

**Bartholomew Court,
93-99 Bartholomew Street,
Newbury**

An Archaeological Evaluation

for

Dovemill Properties Limited

December 1997

93-99 Bartholomew Street, Newbury
An Archaeological Evaluation

by M. J. Saunders

Report 97/88

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological field evaluation carried out at Bartholomew Court, comprising land to the rear of 93-99 Bartholomew Street, Newbury (NGR SU 4700 6675). The work was commissioned by Mr. G. I. Maspero of Mackenzie and Campbell House Limited, Wiltshire House, 121 High Street, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 1LZ, acting on behalf of their clients, Dovemill Properties Limited.

Planning permission has been granted by Newbury District Council for the construction of a new office building (application no. 150306) subject to an archaeological condition (11) which requires a scheme of archaeological investigation in the form of a field evaluation.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Policy and Planning Guidance Note, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG 16, 1990). The field investigation was carried out to a specification prepared by Thames Valley Archaeological Services and approved by Mr. Peter Fasham, the Principal Archaeologist of Babbie Public Services Division, who act as archaeological advisers to Berkshire County Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Alan Ford, M. John Saunders and Andy Smith between the 10th and 12th of December 1997 and the site code is BSN 97/88.

Location, Topography and Geology

The site is located at Bartholomew Court, on a parcel of land c. 0.35 ha, in area which was formerly a builders yard and is currently derelict. This lies to the rear of 93-99 Bartholomew Street, which is within the historic core of Medieval Newbury. Newbury itself is situated on the River Kennet, close to its junction with the River Lambourn (Fig. 1). The development site is generally level and lies at a mean height of 77 m. above Ordnance Datum. The geology underlying the site is river terrace gravel (BGS 1971) which is covered, in places, by peat and alluvium. Gravel and peat was encountered during excavations at 143-5 Bartholomew Street (Vince 1980) and natural gravel was also reached at a depth of 1.6 m. below ground level during an evaluation on a vacant plot on St. Michael's Road not too far distant (Brown 1995). An evaluation at the rear of 21 Bartholomew Street encountered peat at a depth of nearly 3.0 m. (Durdan and Saunders 1996).

Archaeological Background

The archaeological potential of the site has been highlighted by Babbie Group Ltd., archaeological advisors to Berkshire County Council. The site lies on one of the main streets of the Medieval town and several recent excavations and evaluations (eg. Vince et al 1997) have demonstrated the potential for the area to provide information on the early development of the town's historic core. Prehistoric finds of all periods are known from this part of the Kennet valley and the surrounding downland. Numerous stray finds of Mesolithic flint tools have been recovered from Newbury itself and similar stray finds of Neolithic date are also known from the town. Bronze Age activity is represented in the area by the round barrow cemetery at Wash Common and stray finds of beaker pottery and

bronze implements from Newbury and its environs. Iron Age finds are less common, but a number of wooden pile structures which may be of this date have been found during the course of excavations and building works on Northbrook Street, Bartholomew Street, and Cheap Street. Astill has suggested, however, that these are more likely to be the remains of Medieval piles driven into the alluvium to stabilise buildings (1978, 54). Stray finds of Roman pottery, tile, coins and metalwork have been found in the town and during excavations at 140 Bartholomew Street, a pair of ditches 32 feet apart and running at an angle of approximately 7° to the current street frontage were found. It was suggested that these represented part of a Roman road (Ford 1976, 29); however, a ditch, which may be a continuation, was located at 143-5 Bartholomew Street and contained late Saxon or early Medieval pottery (Vince 1980).

The original Medieval town appears to have been laid out on a Y-shaped plan consisting of Bartholomew Street, Cheap Street and Northbrook Street, with settlement consisting of burgage plots laid out on either side of these roads. The shape of these plots tended to be long and narrow, with the narrow end facing the street, thereby increasing the number of plots with a desirable street frontage. Some of these plot boundaries still survive and are especially apparent in the triangle of land between Bartholomew Street and Cheap Street. Excavations at 140 Bartholomew Street revealed several phases of Medieval buildings overlying earlier ditches, a hearth and a well (Ford 1976). Further excavations at nearby 143-5 Bartholomew Street (Vince 1980) also revealed several phases of Medieval buildings, overlying a ditch and ploughmarks. It is not unlikely, therefore, that similar evidence of Medieval occupation might be found in this part of Bartholomew Street.

Objectives and Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological or palaeoenvironmental deposits within the area of development. The brief prepared by Babcic calls for the excavation of a 4% sample of the 0.35 ha. site (140 sq. m.). It was therefore proposed to dig 87 m. of trench, 1.6 m. wide. This would be achieved by digging five trenches positioned as shown in Figure 2. Trench 1 would be positioned as close to the Bartholomew Street frontage as possible to investigate the possible presence of Medieval buildings. The trenches were to be dug using a JCB-type mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, under close archaeological supervision. A toothed bucket would also be used to remove compacted overburden or tarmac/concrete. The surface of all certain or possible archaeological features would be hand cleaned and sufficient of these excavated to satisfy the terms of the brief. All spoilheaps were to be monitored for finds.

A complete list of trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

Results

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

Trench 1 was 24 m. in length and aligned approximately east-west. It was situated as close to the Bartholomew Street frontage as possible. At the west end the stratigraphy comprised 0.10 m. of tarmac above successive bands of ballast totalling 1.2 m. in thickness. At this end of the trench a live sewer pipe on a similar alignment prevented excavation below 1.2 m. for a distance of 10 m. This part of the trench was further disturbed by a number of water pipes and electricity cables. The majority of the remainder of the trench was occupied

by a modern brick cellar which had been backfilled with bricks and concrete blocks. A large number of these bricks were observed to have been subjected to burning, while others were extensively soot-blackened. The cellar itself reached a depth of 3 m. Nothing else of archaeological significance was observed and no finds were recovered from the spoilheaps. It seems probable that any archaeological features or deposits would have been completely truncated by both the service trenches and the construction of the cellar. Natural gravel was observed in those parts of the trench unaffected by modern disturbance.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 15 m. long, situated in the middle part of the site, and was aligned east-west. The stratigraphy comprised 0.5 m. of rubble above 1.0 m. of dark brown soil mixed with modern debris. This in turn lay over a fill of brown clay silt with modern stone and concrete inclusions 1.2 m. deep. Between 5 and 8 m. from its west end was a large modern rubbish pit. At the eastern end of the trench was a large underground fuel storage tank enclosed by bricks. Nothing of archaeological interest was observed and no finds were recovered from the spoilheaps. Reddish brown gravel natural was encountered at a depth of 2.4 m. and again it appears that the extent of modern disturbance would almost certainly have destroyed any archaeological remains.

Trench 3 (Plate 2)

Trench 3 was 17 m. in length and excavated to a depth of over 3 m. A test pit was excavated at its western end to examine the geology and the natural gravel was encountered at a depth of approximately 4 m. Due to the fact that the northern side of the site was occupied by a standing building this trench had to be repositioned further south than originally intended, but still on an east-west alignment. The stratigraphy comprised several bands of modern tarmac interleaved with layers of ballast to a depth of 1.2 m.

Nothing, other than modern infill, was observed. However, the unstable nature of this infill resulted in the almost complete subsidence of the southern side of the trench fortuitously exposing the outer side of another modern brick cellar (Plate 2). This was 13 courses deep with the cellar extending away to the south. A small number of cattle bones were recovered from the spoilheap towards the eastern end of the trench and were also seen in the north facing section of the trench at a depth of 1.59 m. They were, however, within the modern infill and as such have no archaeological significance. Nothing of an archaeological nature was present and once more modern disturbance would have truncated any features or deposits.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 15 m. long and excavated to a depth of over 3 m. It was positioned diagonally across the central eastern part of the site. The stratigraphy consisted of layers of tarmac, crushed tile, and gravel to a depth of 0.5 m. This lay above at least 2 m. of landfill comprising clay, brick rubble and ballast, which appeared to lie within a very large cut. A tip line of roof tiles sloped down from north-west to south-east. This feature was cut into a very dark brown soil with large stone and tile fragments within it. No archaeological features were observed and no artefacts other than 20th century material were recovered from the spoilheaps. Burnt wooden planks and areas of ash were present towards the base of the trench.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was 20 m. long and aligned north-south parallel to the eastern boundary of the site. The stratigraphy consisted of 0.05 m. of tarmac over 0.12 m. of concrete. These overlay 0.08 m. of sandy mortar, 0.21 m. of asphalt, 0.12 m. of ballast, 0.22 m. of dark brown clay soil with brick rubble inclusions, and 0.44 m. of yellowish clay. Below this was

landfill which varied in depth from 0.86 m. to 1.11 m. This in turn overlay the natural gravel. The landfill included a large number of paint tins, corrugated iron sheets and other modern debris. No archaeological features or deposits were present and only modern material was recovered from the spoilheaps.

Conclusion

From the observations made during the evaluation it would appear highly unlikely that, should any features or deposits of an archaeological nature have been present on the site, they would have survived the very great degree of truncation and modern disturbance that has occurred. Modern cellars and service trenches towards the Bartholomew Street frontage have almost certainly destroyed any archaeological remains, as has cellaring in the centre of the site. The majority of the remainder of the site seems to have been used as a landfill site for some length of time and the depth of this dumping is considerable. It is possible that some of this landfill may have been infill of bomb craters, although the burnt bricks and timbers may be seen as evidence of fire damage. There are, however, contemporary newspaper reports of bomb damage occurring from a single Dornier aircraft, in 1943, which caused the loss of several lives. A booklet in Newbury Museum shows the line of the reported bomb damage to directly cross the eastern part of the site, although no direct hit was notified at the time. Sites of impact damage are plotted at regular intervals along this line but significantly absent directly on Bartholomew Court where one would expect to see the pattern completed. It is possible, therefore, that the crater-like feature observed in Trench 4 was caused by a bomb, although this cannot be substantiated conclusively. Alternatively, the excavation of gravel pits could also explain this feature.

There would seem to be little chance of archaeology surviving elsewhere on the development site, apart, perhaps, from the few metres closest to Bartholomew Street where a second floor office above the street entrance prevented excavation. In conclusion, the development is likely to cause minimal damage, if any, to archaeological deposits.

Acknowledgements

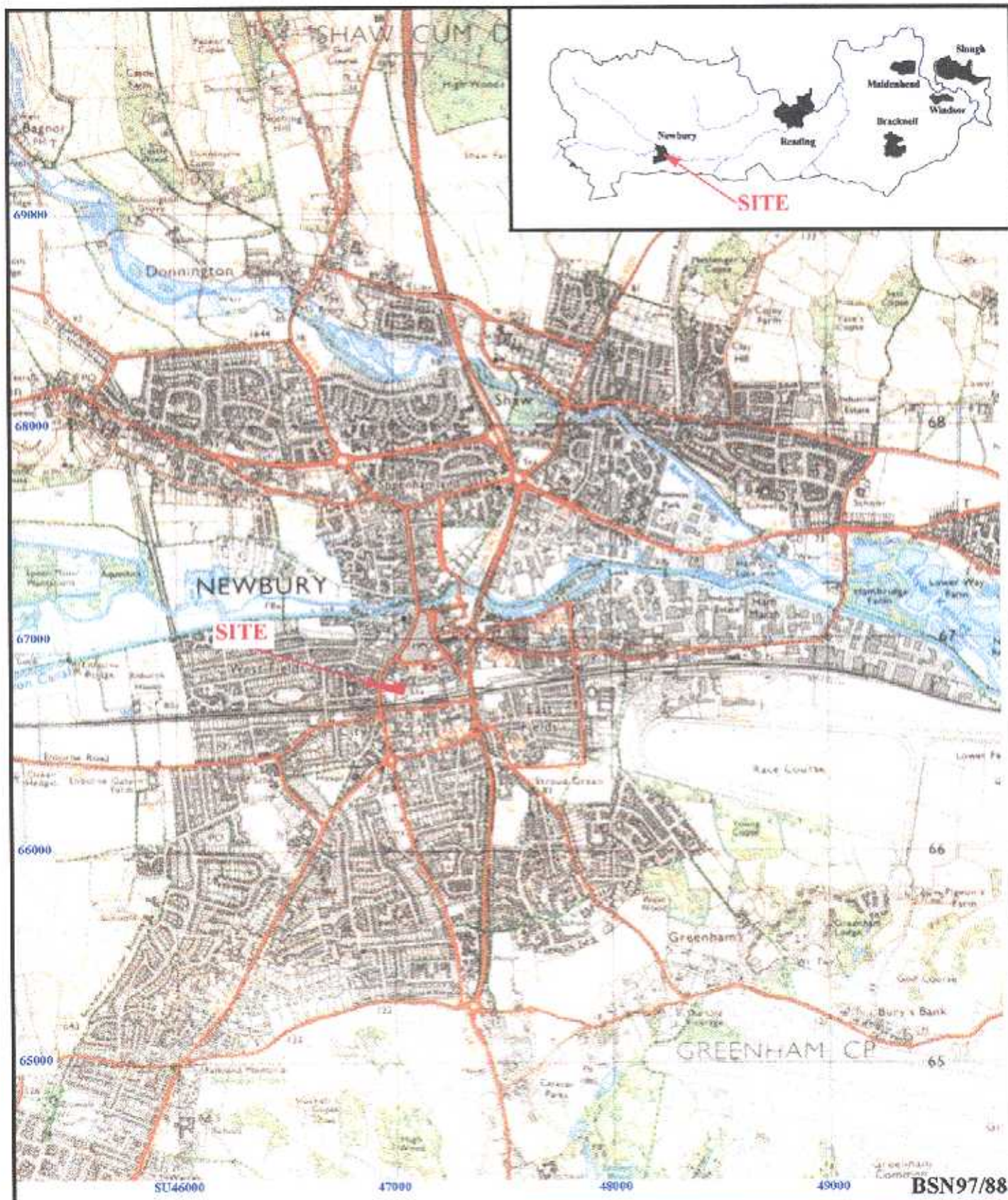
Grateful thanks are due to Mr. Tony Higgott of Newbury Museum for his information regarding the bombing of Newbury during the last war and for showing me the relevant booklet and newspaper cutting.

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APPENDIX 1: Trench Details

Trench No.	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Depth (m)	Comment
1	24.00	1.6	1.30 (W) 3.00 (E)	0.10 m. of tarmac over 1.20 m. of banded ballast at the west end. A sewer pipe prevented natural being reached for 10 m. from west end. Infilled cellar present at 8 m. from west end reaching 3 m. deep. Natural comprised greenish gravels.
2	15.00	1.6	3.00+	0.50 m. of rubble over 1 m. of dark brown soil with modern debris above 1.2 m. of brown clay silt with modern stone inclusions. Modern rubbish pit from 5-8 m. Underground fuel storage tank at E. end. Natural reddish brown gravels encountered at 2.4 m. deep.
3	17.00	1.6	3.00	1.2 m. of banded modern tarmac layers with bands of ballast over modern fill. Cellar wall observed in north facing section. Test pit at west end encountered gravel at 4 m.+
4	15.00	1.6	3.00+	0.5 m. of tarmac layers with crushed tile and gravel over 2 m.+ of landfill comprising clay, brick rubble and ballast in very large crater. Tile tip lines sloping down from east. Crater cuts very dark brown soil with stones and tile fragments.
5	20.00	1.6	2.35	0.05 m. of tarmac over 0.12 m. of concrete over 0.08 m. of sandy mortar above 0.21 m. of asphalt over 0.12 m. of ballast over 0.22 m. dark brown clay silt with brick inclusions over 0.44 m. of yellowish clay above between 0.86 m. and 1.11 m. of landfill.



Bartholomew Street, Newbury, Berkshire, 1997

Figure 1. Location of site within Newbury and Berkshire.

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THAMES VALLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

S E R V I C E S

Bartholomew Court, 93-99 Bartholomew Street, Newbury, Berkshire, 1997

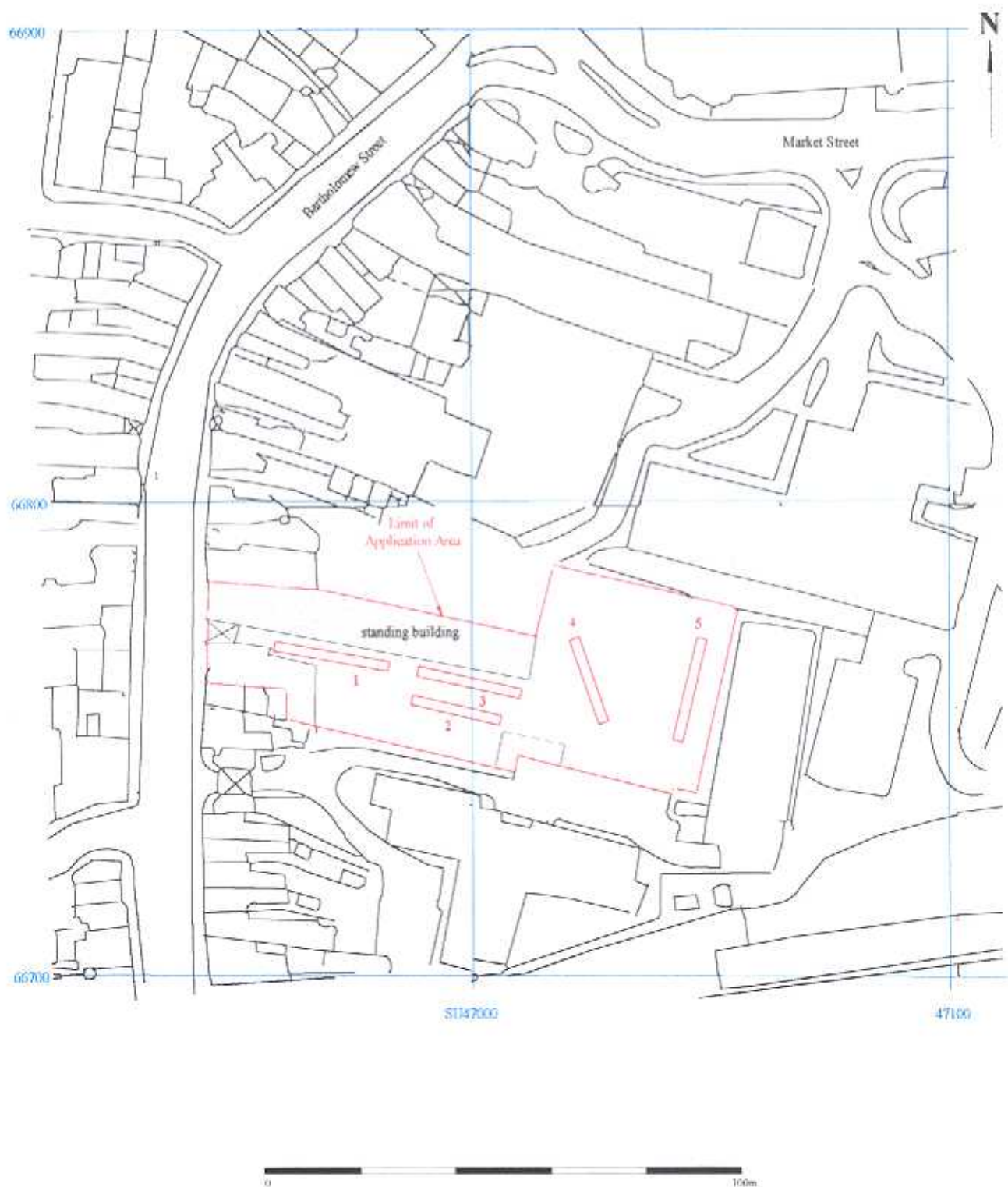


Figure 2. Trench location plan.



Plate 1. Trench 1 looking west, scale 2m.



Plate 2. Trench 3 looking south, showing cellar.