



## The History of Playstreet

The presence of the site at Playstreet came to light in 1977 through aerial photographs taken by Time Team archaeologist Mick Aston. The photographs seem to show the extensive remains of a deserted medieval settlement.



The soil marks include what appears to be a street marked by a shallow hollow, with building plots lying on both sides.

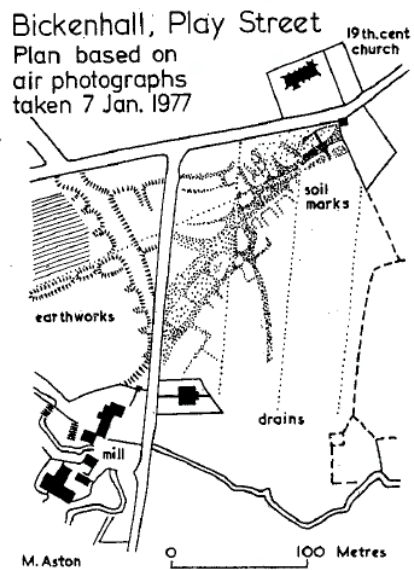
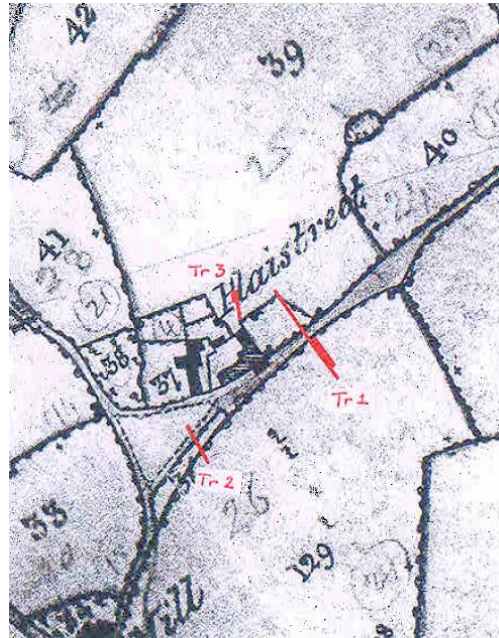


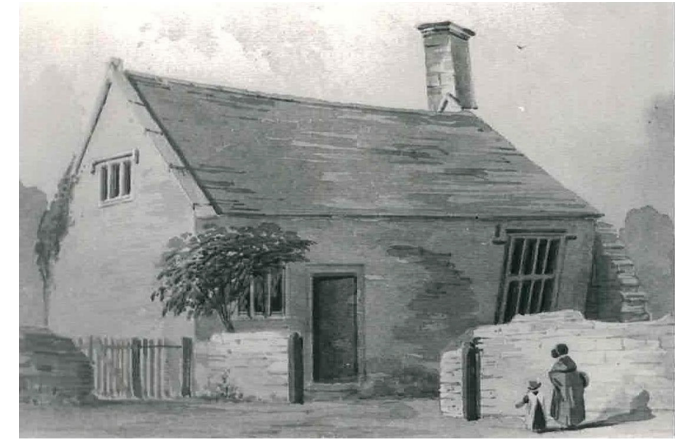
Fig. 11.

This 'street' forms the southern edge of a triangular shaped green, the presence of which is confirmed in a statement made by Thomas Coleman of Bickenhall in 1658. He describes how all the stray stock from the common land in the Forest of Neroche were driven to 'Plaistreet Green' for collection. Apparently any remaining stock were kept there for one hour before being driven to Bickenhall Pound



Plan showing trench locations for 2008 excavation

Documentary evidence suggests that Playstreet was in existence by the early medieval period. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536-1540) Playstreet fell into the hands of a number of private owners; latterly in 1602 this included Rachel Portman (daughter of Sir Henry Portman). At the time the building is described as having two chambers with a little orchard outside the kitchen door. No mention is made of any other buildings or the rest of the settlement. On her death in 1631 Playstreet became part of the Portman estate.



The settlement at Playstreet lies some 200m from the former northern boundary of the Forest of Neroche, which once followed the course of the stream to the south. It also lies on the eastern edge of a former deer park at Park Farm. The deer park, which may be 13th century in date, is known to have disappeared sometime during the mid 16th century.

Playstreet is now bisected by the new road, which leads to Curland. The eastern half of the site is ploughed, while slight earthworks associated with a former trackway survive in the pasture field to west.



## The Playstreet Project

Between June – November 2008 the Neroche Community History Project undertook a field survey of the site. A geophysical survey, earthwork survey and archaeological investigation have all been undertaken.



### Geophysical Survey Results

The geophysical survey at Playstreet was not as successful as we had hoped. The soils did not 'respond' to the magnetometer (possibly a result of the waterlogged conditions). This 'picture' was further distorted by the presence of two modern pipelines,

which further masked any nearby archaeological remains. A number of probable medieval features were however identified. These include some pits, ditches and areas of burning which could be associated with ironworking.



### Earthwork Survey

The earthworks found can be directly related to the Bickenhall parish map of 1823, which shows that Grughay Lane used to continue all the way down to Bickenhall Bridge. A deep hollow, which runs across the north-east corner of this field, is the continuation of this ancient lane. Scarp marks show the position of an old boundary between two fields and an indistinct platform shows part of the old enclosure, which would have once contained a house shown at Playstreet on the 1823 map – the site of Rachel Portman’s house.



### Excavation Results

A total of three trenches were excavated. Each one was intended to investigate the settlement features identified on 1977 air photographs and later transcribed by Mick Aston.



*Children from Ruishton Church of England Primary School participating in the dig*

A variety of features including the holloway, several pits and ditches and a series of wall foundations were all found. The wall foundations were particularly

interesting, as they seem to represent the remains of outdoor yard areas possibly associated with an iron ore processing site.

The finds recovered include local 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century medieval coarse wares (South Somerset & Ham Green Wares) and a small amount of later post medieval pottery. Quantities of daub and oven bricks, which may be of a medieval date, were also found.

Ironworking waste including tap slag and iron smithing waste was also recovered. The presence of such material proves that a mixed, small-scale industrial ironworking site was in existence at Playstreet. Roasting, smelting and smithing seem to have been taking place. This is particularly significant as Bickenhall is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as paying its rent to the Manor at Curry Rivel in blooms of iron.

The finds and features have confirmed that the settlement was indeed established in the early post conquest period (i.e. c1070’s) as suggested by documentary evidence. This makes its development contemporaneous with the construction of the motte and bailey at Castle Neroche, which was built by William the Conqueror’s half brother, Robert Count of Mortain.



If you would like to participate in future projects. Please contact Tanya James on 07881 850660. Or contact the Neroche Scheme:

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or email us: [info@nerochescheme.org](mailto:info@nerochescheme.org)



Welcome  
to the  
**PLAYSTREET  
EXHIBITION**  
Neroche Parish Hall  
Friday 27<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2009

