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### Summary

The watching brief conducted between November 2<sup>nd</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> 2011 near Whinney Hill in advance of an electricity cable was archaeologically sterile except for a possible undated foundation.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project origins

Gerry Martin has been commissioned by Mr Bob Barber (the client, Waitings Ltd) to prepare a Specification of Works for a Programme of Archaeological Watching Brief Action. The watching brief action has been encouraged by Northumbria County Council and English Heritage as potential and significant archaeological remains may be encountered.

### 1.2 Project outline

The watching brief is an interim measure in order to monitor invasive action that potentially may compromise sub-surface archaeological assets.

For archaeological purposes this linear site has been divided into seven road sections divided by road crossings (RDX).

The development involves the laying of electricity cables from the sub-station at Whinney Hill, Fourstones to the Birtley junction beside the A68 where a wind farm is being constructed on behalf of EDF Energy PLC.

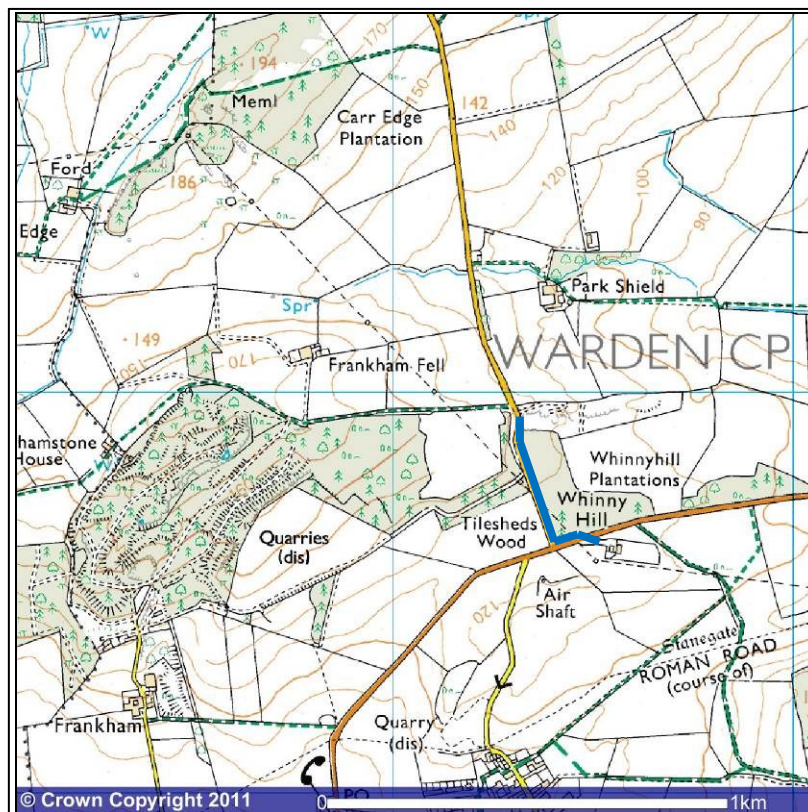


Figure 1. Location of study area (blue outline) (OS Copyright, Licence no. 100044205)

The cable trench measures no more than 1.00m in width and 1.00m in depth and predominantly involves the burial of cables with earth cover and a supporting base of fine gravel. It was only monitored for a short while, one week, the extent outlined in blue (figure 1).

The line of the trench is primarily within the grass verge along existing minor roads, but occasionally impacting upon these carriageways.

The trench is 19km in length and it is anticipated that the cable-laying will require seven months to enact.

A decision by Northumberland County Council Archaeology Service required no further archaeological monitoring along the course of the trench except where it impacts upon areas already outlined by the resident consultant archaeologist Mr Peter Cardwell.

Invasive work that will impact upon the monument of Hadrian's Wall will require Scheduled Monument Consent issued by English Heritage through the agency of Mr Mike Collins, the Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist based in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

The watching brief was conducted between November 2<sup>nd</sup> and November 8<sup>th</sup> 2011.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Location, topography and geology**

The study area around Whinney Hill comprises Whinstone limestone overlain by thin spreads of clay and glacial till.

The land is undulating, generally upland consisting of parkland and pasture and has been subject to considerable quarrying in the past.

## **3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 Historical background**

Disturbance of past cultural assets is likely to be low due to low population density during antiquity, a generally unfavourable agricultural landscape and a narrow footprint for the cable trench. Despite these limitations, some important past landscape features will inevitably emerge.

It is understood that a formal Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) has been undertaken for the project and it is not the intention of this report to repeat this work.

However, a little understanding of the archaeological context for this brief is desirable.

Approximately 250m south of the sub-station was the east-west course of the Stanegate.

It is believed that the Stanegate was probably built under the governorship of Agricola. It is also thought that it was built as a strategic road when the northern frontier was on the line of the Forth and Clyde, and only later became part of the frontier following Roman withdrawal from Scotland. An indication of this is that it was provided with forts at one-day marching intervals, 14 Roman miles or 13 miles (21 km).

Approximately 2.2 km north of the sub-station is the location of Hadrian's Wall and its adjacent Vallum.

Hadrian's Wall was probably planned before Hadrian's visit to Britain in AD 122. Reasons for the construction of the wall vary and the exact explanation has never been recorded. However, a number of theories have been presented by historians, primarily focusing on an expression of Roman Imperial power and Hadrian's policy of defence and consolidation before expansion.

At nearby Black Carts during June and July 1998 English Heritage initiated a project to characterise the state of preservation and archaeological potential of the earthworks of the Wall in close proximity to the course of the development.

The fieldwork revealed the following

- The Wall ditch was only 3.50m in width and 0.80m in depth cut through the Whinstone bedrock.
- Beneath the counterscarp lay a substantial, intact sealed buried soil horizon that revealed a heathland environment.
- Beneath the vallum mound, ard marks were recovered indicative of ploughing and suggesting that the frontier was built over requisitioned arable land.
- The vallum ditch was 2.80m in depth, 6.00m in width with vertical sides penetrating 1.30m in to the bedrock (Wilmott 1999, 120-122).

Sandwiched between two major Roman landscape features, it appears probable that the study area was settled, articulated as a series of land divisions, probably as ditches.

Although spatial management is poorly understood, farming probably occurred prior to the Roman conquest during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Once more ditches are likely to highlight this activity.

In the remote past, the area north of Hexham was populated by late Neolithic and Bronze Age settlers who produced distinctive rock art in the form of cup marks e.g. Goatstones (NY 8293 7471). Although the likelihood of encountering this material is remote, the chance will increase as the cable trench proceeds into the uplands towards Birtley. Numerous cairns, tumuli and field systems are illustrated on the Ordnance Survey map in this area.

Medieval features may be apparent although the method of defining field systems appears to heavily rely on dry-stone walling and other above ground methods. However, earthworks and tofts may be present indicating deserted settlements.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Project design**

The objective of the watching brief investigation was to carry out a formal programme of archaeological observations and investigations during any operations on site that disturbed or destroyed archaeological or architecturally informative deposits or remains. The specific aims of the work were to:

- Provide a record of those works associated with the removal of the topsoil
- Provide a record of any significant archaeological or architectural features encountered by intrusive activities

In order to achieve these objectives, a record of all archaeological informative deposits encountered during the ground operations was made consisting of detailed context records on individual proforma sheets, according to the protocols set out in the GMA manual.

The trench was excavated using a toothed bucket using the back actor of a JCB excavating machine.

The resident archaeologist inspected the sides of the trench for any past cultural remains below the topsoil.

The removed spoil was inspected in order to recover any past cultural artefacts.

Revealed features were located by a hand-held GPS instrument and according to the protocols described below.

Each layer, fill and cut was individually numbered and described in terms of soil detail, stratigraphic position, dimensions, artefact content, environmental samples and interpretation. The context system was cross-referenced to other records. Registers were maintained for all photographs, levels, plans, section, finds and samples taken, made or gathered in the field.

Any plans drawn were at scale and related to a base plan to the OS grid. All levels were calculated to Ordnance Datum. All photographs were numbered and labelled with subjects, orientation and scale and cross-referenced to film and negative numbers. General shots of the site were also be taken.

All finds from stratified deposits (with the exception of modern ceramic building material) were collected, processed and recorded as expressed in the GMA Manual, forming an individual section within the final report where relevant.

Sealed and anaerobic deposits would have been environmentally sampled as appropriate and according to the GMA manual, in order to examine past environmental conditions. This element would form an individual section within the final report if relevant.

The watching brief would aim to provide an opportunity, if needed, to recover any exceptional archaeological find that has not been adequately resourced. Any "unexpected" discoveries would be made known to the Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist at English Heritage.

## **5 RESULTS**

### **5.1 Section 1**

Section 1 comprised of a 57m length of trench stretching from the gates of the sub-station to the northern side of the road to Fourstones from Chollerford (RDX 1).

The area had been landscaped during the construction of the sub-station, a cutting removing the original ground surface. The trench therefore was inserted into truncated ground that was archaeologically sterile up to the grass verge beside the road (RDX1).

Approximately 3.00m south of the road and truncated by various service cables was a southern roadside ditch 4 (figure 2). This feature measured 1.80m in width and 1.27m in depth filled by a

basal fill of mixed grey clay 5, overlain by light brown clayey silt 3, beneath heavily mixed darkish grey clay 2 and capped by fine but stony, light brown clayey silt 1.

The ditch appeared to cut a concordant horizon of broken and irregular shaped yellow sandstone fragments 6 that formed the sub-base for the current road.

No finds were recovered from ditch 4 although yellow sandstone similar to layer 6 had tipped into the ditch verifying that the ditch was once open. Most probably this feature represented a 19<sup>th</sup> century roadside ditch between the road and a dry-stone wall now heavily repaired and modified.



Figure 2. Ditch 4, section 1



Figure 3. Road make-up and natural clay, section 2

## 5.2 Section 2

Section 2 measured 87m in length and covered the area north of RDX1 to the junction with the lane that headed northwards from Whinney Hill.

Within this section, only natural yellow and pink clay (figure 3) was encountered overlying hard Whinstone Limestone, the trench refraining from any impact with past cultural deposits.

## 5.3 Section 3

Section 3 comprised the course of the trench from the southern road junction at Whinney Hill to the junction with the B6318, the Military Road.

Only 300m was investigated before the watching brief was abandoned.

The trench penetrated the roadside verge before encroaching into the road in order to avoid an adjacent dry-stone wall that was in a poor state of repair.

Two features were encountered.

Eighteen metres north of the road junction was an irregular shaped pit 7 filled with tightly packed discarded red sandstone, lime mortar and other demolition material 10 (figure 4) measuring 3.80m in width. This feature appeared to represent an *ad hoc* pit filled with relatively modern material. Most probably, a building had existed on the corner of Whinney Hill road junction prior to its demolition.



Figure 4. Pit 7, section 3



Figure 5. Foundation 8, section 3

Approximately 48m from the Whinney Hill road junction was a possible east-west aligned cut 8 (figure 5) filled by broken stone within a light grey clay matrix 9. This undated, linear feature measured over 0.90m in length, 0.50m in width and 0.07m in depth.

Definition was reasonably good and it is unlikely to be a natural geomorphological formation but cultural action perhaps representing a light foundation for a building rather than a wall.

No wall returns or parallel foundations were encountered but this possible undated feature may possess some antiquity.

Beyond 150m from the southern road junction at Whinney Hill, the trench required breaking out of bedrock overlain by very thin soil and occasional spreads of yellow clay. This area was archaeologically sterile up to the entrance of a former quarry that possessed a 19<sup>th</sup> century stone lime kiln where the watching brief action ceased.

#### 5.4 Discussion

The watching brief at the southern end of the trenching scheme was an interim measure in order to facilitate construction works through a period of final consideration led by Northumberland County Council regarding the archaeological impact that this project may incur upon past cultural assets.

An undated stone foundation 8 was the only feature that may have possessed some antiquity the remaining 500m of opened trench having been archaeologically sterile.

#### 6. ARCHIVE

The archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design and the guidelines set out by English Heritage (1991, 2006) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, 2008).

The archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record if requested by the curatorial authority.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Mr Bob Barber of Waitings Ltd, the contractors laying the cable, for his assistance with this project. I would also like to thank Stuart Wilson and his colleagues for their help and co-operation whilst the excavation process was in progress.

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