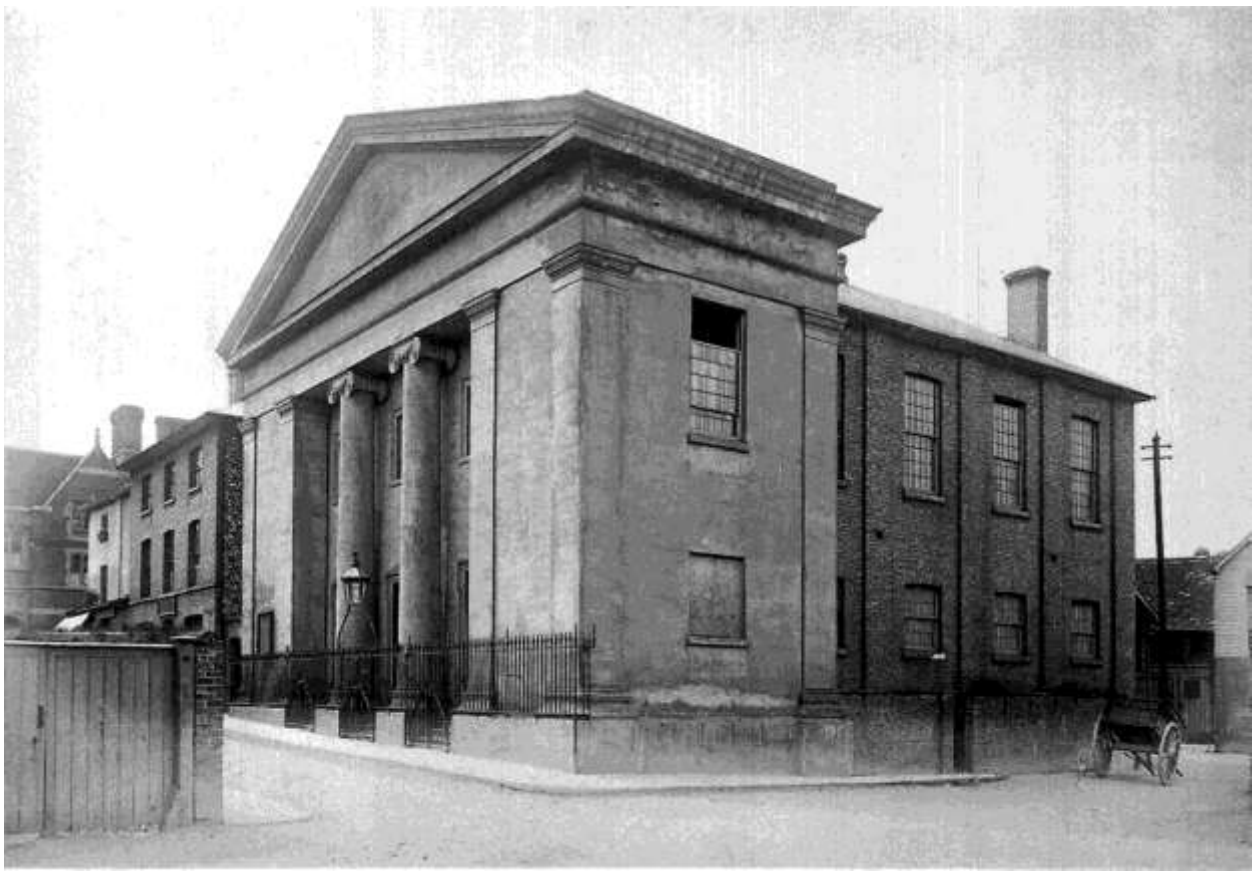

Figure 26: John Street Congregational Chapel (after Ketteringham 1992, 37)

Summary

Although some have sought an earlier origin for the settlement at Royston, it is apparent both from archaeological and documentary evidence that it was a development of the twelfth century. It is a moot point whether the town developed around the Priory or the Priory and the chapel that preceded it were built to serve an existing community. It is possible that this question will never be answered.

However, there is abundant evidence for human activity in the vicinity of the town stretching back at least to the Mesolithic period, with discoveries of artefacts, the survival of monuments and occasional discoveries of buried features adding to the picture of human settlement. This is unsurprising, as the region has fertile soils and a mild climate; North Hertfordshire in general has good evidence for continuous human activity since the end of the Pleistocene Ice Age.

Although the area around Fish Hill Square has always been peripheral to the main thoroughfares through Royston, it was one of the town's two medieval market places and it lies between the High Street and the former Augustinian Priory. This position will have placed it at the heart of the medieval town and it would be reasonable to expect that archaeological evidence for the commercial activities that took place in this area to survive. There is documentation, particularly from recent centuries, to show that this area was important enough to see a new County Court built in the middle of the nineteenth century, several of the town's early schools and the town's Fire Station. The town's history of devastating fires might suggest the early development of a volunteer Fire Brigade, and although this has not been a focus of the current project, it might be a rewarding area for further historical research.

There is considerable documentation for the site of the attenuation tank installed in August 2011, mostly cartographic and photographic. These give valuable indications of where substantial brick

Figure 27: Fish Hill Square and surrounding area from the air in 2010 (scale 1:2500)

structures stood on the site before they were demolished in 1960 that assist in the interpretation of the archaeological remains uncovered by the groundworks.

Project aims and methodology

Aims and objectives

The general aim of this observation and recording exercise was to establish whether or not any archaeological deposits, features or artefacts survived that were earlier in date than the existing car park surface of Fish Hill Square (Figure 28 is a view from the square, looking south-east). Royston is a medieval town whose archaeology remains poorly understood, so any opportunity to add to it is always welcome.

Figure 28: the Old Court House, Fish Hill Square, on 10 July 2010

The specific aim of this project was to record any archaeological remains uncovered in the area proposed for an attenuation tank towards the western side of the Square. The tank was to be placed inside a rectangular trench, excavated mechanically to a depth of two metres, the excavation of which would necessarily remove any archaeological and geological deposits within its footprint to that depth (Figure 29). An attempt would be made to compare any discoveries made during the recording with other discoveries in the immediate vicinity of the site in order better to interpret them and to understand their significance. The opportunity would also be taken to synthesis data about the development of the town in relation to potential discoveries on the site.

Methodology

The work was conducted according to a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared before fieldwork began by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, submitted to and approved by Hertfordshire County Council's Historic Environment Unit. It also conformed to current best practice as outlined in the Institute for

Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*. An initial site inspection was undertaken on the morning of 4 July 2011, when it was arranged with the site manager, Nial Casey of Maylim Ltd., to return on Thursday 7 July, when excavation was scheduled to start.

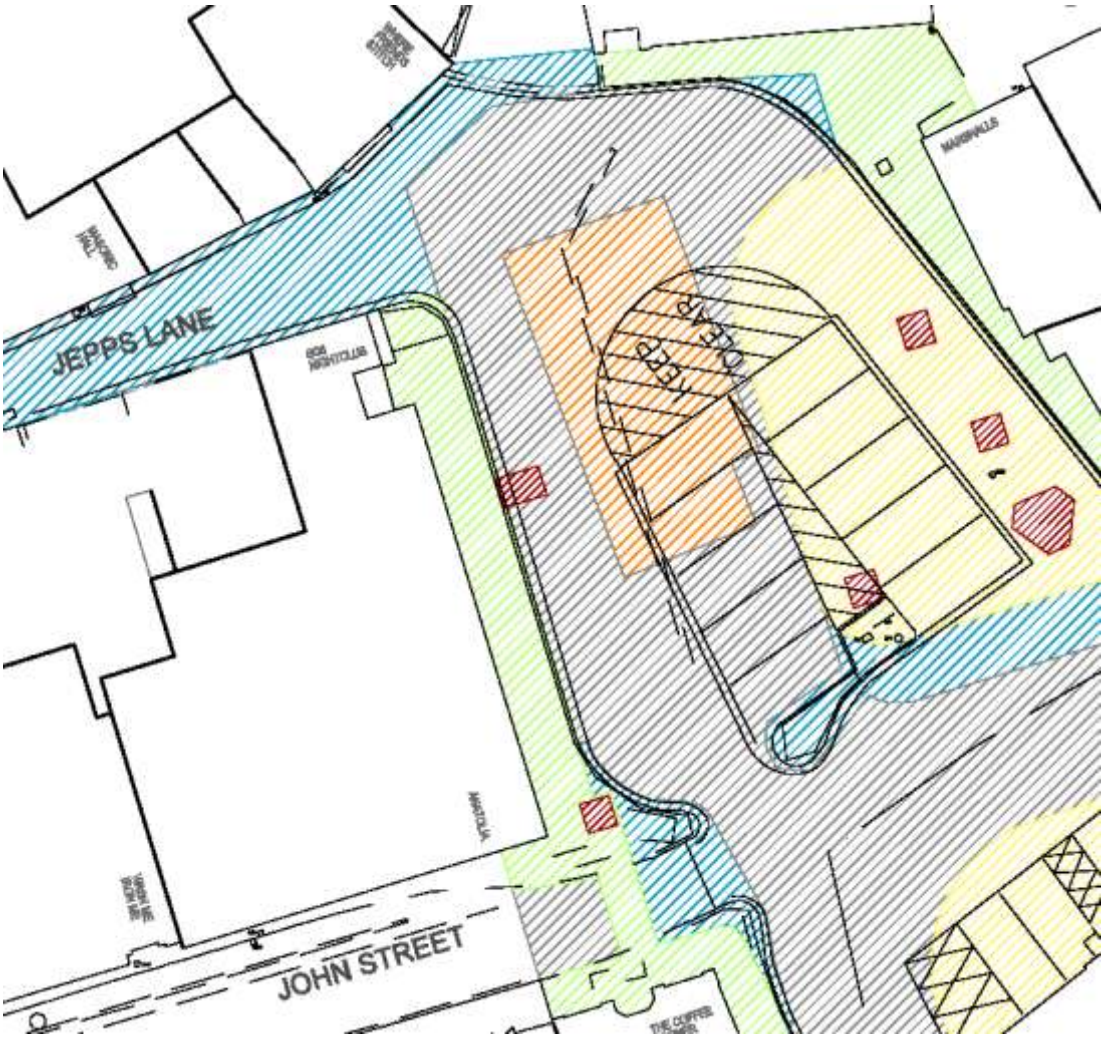

Figure 29: Fish Hill Square (1:300); the position of the attenuation tank is shaded orange

The excavation was conducted by the contractors for North Hertfordshire District Council using a 360° tracked JCB mechanical excavator fitted with a one metre toothed bucket. This was used to strip the overlying deposits of tarmac and its make-up layers (see below for details of these deposits) before beginning to empty the cellars of the properties that had formerly occupied the site. The spoil was placed to one side of the excavation to be removed from site by lorries. Observation of material removed from the site had to be undertaken from outside the fencing around the site for safety reasons.

During the first morning's work, the lorries to remove the spoil could not keep up with the pace of the excavator and work had to end early. At this point, only the north-eastern quarter of the excavation for the attenuation tank had been started and had reached a depth of around 1.5 m. The archaeologists were informed that there would be no more excavation on that or the following day and that they should return on the following Tuesday.

When the archaeologists returned around 9.20 am on Tuesday 12 July, the excavation had been completed, allowing no opportunity to observe any archaeological remains that might have been

preserved in the other three quarters of the trench, although it was possible to project where walls exposed on the previous day would have run.

Detailed site recording was necessarily restricted to the edges of the excavation (see the location plan in Figure 30). Here, exposed archaeological deposits and features were visible on the southern and western edges of the trench; where features could be seen, they were cleaned rapidly by hand using WHS pointing trowels and a more rapid clean was undertaken in other areas that were not obviously solid chalk, revealing several additional features. Following cleaning, each feature was located within the section (measured by distance from one edge of the trench and depth from the present surface), sketched at a scale of 1:10, photographed and recorded on pro forma record sheets. The eastern part of the northern edge and the eastern edge had substantial areas of poorly consolidated brick rubble left in section and, for safety reasons, no attempt was made to clean these.

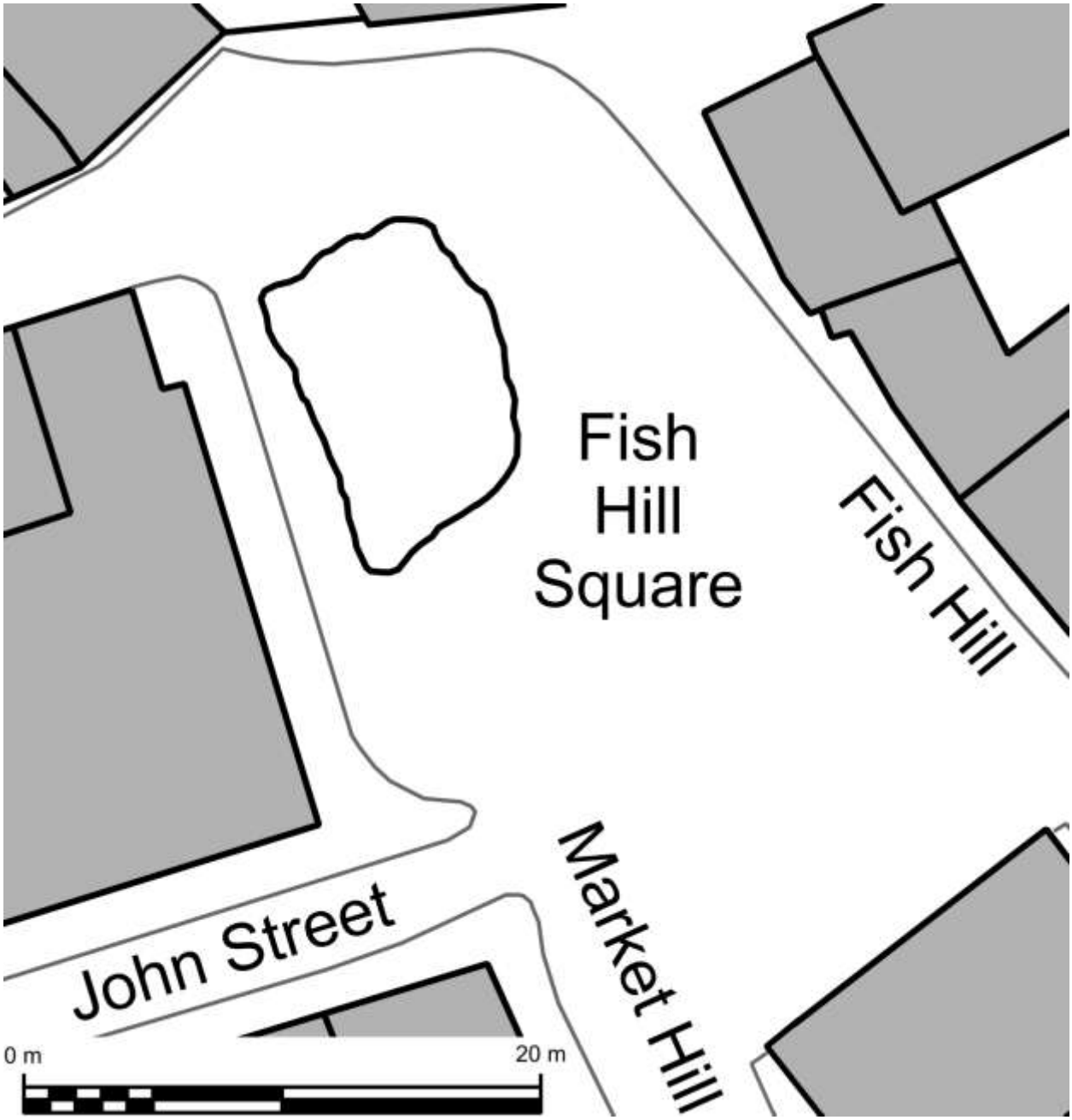

Figure 30: location of the excavation trench (1:250)

A measured sketch was made of the southern and western faces of the excavated area and photographs were taken of all exposed sides of the trench. This was hampered slightly by the presence of the arm and bucket of the mechanical excavator, which had been left resting on the bottom of the trench; there was no driver on site to move it during the site visit by the archaeologists and the site manager could not be contacted as he was in a meeting with his telephone switched off.

The western edge of the trench was tackled first, as there were fewer obvious features cut into the chalk on this side. The southern edge was tackled next, followed by basic plans of the walls to the north and east; the walls were too obscured by poorly consolidated brick rubble to make it possible to record them in section. Recording took somewhat less than two hours.

Several smaller holes were also excavated at various points through the pavement and car park surfaces around Fish Hill Square. None of them was more than 0.45 m deep; the only stratigraphy exposed in them consisted of tarmac surfaces and make-up deposits identical to deposits (1), (2), (3) and (4) in the attenuation tank trench (see below). In the base of all of these smaller cuts, the chalk bedrock was exposed and no archaeological features were visible.

A subsequent site visit took place after the attenuation tank had been inserted and the hole backfilled, as a well has been discovered to its south. A brief visit was made around 1 pm on Friday 19 August 2011, when there were no workers on site and it again proved impossible to contact the site manager. The hole in which the well was discovered had been shuttered and concrete poured almost to its top. All that was visible was the top of a (nineteenth-century?) brick capping, evidently forming a hemispherical dome, a little under a metre in diameter. No further recording was possible on this element of the watching brief.

This was the total fieldwork carried out on the site, amounting to only about four hours in total. It is to be regretted that the bulk of the excavation for the attenuation tank was carried out without an archaeologist present to observe the work, despite arrangements having been made for this to happen. Any features that may have been present, including architectural details of the cellarage, have been destroyed without record. Nevertheless, those features that could be recorded add a little information to the body of archaeological data for this part of Royston.

Recorded deposits and features

Surfaces and spread deposits

Three deposits were observed to seal all archaeological features on all four sides of the hole excavated to contain the attenuation tank. All were clearly of later twentieth-century date, although no dating material was recovered from them or, indeed, from any deposits on the site. The uppermost (deposit (1)) and the lowest (deposit (3)) of these three deposits consisted of tarmac road surfacing. Deposit (1) was the present car park surface, while (3) was evidently the surface of an earlier car park that must post-date the demolition of the structures that formerly occupied the site.

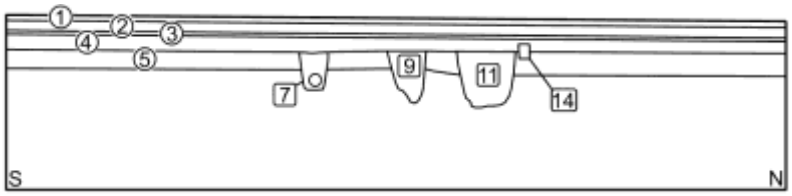

Figure 31: the western (east facing) section (1:100)

Beneath deposit (3), deposits (4) and (5) were observed only on the western and northern edges of the cut. Deposit (4) sealed a series of features in the western section, including brick feature, [14], the foundations of a former structure on the site, and others that cut through deposit (5), including a ceramic drain of later nineteenth or twentieth-century date, [7], a cut of obscure function, [9], and a posthole, [11]. No features other than brick walls were observed in the northern section. On the south section, deposit (3) sealed feature [25] and deposit (17); this in turn sealed features [22] and [27], as well as deposit (41); this then sealed feature [19].

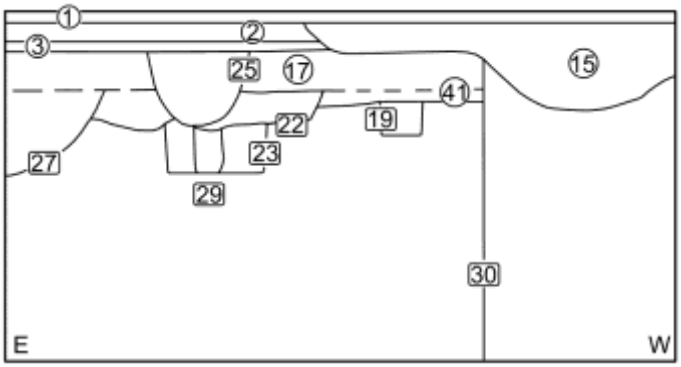

Figure 32: the southern (north facing) section (1:50)

Apart from the car park surfaces and their make up deposits, there was no continuity of stratigraphy between the sections. The western edge of cut [30] coincided exactly with the line of the western edge of the trench, while a brick wall was aligned with its south-eastern corner, entering it at the lowest point visible of cut [27].

(1) Surface

A layer of tarmac forming the car park surface at the time of recording; it was 80 mm thick across the whole site with no significant variation in thickness.

(2) Deposit

A mid yellow brown soil containing a little rubble of later post-medieval (nineteenth and twentieth century) date, sealed by surface (1) and sealing surface (3) that was visible on the northern, western and southern sides of the excavation. It was 0.14 m thick across the site with little variation in thickness.

This appears to have been laid as a levelling deposit for surface (1) and was probably of late twentieth-century date. It may have been laid to counter the slumping observed where surface (3) lay over infilled cellars.

(3) Surface

A layer of tarmac completely sealed by deposit (2) was observed in all four sides of the excavation. It was 50 mm thick, although on the eastern side of the excavation, it was thicker over the walls and backfills of the cellars of buildings that had formerly stood on the site.

The former car park surface of Fish Hill Square, probably laid following the demolition of the buildings in 1960. It appears to have been laid directly on top of the demolished remains of these buildings and the backfills of the cellars. In the areas of slumping, it is possible that additional layers of tarmac had been used to fill in the hollows created, although this was not observed on site.

(4) Deposit

A discontinuous deposit of rubble in a greyish brown soil matrix was observed across the whole of the western edge of the excavation but not in other edges. It contained significant quantities of post-medieval rubble of indeterminate date (but with a *terminus post quem* of the nineteenth century). It varied between 0.19 and 0.16 m in thickness; towards the northern end, it sealed features [7], [9], [11] and [14].

This layer was probably a levelling deposit that is likely to have pre-dated the construction of the Jubilee Fire Station in 1897 and was possibly also earlier than the four tenements that occupied the site for much of the nineteenth century.

(5) Deposit

A grey-brown deposit, seen only in the western section of the excavation. It was completely sealed by deposit (4) and was cut by features [7], [9] and [11]. It contained a little rubble, including earlier post-medieval (seventeenth century?) brick and tile. It lay immediately over the chalk bedrock.

This deposit represented activity on the site pre-dating the structures occupying the site before the construction of the buildings demolished in 1960, which appear from feature [11] to have been timber-framed. Nevertheless, this deposit is no earlier than seventeenth century in date.

(15) Deposit (fill?)

A grey layer of chalky rubble was seen only in the south-western face of the southern section of the excavation. It physically overlay deposits (2), (3), (17) and (16); (16) was the fill of vertically sided cut [30], whose western edge coincided exactly with the western edge of the excavation, and the position of (15) effectively removed the stratigraphic relationship between (2)/(3) and (16).

This was evidently packing material inserted into an area of slumping in the fill of feature [30]; it appears that some of the deposits forming the car park surfaces – (2) and (3) – were removed around the edge of the slump, presumably to aid the laying of this packing. It pre-dated the existing car park surface but must post-date the original *c* 1960 surface.

(17) Deposit

A deposit of dark brown soil up to 0.33 m thick underlying tarmac deposit (3). It was cut by feature [25], although it was not possible to trace the edge of the cut all the way to the surface of (17), as the fill of [25] was almost identical in character to this deposit. It also overlay (26), the fill of [27], although again, it proved impossible to distinguish the two deposits, which were identical in character. The top of feature [22], whose fill (20) was of very different character from (17) could be seen to extend 60 mm above the top of the chalk bedrock, suggesting a level for the base of (17); a new number, (41), was assigned to the deposit beneath, which was yet again identical in character to this deposit.

This was a deposit certainly pre-dating the laying of the first car park surface *c* 1960; it was also earlier than cut [30], which must relate to one of the structures that had earlier occupied the site. It is unclear whether this was the Jubilee Fire Station of 1897 or The Cage demolished to make way for it, although the probable association of cut [22] with the construction of The Cage (below, page 51) would make this deposit contemporary with the construction of the Jubilee Fire Station in 1897.

(39) Deposit

A dark to mid reddish brown sandy deposit immediately beneath the lower of the two tarmac deposits, (3). It overlay and penetrated the gaps between the brick rubble forming deposit (40).

This appears to have been a levelling deposit, laid over the brick rubble used to infill the cellars of the tenement building demolished in 1960. There are indications that it slumped, leading to periodic repairs of hollows in surface (3) by dumping more tarmac in them.

(40) Deposit (fill)

A thick deposit consisting largely of brick rubble with a dark reddish sandy matrix similar to deposit (39), which sealed it, was found to occupy the area within a set of brick walls ([31], [32],[33], [34], [35], [36] and [37]). It was generally between 2.0 and 2.2 m thick and rested on chalk bedrock.

This was the lower backfill of the cellars of the tenement buildings that originally stood at the northern end of Market Hill, probably formed largely from the walls of the buildings.

(41) Deposit

A dark brown soil indistinguishable from (17), which sealed it; a separate number was assigned because (17) overlay (18), the fill of [19], a feature that cut this deposit.

This was a deposit pre-dating (17) and probably also the construction of the Parish Rooms in 1718. However, it was not possible to date the deposit more precisely.

(44) Deposit

A dark brown soil indistinguishable from (17), which sealed it; a separate number was assigned because (17) overlay (26), the fill of [27], a feature that cut this deposit.

This deposit pre-dated (17) and probably also the construction of the Parish Rooms in 1718. However, it was not possible to date the deposit more precisely.

Walls and foundations

The eastern side of the excavation was dominated by a series of walls forming at least two distinct 'rooms'. All the walls that lay within the area for the attenuation tank were removed by mechanical excavator, with no opportunity for detailed measured recording; those elements that remained on the morning when recording took place were partly obscured by the unconsolidated rubble (40) (Figure 33). In the

Figure 33: recess in wall [37] during excavation

south wall of the northernmost 'room' formed by the walls, a doorway with a semi-circular arch was seen before demolition; in the south wall of the southern room, a small recess, also with a semi-circular arch, was observed, part of which survived for later recording.

Unfortunately, the remainder of the site was cleared without observation, despite a request that the contractors inform the archaeologists when work was due to recommence. This makes it impossible to know if there were further walls to the east and where the truncated brick wall visible in the southern end of the eastern section originally ran. It is possible that this was part of a third 'room', further south than the two recorded, although it is unclear how it would have related to the walls that were recorded.

[14] Brick structure

A small section of brick foundations was observed in the western (east facing) section of the trench. Only three courses of brick survived and were sealed by rubble deposit (4). The bricks were of nineteenth century character.

This was probably part of the foundations for the front garden wall of the nineteenth-century tenement block facing Market Hill.

Figure 34: brick foundations [14]

Structures [31]-[38]

A wall was observed running north-north-west to south-south-east from approximately the centre of the northern edge of the excavation, wall [31]; to the east, it was joined at right angles to wall [32], which ran for 3.53 m west-south-west to east-north-east along the edge of the trench. Some twenty-four courses of bricks laid in English Bond were observed, surviving to a height of around 1.95 m. The bricks rested directly on chalk bedrock and, to the west, abutted chalk bedrock with no trace of a cut to contain them or a backfill. The eastern face of [31] and the southern face of [32] were limewashed. Parts of wall [32] were obscured by the remains of deposits (39) and (40), where the wall disappeared beneath the edge of the trench.

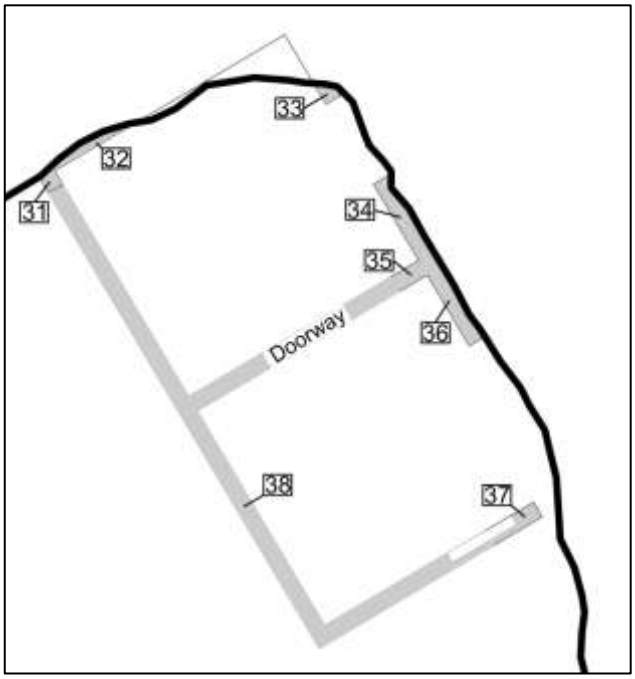

Figure 35: walls observed and inferred (scale 1:100)

To the east, wall [32] presumably joined wall [33] at right angles, although the angle was obscured by unexcavated portions of backfills (39) and (40). Wall [33] ran parallel with wall [31], but 1.07 m south of its junction with [32], it terminated. There was then a gap some 1.23 m wide, after which the line of wall [33] was continued by wall [34]. After 1.17 m, this wall joined wall [35], which ran parallel with wall [32]. These wall

elements therefore enclosed an almost square space some 3.53 m long (west to east) and 3.50 m wide (north to south). Wall [35] was the one observed to contain a semi-circular arched doorway during the first stage of excavation. The gap between walls [33] and [34] likewise appeared to be a doorway, although this did not have a semi-circular arch, unlike that in [35] and there was no sign of a lintel; it was possible to see that beyond this gap lay more poorly consolidated rubble and sand deposits identical with (38) and (39) that filled this space.

South of wall [35], wall [36] continued the line of wall [34] for a distance of 1.08 m; beyond this, there was a gap of 2.14 m before a short stretch of wall running west-south-west to east-north-east was encountered, wall [37]. This was the wall in which a small recess was observed during the excavation and its eastern edge lay some 0.34 m west of the eastern end of this wall. It did not continue into the eastern edge of the section and there was evidently more activity to its south-south-east than could be seen after the trench had been emptied. It is probably related to the bricks seen in section in the extreme southern end of the eastern face of the trench whose alignment could not be determined, [42].

Walls [31], [32], [33], [34] and [35] formed a cellar beneath the northernmost of the nineteenth-century tenement properties fronting Market Hill before demolition in 1960 (Figure 36). Photographic and map evidence indicates that they would have lain beneath the front rooms of the properties. The doorway in the eastern walls ([33] and [34]) appears to have given access either to a second room of cellarage that would have lain beneath the rear room of the property or to a staircase giving access to the cellars.

Figure 36: walls [31], [32], [33] and [34]

Walls [35], [36], [37] and the inferred wall [38] formed a cellar beneath the middle nineteenth-century tenement property. It was clearly linked with the cellar to the north and there was also a door giving access to a room to the east; however, there also appears to have been a door through to a cellar to the south that straddled the line of the diving walls between the individual cellar rooms in the other properties. The southern part of the section on this side of the trench consisted of a depth of brick rubble similar to deposit (40) to the north, beneath a thick concrete slab, (43); a slight void had formed

beneath the slab where the rubble deposit had slumped. The slab may have been laid to consolidate the backfilled cellars following the demolition of the tenements in 1960.

It is possible that wall [42] was part of the south wall of a third cellar beneath the southernmost of the three tenement properties that survived until 1960, with [37] forming its north wall and the west wall lost during the part of the excavation carried out without archaeologists in attendance. This southernmost wall might have lain directly against the chalk face that formed the southern edge of the trench: there were no signs that the chalk or soils in this area had been scraped by the bucket of the mechanical excavator, suggesting that a brick wall might simply have been pulled away from this edge.

Cut features

The only other features that could be recorded following the excavation of the pit for the attenuation tank were cut features visible in the sides of the trench. Cut features are the result of digging through earlier deposits (soil, former surfaces, bedrock and so on) and are generally visible because their fills are of a contrasting colour to, or contain different materials from those they were cut through. This is particularly the case with features cut into the white chalk bedrock.

[7] Drain

Slightly south of the centre of the western (east facing) section was an almost vertically sided cut feature, [7], 0.38 m wide at the top, 0.25 m wide at the base and 0.50 m deep in total (Figure 37). It contained a single uniform fill, (6), a brown sandy loam with large, angular chalk pebbles, which sealed a pale yellowish brown ceramic pipe 0.18 m in diameter externally. The feature was cut through deposit (5) and its fill was sealed by deposit (4).

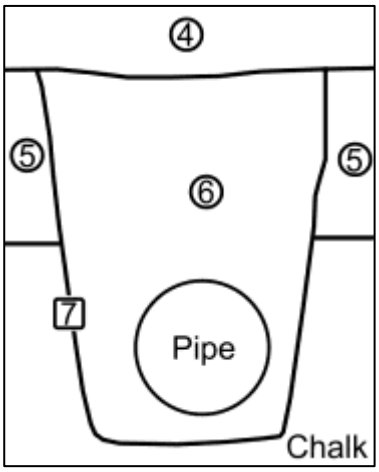

Figure 37: feature [7] scale 1:10

Figure 38: feature [7] photograph

The ceramic pipe was a drain of late nineteenth or twentieth century type (Figure 38), presumably connected with drainage for the tenement properties fronting Market Hill. Although disregarded by many archaeologists as nothing more than annoying intrusions into earlier deposits, drains are an interesting feature of the archaeology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Public Health Act of 1875 required every Local Authority to provide sewerage at their, placing the burden on the local ratepayers (Hill 1977, 195). This tended to reinforce the growing division between the rich and poor, and many urban centres recently deserted by the middle and upper classes suffered a relative neglect in service provision (Evans 1983, 154).

[9] U-shaped cut

In the centre of the western (east facing) section, cut [9] had an almost vertical northern edge, a southern edge sloping at around 80° and a poorly defined base (Figure 39); it was about 0.50 m wide at the top, where it cut deposit (5), 0.32 m wide where it began to curve inwards towards its poorly defined base and up to 0.60 m deep. It contained a single fill, (8), a mid brown clay loam with numerous small flints and a few chalk pebbles; it was difficult to define the edges of the feature where it had cut through (5) owing to the similarity between its fill and that deposit.

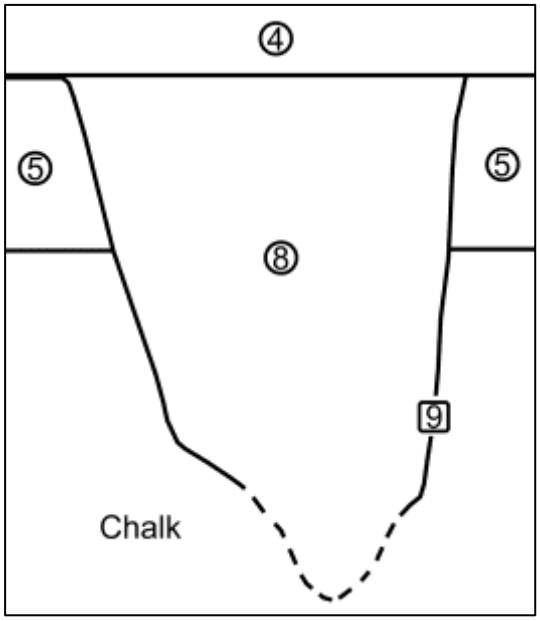

Figure 39: feature [9] scale 1:10

Figure 40: feature [9] photograph

This cut feature is of obscure character (Figure 40). No evidence was found by which to date it apart from its relationship with deposit (4) of probably early nineteenth century date, which sealed it, and deposit (5) of probably seventeenth century date, which it cut.

[11] Posthole

A U-shaped cut was observed north of the centre of the western (east facing section), about 0.80 m wide at the top, where it cut deposit (5), about 0.50 m wide at its base and 0.53 m deep (Figure 41). It contained two fills: (12), a deposit of chalk rubble, and (13), a light grey-brown clay loam. The latter surrounded (10), a dark brown deposit contained within a vertical post-pipe some 0.22 m wide. The upper part of the feature was obscured by rubble in deposit (4), which sealed it and the upper part of the northern

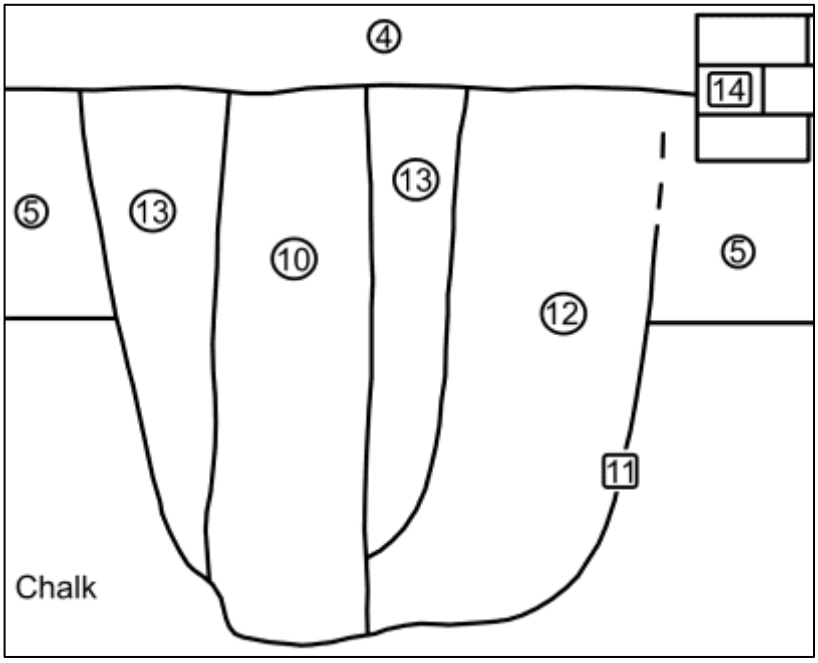

Figure 41: feature [11] scale 1:10

edge of the cut could not be seen because of overhanging rubble. Nevertheless, it was clear that it was cut from the surface of deposit (5).

This was a substantial posthole (Figure 42); as it was observed only in section, it is impossible to determine the original thickness of the post it supported as it is not known if the section cut across its maximum diameter. The earth-fast post appears to have decayed *in situ*, leaving a rather darker deposit in the posthole than the surrounding soils; after partial backfilling of the posthole around it with chalk packing (13), deposit (12) was rammed down around the post, which had been deliberately sited toward one edge of the posthole (the southern), perhaps to give it more stability.

Given the size of the post, over 0.22 m wide, it is likely to have been a structural element rather than, say, a fence post. It must therefore have been part of a building that stood on this site, probably facing Market Hill, before the construction of the tenement buildings in the nineteenth century. As it cut deposit (5), which contained probably seventeenth-century bricks, the building can have been no earlier than that.

Figure 42: feature [11] photograph

There is no evidence to suggest what this building might have been. As noted above, the early cartographic representations of this part of Royston show no detail. However, as also noted, buildings in the surrounding area are principally of sixteenth-, seventeenth- or nineteenth-century date, although none earlier than the nineteenth century actually survives on Fish Hill Square. This posthole is therefore likely to have been part of a seventeenth-century building demolished for the construction of the tenement buildings early in the nineteenth century.

[19] Flat bottomed cut

Towards the western end of the southern (north-facing) section was a shallow, straight-sided and flat bottomed cut (Figure 44), some 0.29 m wide at the top, 0.27 m wide at the base and 0.20 m deep, cut into the natural chalk bedrock and sealed by deposit (41). Its fill, (18), was a very dark brown clay loam containing a few small chalk pebbles.

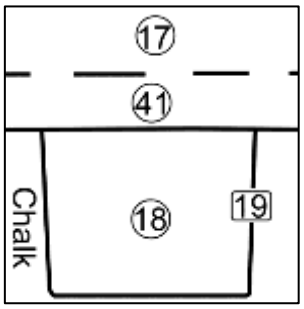

Figure 44: feature [19] scale 1:10

Figure 43: feature [19] photograph

The visible section of this feature (Figure 43) suggests that it was a beamslot, a linear cut designed to hold a horizontal beam that would have supported a timber-framed building. Alternatively, it could have been the base of an earth-fast post, which, unlike posthole [11], was dug directly into the chalk; this is a much less likely option. The dark colour of its fill suggests that it is the result of the wooden contents decaying *in situ*.

If it had been a structural element, it is unclear whether it was part of the same structure as posthole [11]. Its upper surface lay 0.60 m below the present ground surface and its base 0.80 m below; the top of posthole [11] lay 0.43 m below the present ground surface and its base 1.16 m below. Even allowing for truncation at the time The Cage was built in 1718 or the Jubilee Fire Station in 1897, the differences in levels suggest that they were parts of two separate structures. As with posthole [11], there was no direct dating evidence. However, if the deduction that the formation of deposit (41) pre-dated the construction of The Cage is correct, this would mean that [11] and [19] were roughly contemporary, even if they were parts of different buildings.

Figure 45: features [22], [23], [25] and [29] photograph

[22] Flat bottomed cut

In the centre of the southern (north facing) section was a group of three intercutting features (Figure 46), with a fourth cut to their east. Feature [22] was a flat bottomed cut at least 0.75 m wide (its eastern side had been truncated by later cut [25]) and 0.21 m deep, containing a single fill, (20), an orange-brown sandy loam. It was sealed by deposit (17) and cut deposit (41) to the west; its relationship with deposit (44) to the east could not be determined. There was a slight dip in the base towards its eastern end, where it had been cut into the softer fill (28); its eastern edge may have coincided with the eastern edge of post-pipe [29], although the complexity of cuts and deposits in this area made it difficult to be certain of this.

As this feature cut deposit (41), which may have formed before The Cage was built in 1718, it is tempting to relate this feature to the construction or use of The Cage. This would then push deposit (17) into the late nineteenth century and associate it with the demolition of The Cage and the earlier Fire Station, which is not unreasonable.

[23] Flat bottomed cut

Another flat bottomed cut was truncated by feature [22], feature [23]: this survived to a width of 0.63 m and a depth of 0.26 m (Figure 46) but it is unlikely to have been much deeper originally. It contained a single fill, (21), a deposit consisting largely of chalk with some dark brown soil; east of the centre of the feature, an almost vertical post-pipe, [29], was visible, around 0.15 m across. This contained a gravelly grey-brown fill, (28).

This feature was evidently a large post-hole, the visible part of the post-pipe probably not representing the full thickness of the post. The timber was evidently withdrawn before it decayed, as the fill contained no trace of organic staining. The base of the feature lay some 1.08 m below the present surface, a similar depth to posthole [11]; it is therefore possible, although not proven, that they therefore belonged to the same building.

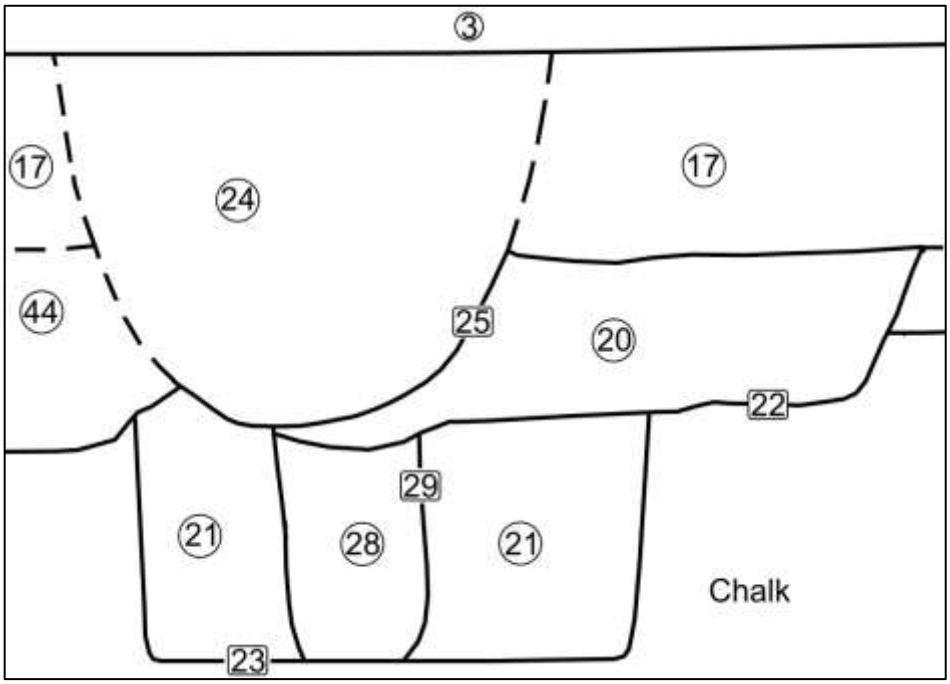

Figure 46: features [22], [23], [25] and [29] scale 1:10

[25] U-shaped cut

The fills of both [22] and [23] were partly truncated to the east by a U-shaped cut, feature [25], the upper part of which was difficult to define (Figure 46) but which evidently cut deposit (17). It was around 0.66 m wide at the top and up to 0.50 m deep, with a single fill, (24), a grey gritty loam with inclusions of angular chalk pebble and containing fragments of Cambridge Gault bricks.

A cut feature of uncertain purpose. The fragments of Gault brick suggest a date in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries; the Jubilee Fire Station had used these bricks in its construction, so it could be associated with either the construction of the building in 1897 or its demolition in 1960.

[27] Cut

At the eastern end of the south (north facing) section was a cut feature that evidently extended beyond the eastern edge of the trench, where it abruptly rose vertically (Figure 47). It was about 0.67 m wide and 0.57 m deep, with a single, very mixed fill, (26), a grey-brown gritty loam containing significant quantities of rubble, although it was distributed in discrete patches rather than throughout the deposit.

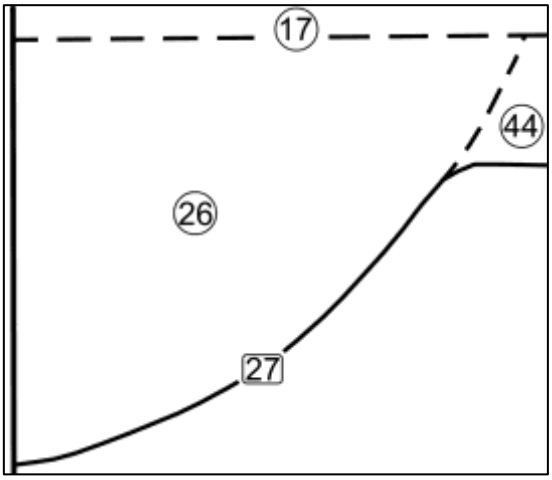

Figure 46: cut [27] scale 1:10

Figure 48: feature [27] photograph

This was another cut feature whose purpose could not be established. Its stratigraphic position, apparently earlier than deposit (17) and cutting deposit (44) suggests that it may have been part of the construction work for The Cage in 1718. A fragment of Gault brick visible in the photograph (Figure 48) is intrusive and appears to have been dragged into the deposit by the bucket of the mechanical excavator.

[30] Vertically sided cut

At the extreme western end of the south (north facing) section was a vertically sided cut feature, 1.25 m wide and 2.05 m deep; its western edge coincided with the western edge of the trench and its base with the base of the trench (Figure 49). It contained a single fill, (16), a poorly consolidated yellow brown loam containing brick rubble (with both yellow Gault and red bricks) that had partly spilled out across the base of the trench (Figure 50). An earlier period of slumping may also account for the dip in the base of deposit (15), which sealed the fill.

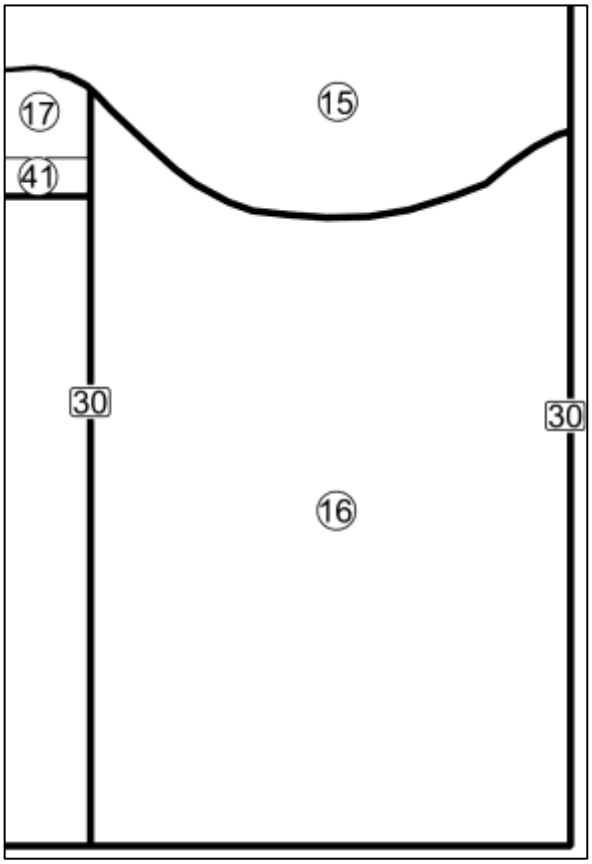

Figure 49: feature [30] scale 1:20

This feature appears to have lain beneath the north-western corner of the Jubilee Fire Station and must have been connected with its use, presumably in some king of cellarage. Interestingly, there was no indication that there was ever a brick lining to this feature, which must have been either a passageway or, perhaps more likely, part of the stairwell leading down into a cellar. As it cut deposit (17), this means that (17) must pre-date the construction of the

Jubilee Fire Station, as suggested in the description of feature [22], above. The bricks in the fill probably derive from the demolished Jubilee Fire Station, confirming the use of Cambridge Gault bricks with contrasting red brick detailing in its construction.

No other deposits, structures or features were visible in the trench cut in July 2011. The only other feature revealed during construction was a brick-capped well to the south of the trench dug for the attenuation tank, discovered in August 2011. It had a dome of nineteenth century bricks that sealed what was evidently a brick-lined well. This must have been located in front of The Cage; none of the historic photographs shows a feature in the road that would have allowed access to it, so the well must have gone out of use before the late 1890s. Whether the capping was put in place to seal the well or was part of its construction could not be determined.

Figure 50: feature [30] photograph

Natural

Undisturbed geological deposits were visible on all but the eastern edge of the trench. Only chalk rock was visible (Figure 51), with no trace of drift geology or of weathering deposits on its upper surface. This suggests that earlier deposits that may have formed above the deposits, including the topsoil pre-dating the growth of the town, had been removed at some point before the formation of the earliest deposits, (5) and (41), probably in the seventeenth century. This evident truncation is a phenomenon noted across the town, but for which no easy, single explanation can be suggested.

Figure 51: chalk bedrock on the south side of the trench

Summary of observations

Although only those deposits, structures and features that were visible in the sides of the trench dug for the attenuation tank could be recorded, a number of interesting observations were made about the history of the site. Most importantly, the earliest evidence recorded was for timber-framed structures of probably seventeenth-century date that stood on the site before any of the buildings depicted in historic photographs or on early maps were constructed. Because of the position of the attenuation tank on the

west side of Fish Hill Square, these structures must have fronted Market Hill and it is possible that there will be documentary evidence for their use, although this was something that could not be researched for the present project.

There was also evidence for the construction of various other structures, including possible evidence for The Cage in 1718 and the Jubilee Fire Station in 1897. The construction deposits were matched by demolition deposits of late nineteenth- and mid twentieth-century date. Two separate car park surface were observed, sealing the 1960s demolition deposits.

In terms of the development of Royston more generally, the evidence from this project suggests that the north end of Fish Hill and Market Hill remained undeveloped until the seventeenth century. This may date the infill of this part of the market place, a process that has been reversed since 1960, with the creation of Fish Hill Square.

Discussion and conclusions

The observation of the works carried out in Fish Hill Square revealed no archaeological deposits, features or artefacts that could be dated earlier than the seventeenth century AD at the earliest. Everything identified was of post-medieval date, a phenomenon that has been noted across the historic town for reasons that are not altogether clear. There has evidently been considerable truncation of medieval (and possibly earlier) deposits throughout the core of the medieval town. In part this may be a feature of the topography, with the town sitting at the base of a steep slope and suffering periodic floods of water (which, indeed, were the reason for the installation of the attenuation tank that made this work necessary); a series of flood events up to the seventeenth century could periodically have scoured earlier deposits from the top of the chalk.

Figure 52: Fish Hill Square in March 2012, after the completion of the work

However, this does not appear to be an adequate explanation on its own, as a similar lack of medieval deposits has been noted on sites that were not thoroughfares and where the presence of buildings and boundary walls would have prevented this kind of water-driven scouring. It therefore appears possible that, for whatever reasons, activities in the medieval town did not lead to the development of deeply stratified deposits.

The archaeological potential

It is clear that further archaeological deposits and features survive beneath the surface of Fish Hill Square. These will include further elements of the cellarage recorded in part in July 2011, both beneath the Jubilee Fire Station and the nineteenth-century tenements. The levelling deposits seen in section

Figure 53: the site of the attenuation tank after reinstatement (March 2012)

extend beyond the edges of the trench and probably contain material that would permit more precise dating than suggested here.

Of greater significance are the postholes and beamslot of apparently seventeenth century date. These are the first evidence for buildings on the site before those recorded in historical photographs or later nineteenth century maps. Further work could reveal additional postholes and beamslots, enabling suggestions to be made about the superstructures of the buildings based around them.

What is clear, though, is that nothing survived from the medieval activities that can be assumed to have taken place on the site, including the market attested from the thirteenth century onwards. In some ways, it is unsurprising that this should leave few traces in the archaeological record, although it is curious that the earliest deposits on the site appear to date from the seventeenth century and seal undisturbed bedrock.

This may be evidence for the truncation of earlier deposits, a phenomenon noted throughout the core of the medieval town. What is not clear is whether this truncation was of anthropogenic origin – for instance, as a result of terracing – or if it is a result of natural phenomena, such as water scouring. Although the latter is a plausible explanation for the lack of medieval deposits in an open space, such as a market place, it does not explain why medieval deposits are not found in other parts of the town where buildings would have prevented this kind of erosion.

On balance, deliberate truncation appears to be a better explanation for the widespread removal of medieval deposits throughout the town. Why this should have occurred and when it took place are

questions that cannot be answered by the present project, although the start of the sequence in the seventeenth century provides a *terminus ante quem*. Possible contexts for this sort work include the Dissolution of the Priory in 1537 and the construction of King James I's hunting lodge in the early seventeenth century.

The impact of redevelopment

The works in Fish Hill Square impacted on archaeological deposits principally in the siting of the new attenuation tank (Figure 53), where they were removed completely. In a few places, test pits and foundations for street furniture also removed deposits down to the chalk bedrock, but these were individually small and scattered around the site.

The redevelopment as a whole has not resulted in the wholesale destruction of the archaeological resource for Fish Hill Square. Indeed, further work in the area may well elucidate many of the observations made during the current project, as already indicated.

Figure 54: the public art erected in Fish Hill Square as part of the refurbishment (March 2012)

Figure 55: new street furniture (March 2012)

The enhancement work has made the Square more attractive within the townscape, which ought to help revitalise this part of Royston. There is now public art (Figure 54) and new street furniture (Figure

55), while car parking has been shifted to the western edge of the square, opening it up to better use. It is also now possible to appreciate the architectural diversity of the square and, especially, the dominant position of the Old Court House.

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Appendices

1: List of contexts recorded

1	Surface	Tarmac forming current car park surface	Late C20
2	Deposit	Mid yellow brown soil	Late C20
3	Surface	Tarmac	*c* 1960
4	Deposit	Discontinuous deposit of rubble in greyish brown soil matrix	Early C19?
5	Deposit	Grey-brown soil	C17?
6	Fill	Backfill of drain trench [7]	Late C19
7	Cut	Cut containing ceramic drain	Late C19
8	Fill	Light grey-brown fill of cut [9]; contains numerous small flints	C18/C19?
9	Cut	U-shaped cut	C18/C19?
10	Fill	Dark brown fill of post-pipe in posthole [11]	C17
11	Cut	Posthole	C17
12	Fill	Light grey-brown fill of posthole [11]	C17
13	Fill	Chalk rubble packing in posthole [11]	C17
14	Structure	Brick foundations	C19
15	Fill	Chalk rubble	Late C20
16	Fill	Brown soil and brick rubble fill of cut [30]	*c* 1960
17	Deposit	Dark brown soil	*c* 1897
18	Fill	Very dark brown fill of cut [19]	C17
19	Cut	Vertically sided, flat bottomed cut	C17
20	Fill	Orange-brown fill of cut [22]	*c* 1718
21	Fill	Dark brown soil containing much chalk, fill of posthole [23]	C17
22	Cut	Flat bottomed cut	*c* 1718
23	Cut	Posthole	C17
24	Fill	Grey gritty fill of cut [25]	1897×1960
25	Cut	U-shaped cut	1897×1960
26	Fill	Grey-brown gritty fill of cut [27]	*c* 1718
27	Cut	Amorphous cut	*c* 1718
28	Fill	Gravelly grey-brown fill of post-pipe [29] in posthole [23]	C17
29	Cut	Near vertically sided cut	C17
30	Cut	Vertically sided cut	*c* 1897
31	Structure	Cellar wall running north-north-west to south-south-east; joined to [32]	C19
32	Structure	Cellar wall running west-south-west to east-north-east; joined to [31] and [33]	C19
33	Structure	Cellar wall running north-north-west to south-south-east; joined to [32]	C19
34	Structure	Cellar wall running north-north-west to south-south-east; joined to [35]	C19
35	Structure	Cellar wall running west-south-west to east-north-east; joined to [34] and [36]	C19
36	Structure	Cellar wall running north-north-west to south-south-east; joined to [36]	C19
37	Structure	Cellar wall running west-south-west to east-north-east; joined to [38]	C19
38	Structure	Cellar wall running north-north-west to south-south-east; joined to [37]	C19
39	Fill	Sandy levelling deposit over cellars	*c* 1960
40	Fill	Brick rubble backfill of cellars	*c* 1960
41	Deposit	Dark brown soil	C17
42	Structure	Cellar wall in extreme south-eastern corner of the trench	C19
43	Deposit	Concrete slab in southern end of the eastern section	*c* 1960
44	Deposit	Dark brown soil	C17

Index