



Northern Gas Networks

Eastgate, Hexham

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

P190395

MARCH 2014

RSK

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1 SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by Gerry Martin Associates on behalf of RSK Environment Ltd. along Eastgate in Hexham (NGR 393632 563863) for Northern Gas Networks during an essential gas mains replacement. This work took place between the 15th January and 4th of February 2014. The gas main was replaced by insertion of a new plastic pipe into the old metal one for a length of 150m along the street. Nine observations were made within the narrow machine dug trench, where the new main started and finished and at connections to individual properties.

A late Post-Medieval stone cellar was encountered at the southern end of the trench. A culvert ran down the street that probably connected with Skinners Burn further upstream. Walls encountered in the trench provided evidence for the southern part of the culvert by-passing the stone cellar. The existence of this culvert appeared to explain the presence of a northeast-southwest aligned wall found in 2006 and previously interpreted as a masonry Medieval structure predating the modern road. Based on the evidence from this watching brief, the road appears to have been established and maintained since the Medieval period.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Origins

Ahead of essential maintenance to an existing gas main, Gerry Martin Associates Ltd was commissioned by RSK Environment Ltd on behalf of Northern Gas Networks to undertake a watching brief on the east side of Eastgate, Hexham, Northumberland (NGR 393632 563863).

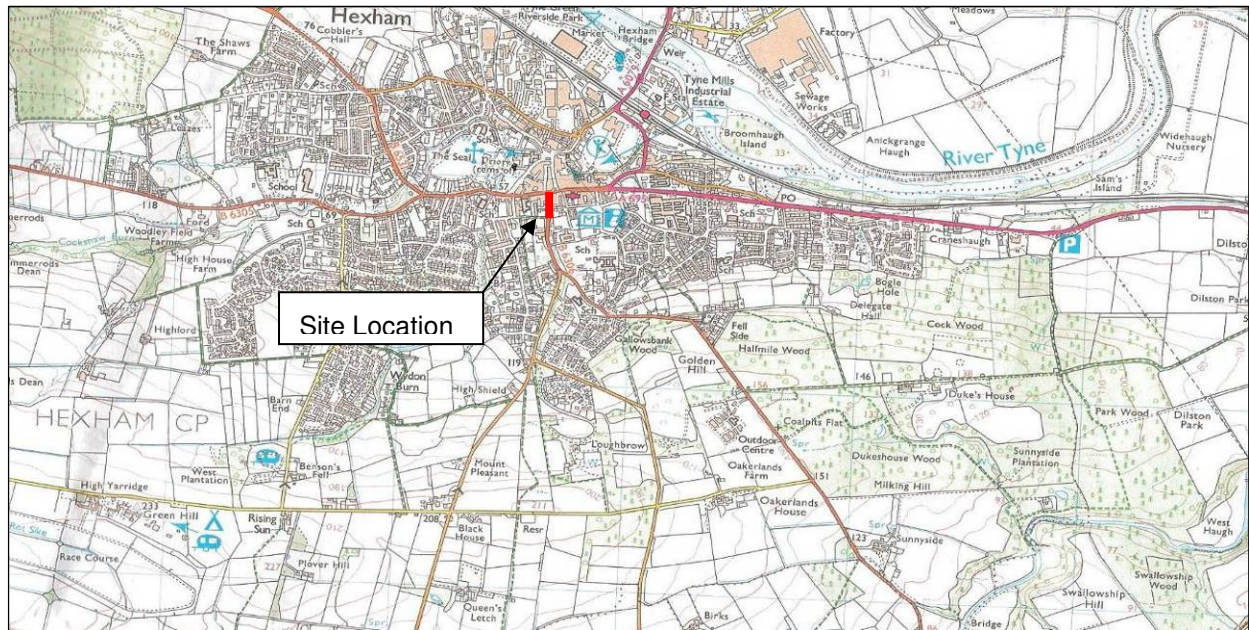


Figure 1 - Site Location (OS Copyright, Licence no. 100044205)

The watching brief was requested by Northumberland County Council as potential and significant archaeological remains could have been encountered relating to the suburbs and Medieval origins of the town. Previous archaeological monitoring of utility trenches along Eastgate had suggested the survival of wall structures, whilst the northern end of the street lies in an area of archaeological sensitivity (Northumberland CC 2009, 57). The archaeological element of the project had the potential to inform Hexham's archaeological research agenda (Northumberland CC 2009, 61):

- Medieval: evidence of trade craft and industry
- Post-Medieval: the nature, extant and development of the tanning, glove making and other industries

RSK prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that was approved by the curatorial authority prior to the commencement of the work on site. The approved methodology was adhered to by the contractor. Fieldwork was monitored by RSK and Northumberland County Council.

This report has been assembled to the relevant standards and protocols of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (*Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief 2013* and *Code of Conduct 2013*), combined with accepted best practice and in accordance with the brief prepared by the curatorial authority.

2.2 Project Outline

Eastgate is a narrow road bordered by dwellings to the east and a steep bank to the west. The eastern carriageway required partial closure as the work proceeded. At the junction of Eastgate and Cattle Market, the road was closed for a short period of time during February 2014 (Figure 2).

The gas mains replacement involved new gas connections to each property along the east side of the street and replacement of the former iron pipe with a plastic pipe inserted within the existing metal pipe. Due to the complex arrangement of services and culverts, the project involved open cut throughout Eastgate in order to lay the new gas main. The tarmac was cut by saw and then the road fabric and backfill to earlier gas pipes removed by a mini-digger. Where cross-cutting utilities occurred hand excavation was required.



Figure 2 - Excavations in Eastgate

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Location, Topography and Geology

The town of Hexham is situated on the south side in the Tyne valley, 5km west of Corbridge at a bridging point just to the east of the confluence of the North and South Tynes at Warden (Figure 1). The town occupies a flat terrace over a broad flood plain approximately 52m OD. Superficial geology along the terrace comprises alluvial sands, clays and gravels resting above glacial sands and gravels. The solid geology at this point consists of Carboniferous mudstone, sandstone and limestone that are part of the Stainmore Formation (BGS, 2014).

Eastgate is the main southerly exit from the town centre. The course of the road follows the north-south course of Skinners Burn. Eastgate descends a steep slope, a fall from south to north of 68m OD to 53m OD towards the town centre.

Skinner Burn disappears beneath Eastgate just to the south of Kings Mews where the insertion of the gas pipe began. Skinners Burn was formerly known as East Burn and prior to that name Bondgate, the ancient entrance to the town from the autonomous district of Hexhamshire (Wright 1823, 18).

3.2 Historical Background

The Tyne Valley has been an important communication corridor since the prehistoric period. Low-lying crossing points were of special significance, becoming nodal points for trade, defense and communications. Although Bronze Age cist graves have been encountered near Hexham, there is no substantive evidence for prehistoric or Roman occupation.

A secular settlement is inferred following the establishment of a monastery by Wilfred an Anglo-Saxon noble, by a grant of land from Queen Ethelreda at Hexham in the early 670s (Northumberland CC 2009, 5). St Andrew's flourished, becoming a cathedral by 681 and a centre of learning and administration. It suffered from Viking raids in 821 and 876 and fell into decline. Following a quarrel between Henry I and the Bishop of Durham, St Andrews's was refounded under the Archbishopric of York in 1113. During the 12th and 13th centuries the town was prosperous but incursions from Scotland in 1296, 1312 and 1346 alongside the Black Death in 1349 led to a decline in its administrative importance.

A preference for cattle farming in the 14th century was a boost to the tanning industry that became established in Hexham. Due to the foul-smelling odour, the tanneries concentrated on the lower waters of the Cockshaw Burn, while skinners settled by the less substantial East Burn, later the Skinners' Burn (Corfe 1999, 24). Court Rolls show that skinners and tanners had been the principal trades in Hexham from the Medieval period (Wright 1823, 117).

With the onset of the Reformation, Hexham went into further decline although leather working remained important accounting for two (Skinners and Glovers and Tanners and Shoemakers) of the towns four trade guilds (Corfe 1999, 36). Revival occurred following the introduction of new turnpike roads from 1752 and the Military Road built between 1751 and 1757. New bridges were constructed between 1770 and 1793 encouraging the economy and trade. The importance of east-west communications promoted the construction of a railway in 1829, that by 1834 was carrying wagon-trains carrying lead from Hexham to Blaydon. From 1838 the railway carried passengers and freight between Carlisle and Newcastle (Corfe 1999, 43).

Eastgate divided the two commons of Hexham into East Common and West Common (Ridley 1974, 214). From the 15th to the 17th centuries, common land was reduced by landowners around the periphery who erected fences in parts of the Common, encroachments known as Intakes or Inclosures (Ibid 215). On 20th February 1753 the freeholders and copyholders of Hexham petitioned Parliament to enclose the East and West Common. This enclosure was granted and the Common divided by landowners on May 1st 1758 (Ibid 216).

The leather trades thrived during the early 19th century with 23,504 pairs of gloves made in 1823 alone, by a workforce of 1,000 sewing women working from home and 110 men and boys employed as leather dressers and cutters (Kristensen & Dallison 2006, 80). Although the population rose steadily during the 19th century it fell below the average population rise in the North-East. Rather than expand, the town became crowded and gained a reputation for ignorance and poverty little helped by the paternalistic attitude of the landed class and an anachronistic administration dating to the Middle

Ages (Corfe 1999, 46-47).

Self-help brought many improvements during the early 19th Century. These included:

- A subscription school was built nearby in 1813 at a cost of £347 and took 240 boys (Jennings 2005, 165).
- A dispensary was set up in 1816 to help the poor and a Mechanics' Institute and library founded in 1825.
- A gasworks opened in 1835 replacing oil lamps that formerly lit the town
- A Hexham Union workhouse built in 1839
- A Local Board of Health established in 1854

Action on public health meant that every house in Hexham had piped water by the 1860's delivered from Wydon Burn Reservoir. Sewerage ensued, with a complete system of drains laid between 1875 and 1878. Clearance of poor housing and casual workshops occurred close to the Abbey from the 1840s onwards whilst the urban landscape was opened with tree lined boulevards and new civic buildings including a Town Hall and Corn Exchange built in 1866 (Ibid 49-51). The present urban landscape and landscape was thus firmly established by the end of the 19th century.

3.3 Historic Environment Record

Eastgate is located within the Hexham Conservation Area. There are no Scheduled Monuments along Eastgate. However, there are three listed Grade II buildings along Eastgate as follows:

- HER 8848 Walls to park leading to Gapriggg Lane, Eastgate (west side)
- HER 8849 18 and 18A Eastgate (east side)
- HER 8850 19 and 20 Eastgate (east side)

An archaeological watching brief undertaken in association with water mains refurbishment during 2005-06 along the western side of Eastgate identified wall footings (HER 22878) of possible Medieval origin and the remains of a more substantial stone wall (Peters 2007, 24-25) which may pre-date the Medieval street plan (HER 22877).

3.4 Map Regression

The earliest map illustrating the setting of Hexham is John Ogilby's road map from "Tinmouth to Carlisle" dated 1675 that describes a wooden bridge crossing the River Tyne (Northumberland CC 2009, 7).

Greater topographic detail is supplied by Armstrong's map of Northumberland published in 1769. A short-lived bridge crossing the Tyne was depicted and the turnpike "barrs" around the town. Of particular interest is the Skinner Burn, shown to cross Eastgate and then disappear presumably into a culvert just before the junction with Cattle Market at a location occupied by the current Tap and Spile public house (Figure 3). Buildings do not appear to exist along Eastgate at this date although leather trades almost certainly existed in this vicinity.

Wood's 1826 survey provides the first detailed map of the urban layout of Hexham (Figure 4).

On the eastern side of Eastgate, houses form a ribbon development up to the site of present-day Kings Mews built around ten years ago. These dwellings back onto a large open field that is also extant (Field Number 350) on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1864 (Figure 5). Skinner Burn appears to terminate just south of present-day Kings Mews as is the case on the Ordnance Survey map of 1864 (Figure 5) and is then lost.

It may be surmised that between 1769 and 1826, the water course was diverted into a culvert that within the road. A high bank prevented a westward course, (which also prohibited house-building in this area), whilst existing stone buildings meant it could not be sited eastwards. Towards the town centre, along the Battle Hill and Priestpopple thoroughfare, narrow strip properties are present whose form were probably initiated during the Medieval period.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1864 (Figure 5) describes Eastgate as “Skinner Burn” reinforcing the association with leather trades despite the industry having been decimated from foreign competition by the mid-19th century. The “burn” is depicted as a small tree-lined valley that continues onto the 1894 and 1922 Ordnance Survey maps.

The First Edition map does not define any particular trade or activity although a smithy almost certainly existed and appears to be illustrated as a single rectangular building, slightly offset, close to a property boundary on the other side of the road. The smithy was still active in 1894 and 1922 when it is mentioned on the Second (Figure 6) and Third Edition Ordnance Survey maps (Figure 7).

The Second Edition Ordnance Survey (Figure 6) displays gradual infilling of fields close to the town centre. Hexham Auction Mart is introduced as is St Winifred’s, later the War Memorial Hospital. By 1894 Skinners Burn had been renamed Eastgate.

The Third edition Ordnance Survey map of 1922, shows the fields to the east of Eastgate as allotments and nurseries indicating the importance of market gardening in the early to middle 20th century (Figure 7).

By the late 20th century, infilling of urban space has become prevalent and a garage is present (Figure 8). This establishment was demolished to allow the residential development of Kings Mews in the early 21st century.

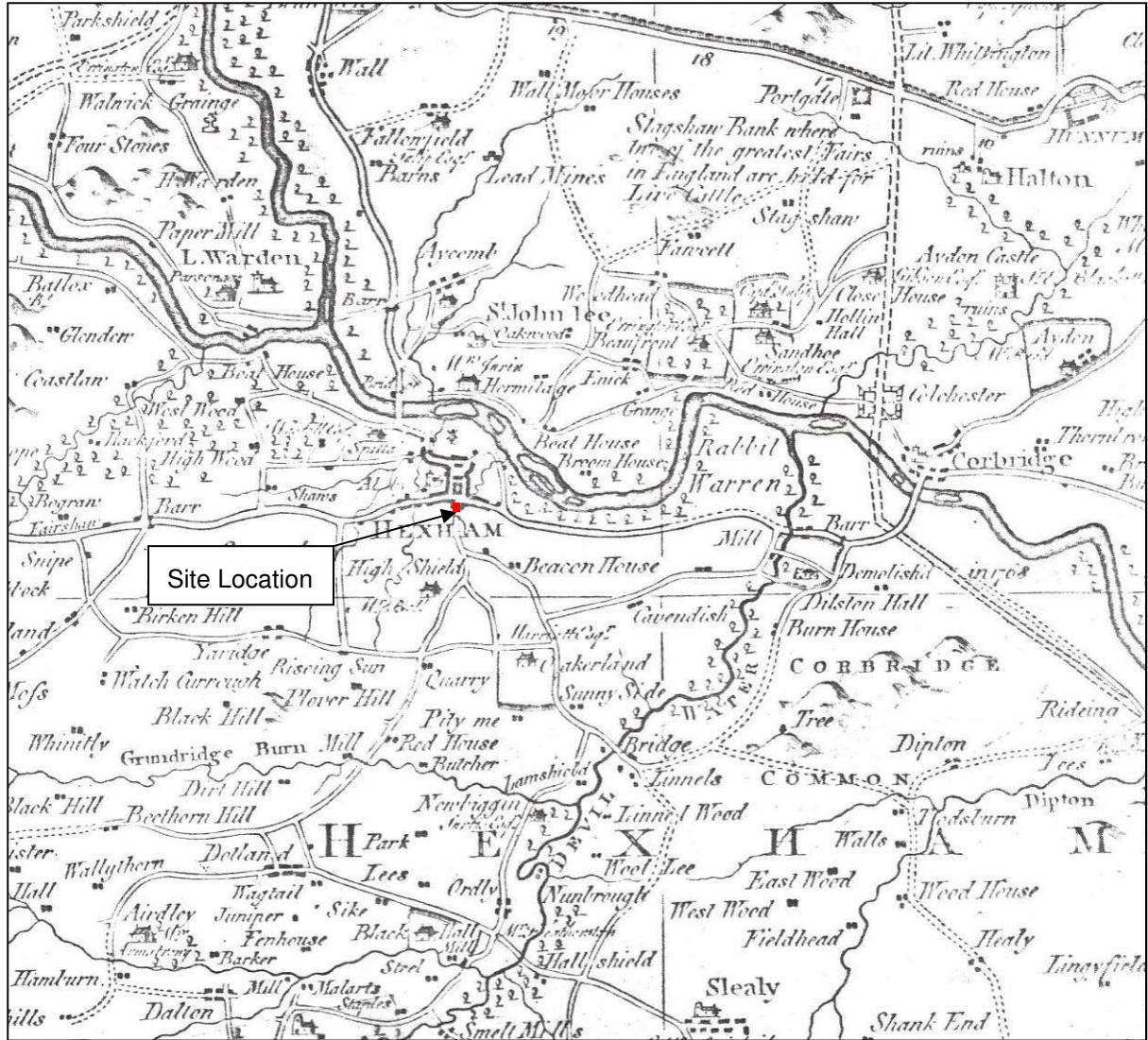


Figure 3 - Armstrong Map of 1769

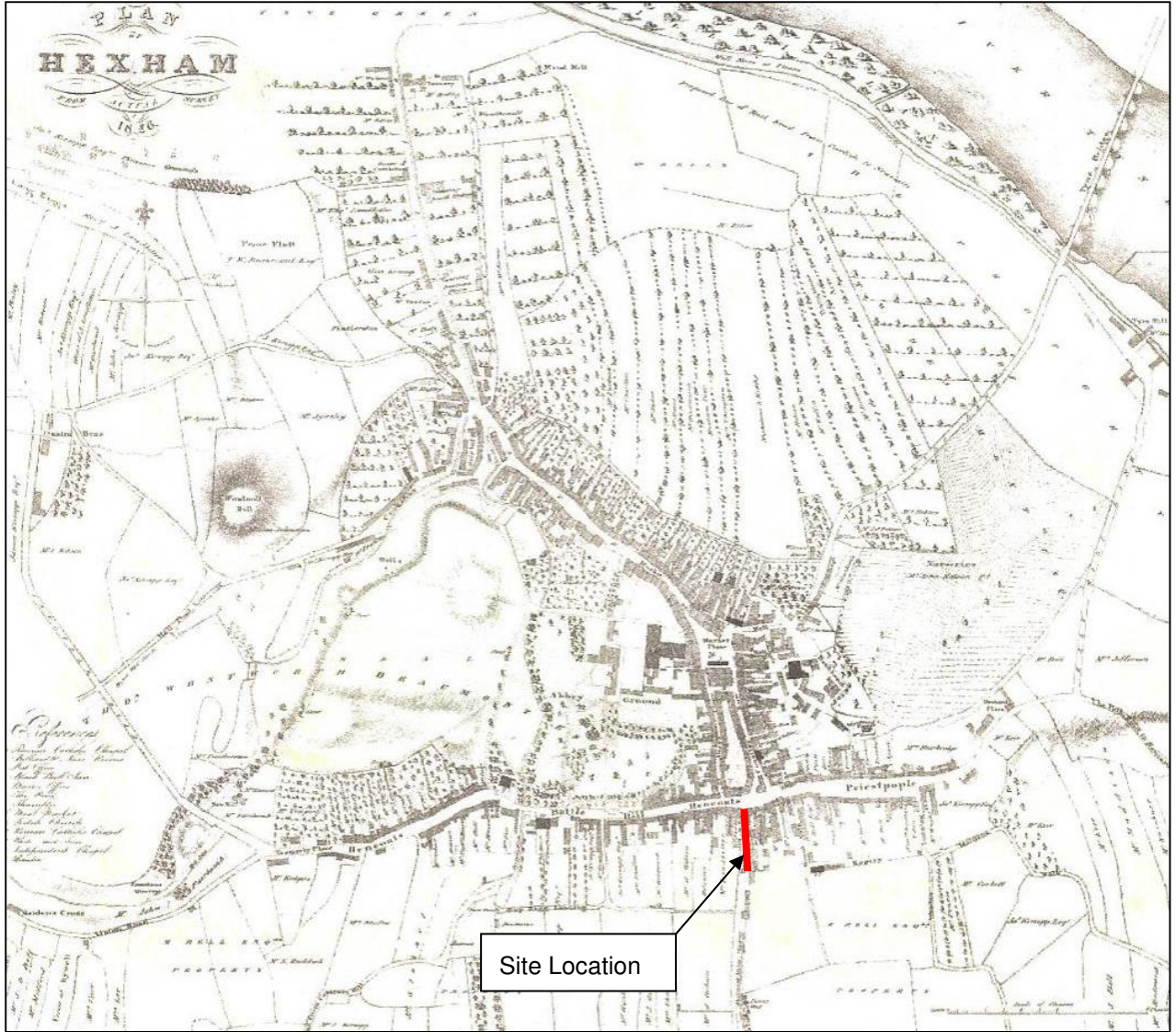


Figure 4 - Wood's Map of 1826

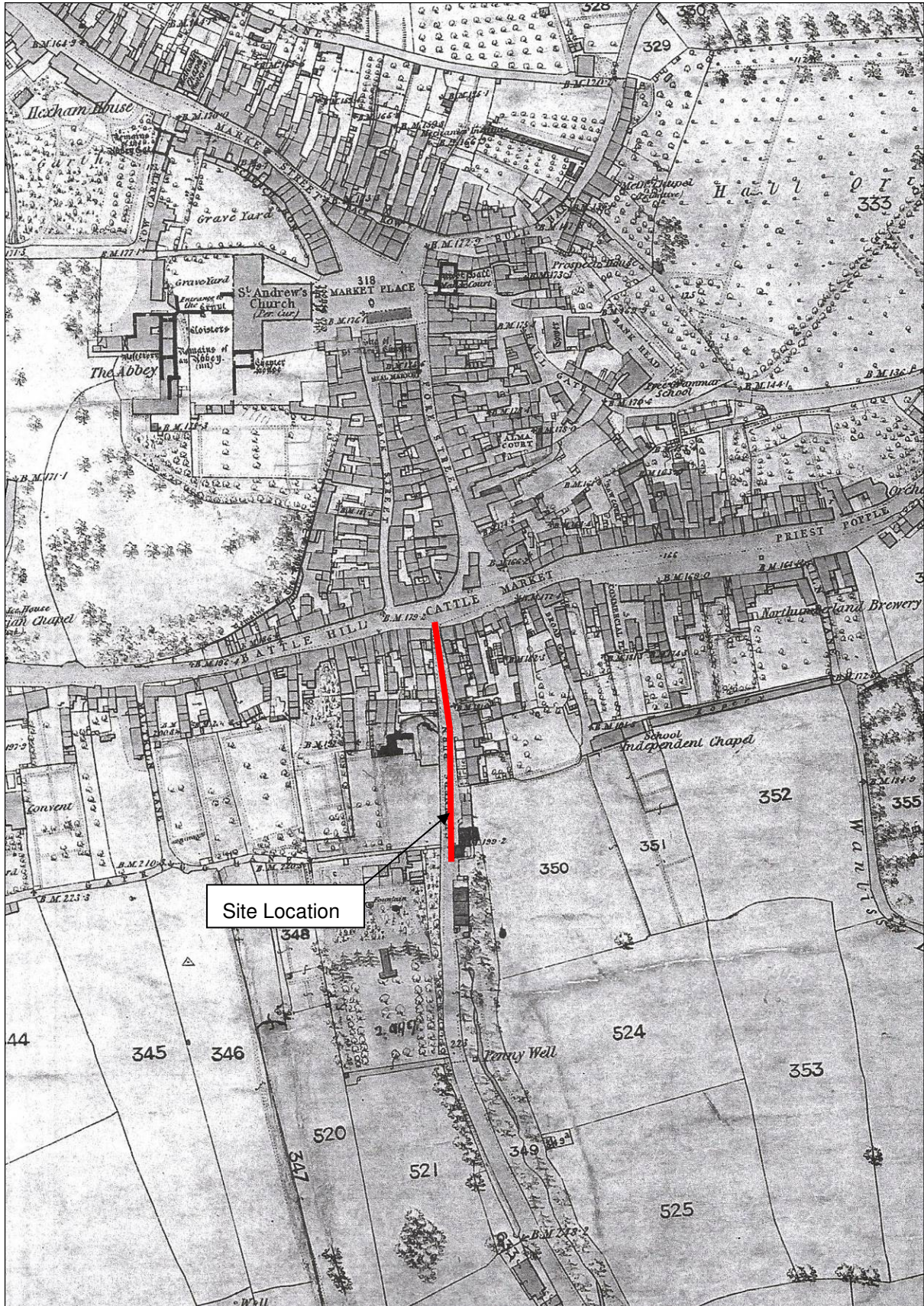


Figure 5 - First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1864

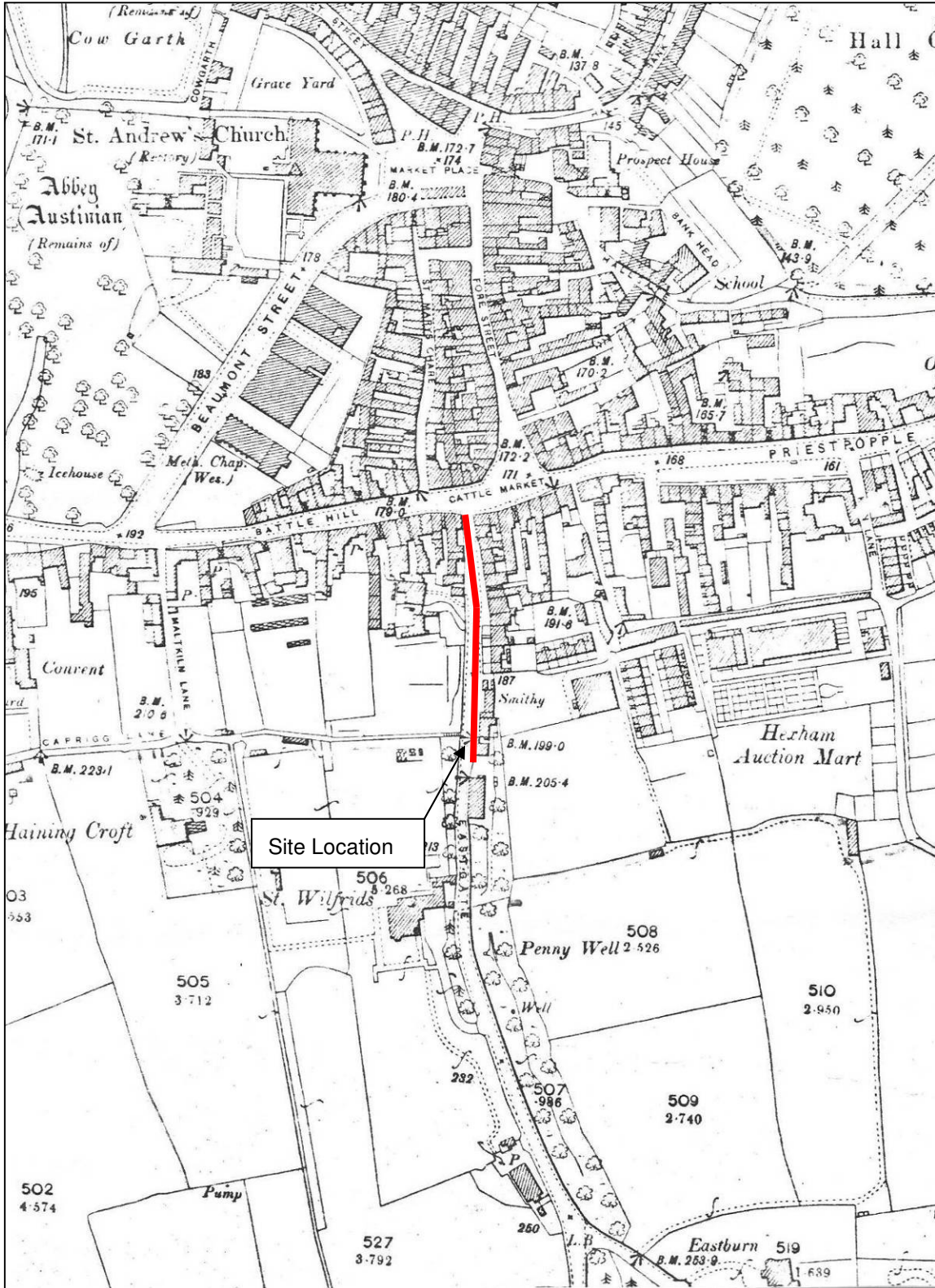


Figure 6 - Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1894

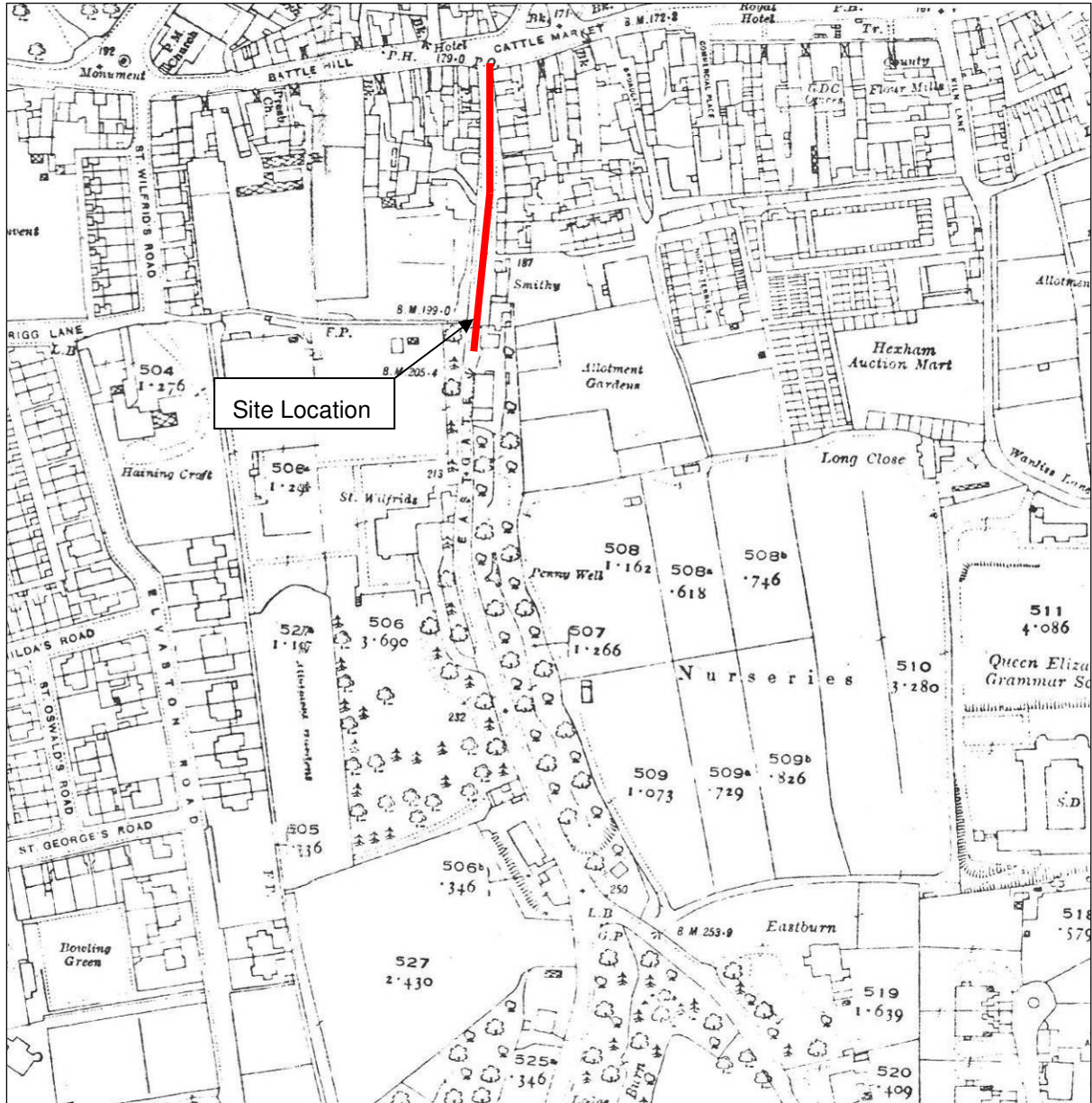


Figure 7 - Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1922

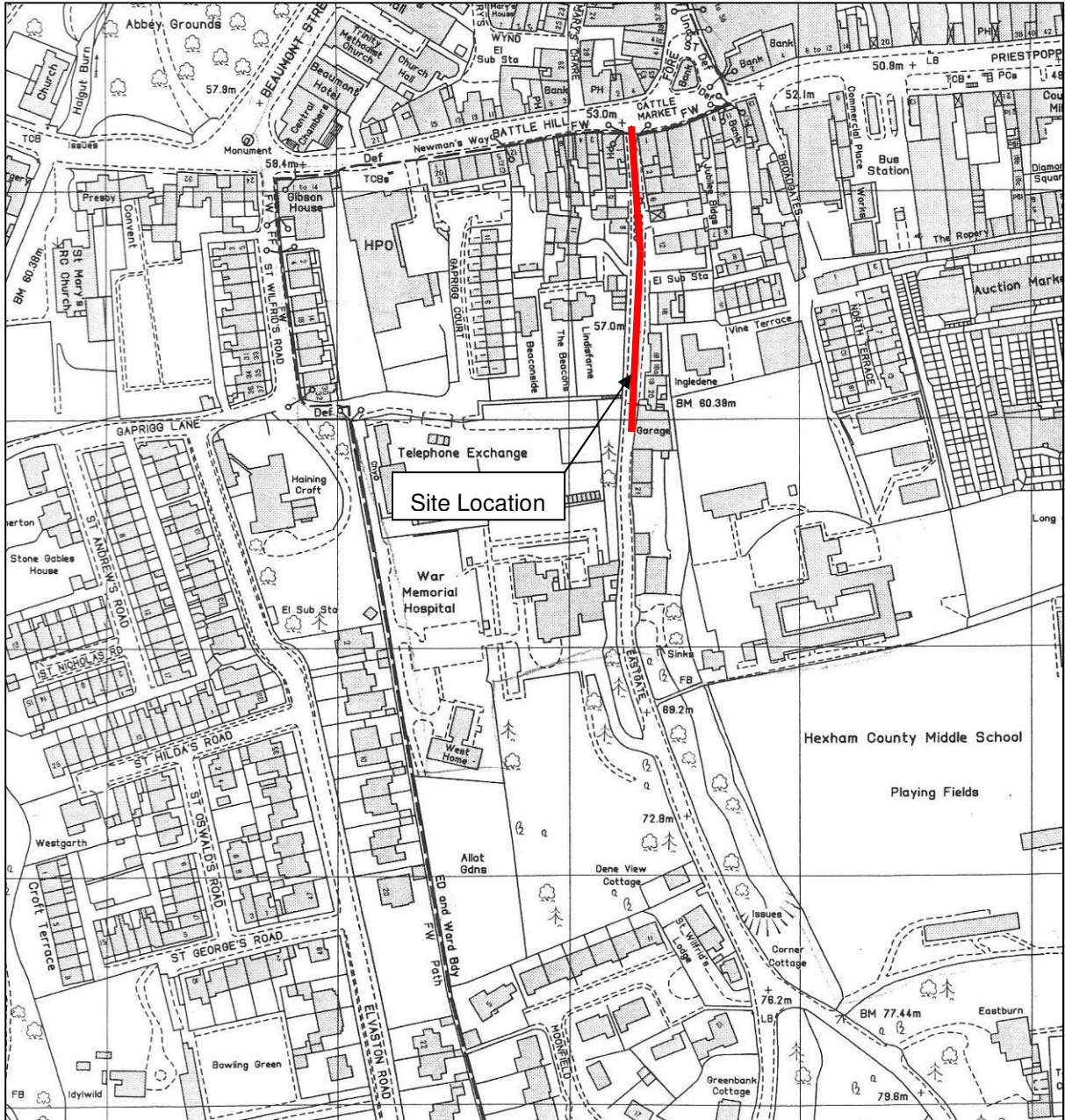


Figure 8 - Ordnance Survey Map of 1987

4 METHODOLOGY

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 damaged 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 overburden
- 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 deposits encountered during the ground operations was made consisting of detailed context records on individual pro-forma sheets.

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

The watching brief archaeologist inspected the sides of the trench for any past cultural remains below the overburden. The removed spoil was inspected in order to recover any past cultural artefacts.

Where archaeological deposits were revealed, 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 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. No finds were present.

The watching brief was an opportunity, to recover any exceptional archaeological find that had not been previously anticipated.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The Northumberland Extensive Urban Survey for Hexham notes that little is known of the extent and condition of any surviving archaeological deposits beyond the historic core of Hexham (NCC, 2008). It was anticipated that deposits within the trench along Eastgate were likely to have been truncated by previous services that include a water main monitored in 2006, gas mains both live and extinct, electricity cables and telecommunication cables and ducts. Moreover, cartographic evidence infers that a culvert is likely to divert Skinners Burn down Eastgate.

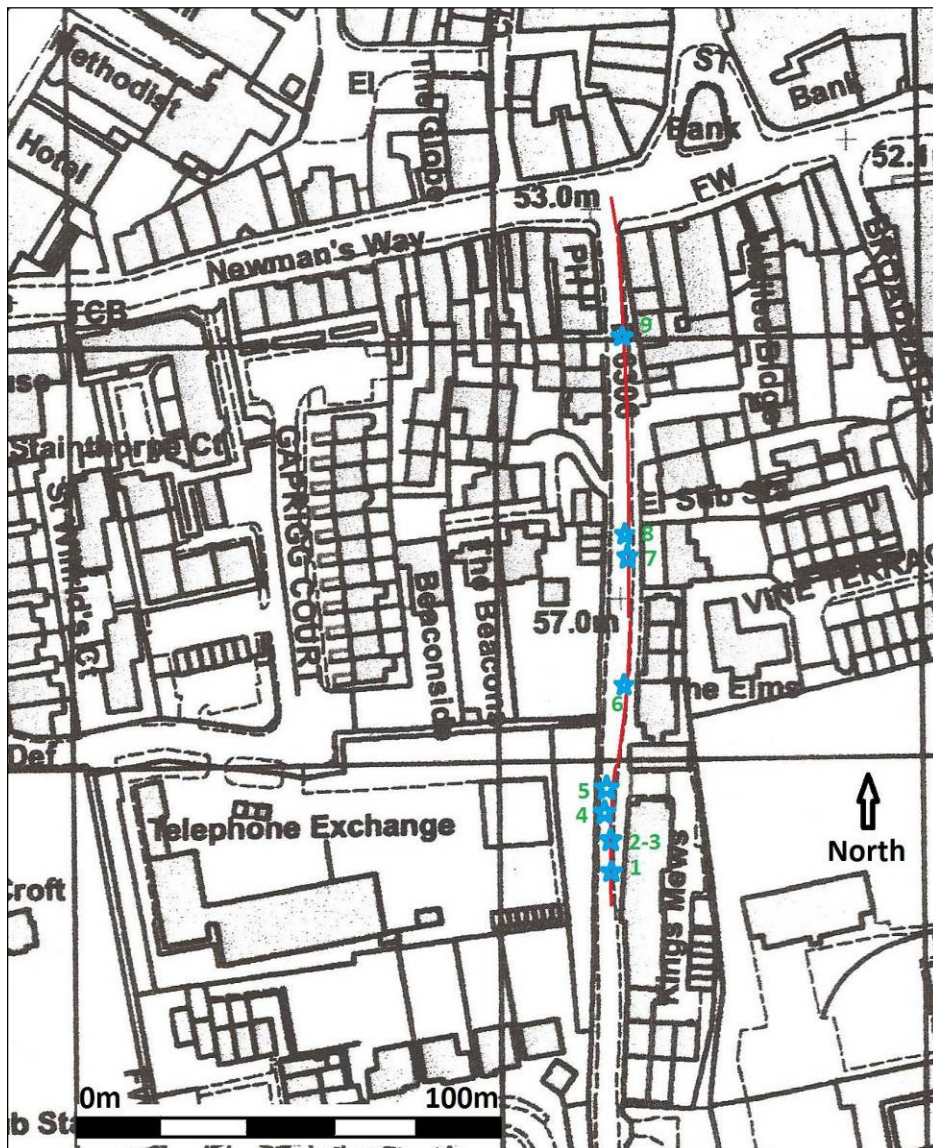


Figure 9 - Location of Observations in Eastgate

5.2 Observations

In total, nine discrete archaeological observations were made along Eastgate during the watching brief. The locations of the observations are, shown on Figure 9. The results are summarised in Table A below:-

Table A: Summary of Archaeological Observations along Eastgate, Hexham

Feature	Length	Width	Depth	Description	Summary
1	0.40m+	3.30m	0.90m+	Double vaulted stone cellar	Post-Medieval?
2	1.00m+	unknown	0.55m	Base of stone wall	Undated
3	0.30m	0.30m	unknown	Spread of dark grey organic silt above bright orange gravel natural	Occupation deposit?
4	4.50m	unknown	0.40m	Coursed stone wall with plinth	Undated culvert?
5	3.50m	0.10m+	0.40m	Coursed stone wall with plinth	Undated culvert?
6	0.50m+	0.40m+	unknown	Light grey silt above orange sandy clay gravel natural	Occupation deposit?
7	4.00m	unknown	0.45m	Stone wall belonging to culvert	Undated culvert
8	unknown	1.50m	1.00m	Live stone culvert	Undated culvert
9	0.80m	0.40m	0.10m	Stony surface above natural	Road surface?

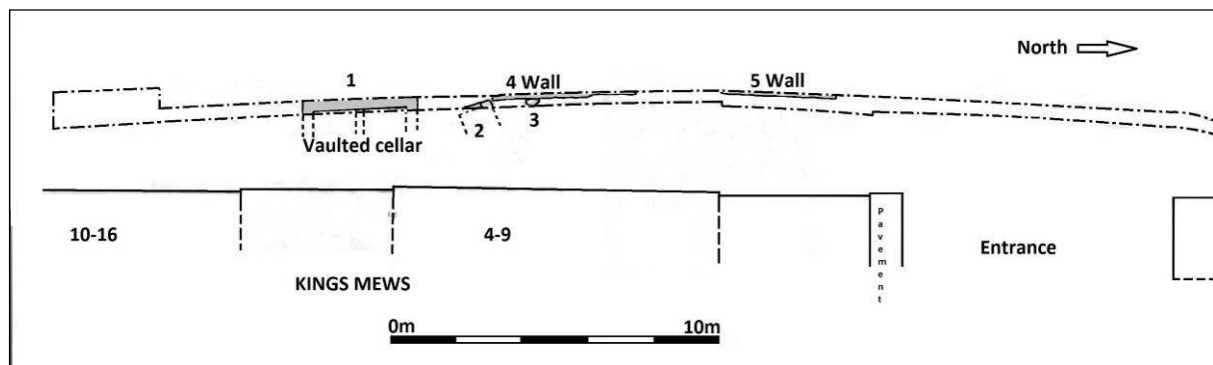


Figure 10 – A Plan of Features 1-5 at the South End of Eastgate

5.2.1 Observation 1 - Cellar

Removal of a sandstone block during excavation of the pipe trench revealed the presence of a sandstone built, double-vaulted cellar formed from rough-hewn stone blocks underneath the adjacent pavement (Figure 11). The western end of the cellar was encountered in the pipe trench containing a north-south aligned wall. The southern vault (Feature 1) had a void space at least 0.90m in height. The northern vaulted part of the cellar (2) was partially filled with rubble. The eastern end of the cellar was blocked by a later wall (Figure 12). The vault consisted of a double skin of rough-hewn stones held in place by a keystone (Figure 13) with rubble fill above the arch. The cellar measured 3.30m in total width (north – south) with walls approximately 0.40m thick. Entry to the cellar was not permitted on health and safety grounds. No dateable diagnostic architectural features were observed and no associated artefacts were identified.



Figure 11 - Void Revealing Southern Vault



Figure 12 - Blocked Rear Wall in Cellar (Southern Vault)

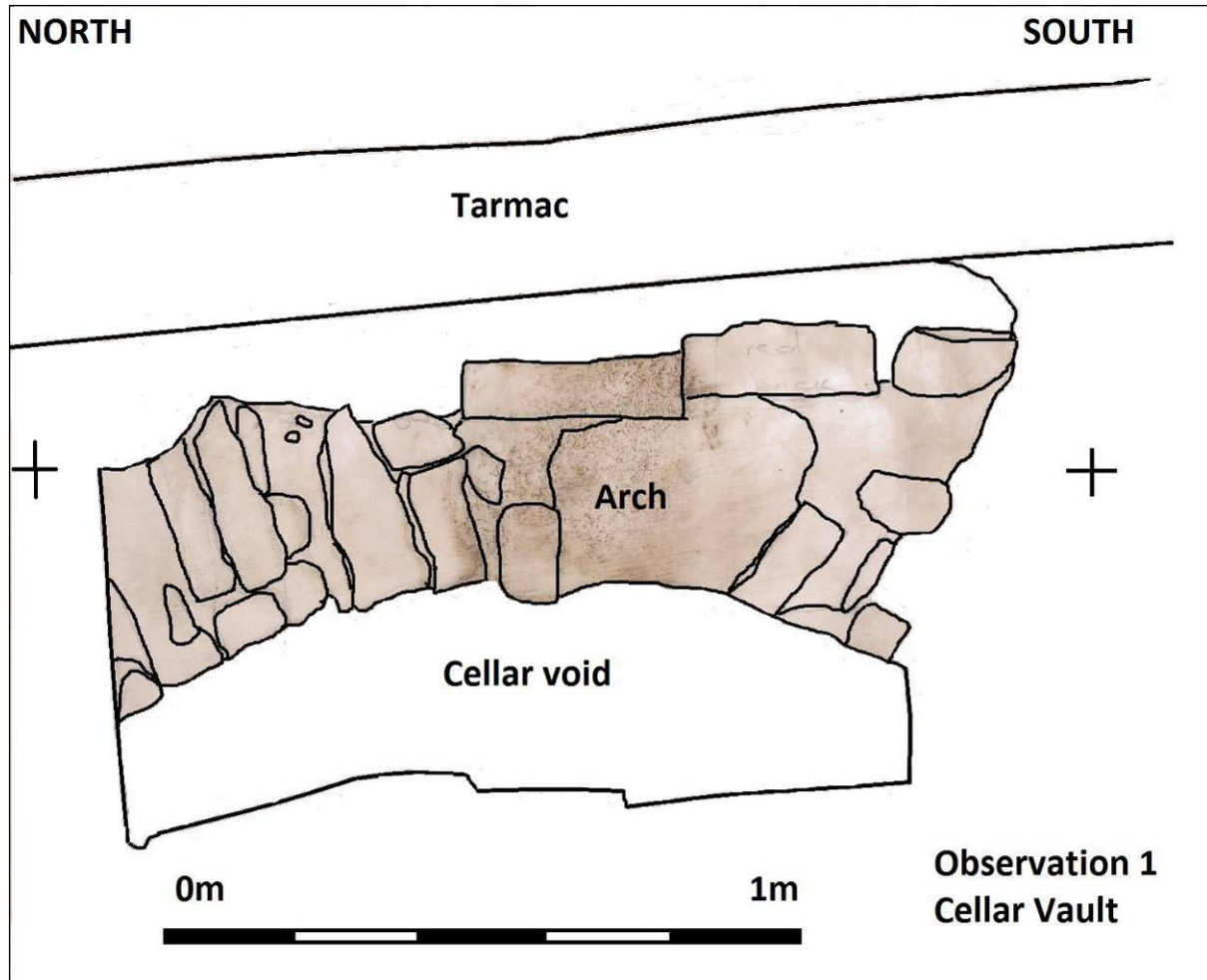


Figure 13 - Elevation Showing Cellar Southern Vault

As the vaulted cellar was underneath the pavement and not actually in the trench, after consultation with highway engineers from Northumberland County Council it was agreed that the vault was structurally sound and could be left untouched in-situ. The hole into the cellar was blocked using a metal shutter to prevent the trench backfill falling in to the cellar and causing subsidence in the road at a later date.

5.2.2 Observation 2 – Wall Base

At this location, part of a coursed sandstone wall (Figure 14), that sat on a small stone plinth was interpreted as a wall foundation or the base for a drain. The wall appeared to have a southeast-northwest alignment that did not respect the alignment of the walls of cellar 1 (see Figure 10). Although unclear, wall 2 may link with wall 4 located across the pipe trench and be part of a possible drain or culvert.



Figure 14 - Wall Base 2



Figure 15 - Silt 3

5.2.3 Observation 3 – Silt Deposit

A spread of dark grey organic-like silt **3** appeared at first to be an intrusive feature (Figure 15) but was probably either accumulated topsoil above either a track or natural geology. Unstratified and undated off-cuts of leather were just visible within this horizon that may have been associated with adjacent leather trades.

5.2.4 Observation 4 - Wall

An east facing north-south aligned wall **4** formed from rough-hewn sandstone blocks (Figure 16) amounting to four courses and sitting on a stone flag plinth resting on a shallow footing of rounded pebbles and stone debris approximately 0.30m in depth.

Later intrusions have truncated the wall with its probable relationship with wall **2**. Possibly, the wall represents the western wall of a building formerly indicated on Wood's 1826 map although its alignment would have been further west of cellar **1**.



Figure 16 - Wall 4

5.2.5 Observation 5 - Wall

A north-south aligned wall **5** formed from rough-hewn sandstone blocks (Figure 17) amounting to four courses with a vertical face was observed in the western edge of the trench. The wall possessed no plinth and was not entirely consistent with the alignment of wall **4**.

This may be the western wall of a building formerly indicated on Wood's 1826 map and a continuation of wall **4** which would constitute a stretch of wall at least 10m in length.



Figure 17 - Wall 5

5.2.6 Observation 6 - Silt

At this location there was a clean, light grey silt **6** (Figure 18) resting above orange sandy clay gravel (natural drift geology). Due to the narrow confines of the trench it was not possible to determine the nature of this deposit.

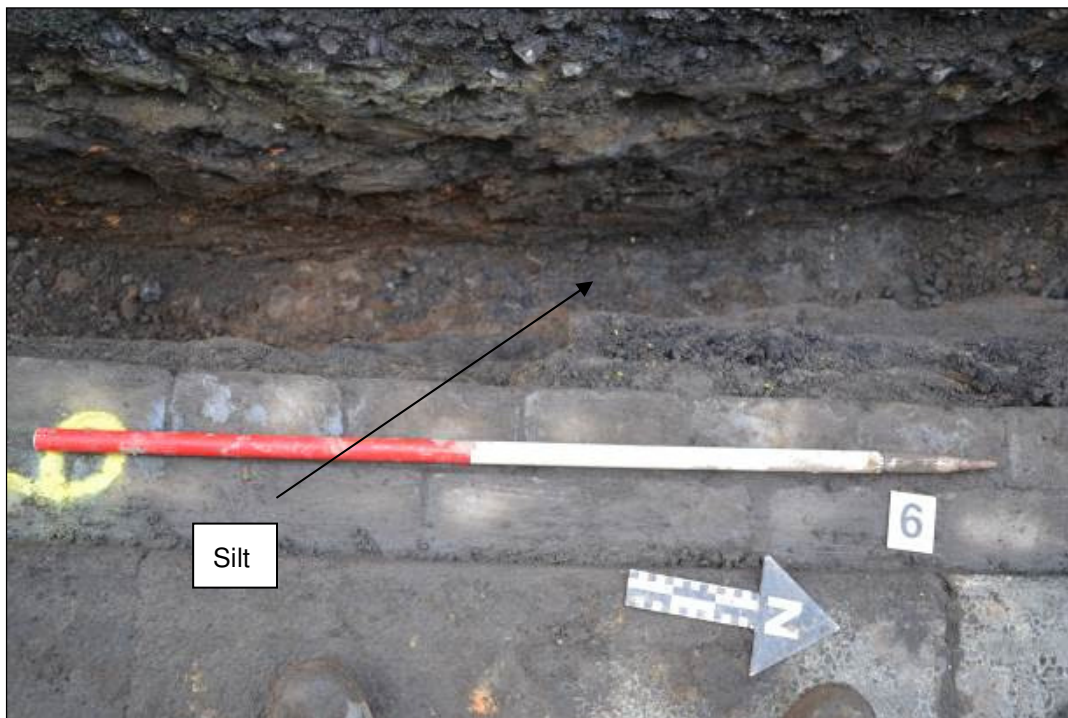


Figure 18 - Silt 6

5.2.7 Observation 7 - Culvert Wall

The western wall **7** of a north-south aligned stone culvert was encountered adjacent to an existing gas pipe (Figure 19). The culvert was at least 1.00m in height of which 0.45m of wall was observed. A dressed stone face developed into a coarse stone elevation with grey ashy cement seeping through the bond suggesting that the construction trench was cut flush to and alongside the southern end of the culvert.



Figure 19 - Culvert 7

5.2.8 Observation 8 - Culvert

Just to the north of culvert **7** (approximately 4m and passing through an extant manhole), culvert **8** traversed the road in a north westward direction. Culvert **8** was a northward extension of culvert **7**. Its eastern side was exposed in the pipe trench (Figure 20).

The roof of the culvert was 0.25m thick and was constructed from red bricks that formed an arch (Figure 20). Peering into the culvert, it was clearly live, discharging water towards the town centre (Figure 21). The culvert was formed from dressed sandstone blocks re-pointed with grey ashy cement. The concave base of the culvert was constructed from sandstone.

A series of former interventions (monitored in 2006 by North Pennines Archaeology) were clearly visible within the road surface, respecting the projected course of culvert **8**. It would appear likely that the wall they observed in 2006 was the western side of culvert **8**.



Figure 20 - Culvert 8



Figure 21 - Interior of Culvert 8

5.2.9 Observation 9 - Coarse Surface

Natural consisting of yellow-orange coarse sand **9** was observed beneath a single coarse of intermittent rounded cobbles. This stony horizon may have been part of a crude former road surface predating the modern road (Figure 22).



Figure 22 - Surface 9

Overlying surface **9** was a horizon of flecked grey clayey silt sealed by loose yellow sand. This loose sand extended into the area exposed in Battle Hill (Figure 23) an area riddled with previous services. Naturally deposited gravel drift geology could not be discerned despite the machine removing overburden to a depth of 0.60m.



Figure 23 - Junction with Cattle Market

5.3 Discussion

The most significant discovery encountered during the watching brief was the presence of a stone cellar **1** beneath the pavement in front of Kings Mews. The cellar appeared to be completely closed as it was blocked at both ends, it is assumed that the cellar is associated with an earlier street front building on the eastern side of Eastgate.

Map regression suggests the cellar relates to a building depicted on Wood's 1826 map and continued on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1864, 1894, 1922 and 1987. The building was replaced by Kings Mews at the turn of the 21st century. Although undated, the cellar probably was in position in 1826 as a building appears on Wood's Map at this location (Figure 3).

To the north of the cellar **1**, wall base **2** may have been part of a drain. Due to the narrow nature of the trench its relationship to cellar **1** and with wall **4** and **5** was not obvious and not clearly understood. Wall **4** and **5** probably formed parts of the same wall perhaps, consistent with a drain or culvert rather than a building. Wall **4/5** may have passed just to the west of cellar **1** with wall base **2** perhaps representing a connecting drain. If this is the case then the cellar is likely to pre-date the culverting of Skinners Burn sometime between 1769 and 1826 (*passim* 8-9).

Wall **4/5** may have been the eastern side of a drain or culvert. This culvert may have joined with Skinners Burn which is now largely buried along Eastgate. Drawing water from a reliable water course would have been essential for leather trades that are known to exist in Eastgate from the Medieval period. Evidence of leather working was demonstrated by the presence off-cuts of leather were just visible within silt deposit **3**.

An extant water course was identified by walls **7** and **8**. It was not possible to connect this feature with wall **4/5** but there exists some possibility that they form a single, continuous culvert. Almost certainly the northeast-southwest aligned walls identified in 2006 (Peters 2007, 25) were part of culvert **7/8**. This observation would refute the previous interpretation that a substantial pre-road structure dateable to at least the Medieval period existed.

The high bank to the west prevented the road shifting in that direction whilst later buildings and Skinner Burn prevented encroachment eastwards. The road footprint therefore must have remained relatively static. Presumably, the road would have been prone to flooding from the adjacent water course producing poor ground under foot. Burying Skinners Burn into a culvert solved poor road conditions and increased the efficient use of space within a narrow corridor.

Little of the road fabric was visible. Possibly, sandy spreads **3**, **6** and **9** represent the truncated remains of a metalled track that rested above orange sand and gravel drift geology although this assertion should be treated with caution due to the restrictions imposed on the watching brief.

6 ARCHIVE

The archive has been compiled in accordance with the WSI (RSK, 2014), guidelines set out by English Heritage (1991, 2006) and the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994, 2008).

The archive will be deposited with the Great North Museum and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record.

The archive consists of digital photographic images that will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS).

A copy of the report will be submitted by the contractor to the online grey literature archive, *OASIS* as Oasis ID 175289.

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