

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON
STEPNEY BANK, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE,
TYNE AND WEAR**

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PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

**An Archaeological Watching Brief on Stepney Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
Tyne and Wear**

Central National Grid Reference: NZ 2602 6452

Site Code: STB 05

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1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- 1.1 An archaeological monitoring and recording exercise was undertaken in December 2005 on Stepney Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear. The central National Grid Reference of the site is NZ 2602 6452.
- 1.2 The archaeological investigation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited and commissioned by Northern Electric Distribution Limited. The work involved monitoring groundworks associated with the installation of an underground electricity supply for Albion House, Stepney Bank.
- 1.3 The investigation was undertaken following a recommendation by the Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist. The site lies close to the presumed line of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Hadrian's Wall, therefore the installation had the potential to disturb important archaeological remains.
- 1.4 The cable installation involved the excavation of a narrow trench across the carriageway of Stepney Bank adjacent to the access to Albion House and The Courtyard. Any remains of note that were exposed during the groundworks were to be recorded.
- 1.5 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered during the course of the investigation.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 General Background

- 2.1.1 This report describes the methods and results of an archaeological monitoring and recording exercise (hereafter 'watching brief') carried out on Stepney Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear (Figure 1).
- 2.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken on 10th December 2005 by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA) and the work was commissioned by Northern Electric Distribution Limited (NEDL). The investigation took place in association with the installation of an underground electricity supply to Albion House, Stepney Bank.
- 2.1.3 The archaeological work was undertaken following a recommendation by the Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist (TWCA). The site lies close to the presumed line of Hadrian's Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, therefore the installation had the potential to disturb important archaeological remains.
- 2.1.4 A Specification for the undertaking of the watching brief was issued by the TWCA.¹ The broad aim of the watching brief was to allow preservation by record of archaeological remains encountered during intrusive groundworks.
- 2.1.5 At the time of writing, the project archive is housed at the Northern Office of PCA, at Unit N19a, Tursdale Business Park, Durham. The completed project archive, comprising written, drawn, and photographic records will be ultimately deposited at the Museum of Antiquities, University of Newcastle, under the site code STB 05. The **Online Access to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS** (OASIS) reference number is: preconst1-11979.

2.2 Site Location and Description

- 2.2.1 The site was located on Stepney Bank in the Ouseburn Valley area to the east of the historic core (and modern city centre) of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The central National Grid Reference of the site is NZ 2602 6452 (Figure 1).
- 2.2.2 Stepney Bank is a long established road that falls away to the north-east, reflecting the natural topography of the valley side. Properties on the north side of the street are bounded by Byker Bridge, with the Tyne and Wear Metro line to the north of that.
- 2.2.3 In its western portion, Stepney Bank is developed along both sides with a variety of properties, some surviving from 19th century industrialisation of the area, the remainder of more recent origin. The area of investigation was a narrow trench running from pavement to pavement across the carriageway in this western portion. To the north, the pavement was bounded by a high sandstone revetment wall of relatively ancient origin. To the south, the area of investigation was bounded by a ramped access drive to Albion House and a recent development, The Courtyard, comprising a series of industrial units.

¹Newcastle City Council, 2005.

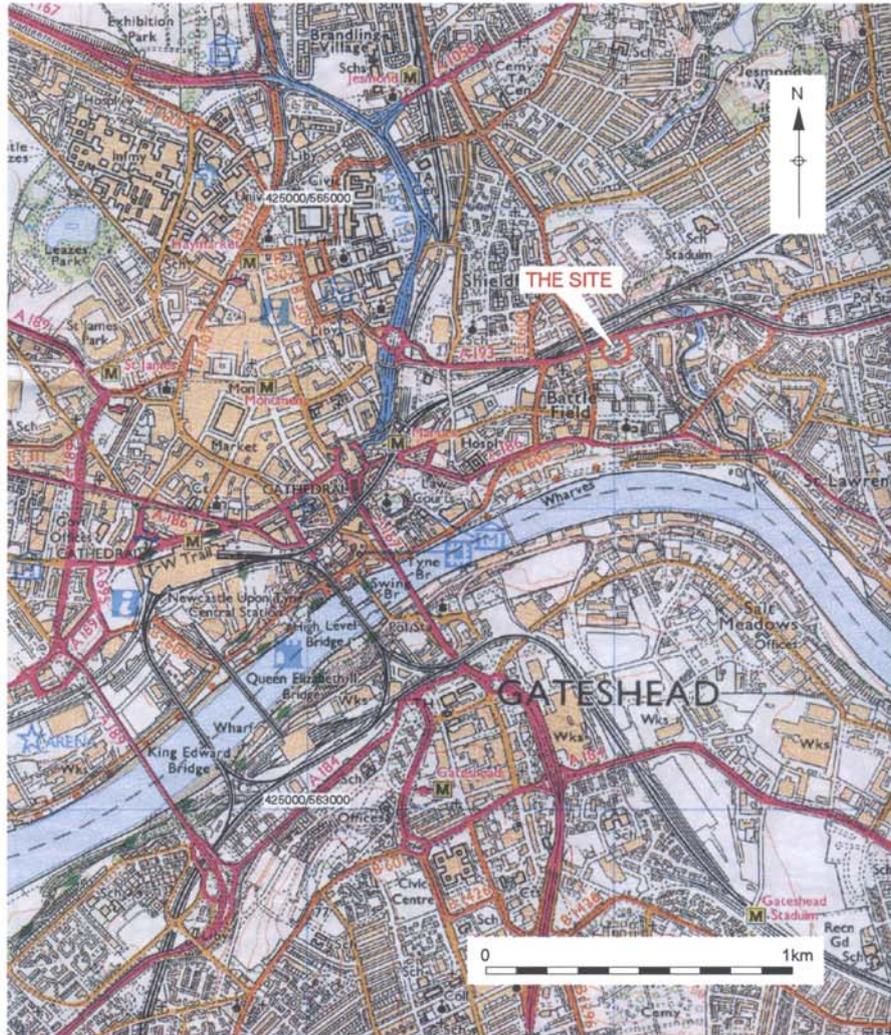


Figure 1. Site location
Scale 1:25,000

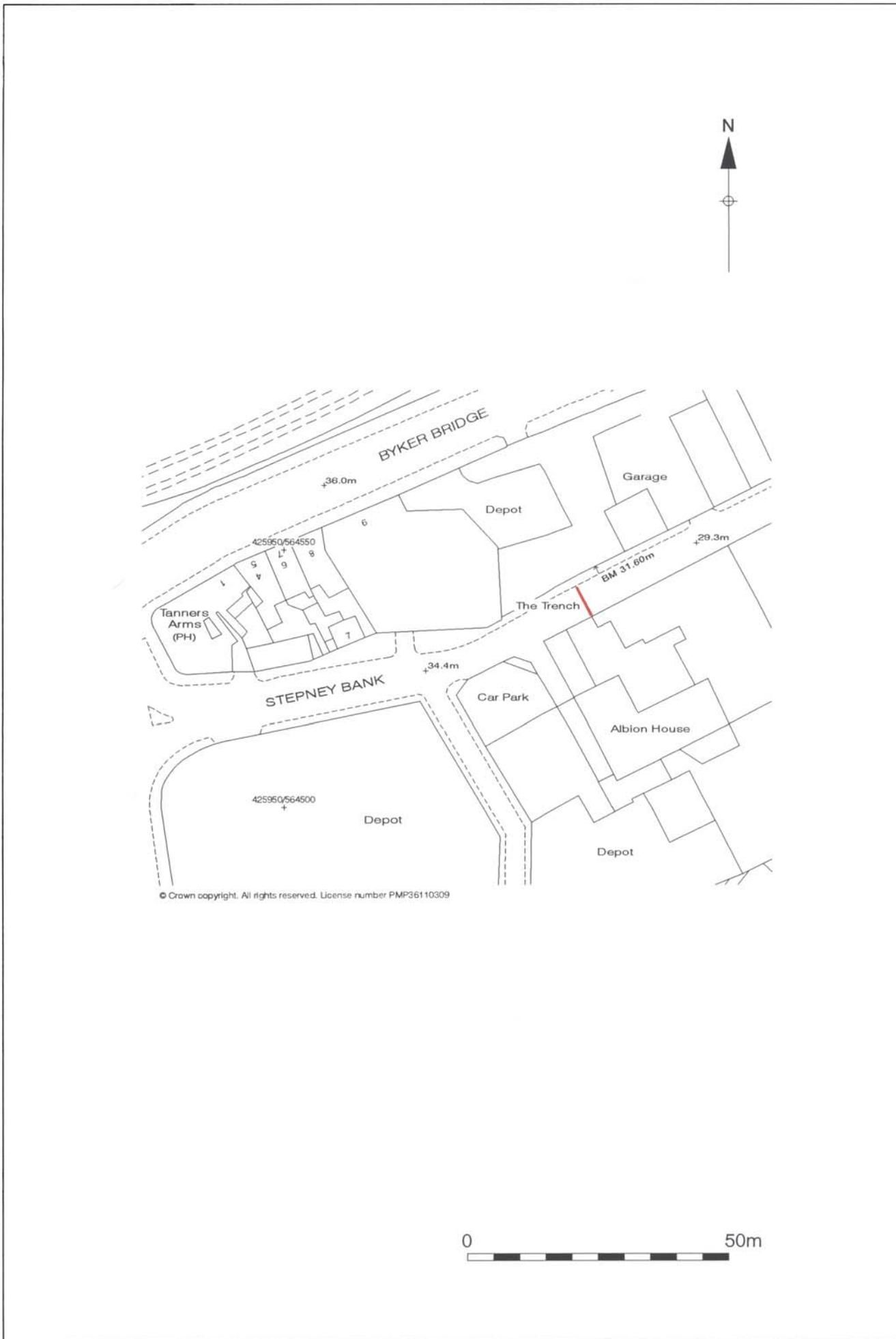


Figure 2. Trench location
Scale 1:1000

2.3 Geology and Topography

2.3.1 The solid geology of the area comprises Middle Coal Measures rock of the Upper Carboniferous period.

2.3.2 The drift geology of the area comprises glacial till (boulder clay).

2.4 Planning Background

2.4.1 An application for planning permission to install a new electricity supply to Albion House, Stepney Bank was made by NEDL to the Local Planning Authority, Newcastle City Council.

2.4.2 The need for early consultation in the planning process in order to determine the impact of development schemes upon the archaeological resource is identified in the document '*Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: 'Archaeology and Planning'*' (PPG 16).²

2.4.3 The TWCA, attached to the Historic Environment Section of Newcastle City Council, has responsibility for archaeological development control in Tyne and Wear. Because the cable installation is in the area of the presumed line of Hadrian's Wall, it was considered that there was potential for structural fabric of the Wall and associated archaeological deposits to be disturbed by the installation.

2.4.4 In considering any proposal for development, the City Council is mindful of the policy framework set by government guidance, in this instance PPG 16, as well as existing Development Plan policy. The Development Plan framework is provided by the '*Newcastle-upon-Tyne Unitary Development Plan*'.³ The Plan contains the following policies:

Policy C04

Development which would harm sites or areas of archaeological interest and their settings will not be allowed.

Policy C04.1

The following sites and areas of archaeological interest are identified for the purposes of Policy C04:

Other sites and areas of archaeological interest as defined on the Proposals Map.
18. Unscheduled areas of the known and presumed line of Hadrian's Wall, Vallum, Ditch and fortifications

Policy C04.2

Where a proposal may affect a site or area of archaeological interest, the developer will be required to submit an appropriate assessment of its potential impact upon the archaeological remains and where necessary undertake an archaeological field evaluation.

Policy C04.3

Where assessment and evaluation have established that proposed development will adversely affect a site or area of archaeological interest, developers will be required to preserve archaeological remains *in situ* unless this is clearly inappropriate or the destruction of the remains is demonstrably unavoidable, in which case a programme of archaeological works shall be submitted to and agreed with the Council before the start of development.

² Department of the Environment, 1990.

³ This is available to view online on the *Planning Portal* website.

- 2.4.5 Accordingly, it is present policy of Newcastle City Council (and English Heritage in areas where the Wall has Scheduled Ancient Monument status) to ensure the preservation of all structural remains associated with the Wall. Therefore, as a rule, advice from the TWCA is that re-development must ensure that there is no possibility of construction work affecting any surviving Roman structural remains, preservation *in situ* of such remains being the strongly preferred option.
- 2.4.6 The aforementioned Specification for the archaeological investigation was prepared by the TWCA. In broad terms, the investigation aimed to record archaeological remains exposed during the cable installation.

2.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.5.1 The site lies within an area of archaeological sensitivity, close to the presumed line of the Hadrian's Wall corridor. The Wall, constructed on the orders of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, from AD 122, marked the northern frontier of the Roman Empire. The Wall and its associated features represent the best-preserved frontier of the Roman world and consequently the Hadrian's Wall corridor has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- 2.5.2 The presumed line of the Wall takes it across the Ouseburn Valley, running westwards towards the historic core of Newcastle. This course is shown on antiquarian maps, such as Hutton's 1772 map, Wood's 1827 map and Oliver's 1830 map.⁴ A roughly projected line of the Wall corridor can be created by linking Scheduled sections of Wall at Jubilee Street and Crawhall Road (SAM 28/9) to Milecastle 3 and the excavated section of wall found to the south of Shields Road in 2001 to the east. The area of investigation does not lie within a Scheduled area.
- 2.5.3 The Lower Ouseburn Valley was originally part of the township of Byker, one of the first outside Newcastle town walls. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the valley was mainly agricultural, but industrialisation came early to the area because of the availability of river transport, coal and water power. By the 17th century, this was the hub of Newcastle's glass and pottery making industries, and several mills were in operation. Hutton's late 18th century map shows industrial development skirting the Ouseburn, with the Stepney area on the western side of the valley still essentially rural in nature. The course of what would become Stepney Bank is shown, with a windmill on its north side, at the top of the bank.
- 2.5.4 Wood's early 19th century map shows development along the road that would become Stepney Bank, with the aforementioned windmill still in evidence and a tannery and the 'Stepney Pottery' shown on the north side of the road. Oliver's map of 1830 shows an essentially similar layout, along with the projected line of what was to be New Bridge Street and Byker Bridge.

⁴ These are available to view online on the *Pictures in Print* website.

2.5.5 Ouseburn first witnessed intensive development in the 19th century, followed by 20th century degradation as key industries fell into decline. The 1930's saw widespread clearance of 'slum' dwellings along Stepney Bank. While some of the properties lining the road in its western portion are relatively new buildings, some earlier structures do survive, generally occupied by commercial premises such as motor garages. Albion House itself appears to be of 20th century origin and the buildings immediately to its east, around The Courtyard, are very recent low-rise industrial units.

2.6 Aims and Objectives

- 2.6.1 In broad terms, the aim of the archaeological investigation was to record the character of any archaeological remains exposed as a result of groundworks for the electricity supply to Albion House, Stepney Bank.
- 2.6.2 The specific objective of the work was to record evidence of archaeological remains associated with Hadrian's Wall.
- 2.6.3 The project had the potential to make a contribution to archaeological knowledge of the area.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The archaeological investigation at Stepney Bank, Newcastle-upon-Tyne was undertaken on the recommendation of the TWCA. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the relevant standard and guidance document of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA).⁵ PCA is an IFA-Registered Organisation (RAO 23).
- 3.1.2 One trench for a cable installation was monitored, this being the entire groundworks programme (Figure 2). The dimension of the trench were as follows:
- Trench 1, 6.10m x 0.40m x up to 0.65m deep.
- 3.1.3 Following cutting of the tarmac road surface with a two-stroke disc cutter, Trench 1 was excavated with a tracked 2-tonne 'mini-excavator' using a narrow toothless 'ditching' bucket. A hydraulic breaker was fitted to the machine to 'break-out' a concrete layer directly beneath the tarmac, as well as parts of two substantial concrete obstructions in the central portion of the trench.
- 3.1.4 The trench was opened in two sections, due to the requirement to keep one carriageway open for the passage of vehicular traffic. Initially, the northern half was opened, down to the required depth, with the cable duct being installed prior to backfilling and laying of a temporary bitumen road surface along the line of the trench. The southern half was then dealt with in similar fashion with the cable ducts joined together at the mid-point of the trench. All work was monitored by an archaeologist.
- 3.1.5 A sketch section was made at 1:50 of the east-facing section of the cable trench. The trench was of insufficient dimension to allow more detailed recording. Archaeological deposits were recorded using the 'single context recording' method on *pro forma* sheets.

3.2 Post-excavation

- 3.2.1 The stratigraphic data for the project is represented by the written, drawn and photographic records. In total, 10 archaeological contexts were defined during the watching brief. Post-excavation work involved checking and collating site records. A written summary of the archaeological sequence was then compiled, as described below.
- 3.2.2 No artefactual or organic material was recovered and no bulk samples for palaeoenvironmental remains were collected during the watching brief.
- 3.2.3 The complete project archive, in this case comprising only written and drawn records (including all material generated electronically during post-excavation), will be packaged for long term curation. No material was recovered that required specialist stabilisation or an assessment of potential for conservation research. The depositional requirements of the receiving body, in this the Museum of Antiquities, will be met in full.

⁵ IFA, 1999.

4. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

4.1 Phase 1: Post-medieval/Modern

4.1.1 The earliest deposits to be recorded were exposed towards and within the base of the cable trench. To the north, was deposit [6], comprising soft mid yellowish brown clayey sand with occasional fragments of brick throughout. In the central portion of the trench was deposit [7], comprising compact black silt with crushed and fragmented coal and occasional small fragments of brick throughout. To the south was deposit [8], comprising firm dark grey clayey silt with moderate small and medium fragments of brick and occasional fragments of salt-glazed drainpipe. The maximum thickness of any of these deposits was c. 0.35m.

4.1.2 At no point was the natural sub-stratum encountered in the trench and the full depths of the three deposits described above were not seen at the maximum depth of excavation, 0.65m. The three deposits were dump deposits of post-medieval or modern origin and of no archaeological significance. If there were stratigraphic relationships between any of the three deposits, these could not be determined due to the limited degree to which it was possible to examine the trench exposures.

4.2 Phase 2: Modern

4.2.1 Towards the centre of the trench were two substantial concrete intrusions, both assigned context number [3]. These appeared to be of linear form, crossing the trench and running parallel to the line of the road. They were of identical construction, being 0.50m wide and c. 0.35m thick, and were revealed, 1.0m apart, directly beneath the tarmac road surface. Such was the solidity of the two structures, they proved impossible to break out in their entirety and the cable duct was fed beneath them. Between the concrete structures was a surface of granite sets, [2], again overlain with the tarmac road surface.

4.2.2 Abutting and to the north and south of the aforementioned concrete structures, was a layer of concrete, [9], this of far less solidity and evidently the make-up layer for the existing road surface. At the northern end of the trench, the concrete layer was at its thickest, being c. 0.35m thick and underlain by a bedding layer of loose sand and gravel.

4.2.3 Towards the southern end of the trench, a narrow service trench, [5], infilled with limestone hardcore, [4], had been cut through the concrete layer. A plastic pipe was exposed towards the base of the feature at the maximum depth of the excavation. The aforementioned tarmac road surface, [1], 100mm in thickness, was the uppermost deposit along the full length of the trench.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were recorded during the watching brief.

5.2 It is recommended that no further work be undertaken on the information recovered during the watching brief on Stepney Bank.

6. REFERENCES

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Pictures in Print website at: www.dur.ac.uk/picturesinprint/

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Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited, 1999. *Field Recording Manual*, PCA unpublished.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS

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