

# HERITAGE NETWORK



## **THOMPSON'S YARD** **85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts.**

HN485

*Archaeological Evaluation Report*



# THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

*Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation*

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

## THOMPSON'S YARD 85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts.

HN485

### *Archaeological Evaluation Report*

*Prepared on behalf of Lantern Construction Ltd*

*by*

Geoff Saunders, BA

Report No.252

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*The cover illustration shows a view of the site taken from the west*

## Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by Chris Turner, and Mark Winter. Illustrations were prepared by David Kaye, and the report was edited by David Hillelson.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to Brent Smith and Keith Jenkins, Lantern Construction Ltd; Peter Wilson, Plant Hire; and Jonathan Smith, County Planning Archaeologist, Hertfordshire County Council, for their co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

## Summary

<b>Site name and address:</b>	Thompson's Yard, 85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Hertfordshire		
<b>County:</b>	Hertfordshire	<b>District:</b>	North Hertfordshire
<b>Village/town:</b>	Hitchin	<b>Parish:</b>	Hitchin
<b>Planning reference:</b>	1/04/0764	<b>NGR:</b>	TL 1826 2897
<b>Client name and address:</b>	Lantern Construction Ltd, c/o Brent Smith, 'Aspen', Newlands Lane, Hitchin		
<b>Nature of work:</b>	New housing	<b>Present land use:</b>	Builder's yard
<b>Size of affected area:</b>	c.160m <sup>2</sup>	<b>Size of area investigated:</b>	c.15m <sup>2</sup>
<b>Site Code:</b>	HN485	<b>Other reference:</b>	n/a
<b>Organisation:</b>	Heritage Network	<b>Site Director:</b>	David Hillelson
<b>Type of work:</b>	Evaluation	<b>Archive location:</b>	NHDC Museums
<b>Start of work</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	<b>Finish of work</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2004
<b>Related SMR Nos.:</b>	N/a	<b>Periods represented:</b>	Post-medieval
<b>Previous summaries/reports:</b>	N/a		

**Synopsis:** In order to determine the archaeological risk posed by a proposal for housing development at Thompson's Yard, 85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Lantern Construction Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological evaluation.

A single trial trench measuring 1.65 x 9.7m was excavated across the footprint of the new buildings. The natural geology of reddish yellow sandy clay and gravel was encountered at a depth of c.0.80m below the existing ground level. One feature was observed cut into the natural in the northern end of the trench. The sub-circular feature yielded fragments of late post-medieval tile, and has been interpreted as a pit.

# 1. Introduction

**1.1** This report has been prepared on behalf of *Lantern Construction Ltd*, as part of the archaeological evaluation of a development site on land at Thompson's Yard, 85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts. Planning permission for the development (ref.1/04/0764), controlled by the North Hertfordshire District Council, has been referred back to the applicants for further information on the archaeological potential of the site. This is in accordance with the provisions set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note No.16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning. The scope of the required investigation has been set out in a *Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation* dated 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2004 prepared by the County Archaeological Office (CAO) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as adviser to the planning authority. A full specification was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated August 2004.

**1.2** The site comprises of an irregular shaped open yard, measuring approximately 360m<sup>2</sup>, centred on NGR TL 1826 2897. Thompson's Yard is bounded to the southwest by Tilehouse Street; to the northwest by no. 84 Tilehouse Street; to the northeast by properties accessed from Hall's Yard and no.85 Tilehouse Street.

**1.3** Tilehouse Street lies on the south-western edge of Hitchin, within Archaeological Area 142 (AA142) as defined in Policy 16 of the District Local Plan. This defines the medieval borough of Hitchin and encompasses the medieval core of the town. The street forms the former main road leading from the centre of Hitchin to Luton. A desk-based assessment undertaken by the Heritage Network in May 2004, demonstrated that archaeological remains of late prehistoric, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and medieval date have been recorded in the vicinity, and 84 Tilehouse Street is a Grade II listed building of 18<sup>th</sup> century date which has been grouped with its neighbours on either side (Ashworth 2004).

**1.4** The development proposes the construction of a terrace of three new dwellings, positioned along the street frontage. The property is currently open and under hard standing.

**1.5** The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any remains that are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional, archaeological and historical context for such remains, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were discovered.

**1.6** The present report has been prepared to provide the planning authority with sufficient data to allow it to consider the archaeological implications of the proposed development, and to determine what further mitigation measures, if any, may be required.

## 2. Fieldwork

### **TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

**2.1** The town lies in the centre of the Hitchin Gap, a glacially derived deep cutting. Hitchin lies in the bottom of the valley of the River Hiz, with the land rising on both the eastern and western sides of the river. The site lies at c.69.50m AOD on the west side of the river.

**2.2** The underlying geology is of firm, reddish yellow (7.5YR 6/8), sandy clay and gravel.

### **METHODOLOGY**

**2.3** The alignment of the trench was altered from east – west to north – south with the northern end turning to run north-east – south-west. On site restrictions made this necessary so as to allow adequate room for machining.

**2.4** All other work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and IFA standards.

**2.5** The trench was set out by triangulation from known points (Fig.2).

**2.6** A single trench was opened using a wheeled JCB-type excavator fitted with a 1.60m wide toothless ditching bucket, under direct archaeological supervision. Spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts. The trench was machined to the first significant archaeological horizon.

**2.7** The trench was cleaned by hand, and all potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.

**2.8** All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate pro-forma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at a scale of 1:20.

**2.9** All levels were recorded relative to the benchmark on the front wall of 32 Tilehouse street, having a value of 73.07mAOD.

### **RESULTS**

**2.10** The trial trench was located inside the footprint of the proposed new buildings and was aligned approximately north – south. The trench measured 1.65 x 9.70m and was a maximum of 0.80m in depth. Prior to the evaluation the concrete yard surface and associated levelling layers which had covered the site had been removed under archaeological supervision.

**2.11** The stratigraphy in the trench demonstrated that the first 2m from the southern end of the trench consisted of undisturbed greyish brown silty clay layers, indicative of garden soils. The rest of the trench was disturbed by comparison. Beneath the topsoil, 0.30m in depth, was a dumped layer consisting of ceramic building material (CBM) and mortar. This layer was 0.15m thick and extended across the northern 3m of the trench. This layer represents a dump deposit and not buried structural remains.

**2.12** Only one feature was observed cut into the reddish yellow sandy clay and gravel natural, at the northern end of the trench.

**2.13** Feature [101] was sub-circular in shape, continuing beyond the eastern baulk, with shallow straight sides and a slightly concave base. The feature had a width of 0.90m and a maximum depth of 0.44m. The single loose, brown (10YR 4/3), sandy silt fill contained fragments of late post-medieval tile. This feature was cut directly beneath the deposit of dumped CBM (113), and has been interpreted as a pit.

**2.14** Evidence of tree root activity, was observed within the trench, consistent with the earlier use of the site as a garden plot.

### **Recorded contexts**

Context	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)
101	Cut	Sub-circular cut feature, running beneath the eastern trench baulk, with shallow straight sides and a slightly concave base. Pit.	Diameter: 0.65m Depth: 0.05m
102	Fill	Loose, brown (10YR 4/3), sandy silt. Fill of [101].	Diameter: 0.65m Depth: 0.05m
103	Layer	Firm, dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2), silty clay topsoil.	0.30m thick
104	Layer	Firm, brown (10YR 4/3), silty clay subsoil.	0.30m thick
105	Layer	Firm, dark greyish brown (10YR 4/2), silty clay.	0.18m thick
106	Layer	Firm, reddish yellow (7.5YR 6/8), gravelly sandy clay. Interface with natural geology.	0.16m thick
107	Deposit	Soft, dark grey (10YR 4/1), silt. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.24m thick
108	Deposit	Firm, greyish brown (2.5Y 5/2), silty clay. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.42m thick
109	Deposit	Firm, dark grey (10YR 4/1), silty clay. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.12m thick
110	Deposit	Firm, dark grey (10YR 4/1), silty clay. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.20m thick
111	Deposit	Mixed deposit of CBM fragments and yellowish mortar. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.18m thick
112	Deposit	Firm, dark grey (10YR 4/1), silty clay. Part of tree bole disturbance.	0.16m thick
113	Layer	Mixed layer of mortar and CBM fragments.	0.20m thick
114	Layer	Firm, reddish brown (5YR 5/4), silty clay.	0.50m thick
115	Layer	Firm, dark grey (10YR 4/1), silty clay.	0.22m thick

### **FINDS CONCORDANCE**

**2.15** Two fragments of late post-medieval ceramic building material (CBM), weighing a total of 135g, were recovered from fill (102) of pit [101]. The CBM consists of one small fragment of red brick and a small fragment of tile. Other fragments of similar material were observed in the overburden but were not collected.

**2.16** Post-medieval CBM fragments are common finds on urban sites. No further work is proposed on this small assemblage.

### 3. Discussion

**3.1** Despite the location of the site in an area of known archaeological potential, as demonstrated in the desk-based archaeological assessment for the site (Ashworth 2004), the evaluation of the site revealed only a single cut feature: a late post-medieval pit [101].

**3.2** The stratigraphy observed during the evaluation and the disturbance caused by tree root activity are both consistent with the site's former use as a garden plot.

**3.3** The evaluation has demonstrated that the natural geology lies at approximately 0.80m below the present ground surface. This depth of overburden, combined with the concrete yard surface and levelling deposits removed prior to the evaluation, demonstrates that the ground has been built up, probably to level it.

#### **Conclusions**

**3.4** The archaeological evaluation has demonstrated the presence of late post-medieval activity on the site.

**3.5** No features of a Medieval or earlier date were encountered and no artefacts or ecofacts indicative of occupation prior to the late post-medieval period.

**3.6** On this basis, it is considered unlikely that any significant archaeological features or deposits would be disturbed by the proposed development.

#### **CONFIDENCE RATING**

**3.7** In the course of the fieldwork weather and ground conditions were generally acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation.

**3.8** There are no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the present evaluation which is less than High.

## 4. Bibliography

Ashworth, H. 2004. *Thompson's Yard, Tilehouse Street, Hitchin, Herts.: Desk-based Archaeological Assessment*. Heritage Network, Report no. 236, May 2004.

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Smith, J. 2004. *Design Brief For Archaeological Evaluation: 85 Tilehouse Street, Hitchin*. Hertfordshire County Council.

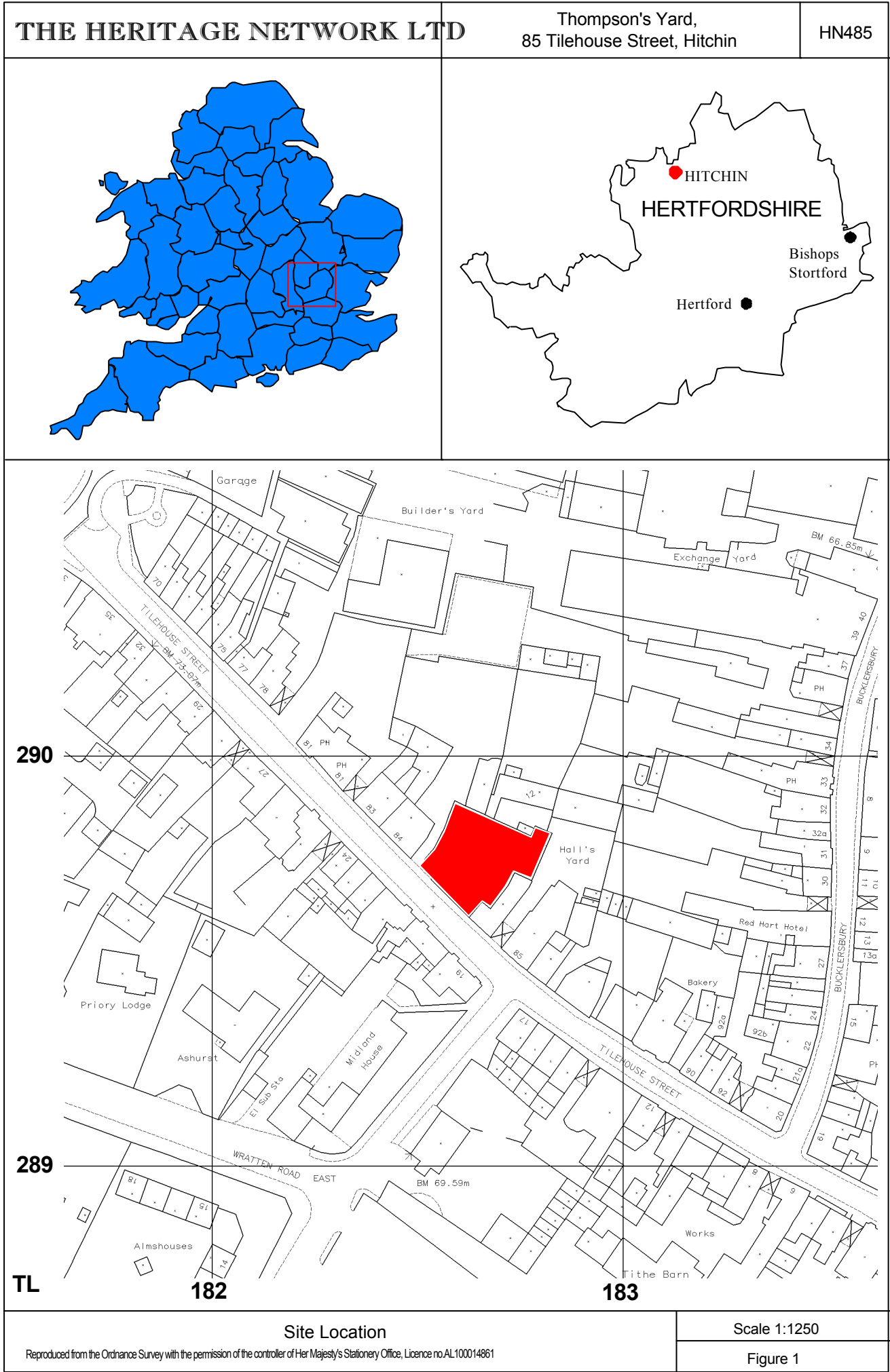
## 5. Illustrations

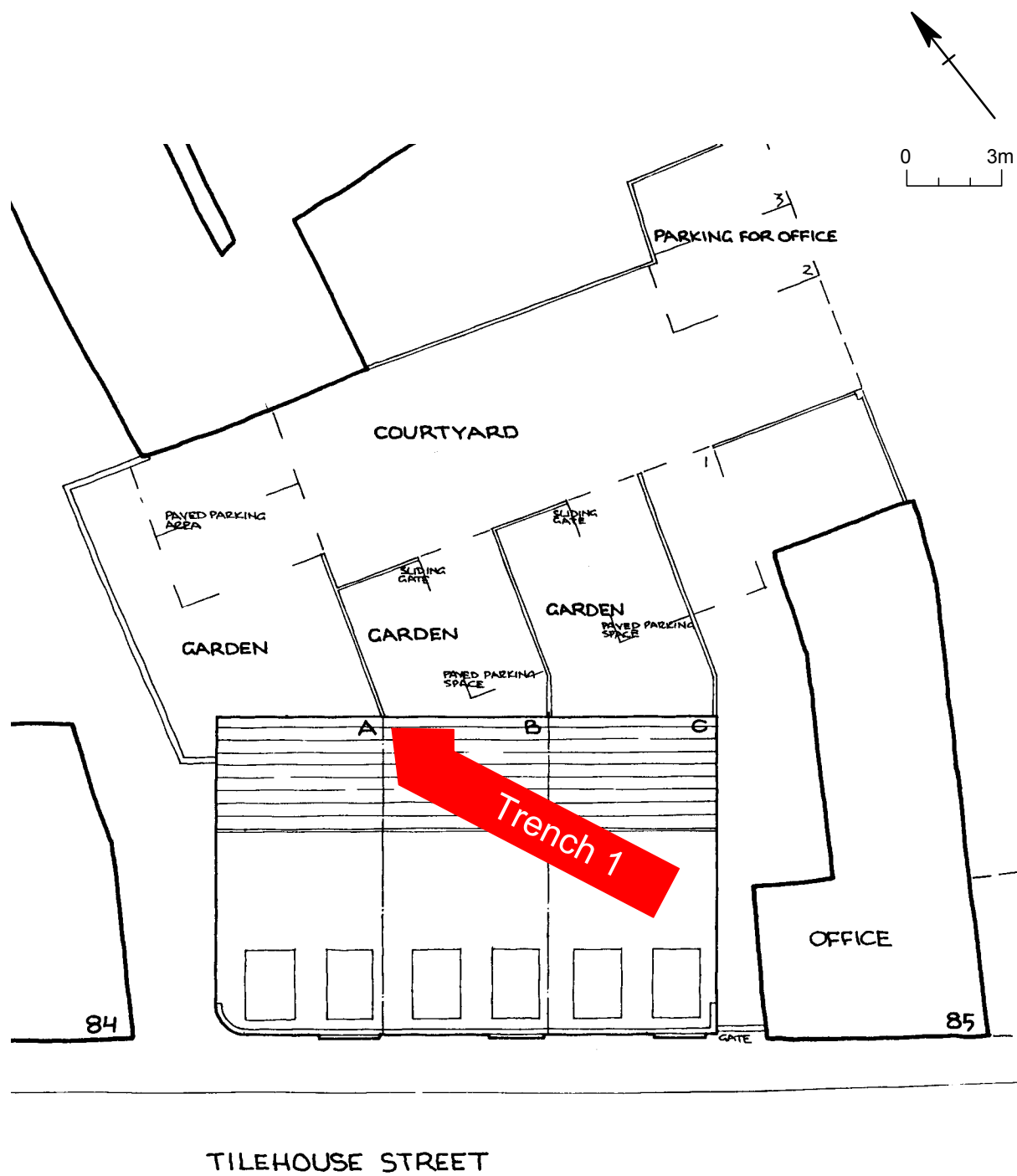
Figure 1 ..... Site location

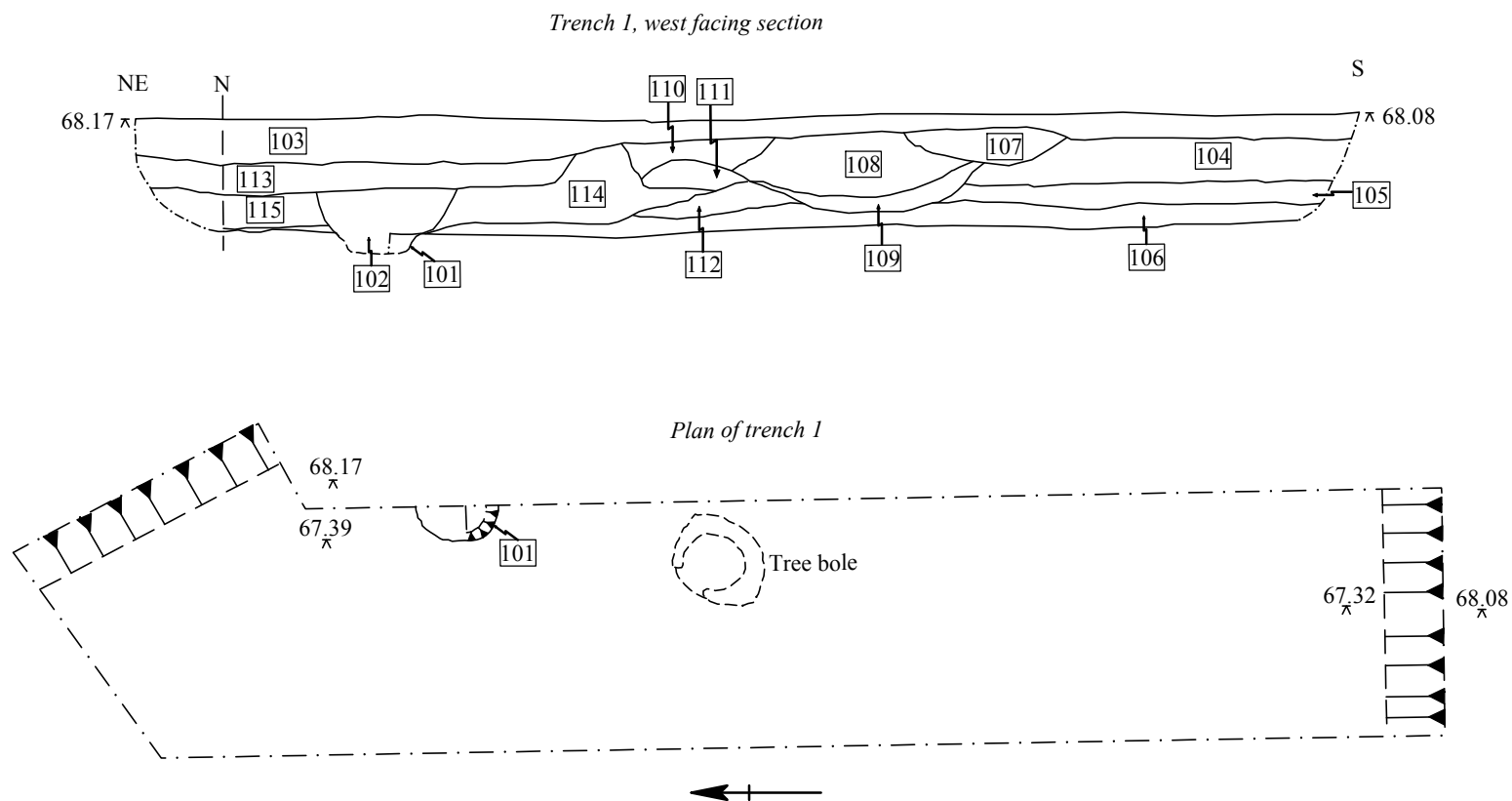
Figure 2 ..... Trench location

Figure 3 ..... Trench plan and section









All levels are quoted in metres above Ordnance Datum



Trench plan and section

Scale 1:50

Figure 3