

Archaeological Watching Brief  
to the rear of  
**NO. 126 HIGH STREET,  
MIDSOMER NORTON, SOMERSET.**  
for  
Smith Design & Build



Report No. 2352/2011

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Archaeological Watching Brief  
to the rear of  
**NO. 126 HIGH STREET,  
MIDSOMER NORTON, SOMERSET.**

Centred on  
N.G.R. ST 66360 54164

Client: Smith Design & Build

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### Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini	Km	Kilometre
aOD	Above Ordnance Datum	m	Metre
BaRAS	Bristol & Region Archaeological Services	NGR	National Grid Reference
BC	Before Christ	NMR	National Monuments Record
c.	Circa	OS	Ordnance Survey
HER	Historic Environment Record		

### NOTE

Notwithstanding that Bristol and Region Archaeological Services have taken reasonable care to produce a comprehensive summary of the known and recorded archaeological evidence, no responsibility can be accepted for any omissions of fact or opinion, however caused.

May, 2011.

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## **SUMMARY**

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during groundworks associated with excavation of foundations for a pair of semi-detached town houses behind No. 126, High Street, Midsomer Norton, Somerset.

The groundworks revealed walls and surfaces associated with previous post-medieval buildings, probably of 19th century or later date.

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- Figure 1 Site location plan, scale 1:1000
- Figure 2 Plan showing study area in detail, not to scale
- Figure 3 Plan of the test pit layout

### **Plates**

- Cover General view of the footings, near completion, looking north-east, scale 0.5m
- Plate 1 Test Pit 4 as excavated, with Wall (106) on right, looking south-east, scale 0.5m
- Plate 2 Overall view of work in progress, including initial excavation of Trench 4, looking north-east, scale 0.5m
- Plate 3 Wall (110) as exposed in House Plot 1, Trench 1, looking south, scale 2 x 0.5m
- Plate 4 General view of the footings, near completion, looking north-east, scale 0.5m

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS) were commissioned by Tim Smith of Smith Design & Build to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of a semi-detached house at the rear of No.126 High Street, Midsomer Norton.
- 1.2 The watching brief was commissioned to comply with the condition of planning consent (B&NES planning consent reference 09/04795/FUL) and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services (BaRAS 2010).
- 1.3 The fieldwork was undertaken on two occasions on February 15th and April 11th 2011 under the supervision of R. K. Ducker who also compiled this report.
- 1.4 The project archive will be deposited with Roman Baths Museum under the Accession Number BATRM 2011.6 and a copy of the report will be made available to the National Monuments Record maintained by English Heritage. The project has been entered in the Bath and North East Historic Environment Record and in the OASIS Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations as: bristola1-94133.

## **2. THE SITE**

- 2.1 The site (centred on NGR ST 66360 54164) partly fronts onto High Street and is partly to the rear of No. 126. It is bounded to the west by Somer House, to the east by No. 125 High Street and to the south and south-east by Nos. 15 – 19 The Island. The site is located centrally in Midsomer Norton and occupies approximately 355 square metres with the footings occupying approximately 72.25 metres of this.
- 2.2 The site is situated at about 85m aOD, a short distance to the north-west of the River Somer. The site is situated within the Midsomer Norton and Welton Conservation area. Although no listed buildings are on or adjoining the site here, there are a number of Grade II structures in the vicinity on the Island and in High Street. No Scheduled Ancient Monuments exist in the immediate area.
- 2.3 At the time of study the site comprised open ground, partly surfaced with tarmac for car-parking, a large storage building that had occupied the southern half of the site having been demolished.
- 2.4 The geology of the study area comprises Mercia Mudstone of the Triassic Period (British Geological Survey 1967).

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 No previous archaeological assessment has been carried out on the site or within close proximity to the site. These are archaeological sites in the local area and spot finds that have been recovered in the past
- 3.2 Midsomer Norton is situated about 10 miles south-west of Bath and lies in the valley of the River Somer, which gives the town the latter part of its name. According to the EUS for Norton Radstock, (La Trobe-Bateman, E 1999), the prehistoric archaeology in the area is “extremely interesting”, with both Bronze Age and Iron Age sites in the vicinity. The major Roman road known as the Fosse Way ran about a kilometre away and there is known Romano-British activity in the area.
- 3.3 Little is known for the period between the 5th century and Domesday Book (1086), and the latter did not mention Midsomer Norton. However, place-name evidence suggests that settlement existed by 1086. Norton lay in the Chewton Hundred, forming part of the royal estate of Chewton. The earliest surviving documentary reference to Norton did not come until 1180. Little is known about medieval Midsomer Norton, but there was a charter for a fair in the 13th century. The settlement was probably nucleated. It was probably only with the exploitation of coal resources in the area from the 18th century that the village saw major change. In 1791 Collinson described the village as containing 290 houses and upwards of 1,500 inhabitants. A century later there were 3,305 people living in the village.
- 3.4 The site currently under development is sited in the historic heart of the medieval village, less than 100m east of the parish church. The street name of High Street is strongly indicative of this being the principal thoroughfare, and indeed the street is on the main route between the parish church (west) and the settlements of Radstock and Welton (to the east and north-east respectively). Cartographic evidence from the 1808 Ordnance Survey (OSD) map shows the settlement clustered along High Street, Silver Street and The Island. Apart from the study area (the parish church) and converted tithe barn, most of the listed buildings in this part of the village date from the 18th or 19th centuries or later.
- 3.5 A watching brief carried nearby at the church of St John the Baptist exposed parts of the footings, some of which may represent an earlier phase of church building, a floor of Lias Limestone slabs and mixed, redeposited mortar and clay deposits as well as a soak-away chamber under the font.
- 3.6 Examination of Ordnance Survey plans of 1886 and 1904 both show the study area to be unoccupied. Latterly the present site has been occupied at its rear by a store building (which was demolished prior to this study) and the remainder was in use as a yard and car park.



#### **4. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 The fieldwork complied with the methodology contained within the Written Scheme of Investigation (BaRAS 2010). The fieldwork also followed the *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* issued by the Institute for Archaeologists (1999). The aim of the watching brief was to record any archaeological features or deposits revealed during the course of intrusive groundworks.
- 4.2 The watching brief involved the monitoring of the mechanical excavation of 4 test pits and standard strip foundations for a pair of semi-detached town houses with associated parking and gardens.

## 5. RESULTS

5.1 All groundworks were carried out using a 360° mechanical excavator using a toothed bucket.

### TEST PITS (Figure 2, Plate 1)

5.2 Initially four small test pits were excavated on 15th February 2011 under archaeological supervision.

#### Test Pit 1

5.3 Was located in the south-east corner of the site and was excavated to a maximum of 600mm deep. Those deposits exposed comprised subsoil (102) sealing archaeologically sterile deposits of sandy clay (103) or sandstone (104).

#### Test Pit 2

5.4 Was located in the centre of the south part of the site and was excavated to a maximum of 900mm deep. Deposits exposed comprised topsoil (101) sealing subsoil (102) and again archaeologically sterile deposits of sandy clay (103) and sandstone (104).

#### Test Pit 3

5.5 Was located on the west side of the site and reached a maximum of 800mm deep. In section a deposit of modern overburden (109) and a fragment of post-medieval wall (105) sat directly over deposits of sandy clay (103) and sandstone (104). A seam of sandstone was also apparent within deposit (103).

#### Test Pit 4

5.6 Was located in the north-east of the site and was excavated to a maximum of 800 mm deep. The uppermost deposit comprised the remains of a modern carpark surface of tarmac (107) and bedding material for this (108). Below these deposits was a post-medieval wall (105) that had been built in a cut directly into the archaeologically sterile sandy clay (103). Below this was the upper surface of sandstone (104).

### FOUNDATIONS (Figure 2, Plates 2 – 4)

5.7 Five trenches were excavated for the two town houses, which varied in depth from 650mm to 1m.

#### Trench 1

5.8 The trench was excavated to 650mm deep and the majority of this trench was excavated directly into deposits of archaeologically sterile sandy clay (103) though some deposits of made-ground (111) remained *in situ* over this in irregular patches. At the base of excavation was the upper surface of sandstone (104). A short length of wall (Wall 110, plate 3) of post-medieval date, orientated roughly east to west, and with a return to the south at the east end, was also recorded in the north-facing section and the base of the trench.

#### Trench 2

5.9 A simple stratigraphic sequence was recorded in this trench, the uppermost deposit comprised tarmac (107) below this, exposed in the east-facing section was part of a surface of worked Pennant slabs (112) – these did not extend across the trench but it seems likely that they

represent a surviving fragment of a larger surface. Below these was a thin mix of topsoil and fragmentary rubble (111) that sat directly over deposits of archaeologically sterile sandy clay (103). At the base of the trench a deposit of sandstone (104) was exposed.

### **Trench 3**

- 5.10 Reached a maximum of 800mm deep. The whole trench appeared to have been excavated through patchy redeposited topsoil and rubble (111) into sandy clay (103) and sandstone (104). At the north end of the trench tarmac car park surfacing (107) was also removed.

### **Trench 4**

- 5.11 Excavation of this trench revealed deposits identical to those exposed in Trench 3. The overall depth of excavation was 900mm.

### **Trench 5**

- 5.12 This trench was excavated to a maximum of 1m deep. The uppermost layer comprised tarmac (107) with some bedding material below it (108). In the south-facing section a few Pennant slabs from an earlier surface (113) remained *in situ* and more were removed during the excavation of the trench. None were visible in the north-facing section suggesting that the trench had been excavated across the edge of the floor feature. The slabs sat directly over sandy clay (103) and sandstone (104).
- 5.13 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed and no artefacts predating the modern period were recovered during intrusive groundworks at the site.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Generally the results of the monitoring revealed only thin, relatively modern made-ground deposits and a modern car park surface overlying archaeologically sterile deposits of sandy clay and sandstone. Those few features recorded comprised walls (105, 106, 110 & 114) and surfaces (112 & 113) of post-medieval date that also had been constructed more or less directly over the geological deposits. An examination of the 1886 and 1904 maps of the town showed the study area to be unoccupied, consequently nothing can be ascertained as to the nature of the structures recorded.
- 6.2 Only in the north of the site - outside the house foundations - was any stratigraphy recorded (Test Pits 1 & 2) and this was limited to topsoil (101) and subsoil (102).
- 6.3 No trace of any structures or features reflecting the site's proximity to the heart of the medieval town was observed during the works.
- 6.4 The watching brief identified no archaeological remains within the area of the intrusive groundworks. The lack of archaeological deposits may indicate that any remains related to medieval Midsomer did not extend into the application area or that they may have been truncated by previous development of the area.

## 7. PROJECT TEAM

- 7.1 The fieldwork was undertaken by Raymond K Ducker who also produced this report. The illustrations were prepared and the report compiled by Ann Linge. The archive was compiled and prepared for deposition by the author and the project was managed by John Bryant.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES CONSULTED

### Published Works

Collinson, 1791, *“History & Antiquities of Somerset”*, Volume 1.

IfA, 2008[a]. Institute for Archaeologists. *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*. Originally published in 1994; revised 2001 & 2008.

La Trobe-Bateman, E, 1999 *Avon Extensive Urban Survey Archaeological Assessment Report: Norton-Radstock*.

### Maps

Ordnance Survey 1967 1: 50,000 Bristol District, *Geological Survey of England and Wales, Solid and Drift*

Ordnance Survey 1: 2,500 plan, 1886.

Ordnance Survey 1: 10,560 plan, 1904.

Ordnance Survey 1:1,250 plan, 1972.

### Unpublished Material

BaRAS 2011 Archaeological watching brief at the Church of St John, Midsomer Norton, Bath & North-East Somerset.

BaRAS 2010. *Written Scheme of Investigation for Archaeological Watching Brief* at Rear of 126 High Street, Midsomer Norton, Bath & North-East Somerset.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BaRAS would like to thank Clive Manley and Tim Gregory of Gregory Builders and Chris Wood of Reports 4 Planning for their assistance and co-operation.

## **APPENDIX 1: Policy Statement**

This report is the result of work carried out in the light of national and local authority policies.

### **NATIONAL POLICIES**

Statutory protection for archaeology is enshrined in the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979), amended by the National Heritage Act, 1983. Nationally important sites are listed in the Schedule of Ancient Monuments (SAM). Scheduled Monument consent is required for any work that would affect a SAM.

### **GOVERNMENT POLICY GUIDANCE**

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (1994) and Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (1990) have been replaced (23 March 2010) by Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (2010) which sets out the Government's national policies on conservation of the historic environment. Those parts of the historic environment that have significance because of their historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest are called heritage assets.

Of particular relevance within the Planning Policy Statement are:

#### **Policy HE6: Information Requirements for Applications for Consent Affecting Heritage Assets**

HE6.1 Local planning authorities should require an applicant to provide a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected and the contribution of their setting to that significance. The level of detail should be proportionate to the importance of the heritage asset and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on the significance of the heritage asset. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets themselves should have been assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary given the application's impact. Where an application site includes, or is considered to have the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where desk-based research is insufficient to properly assess the interest, a field evaluation.

#### **Policy HE9: Additional Policy Principles Guiding the Consideration of Applications for Consent Relating to Designated Heritage Assets**

HE9.1 There should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets and the more significant the designated heritage asset, the greater the presumption in favour of its conservation should be. Once lost, heritage assets cannot be replaced and their loss has a cultural, environmental, economic and social impact. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Loss affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I or II\* listed buildings and grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

#### **Policy HE12: Policy Principles Guiding the Recording of Information Related to Heritage Assets**

HE12.3 Where the loss of the whole or a material part of a heritage asset's significance is justified, local planning authorities should require the developer to record and advance understanding of the significance of the heritage asset before it is lost, using planning conditions or obligations as appropriate. The extent of the requirement should be proportionate to the nature and level of the asset's significance. Developers should publish this evidence and deposit copies of the reports with the relevant historic environment record. Local planning authorities should require any archive generated to be deposited with a local museum or other public depository willing to receive it. Local planning authorities should impose planning conditions or obligations to ensure such work is carried out in a timely manner and that the completion of the exercise is properly secured.

### **LOCAL POLICIES**

The Planning Policy Statement of Archaeology and Planning (PPS 15) consolidates advice to planning authorities. The Guidance stresses the non-renewable nature of the archaeological resource, details the role of the Local Authority Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), encourages early consultation with county and district council archaeological officers and sets out the requirement for developers to provide sufficient information on the impact of a development on the archaeological resource to enable a reasoned planning decision to be taken. PPS 15 also indicates the circumstances where further work would be necessary and outlines the use of agreements and conditions to protect the archaeological resource.

Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan including waste and minerals policies Revised Deposit Draft 2003 as approved for used for Development Control purposes contains the following policies:

**Policy BH.11** – Development which would adversely affect Scheduled Ancient Monuments or any other sites of national importance, and their settings and does not preserve such sites in situ will not be permitted.

**Policy BH.12** – Development which would harm important archaeological remains or their settings outside the scope of Policy BH.11 will not be permitted unless the adverse impact of the development proposal on the remains can be mitigated.

**Policy BH.13** – Development which adversely affects significant archaeological remains within Bath will not be permitted unless the preservation in situ of these remains can be achieved through a detailed design and construction scheme.

Two Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents '*Archaeology in Bath & North-East Somerset*' and '*Archaeology in the City of Bath*' (both 2004) have been adopted. Their principal purpose is to supplement Policies BH.11, BH.12 & BH.13 of the existing and emerging Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with these.

## APPENDIX 2: Context Descriptions

Context No.	Description
100	General number for unstratified finds.
101	Topsoil in Test Pit 1 and area. Up to 150mm of loose, very dark greyish brown, fine, sandy silt with occasional inclusions of charcoal and lime-mortar flecks. Varying amounts of demolition rubble occur throughout the deposit.
102	Subsoil in Test Pits 1 & 2. Up to 300mm of firm, mid-brown, silty clay with occasional small sandstone fragment inclusions.
103	Natural sandy clay and sandstone. Excavated to a maximum of 800mm deep. Hard, red, sandy clay and sandstone.
104	Natural sandstone, hard, red deposit exposed in all test-pits and at base of all footings, generally exposed but not further excavated.
105	Wall fragment in Test Pit 3. As exposed c. 400 x 500 x 300mm in size. Mainly local sandstone rubble bonded with grey mortar with abundant inclusions of charcoal and lime. Stones up to 300 x 200 x 80mm in size. Remains of post-medieval wall.
106	Wall truncated by Test Pit 4. Small section of wall exposed in pit 500mm x 500mm x 300mm high. Comprises unworked limestone rubble of large size (max c. 500 x 300 x 200mm) bonded with grey mortar with abundant inclusions of charcoal and lime. 1 or 2 courses remain. Appears similar to Wall (114).
107	Tarmac surface over Test Pit 4 and the north half of the site, 20mm thick or less.
108	Bedding material under parts of Deposit (107). Crushed/mixed rubble (includes brick, limestone and sandstone fragments) and mortar deposit. Averages 200mm thick.
109	Modern gravel and rubble, thin deposit of redeposited topsoil, gravel and demolition rubble – similar to (111).
110	Wall and return in Trench 1, House Plot 1. Approximately 2m of wall orientated E to W, remains to a height of 500mm. Nearly all materials used are brick but small Lias limestone rubble has also been used. Bricks are mostly stretcher laid, but the exact pattern is not known. White lime mortar bond. The return (to the south) is only visible over 200mm but appears identical to the main body.
111	Patchy, made-ground deposit of redeposited topsoil and rubble (sandstone, brick/tile, mortar and tarmac) averages less than 150mm thick.
112	Pennant slab surface below tarmac on the west side of the site. Pennant slabs visible in section over the northern half of the east facing section of Trench 2. Slabs up to 600mm wide and 150mm thick.
113	Pennant slab surface below tarmac, in section, along the north side of Trench 5, House Plot 2 – not visible in the south side of the trench. Vary in size but up to 600mm across x 200mm thick observed.
114	Masonry fragment at the north end of Trench 3. Similar construction to Wall (106) seems to be an isolated fragment only. Dimensions 500 x 500 x 500mm. Unworked Lias limestone rubble bonded with grey mortar with abundant lime and charcoal flecking.
115	Deposit of made-ground within the space enclosed by Wall (110) and its return, mixed deposit of redeposited topsoil, sandy clay and demolition rubble.



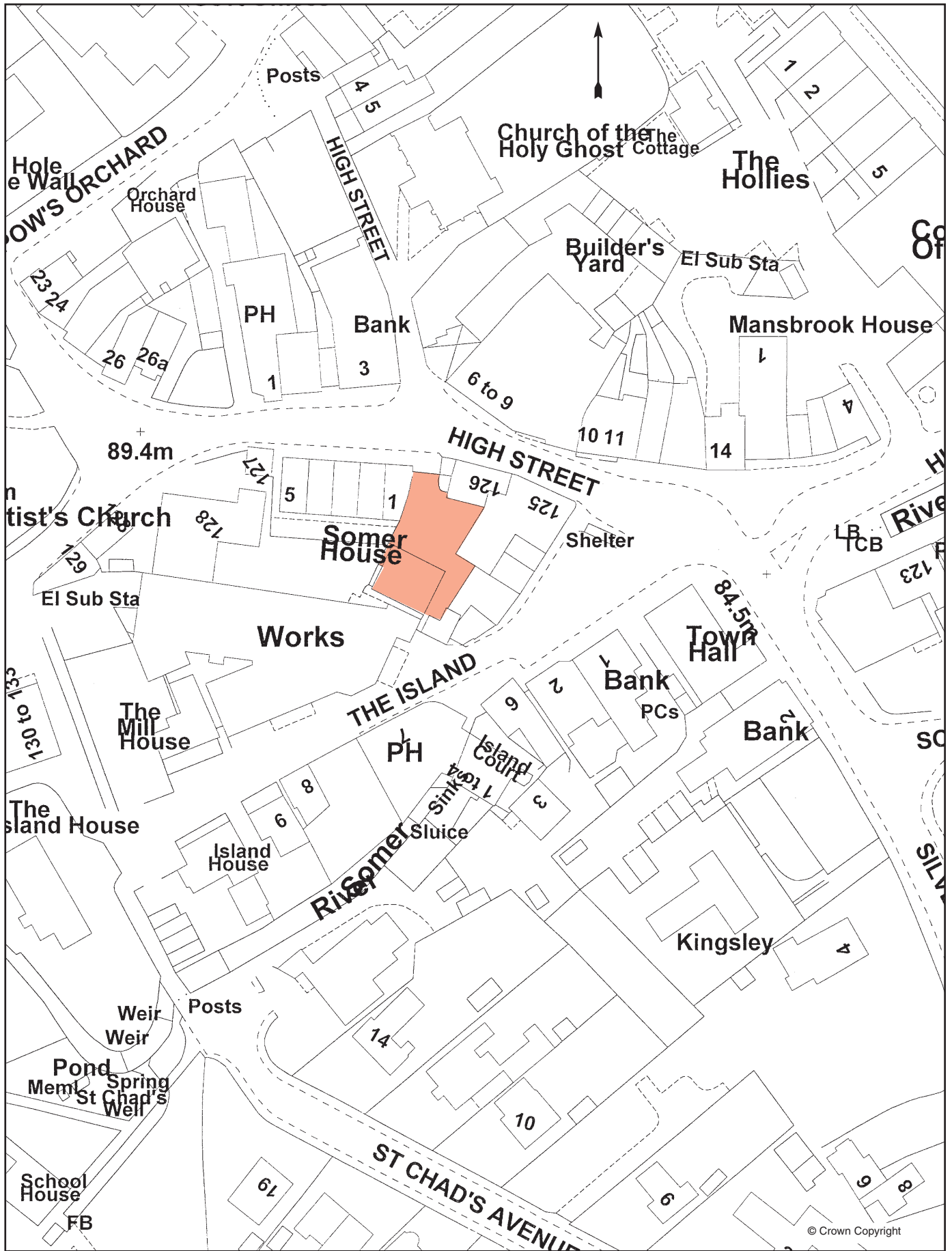


Fig.1 Site location plan, scale 1:1000

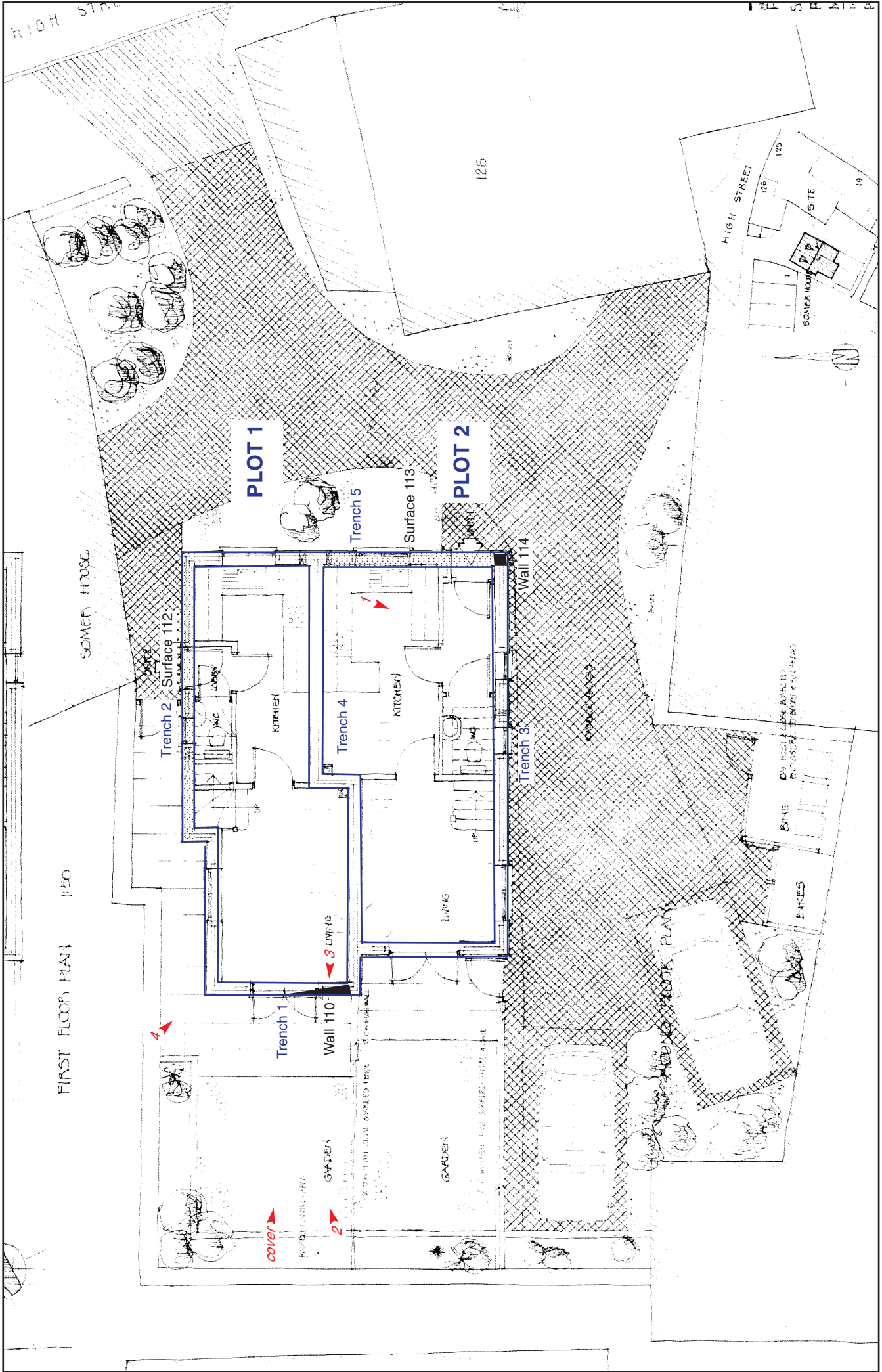


Fig.2 Plan showing study area in detail, not to scale

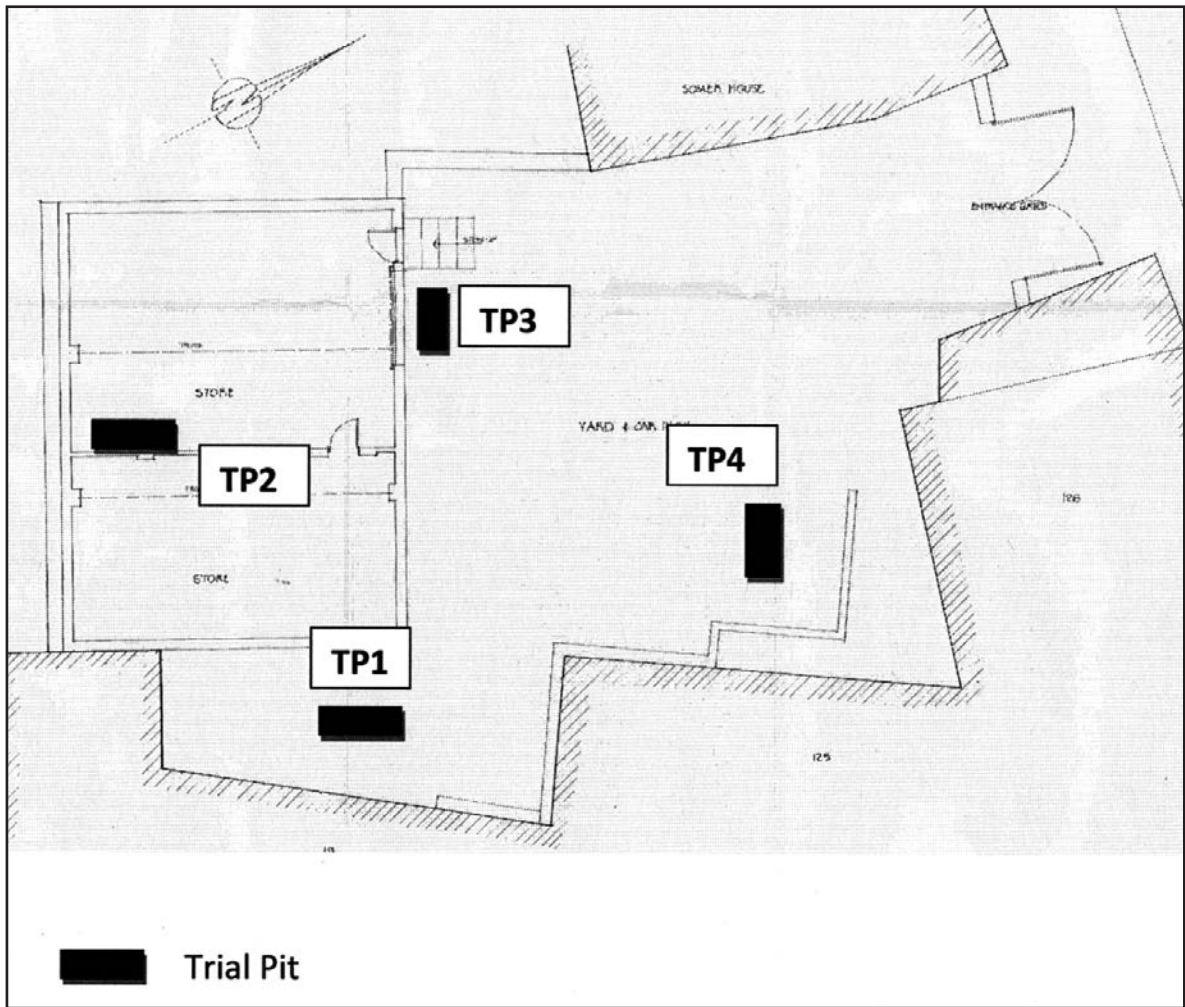


Fig.3 Plan of the test pit layout



Plate 1  
Test Pit 4 as excavated,  
with wall (106) on right,  
looking south-east.  
Scale 0.5m



Plate 2  
Overall view of work in  
progress, including initial  
excavation of Trench 4,  
looking north-east, scale  
0.5m



Plate 3  
Wall (110) as exposed in  
House Plot 1, Trench 1,  
looking south, scale 2 x  
0.5m



Plate 4 General view of the footings, nearing completion, looking north-east, scale 0.5m