

HERITAGE NETWORK



ALPEN HOUSE, 178 NORTON WAY NORTH Letchworth Garden City, Herts.

HN640

Historic Building Record & Archaeological Evaluation Report



THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation
Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BA MIFA

178 NORTON WAY NORTH Letchworth, Hertfordshire

HN640

Historic Building Record & Archaeological Evaluation

Prepared on behalf of Wheatley Homes Ltd

by

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and

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Report no. 405

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The cover illustration shows Alpen House looking south-west

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork for this project was carried out by David Hillelson, David Kaye, Alison Hudson and Mark Winter. Report text and illustrations were prepared by David Hillelson and Alison Hudson, and the report was edited by Helen Ashworth.

The Heritage Network would like to express its thanks to: Wheatley Homes Ltd; Robert Downing, Pentangle Design Group; Andy Instone, County Planning Archaeologist, and the staff of the Historic Environment Unit, County Hall, Hertford, for their help and co-operation and assistance in the execution of this project.

Summary

Site name and address:	178 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire					
County:	Hertforshire	District:	North Hertfordshire			
Village/town:	Letchworth	Parish:	Letchworth			
Planning reference:	1/02/01614	NGR:	TL 22040 33125			
Client name and address:	Wheatley Homes Ltd, Wheatley House, Works Road, Letchworth Garden City					
Nature of work:	New residential	Former land use:	Commercial, retail			
Site status:	Within a documented archaeological landscape	Reason for investigation:	Direction of local planning authority (PPG 16)			
Position in planning process:	As a condition after full determination	Project brief originator:	Local authority			
Size of affected area:	c.1830m ²	Size of area investigated:	c. 91.5m ²			
Site Code:	HN 640	Other reference:	n/a			
Organisation:	Heritage Network	Site Director:	David Hillelson			
Project type, methods etc.:	Evaluation	Archive recipient:	HALS/North Herts Museums			
Start of work	14/03/07	Finish of work	16/03/07			
Related SMR Nos:	n/a	Periods represented:	N/a			
Oasis UID	heritage1 - 26672	Significant finds:	None			
Monument types:	n/a					
Physical archive:	None					
Previous summaries/reports:	None					

Synopsis: As a result of a condition on the planning permission for the construction of 12 flats and a pair of semi-detached chalet bungalows at 178 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, the Heritage Network was commissioned by Wheatley Homes Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological recording and evaluation.

Alpen House, on the Norton Way frontage, was an early Garden City industrial building dating to 1907, and extended in at least four phases between c.1918 and the present day.

Following the demolition of the standing buildings on the site, two trenches were opened across the proposed development area. Both trenches contained a dark greenish grey, silty, alluvial deposit. Cartographic evidence shows that the course of Pix Brook formerly ran across the site. No archaeological cut features were observed and no datable artefacts were recovered from either of the trenches. On this basis it was considered that there

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was a low risk that archaeological remains of significance would be encountered in the course of the development of the site.

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1. Introduction

PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report has been prepared on the instruction of Wheatley Homes Ltd, as part of the archaeological recording and evaluation of a development site located at 178 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. The planning permission for the development (ref. 1/02/01614), controlled by the North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC), has been granted subject to a number of conditions including a standard archaeological condition, drafted in accordance with the provisions of the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16). The scope of the required archaeological work has been defined in a Design Brief for Historic Building Recording and a Design Brief for Archaeological Evaluation prepared by the Historic Environment Unit (HEU) of Hertfordshire County Council, acting as advisers to NHDC. A full specification for the work undertaken was contained in the Heritage Network's approved Project Design dated December 2006.
- 1.2 The study area is located within a documented archaeological landscape and close to the historic line of the Pix Brook. A review of information held on the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record suggested that there was a high risk of encountering features, artefacts and deposits dating to the prehistoric, Iron Age and Romano-British periods. In addition, industrial-age structures have been identified in regional research agenda as being of particular interest and as facing a high rate of loss through redundancy, conversion and demolition (Brown and Glazebrook 2000)
- 1.3 The site is located on the west side of Norton Way North, approximately 90m south of the junction with Icknield Way, centred on grid reference NGR TL 22040 33125 (Figure 1). It extends west to the rear of nos. 249 257 Icknield Way, with a vehicular access running between nos. 247 and 249. The building occupying the Norton Way North frontage was an original Garden City industrial unit dating to c. 1907. It had been extended to the north and to the west, and a further modern industrial building occupies part of the yard area to the rear.
- 1.4 The development proposed the demolition of the existing buildings on the site prior to the construction of a block of flats and a pair of semi-detached dwellings on broadly similar footprints. The archaeological work was divided into two discrete elements: the recording of the existing structures prior to demolition, and the evaluation of the site following demolition and before the start of the construction programme.
- 1.5 The aim of the evaluation has been to consider the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any such remains which are liable to be threatened by the development, and to provide a local and regional archaeological and historical context for them, in accordance with the current published regional research agenda (Glazebrook 1997, Brown and Glazebrook 2000), if they were discovered.
- 1.6 All work was carried out in accordance with the approved *Project Design*, current health and safety legislation, and both IFA and ALGAO standards.

2. Building Recording

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 A number of visits were made in order to inspect and record the extant buildings on the site. The photographic record has been based largely on a series completed prior to the sale of the site by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and lodged with the First Garden City Heritage Museum.
- 2.2 The site was occupied by two buildings at the time that the record was undertaken. Alpen House, on the frontage, was a rendered brick block, characterised by a line of four and a half shaped gables, with a three aisle factory block extending to the west (Figure 3). In the yard to the rear, was a concrete portal frame factory unit of recent date (Figure 2).
- 2.3 The front block dates to c.1907 and represents an early example of a Garden City industrial building. It was originally built as a print works and a contemporary photograph, from the collections of the First Garden City Heritage Museum, shows it to be occupied by Wheeler, Odell and Company (Plate 1). According to a series of Letchworth Garden City development maps, the front block had been extended to the rear by 1918, with the addition of a twin-aisle factory block reaching as far as the eastern bank of the Pix Brook. By 1922, a single aisle factory block had been added to the north, and by 1950, the original extension had been extended west by four bays, to cross the former line of the Pix Brook (Figure 3). After 1960, the front block was extended by one and a half bays north, in a matching style, and the factory unit in the yard to the rear was constructed (Figure 6).

FRONT BLOCK

- 2.4 In its original form, the front block consisted of three bays each with a shaped gable, formed from concave quadrants linked with a flat top, concealing an unevenly pitched tiled roof (Figure 5, Section A-A¹; Plate 5). The roofs may have been glazed, or part-glazed, on their northern slopes. The block is constructed of white bricks, laid in monk bond, with onedge brick coping to the gables, and six segmental arched openings in the front elevation for windows and doors. In Bay 1 (to the south) a personnel door in the centre was flanked by two five light windows (three above two), the upper lights being of four panes each, and the outer pair being top-hinged to open outwards. Similar windows occupied the centre of Bays 2 and 3, with a double goods door, hinged to open outwards, occupying the space in between. A sign board was located above the arched openings, framed by a shallow projecting band of dark bricks.
- 2.5 In its final form, the front block had been extended by one and a half bays to the north, the extension being flat-roofed behind matching gables (Plate 4) and the whole frontage had been rendered in roughcast. All the original windows and door had been replaced in uPVC, probably by the last occupant of the building, which was a replacement window company (Figure 4; Plates 2 & 3). The three pitched roofs of the original block had been covered in roofing felt (Plate 5).
- 2.6 No original features were observed in the interior of the front block, which was divided into offices and a showroom area (Plates 6-8), although some tongue and groove panelling was noted in the roof space, which may have formed part of the 1907 structure.

TWIN-AISLE FACTORY BLOCK

- 2.7 The twin-aisle factory block to the west of the front block was built in two phases, each being of four bays (Figure 3). The first phase had been built by 1918, and is likely to have consisted of brick gable ends and elevations, of which the eastern gable and southern elevation survive. The north-light roof was supported on riveted Belgian trusses set into the southern and, presumably, northern elevations, with a line of girders set on steel stanchions running down the middle (Figure 5, Section B-B¹). The southern slope of the roof was lined with tongue and groove boarding.
- 2.8 The western extension may date to the Second World War or may be a post-war construction. It was certainly in place by 1950. The southern brick elevation was extended, but was not intended to be structural as it incorporated steel stanchions to support the riveted fan trusses of the roof structure. The western gable end was formed of corrugated cement asbestos, and incorporated double hinged goods doors in the northern aisle (Plate 4).
- 2.9 No original fixtures and fittings were observed in the interior of this block (Plates 9 12). A recent extension to the window showroom had, however, been built into the eastern end.

NORTHERN FACTORY BLOCK

- 2.10 A single aisle factory block, of six bays, had been built to the north of the twin-aisle block by 1922. The gable ends and northern wall were built of Fletton brick, but no evidence was noted for the construction of the western end of the southern elevation. The north-light roof was supported on welded Belgian trusses resting on piers set into the northern wall, and girders set on steel stanchions to the south. A later lean-to extension, also built of Fletton brick, with a pent corrugated cement asbestos, was located to the west of this block. A further flat roofed extension sat to the north.
- 2.11 No original fixtures and fittings were observed in the interior of this block (Plates 13 & 14). A recent toilet block and office had, however, been built into the eastern end.

3. Field Evaluation

SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1 The study area is approximately 1830m², with its frontage on the west side of Norton Way North, extending west to the rear of nos. 249–257 Icknield Way. The site is in a natural valley, which slopes gently upwards to both the east and west. The original Garden City industrial unit and associated yard that were situated on the site were both demolished prior to the evaluation.
- 3.2 The stratigraphy of the site was heavily disturbed due to the construction of the previous industrial buildings. The observed natural geology across the site consisted of clay and flint with outcrops of gravel and gravel mixed with chalk.

METHODOLOGY

- 3.3 Two evaluation trenches were triangulated from known points using fibreglass tape measures. Trench 1 measured 26.5m in length and Trench 2 measured 35.4m. Both were 1.55m in width. The trenches were positioned to cross the footprints of the proposed new structures but Trench 2 was relocated slightly to the north of its originally proposed position to avoid a large spoil heap in the south-western corner of the site (Figure 2).
- 3.4 The trenches were opened using a wheeled JCB excavator fitted with a 1.5m wide toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision. They were machined to the first significant archaeological horizon, and spoil from the machining was inspected for archaeological artefacts.
- 3.5 All potential archaeological features and deposits were sampled to ascertain their nature, depth, date, and quality of preservation.
- 3.6 All identified contexts were photographed and recorded using the appropriate proforma. Scaled plans and sections were drawn on drafting film at scales of 1:20 and 1:50.

STRATIGRAPHY

3.7 The stratigraphy observed within Trench 1 was considerably disturbed by previous building work, and consisted of layers of redeposited clay containing varying amounts of building debris and rubble overlying the natural clay. An alluvial deposit 5m in length was recorded at the western end of the trench (Figure 7). Trench 2 contained a more substantial alluvial deposit of the same dark greenish clay silt (GLEY1 4/1 10Y) that was encountered beneath the made ground (Figure 7).

Trench 1

Length (m):	26.5	Width (m):	1.55		Maximum Depth (m):	1.5	Orientation		E-W	
Level at W	est End of T	rench	Top	68.49	Level at Eas	t End of	Trench		Top	68.60
(mOD)			Base	67.04	(mOD)				Base	67.76
Comtout	T			Daganinti	4:		Dimensions (m)			
Context	Туре			Description			Length	Width		Depth
101	Layer	firm, mal	Made Ground. Dark yellowish brown (10 YR 4/6) firm, malleable silty clay with frequent building debris and moderate roots					>1	.55m	0.35m
102	Layer	Dark gree	Dark greenish grey (GLEY 1 4/10Y) silty alluvium >5.5m					>1.	.55m	0.46m
103	Layer	Dark grey (10 YR 4/1) firm malleable clay with moderate chalk inclusions					.55m	0.15m		
104	Layer	Yellowish brown (10 YR 5/8) firm sandy gravel with frequent chalk inclusions. Natural geology					-	-		

3.8 Trench 1 was located in the eastern half of the site through the centre of the proposed block of 12 flats and was orientated east-west. The made ground consisted of a layer of dark, yellowish brown firm clay (10YR 4/6) with frequent building debris. Beneath this was a layer, at the western end of the trench, was a dark greenish grey (Gley 1 4/10Y) alluvial deposit. No archaeological cut features or deposits were identified (Figure 8; Plate 17).

Trench 2

Length (m):	35.4m	Width (m):	1.5m		Maximum Depth (m):	1.15m	Orientation		E-W	
Level at So	uth-West En	d of	Тор	68.80	Level at Nor	th-East	t End of Trench		Тор	68.60
Trench (m	OD)		Base	67.98	(mOD)				Base	67.76
Context	Type			Description			Dimensions (m)			
Context	Type						Length	Width		Depth
201	Layer	Made gro	und.				>35.4	>	1.5	0.4
202	Layer	Dark gree deposit	Dark greenish grey (GLEY 1 4/1 10Y) Alluvial						1.5	0.75
203	Layer	Mottled b	Mottled brown and red (10YR 4/4) firm malleable clay					>1.5		0.3
204	Layer	1	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) firm malleable clay and manganese.					>	1.5	0.2
205	Layer	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/4) firm malleable clay with some grey marbling					27.5	>1.5		0.7 (max)
206	Layer	Mottled brown and red (10YR 4/4) firm malleable clay. Modern service pipe					8.3	>1.5		0.4
207	Layer	Yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) gravel with moderate angular flints chalk (<30mm) inclusions. Natural Geology.					-		-	-

3.9 Trench 2 was located in the western half of the site through the centre of the proposed semi-detached bungalows and was orientated northeast-southwest. Beneath the made ground was a substantial, dark greenish grey (GLEY1 4/10Y) alluvial deposit (202) (Figure 7). The natural geology consisted of mottled brown and red (10YR 4/4) clay at the northeast end of

the trench, and a yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) gravel with chalk inclusions at the southwest end. Between the two was a band of yellowish brown (10YR 5/8) gravel approximately 18m in length. It coincided with the presence of the alluvium. No archaeological cut features or deposits were identified (Figure 8; Plate 18).

3.10 The spoil from the excavation was inspected for artefacts but nothing of archaeological significance was observed.

DISCUSSION

- 3.11 The site lies immediately to the south of the Icknield Way, a known major route between East Anglia and Wessex since the Neolithic period. The study area is located within a documented archaeological landscape and in proximity to the historic line of the Pix Brook.
- 3.12 An examination of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record and the Archaeological Areas identified in the NHDC Draft Local Plan no. 2 has shown that, within a 1km radius of the present site, significant numbers of prehistoric flint implements have been found (HER numbers 1295, 352, 353, 357, 1292). Some evidence of Iron Age activity has also been recorded (HER numbers 1275, 1268), and significant evidence of occupation from Neolithic through to Iron Age has been identified from Blackhorse Road, c. 1km to the northeast. In addition to this, various finds of Roman date have also been registered within 1 km of the site (HER numbers 1286, 1460, 1274, 1268, 1262, 1450, 1267). Although no evidence for Saxon activity has been recorded in the vicinity of the site, well-preserved late medieval or early post-medieval earthworks survive on Norton Common which lies approximately 100m to the north of the study area (A.S. 189).
- 3.13 No cut features, deposits or artefacts of archaeological significance were identified within either trench during the field evaluation.
- 3.14 An alluvial deposit, up to 0.75m deep, was identified in both trenches below the made ground. This material is likely to have been deposited by the Pix Brook. The presence of the alluvial deposit in Trench 2, over 10m to the west of its course in the early 20th century (Figure 9), suggests significant periodic flooding and movement in the course of the brook over a number of years.
- 3.15 A study of the Letchworth Garden City development maps, held by the First Garden City Heritage Museum, shows that in the early 20th century the brook ran as an open watercourse, on a north to south alignment, across the rear of the site and to the west of Alpen House. The rear extension to the building, dated c. 1918, was located on its eastern bank. Between 1918 and 1925 the brook was apparently culverted immediately to the north of Alpen House, causing it to flow underground for a distance, reappearing on the southern side of Birds Hill to the south-east of the study area. The 1950s extension to the building is constructed across the line of the brook.

Conclusion

- 3.16 Despite the study area being located within a documented archaeological landscape, the evaluation of the site encountered no significant evidence of archaeological activity.
- 3.17 On this basis, the risk that the proposed development would disturb archaeological remains of any significance should be considered to be low.

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Confidence Rating

3.18 In the course of the fieldwork, weather and ground conditions were acceptable for the identification of potential features and deposits, and for their investigation. There were no circumstances which would lead to a confidence rating for the work which was less than High.

4. Bibliography

Hillelson, D, 2007 *Alpen House, 178 Norton Way North, Letchworth Garden City, Herts.* Project Design: Historic Building Record & Archaeological Evaluation. Heritage Network.

5. Illustrations

Figure 1	Site Location
Figure 2	Site Layout
Figure 3	
Figure 4	Alpen House: front elevation
Figure 5	Alpen House: sections
Figure 6	Phase plan
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Plate 15	1960s factory block, N & W elevations looking SE
Plate 16	1960s factory block, interior looking NE
Plate 17	Trench 1 looking west
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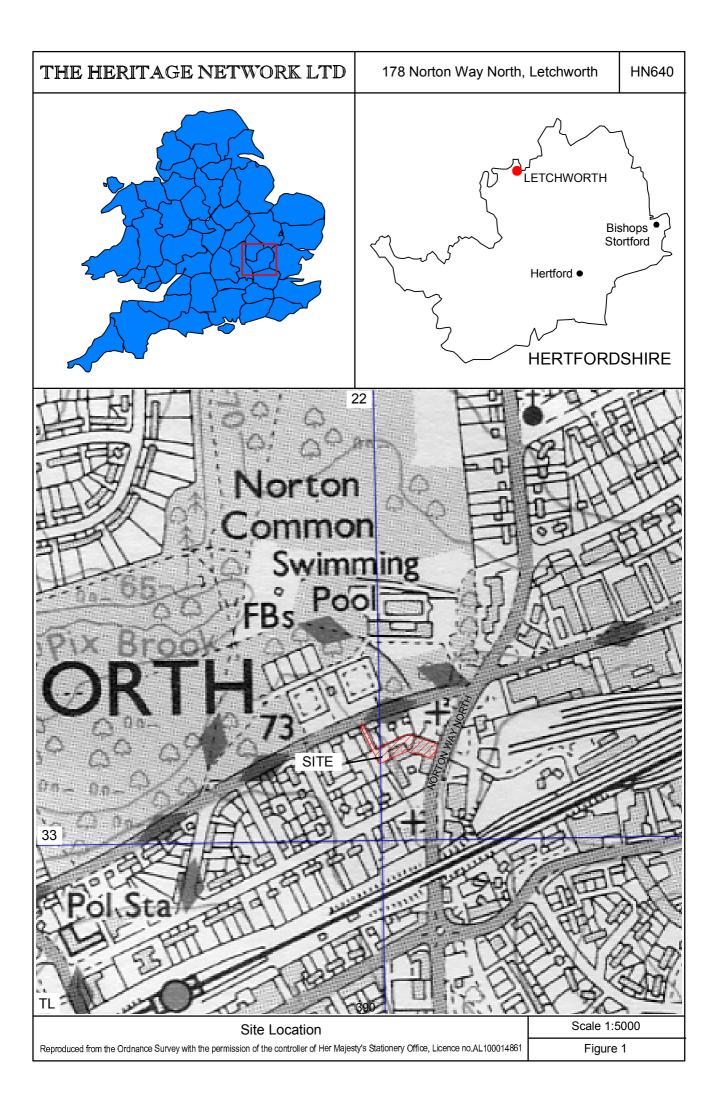
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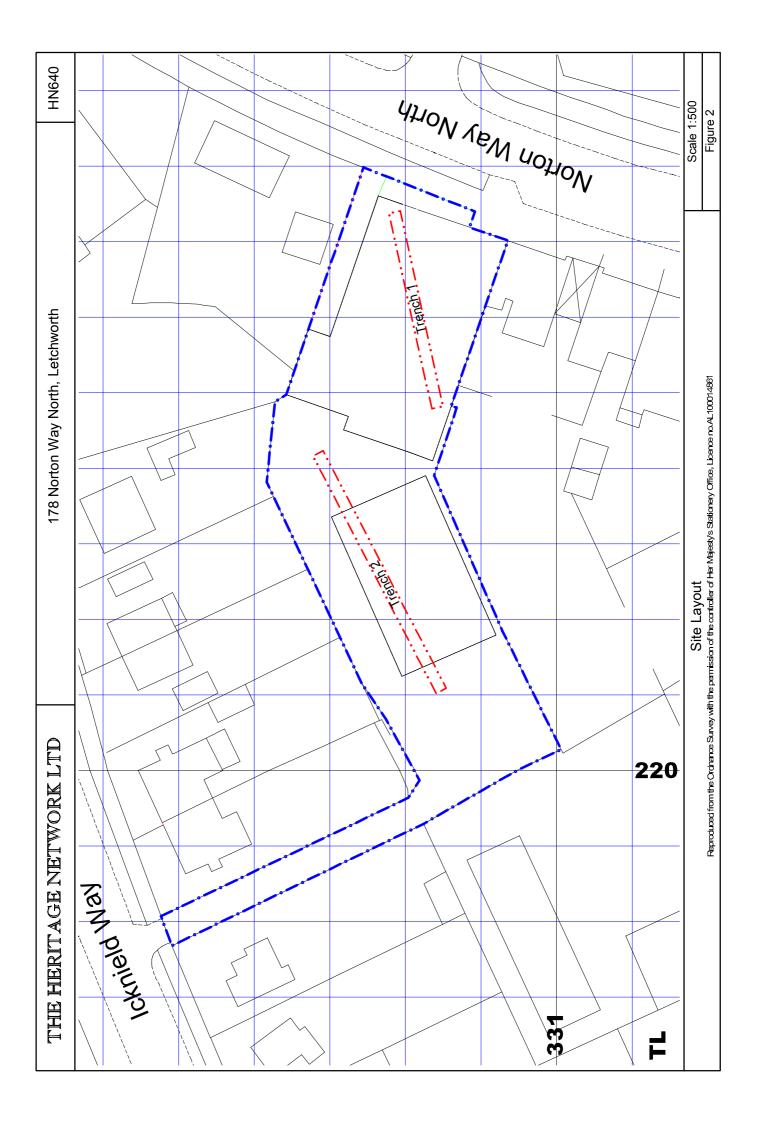
Appendix

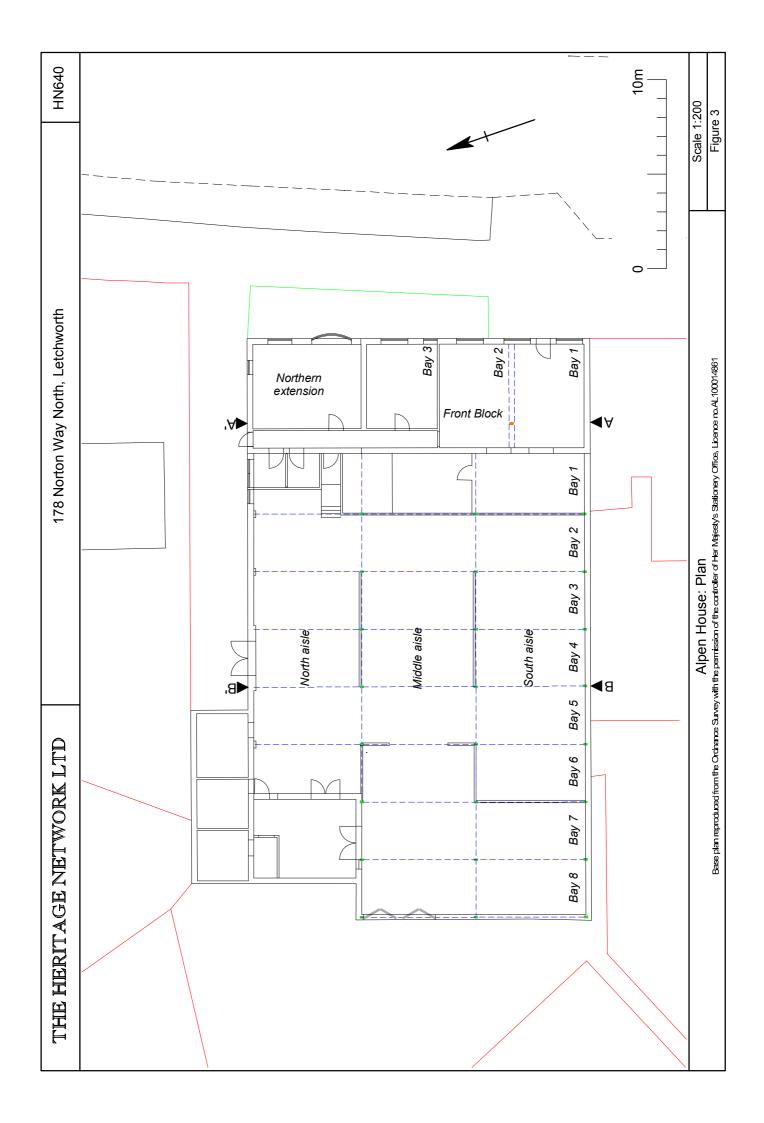
Digital Photographic Log(Photographs courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)

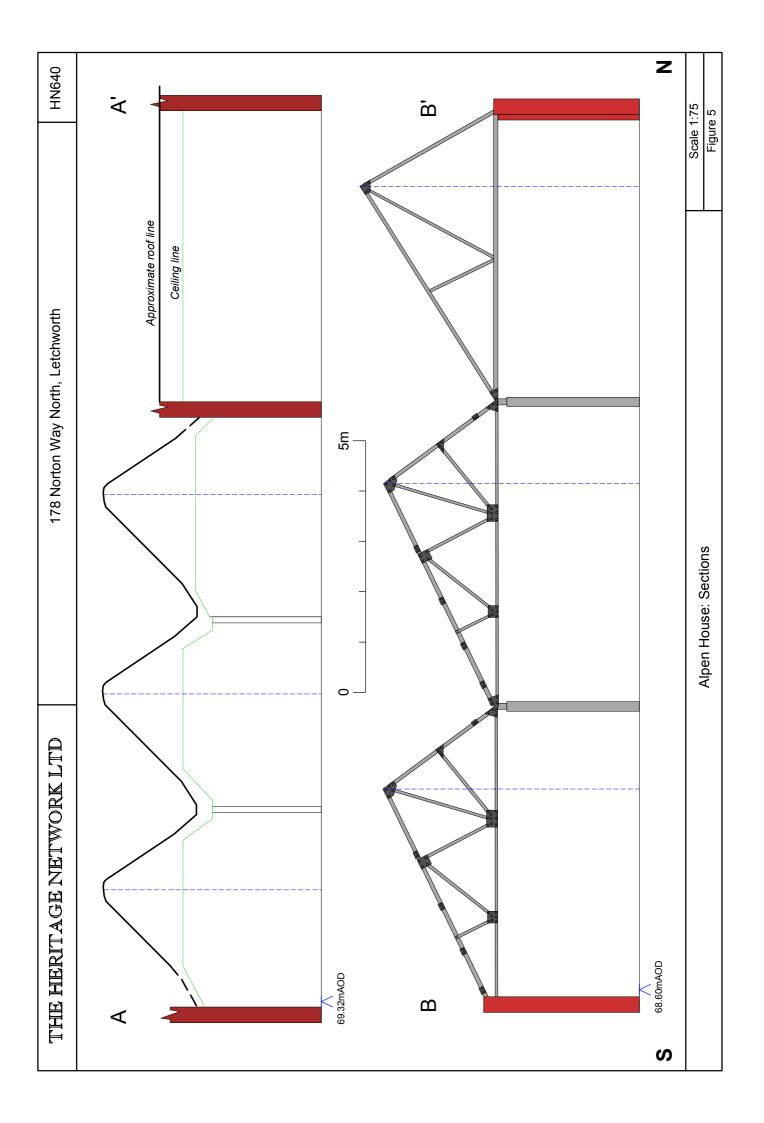
Photograph Number	Details
FGCHM_001	East front, facing south-west
FGCHM_002	East front, facing south-west
FGCHM_003	East front, Bay 1, facing west
FGCHM_004	East front, Bay 2, facing west
FGCHM_005	East front, facing north-west
FGCHM_006	North elevation, facing west
FGCHM_007	North elevation, facing south-west
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FGCHM_009	Junction of Alpen House and rear factory, facing south-east
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FGCHM_011	Front block, Bays 1 and 2, facing north-west
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FGCHM_016	Rear block, middle aisle, facing west
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FGCHM_027	Rear factory, interior, facing north
FGCHM_028	Rear factory, interior, facing east
FGCHM_029	Rear factory, interior west corner, facing west
FGCHM_030	Rear factory, interior south corner, facing south
FGCHM_031	Rear factory, south-west extension interior, facing south-west
FGCHM_032	Rear factory, interior, facing south-west
FGCHM_033	Rear factory, interior, facing south-west
FGCHM_034	Rear factory, north-west and south-west elevations, facing east

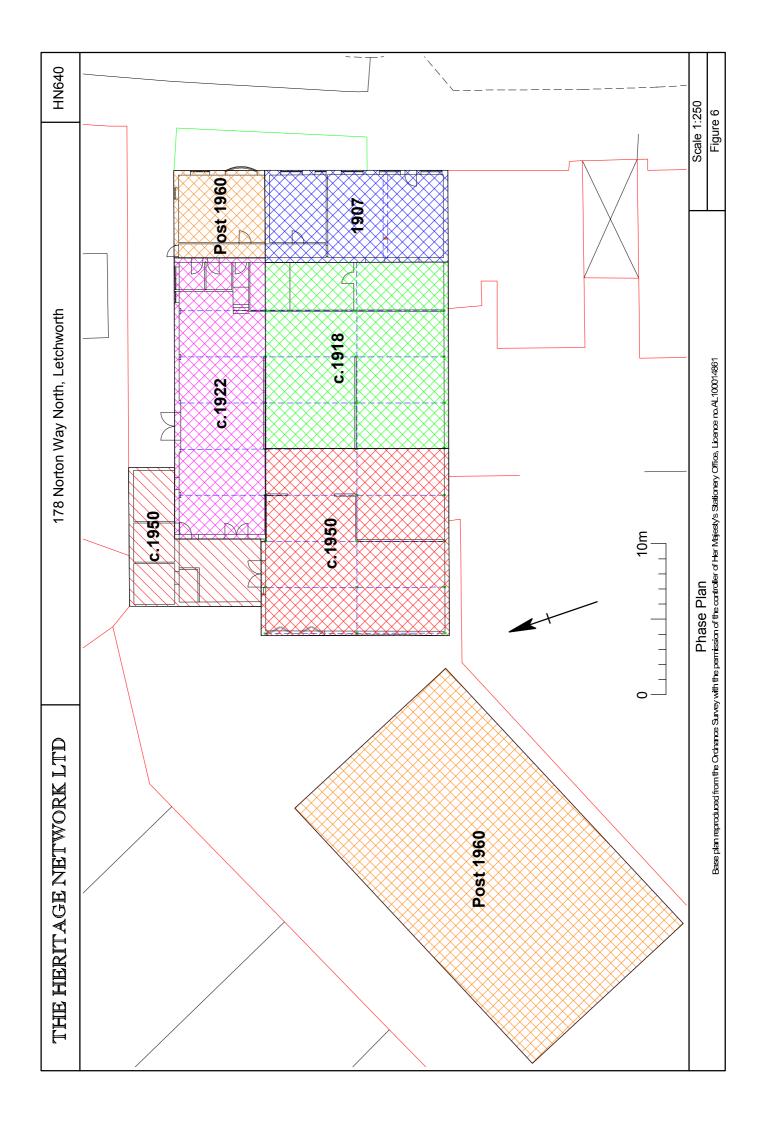
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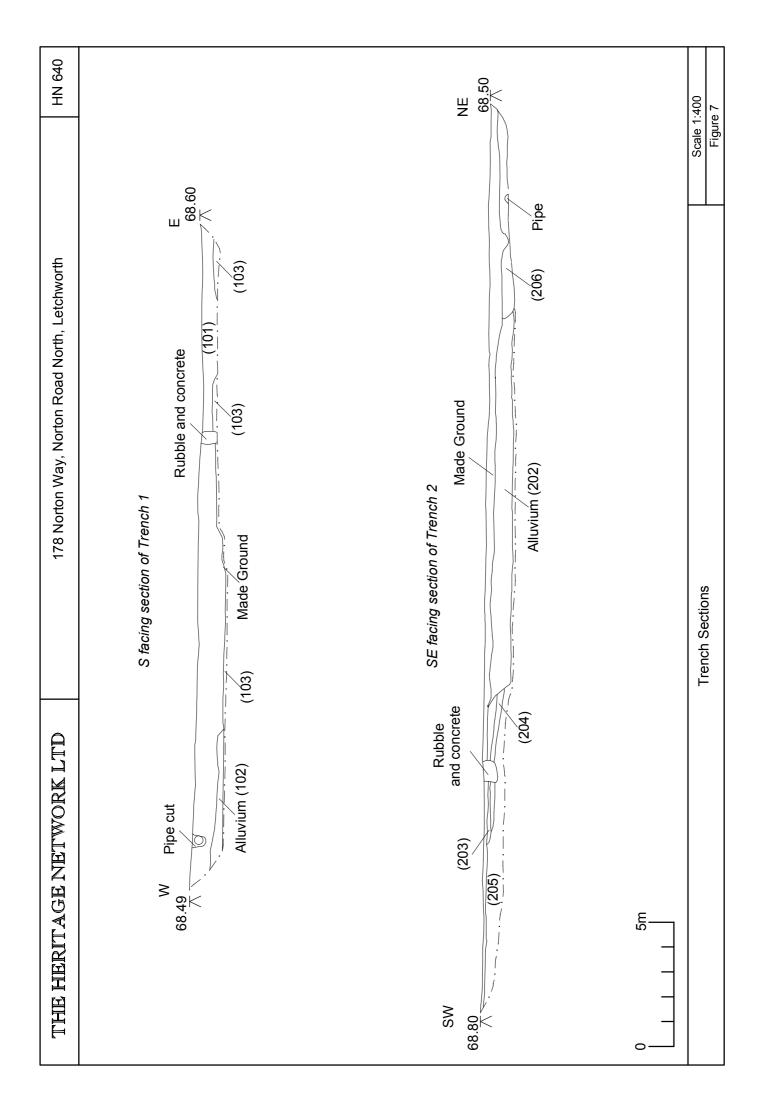


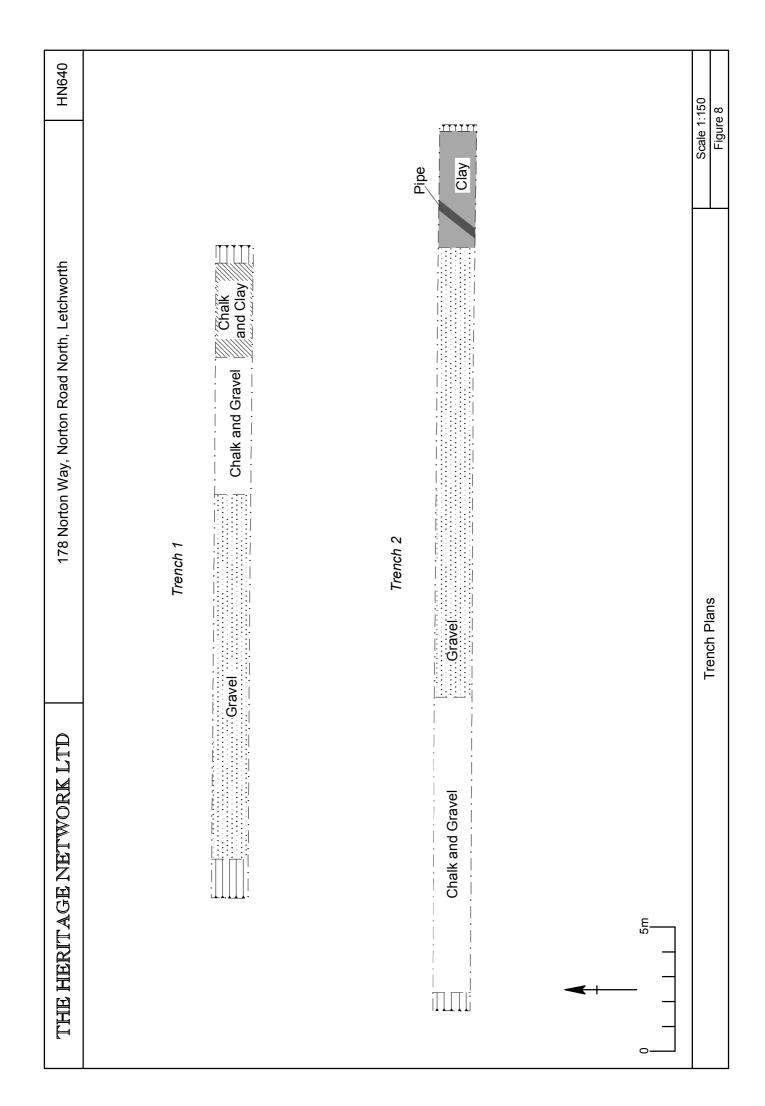












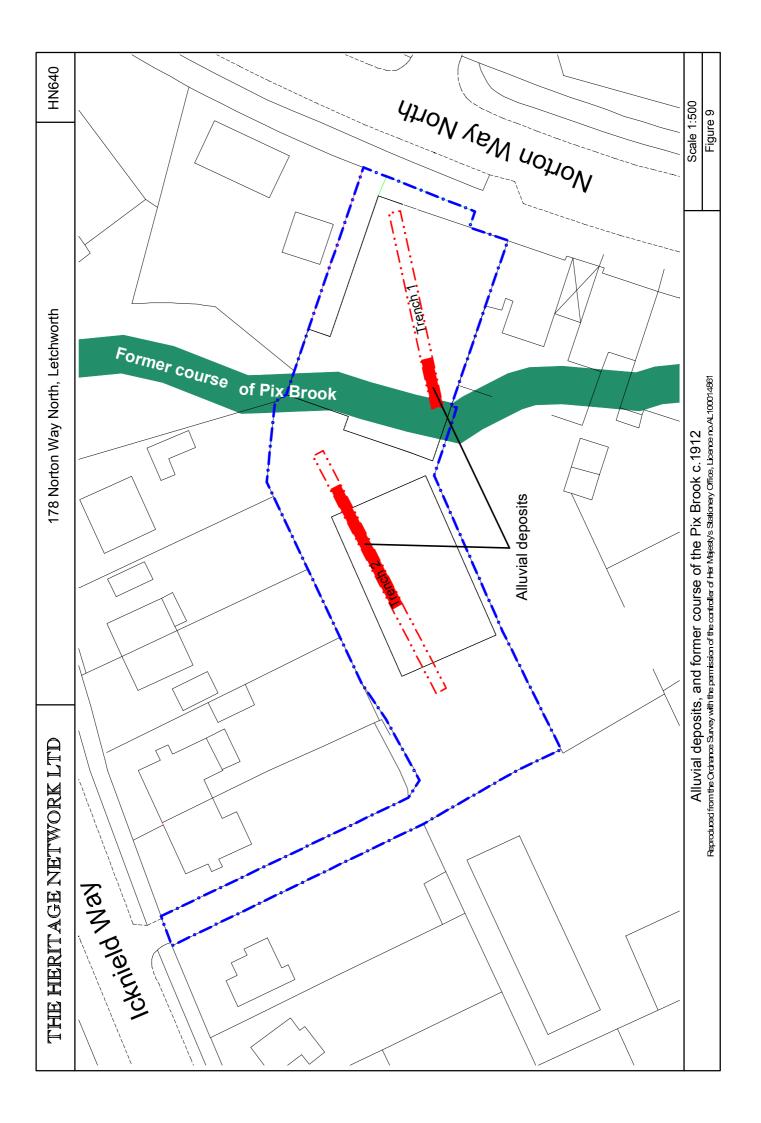




Plate 1: Front elevation, c.1907 (Photograph Courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 2: Front elevation, 2006, looking NW (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 3: Front elevation, 2006, looking SW (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 4: Rear elevation, 2006, looking E (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 5: Front block, valley between Bays 1 & 2



Plate 6: Front block, Bays 1 & 2, interior looking NE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 7: Front block, Bay 3, interior looking NE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 8: Front block, northern extension, interior looking NE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 9: Rear block, S aisle, Bays 1-4 looking N



Plate 10: Rear block, Bays 5 & 6 looking SW (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 11: Rear block, middle aisle, Bays 1-3 looking N



Plate 12: Rear block, middle aisle, Bays 6-8 looking S (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 13: Rear block, Bays 1-6 looking NE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



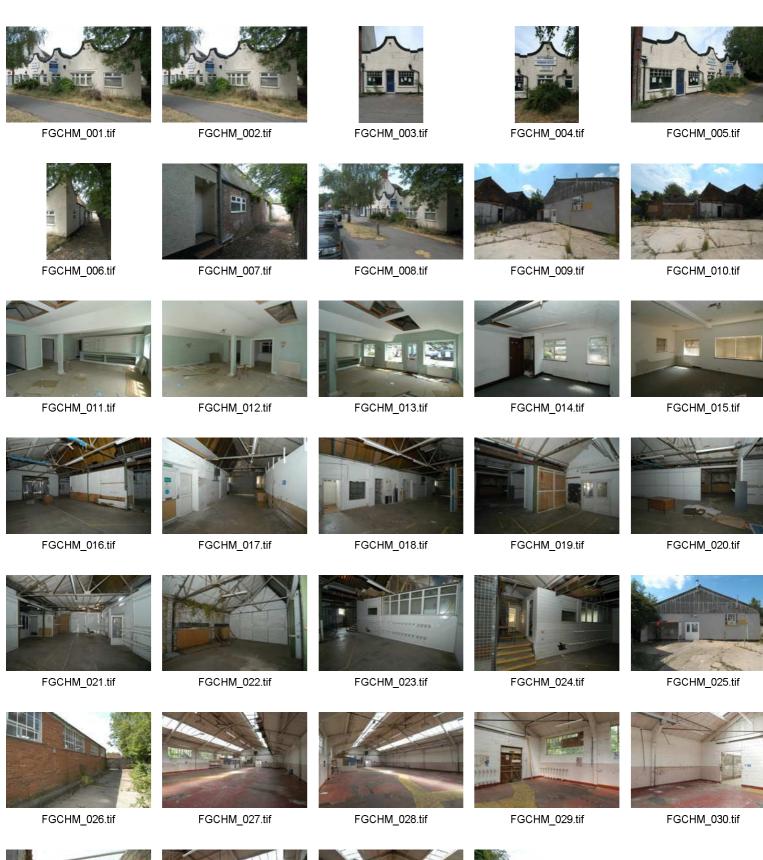
Plate 14: Rear block, Bays 5 & 6 looking SW (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 15: 1960s factory block, N & W elevations looking SE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



Plate 16: 1960s factory block, interior looking NE (Photograph by Nic Cooper, courtesy of the First Garden City Heritage Museum)



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