

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT
FARNLEY GRANGE, CORBRIDGE,
TYNEDALE, NORTHUMBERLAND**

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Farnley Grange, Corbridge, Tynedale Northumberland

Central National Grid Reference: NZ 9977 6298

Site Code: FGC 07

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May 2007**

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1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- 1.1 An archaeological monitoring and recording exercise was undertaken during groundworks associated with the installation of a new electricity supply at Farnley Grange, Corbridge, Tynedale, Northumberland. The central National Grid Reference for the site is NZ 9977 6298.
- 1.2 The archaeological investigation was commissioned by Northern Electric Distribution Limited and undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited in February 2007.
- 1.3 The investigation involved monitoring groundworks associated with the excavation of a trench for an electricity supply cable adjacent to the A695 carriageway at Farnley Grange. The area where the groundworks were to be undertaken lies between Farnley Grange Roman Temporary Camps, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and the course of Dere Street Roman road.
- 1.4 As the proposed works had the potential to disturb important archaeological remains, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team recommended that a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording be undertaken in association with all intrusive groundworks in order to record any archaeological remains of note thereby exposed.
- 1.5 No features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered within the area of investigation. The natural sub-stratum, of glacial origin, was recorded throughout the cable trench, cut into by existing service trenches for a gas pipe and telephone cabling. The uppermost deposit comprised topsoil and turf forming the grass verge through which the trench was excavated.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 General Background

- 2.1.1 An archaeological monitoring and recording exercise (hereafter 'watching brief') was carried out at Farnley Grange, Corbridge, Tynedale, Northumberland. The watching brief comprised monitoring the excavation of a trench ahead of the installation of a new electricity supply.
- 2.1.2 The watching brief was commissioned by Northern Electric Distribution Limited (NEDL). The fieldwork was undertaken 6th-8th February 2007 by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited (PCA).
- 2.1.3 The watching brief was undertaken following a recommendation by Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT). A Brief for the work was issued by NCCCT.¹ The broad aim of the watching brief was to allow preservation by record of any archaeological remains encountered during the groundworks.
- 2.1.4 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 FGC 07. The Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) reference number is: preconst1-26609.

2.2 Site Location and Description

- 2.2.1 The site is located c. 300m south of the River Tyne, c. 1.2km south-east of Corbridge, in Tynedale, Northumberland (Figure 1). The central NGR for the area of investigation is NZ 9977 6298 (Figure 2).
- 2.2.2 The area of investigation was located adjacent to the southern carriageway of the A695 road, a short distance to the east of the hamlet of Farnley Grange. The groundworks comprised a narrow linear trench aligned NW-SE, running parallel to the road and within the grass verge, adjacent to West Lodge, a dwelling north of Farnley House.

2.3 Geology and Topography

- 2.3.1 The site lies in the Middle Tyne Valley, c. 10km downstream of the confluence of the North and South Tyne rivers. This is within the Tyne Gap, a distinctive narrow lowland corridor that separates the North Pennines from the Border Moors and Forest, which to the east merges into the Tyne and Wear Lowlands and to the west merges into the Solway Basin and Eden Valley.
- 2.3.2 The area is underlain by sedimentary rocks of Carboniferous age. These Carboniferous rocks comprise a repetitive succession of limestones, sandstones and shales, locally with thin coals, and a small number of mineral veins. This area is characterised by Millstone Grit of Namurian age (middle part of the Carboniferous Period, 327 to 310 million years ago).

¹NCCCT 2006.



Figure 1. Site location
Scale 1:25,000

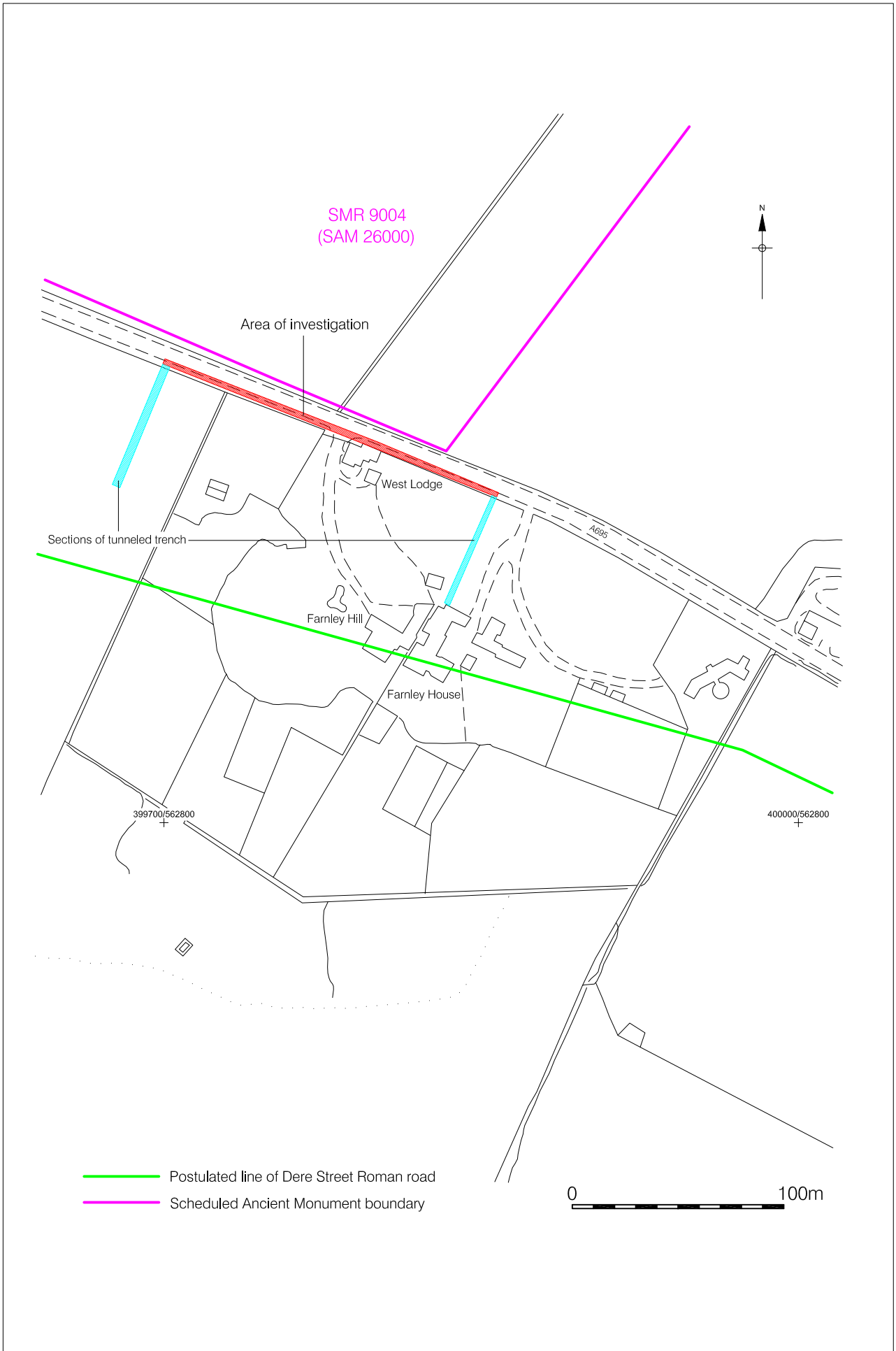


Figure 2. Trench location
Scale 1:2500

- 2.3.3 The landscape of the area was greatly influenced by the passage of ice sheets moving from southern Scotland and the Lake District during the last glacial period, with boulder clay or till being deposited in a thick blanket over much of the area. Deposition of other glacial debris, mainly sand and gravel, during the final melting stages produced terrace deposits along the Tyne Gap. Throughout the area, the river valley landscapes owe much to the legacy of Pleistocene glaciation and thick glacial, periglacial and glaciofluvial deposits mantle hill slopes and infill valley floors.²
- 2.3.4 A short distance to the north-east of the site lies Farnley Haughs, which marks the eastern end of a large alluvial basin that extends upstream as far as Hexham. Four Holocene alluvial units have been identified at Farnley Haughs, with younger fluvial deposits inset below and truncating older fills. It is likely that such an alluvial sequence was produced by lateral channel shift and sedimentation separated by shorter periods of river cut and fill. Each of the Holocene fluvial units at Farnley Haughs comprises coarse sandy gravels, essentially representing river bed material, overlain by up to three meters of fine-grained inorganic sands and silts, representing floodplain and channel fill sediments resulting from overbank and slackwater deposition. To the north-west of the site lies Dilston Haughs, which also forms part of this alluvial basin.
- 2.3.5 Situated on the lower slopes of the steep-sided southern side of the valley of the Tyne, present ground level in the vicinity of the site is at c. 68m OD.

2.4 Planning Background

- 2.4.1 An application for planning permission to install a new electricity supply at Farnley Grange was made to the Local Planning Authority, Tynedale District Council. The site lies within an area of archaeological sensitivity due to its proximity to three temporary Roman camps, which have Scheduled Ancient Monument status, and the line of Dere Street Roman road.
- 2.4.2 National guidance on 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).³ NCCCT has responsibility for archaeological development control in Northumberland and identifies planning proposals that will be subject to archaeological conditions. NCCCT provides archaeological advice in relation to planning matters to Local Planning Authorities, in this case Tynedale District Council.
- 2.4.3 Local guidance is set out in the '*Tynedale District Local Plan*', adopted in April 2000. Section 5, '*The Built Environment*', of the Local Plan, contains Policies BE27, BE28 and BE29 relating to regionally and locally important archaeological sites. In addition, Policy BE25 relates to Scheduled Ancient Monuments and archaeological sites of national importance.⁴

² Passmore and Macklin 1997.

³ Department of Environment 1990.

⁴ www.tynedale.gov.uk

2.4.4 NCCCT took the view that the proposed development, *i.e.* groundworks associated with the installation of the electricity supply, had the potential to disturb important archaeological remains. Therefore, it was recommended that an archaeological watching brief should be undertaken in association with the intrusive groundworks in order to record any archaeological remains of note that were exposed. A Brief for the work was issued by NCCCT.

2.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 2.5.1 Little evidence for prehistoric activity has been found in the immediate vicinity of the site. A bronze hoard, known as the Farnley Hoard, was discovered c. 400m to the north-east in 1835, during construction of the railway. This comprised two spearheads, fragments of dagger blades and a flanged axe, all dating to the Bronze Age. The County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) number for this hoard is 10055.
- 2.5.2 The site lies c. 1.2km downstream of the town of Corbridge. The remains of the Roman fort and settlement of *Corstopitum* lie immediately to the west of the modern town. The first fort in the area was located at Red House, c. 1km west of the consolidated fort, where a substantial supply base was established, this being associated with the northern campaigning of Agricola, which began in AD 79.⁵ The line of Dere Street was also established during these campaigns, this major road led from the legionary fortress at York to Corbridge and crossed the Cheviots into Scotland to the fort at Newstead.
- 2.5.3 By the end of the 1st century AD, the Red House supply base had been replaced by the fort at Corbridge to the east, positioned at the crossroads between Dere Street and the Stanegate road, an east-west route across the Tyne-Solway isthmus which is thought to have formed part of a frontier system that was a precursor to Hadrian's Wall. A complex succession of forts was built at the Corbridge site, which reflect the history of the northern frontier, before the site became largely a civilian town, although retaining a military presence.⁶ The consolidated remains are mainly from the late 2nd and early 3rd century fort and represent only a fraction of the total area of Roman settlement.
- 2.5.4 In the vicinity of the site, the course of Dere Street runs along the river terrace on the southern side of the River Tyne, crossing the river from the bank opposite the Roman fort at Corbridge. Although the exact course of the road in the immediate vicinity of the site is not known, the postulated line of the road runs in a NW-SE direction a short distance to the south of the site, with the dwellings of Farnley House and Farnley Hill situated over the course of the road (Figure 2).

⁵ Frere 1987, 90-91.

⁶ Jones and Woolliscroft 2001, 39.

- 2.5.5 Three temporary Roman camps are located at Farnley Grange (SMR 9004) a short distance to the north of the site on the north side of the A695 (Figure 2). These remains have Scheduled Ancient Monument status (No. 26000). Temporary Roman camps (also known as marching camps) are rectangular or sub-rectangular enclosures constructed to accommodate troops either when out on campaign or as practice camps. Most campaign camps were only occupied on a temporary overnight basis and few were used for longer periods. The camps were surrounded by a single ditch and inner earthen rampart and in plan are invariably straight-sided with rounded corners. They generally have between one and four entrances, these usually centrally placed in the sides and often protected by additional defences. Troops would have been accommodated in leather tents, set out in rows with broad access ways between, with the commander's headquarters in the centre. As these camps were occupied only briefly, usually just for one night, and because troops on campaign would carry few possessions, artefactual remains are rarely found.
- 2.5.6 The Farnley Grange camps are located c. 2km south-east of Corbridge Roman fort and comprise the entire circuit of one camp and the northern sections of two adjacent camps. None of the camps survive as upstanding earthworks, but they are clearly visible on aerial photographs. Camp 1, which is the smallest and most westerly in the group, measures c. 75m across with a main north-south axis. Around half of the camp has been identified, but its southern extent lies under the A695 and buildings at Farnley Grange. The central camp, Camp 2, measures about 100m across and also has a main north-south axis. Around two-thirds of this camp is visible, with its southern extent again obscured by modern development. The full extent of Camp 3, which is the largest and most easterly camp, is visible on aerial photographs and this measures c. 160m WSW-ENE x c. 120m wide. The main axis of Camp 3 lies east-west and breaks in the enclosing defences have been identified as gateways. All three camps lie immediately to the north of Dere Street on the river terrace and their differing orientations reflect their subtle placing to exploit minor topographical features. The southern side of Camp 3 lies a short distance to the north of the site, on the opposite side of the A695.
- 2.5.7 The Anglo-Saxons chose a spur of land to the east of the Roman settlement of *Corstopitum* as the location for their village and monastery. While Corbridge grew into an important medieval market town, smaller villages are known to have existed at Riding, Lee and Farnley. The exact location or extent of Farnley Deserted Medieval Village (SMR 9040) is not known, but it is thought to lie to the south of the site, in the vicinity of the area now occupied by Farnley House. Land in the vicinity of the site may have been utilized to some degree – even if simply for pasture - during the medieval period.
- 2.5.8 The course of the A695 is likely to follow an earlier route, possibly of medieval origin, although certainly in existence by the post-medieval period. To the east of the site, on the north side of the road, lies Farnley Gate House (SMR 10074), a 19th century building that served as a tollhouse on the Gateshead to Hexham Turnpike. Several other buildings also located on the north side of the A695 associated with Farnley Farmhouse (SMR 15470) are also listed on the County SMR, most of these being agricultural buildings of 18th and 19th century origin, many Grade II Listed.

- 2.5.9 Land in the vicinity of the site was utilised as agricultural land throughout much of the post-medieval period and the Ordnance Survey 1st edition map of c. 1850 shows that the land to the south of the site comprised a large agricultural field at this time. The dwellings to the south, in the central part of this field, first appear on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition, c. 1890, as do the Lodge Houses that are situated to the immediate south of the road in the vicinity of the site, dating their construction towards the end of the 19th century.

2.6 Aims and Objectives

- 2.6.1 The broad aim of the watching brief was to allow the preservation by record of any archaeological deposits exposed during the groundworks.
- 2.6.2 The specific aim of the work was to ensure that any archaeological features, deposits or artefacts exposed during the groundworks were systematically examined and accurately recorded, analysed and interpreted.
- 2.6.3 The project had the potential to make a significant contribution to archaeological knowledge of the area.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork

- 3.1.1 The archaeological investigations conducted in association with the installation of a new electricity supply at Farnley Grange, Corbridge were undertaken on the recommendation of NCCCT. The fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the relevant standard and guidance document of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA).⁷ PCA is an IFA-Registered Organisation (RAO 23).
- 3.1.2 The groundworks comprised the excavation of a linear trench along the grass verge on the south side of the A695. This trench measured 170m NW-SE and was uniformly 0.30m wide and up to 1.0m deep. The trench was excavated by a tracked mini-excavator (c. 3 tonnes in size) using a narrow toothless ditching bucket and this work was carried out under archaeological supervision. At each end of this trench, the electricity supply was to run at right angles in a south-westerly direction, the easternmost of these extensions to connect to Farnley House. A percussive mole was utilised to install the cable in these extensions, negating the requirement for archaeological monitoring.
- 3.1.3 All deposits exposed were recorded on *pro forma* recording sheets.

3.2 Post-excavation

- 3.2.1 The stratigraphic data for the project is represented by the written and drawn record. A total of six contexts were defined during the archaeological investigations. A written summary of the archaeological sequence was then compiled, as described below.
- 3.2.2 No artefactual or organic material was recovered from the site. The project's palaeoenvironmental sampling strategy was to recover bulk samples where appropriate, from well-dated (where possible), stratified deposits covering the main periods or phases of occupation and the range of feature types represented. To this end, no features of significance were encountered to warrant the recovery of bulk samples. No material was recovered that required specialist stabilisation or an assessment of potential for conservation research.
- 3.2.3 Survival of all materials from archaeological fieldwork depends upon suitable storage. 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. The depositional requirements of the receiving body, in this case the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle University, will be met in full.

⁷ IFA 2001.

4. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SEQUENCE

- 4.1 The earliest deposit, [6], exposed throughout the cable trench, comprised compact mid yellow clayey sand and coarse sand with frequent pockets of fragmented sandstone. This was encountered at a depth of 0.50-0.60m below the present ground surface. This material is interpreted as a glacial deposit of natural origin.
- 4.2 In the north-western half of the cable trench, the natural sub-stratum was cut into by a linear feature, [5], representing a service trench for a gas pipe, [4]. This feature was excavated for a maximum depth of 0.80m, to a depth of 1.0m below present ground level, in order to establish the depth at which the pipe was located.
- 4.3 The natural sub-stratum was also cut into by a linear feature, [3], running along the south side of the cable trench. This contained telephone cabling, [2], at a depth of 0.40-0.60m below present ground level.
- 4.4 The uppermost deposit, [1], comprised topsoil and turf, up to 0.20m thick, throughout the cable trench.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 No features of archaeological significance were recorded during the investigations. No artefactual material was recovered or noted within any of the deposits exposed.
- 5.2 Natural glacially-derived material was encountered throughout the trench, truncated by service trenches for a gas pipe and telephone cabling.
- 5.3 It is recommended that no further work be undertaken on the information recovered from the investigations associated with the installation of the electricity supply at Farnley Grange, Corbridge, Tynedale, Northumberland.

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Internet Sources

Archaeology Data Service website: <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/terms.cfm>

Keys to the Past website (the online Sites and Monuments Record of County Durham and Northumberland): www.keystothepast.info/

www.magic.gov.uk

www.roman-britain.org

7. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CREDITS**

Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited would like to thank NEDL for commissioning the project herein described. The liaison role of Caroline Gray is acknowledged.

The role of Nick Best, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team, is acknowledged.

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