

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	2
1 INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Project origins	3
2 METHODOLOGY	4
2.1 Project design	4
2.2 Archive	5
2.3 Development proposals	5
3 BACKGROUND	5
3.1 Location, topography and geology	5
4 HISTORICAL CONTEXT	6
4.1 Desk-based assessment	6
5 RESULTS	8
5.1 Methodology	8
5.2 Results	9
5.3 Discussion	11
5.4 Finds and environmental analysis	11
6 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	12
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

FIGURES

Figure 1	Site location	3
Figure 2	Location of the new development	4
Figure 3	Development proposals	6
Figure 4	Ordnance Survey map of 1865	7
Figure 5	Study area prior to excavation	9
Figure 6	Section showing demolished building material	10
Figure 7	Modern material within the lift shaft footprint	10
Figure 8	Trench alongside piles	11

SUMMARY

The watching brief at the Old Fire Station, Carlisle failed to isolate deposits of any antiquity. The observed deposits were probably part of the mid-20th century reconstruction of the Fire Station demolished in 1962.

As natural geology was not encountered, it cannot be confirmed that the study was archaeologically sterile. Therefore, putative Roman and Medieval deposits associated with encroachment into the River Eden may still be present.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Origins

In 2014 Cumbria County Council's Historic Environment Service (CCCHES) was consulted by Carlisle City Council regarding planning permission for an extension and renovation of the former Old Fire Station, Warwick Street, Carlisle (figure 1). The planning application covering this fieldwork was No. 1/14/0129.



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

Gerry Martin Associates Ltd was commissioned by Mr Philip Brooks (the client) to prepare a Specification of Works for a Programme of Archaeological Watching Brief Action relating to the ground works for a two storey extension. The watching brief action has been requested by the County Historic Environment Service, Cumbria County Council as potential and significant archaeological remains may be encountered. The watching brief is also a condition of the Planning Consent, 1/14/0129.

The condition exists “to afford reasonable opportunity for an examination to be made to determine the existence of any remains of archaeological interest within the site and for the examination and recording of such remains, in accordance with Policy LE10 of the Carlisle District Local Plan 2001-2016”.

This following report describes the results of that programme of archaeological reconnaissance and its archaeological context.

All projects conducted by Gerry Martin Associates Ltd are carried out in accordance with PPS 5 (2010) and the guidelines and recommendations issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists and English Heritage.

The development of the site involved the machine removal of extraneous overburden within the proposed building footprint (figure 2, yellow shading).



Figure 2. Location of the new development

This report illustrates the results of that archaeological watching brief with reference to archaeological context as summarised in section 5.3 entitled discussion.

Gerry Martin has achieved the accreditation level of MIFA (Member) with the Institute of Archaeologists (IfA).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Design

In response to a request by Cumbria County Council's Historic Environment Service (CCCHES), Gerry Martin Associates Ltd submitted a Working Scheme of Investigation (WSI). The WSI document outlined the contractors' professional competence as well as general project objectives, including the methodology and the resources needed for the successful expedition of this work.

The course of a Roman road from Carlisle leading to the Roman fort of Stanwix ran along the current course of modern RickerGate. Archaeological reconnaissance to the east at Debenhams and the Civic

Centre Car Park uncovered Roman timber buildings that respected the road. Extra-mural Medieval occupation was also discovered beyond the city defences.

The client intended to reduce the current ground level by up to 0.60m within existing structures and hard standing, an action that could compromise any surviving archaeological deposits should they exist.

Gerry Martin Associates Ltd were commissioned to undertake the archaeological fieldwork following approval of the project design by the curatorial body.

The following report has been assembled to the relevant standards and protocols of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation, 2008), combined with accepted best practice and in accordance with the brief prepared by the curatorial authority.

Fieldwork took place on 21st-22nd October 2014 and was undertaken by Jo Beaty.

The study area is exempt from designated Scheduled Monument status as administered by English Heritage.

2.2 Archive

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

The archive will be deposited with an appropriate repository, Tullie House Museum, Carlisle and a copy of the report donated to the County Sites and Monuments Record.

2.3 Development proposals

The development entailed the construction of a two storey extension to the rear of the Old Fire Station (figure 3) as part of a new arts centre complex.

The new structure involved the removal of the existing slab to a depth of 0.525m (yellow shading figure 3) and the insertion of ground beams also to a depth of 0.525m (orange shading, figure 3).

The former escape tower was removed and the ground reduced to a depth of 0.525m.

A lift shaft measuring 2.70m x 2.40m was excavated to a depth of 1.40m (pink shading, figure 3).

It would appear probable that previous building activity had removed any putative archaeological deposits.

However, an open area was examined for past cultural features. In anticipation of past cultural deposits surviving, protocols for the rapid excavation and planning of these deposits were in place as per the GMA recording handbook.

The greatest likelihood of this occurring was deemed within the lift shaft footprint. Environmentally rich deposits could exist within this trench if it overlay a palaeo-channel that was culturally adapted within the Roman period. The location of this channel would assist ascertaining the presence of a

Roman bridge that must be to the east, respecting the course of Rickergate, but unknown along the course of its north-south axis (Newman 2011, 62-63).

The client had been made aware of this possibility and additional time and human resources were allocated in order to discharge this possibility.

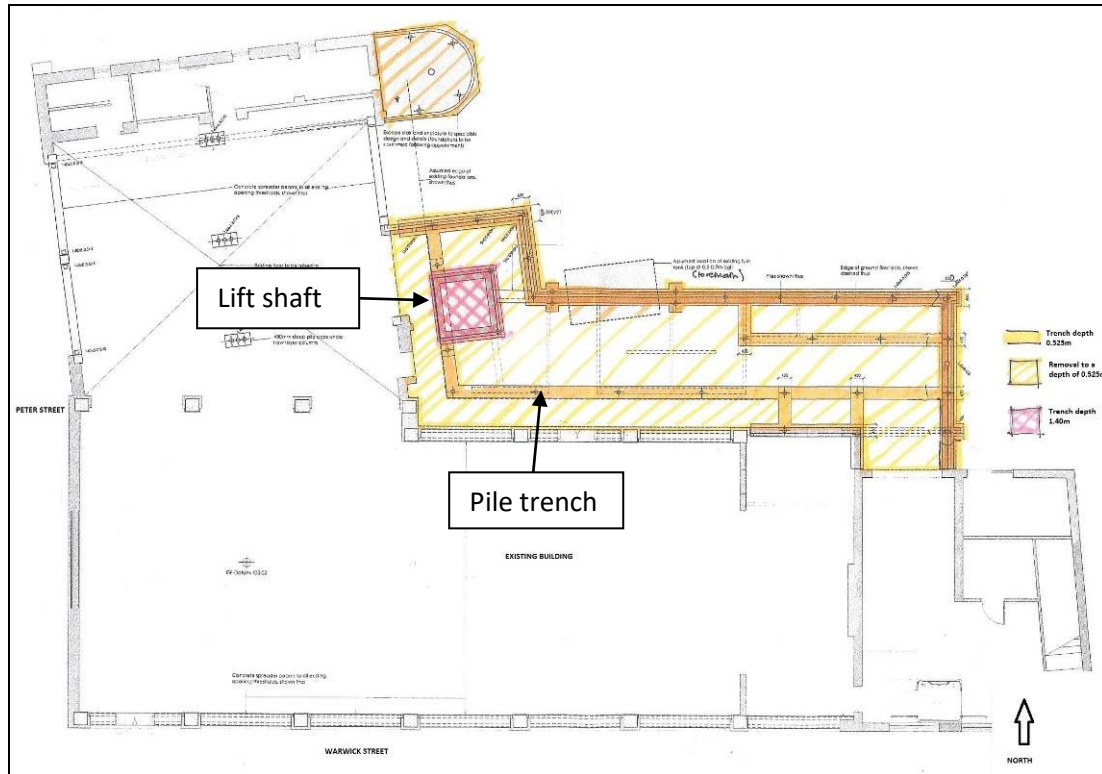


Figure 3. Development proposals

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Location, topography and geology

The study area NY 40050 56210 (figure 1) is located within the former broad channel of the River Eden, heavily built over since the 19th century as part of the urban sprawl advancing beyond the former City Walls.

The local geology has produced a relatively heavy soil with a high clay content due to the local underlying pink Boulder Clay and orange alluvial sands and gravel lain during successive glaciations between 2,000,000 and 12,000 years ago.

Solid geology comprises of bedded Permian and Triassic red sandstone lain between 200,000,000 and 300,000,000 years ago.

4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

4.1 Desk-based assessment

The site lies within a probable prehistoric river channel suggested by a borehole survey (Newman 2011, 5) part of fluctuations in the course of the River Eden that saw the southern abutment of the medieval bridge 300m south of its present course (Perriam 1992, 25-26).

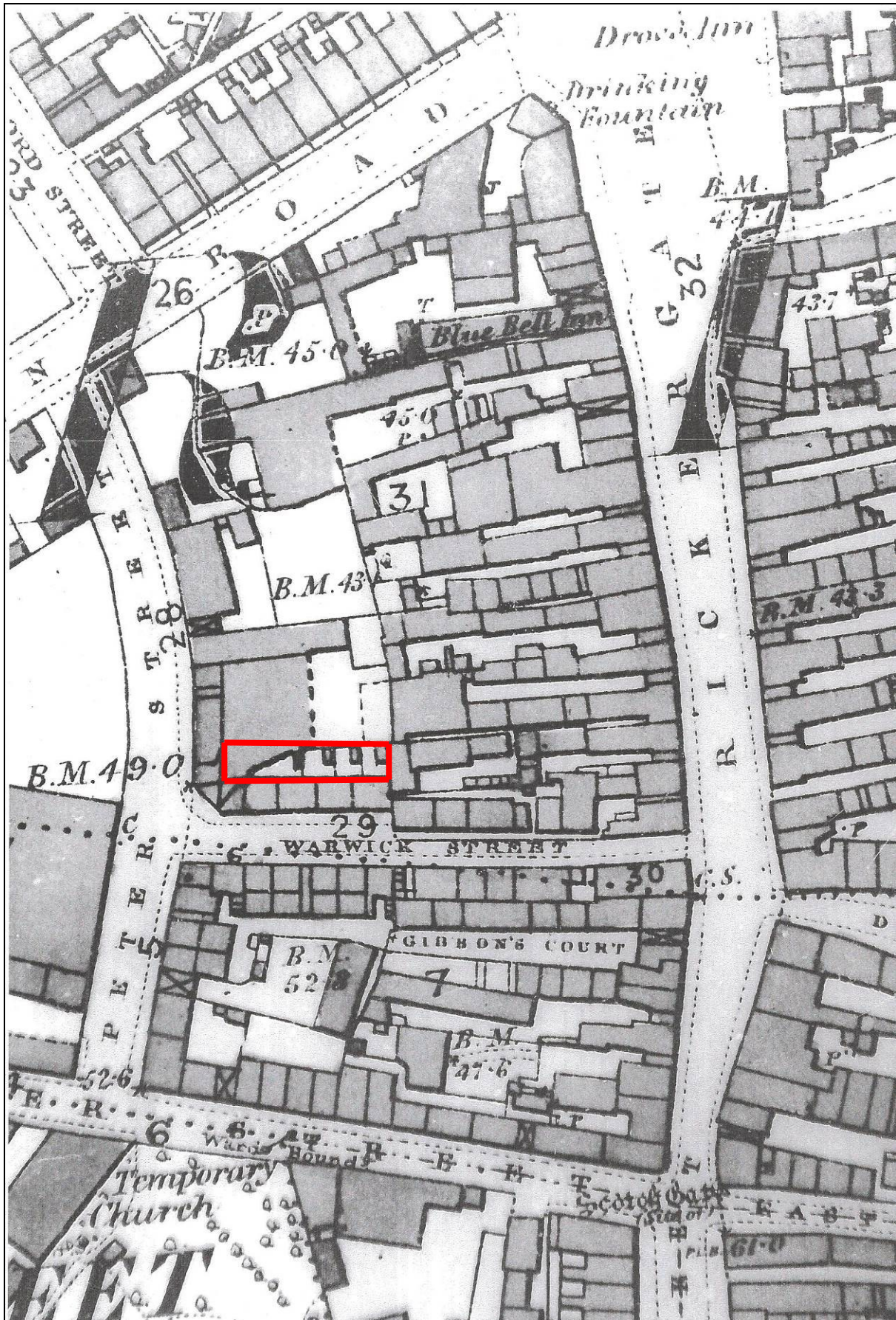


Figure 4. Ordnance Survey map of 1865 (study area red outline)

The presence of four flint blades intimates at transitory prehistoric activity probably dating to the early Neolithic period along the banks of the river (Newman 2011, 61).

Previous excavation at Rickergate, suggested that the present study area may have been subject to a programme of Roman land reclamation. River silts overlain by layers of earth and clay with cobble and gravel interludes formed a combined horizon up to 0.80m in thickness that sealed possible drainage ditches (Ibid, 12).

Intensive occupation appears to have ensued comprising cobble spreads and vestigial clay surfaces probably forming coarse floors dating from the third century. This action suggests the presence of timber buildings respecting the Rickergate street frontage (Ibid, 12).

Decline appears to have set in by the late third century with the accumulation of soil, supplanted by a rectilinear timber building followed by the deposition of thick "Dark Earth" up to 0.70m in thickness (Ibid 13-15).

The study area lay north of the medieval city wall which took a course along East and West Tower Street and was complemented by two large defensive ditches (Ibid 16-24).

Only traces of heavily truncated medieval buildings were identified in close proximity to the current study area. These structures once more respected the course of Rickergate with garden soil accumulating at the rear of these properties with the possibility that the area developed into open fields (Ibid 25-26).

Post-Medieval truncation appears to have removed the majority of medieval deposits leading to dense settlement by the late 18th century (figure 4). These structures have in turn been largely removed with the advent of 20th century development leading to the construction of the Old Fire Station and other civic institutions.

The Fire Station was believed to have been built during 1941-42 (Brooks *pers comm*). However, Fire Station buildings were recorded as demolished in 1962 and the current complex was a significant reconstruction. A photographic record (a strip of ten negatives) was made during the demolition by the Border Press Agency: DB112/NEGS/1962-1-136 box 2 of 6.

The Historic Environment Record lists a Victorian smithy to the north in Corporation Road (HER 41081).

5 RESULTS

5.1 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 may disturb or destroy 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 were made consisting of detailed context records on individual proforma sheets and field drawings, according to the protocols set out in the GMA manual.

Following breaking out of the concrete slab, the ground-works were undertaken by excavating machine under archaeological supervision. This action consisted of observation of the spoil removal and monitoring the displaced soil. Revealed sections were checked for any past cultural activity and if necessary recorded according to the protocols of the GMA manual.

5.2 Results

Work began on the lift shaft (figure 3) measuring 2.80m x 2.50m on October 21st 2014 at the western edge of the site (figure 5).



Figure 5. Study area prior to excavation

The shaft was reduced 1.67m from the concrete slab by machine excavator and then hand excavated around the piles. The excavated material comprised demolished building material mainly brick and concrete (figure 6).

Along the northern edge of the trench, there existed layers of rubble 0.80m in depth, sand 0.20m in thickness, dark grey industrial ash 0.20m in thickness and possibly a soil surface 0.47m in depth; all deposition of relatively recent date (figure 7).

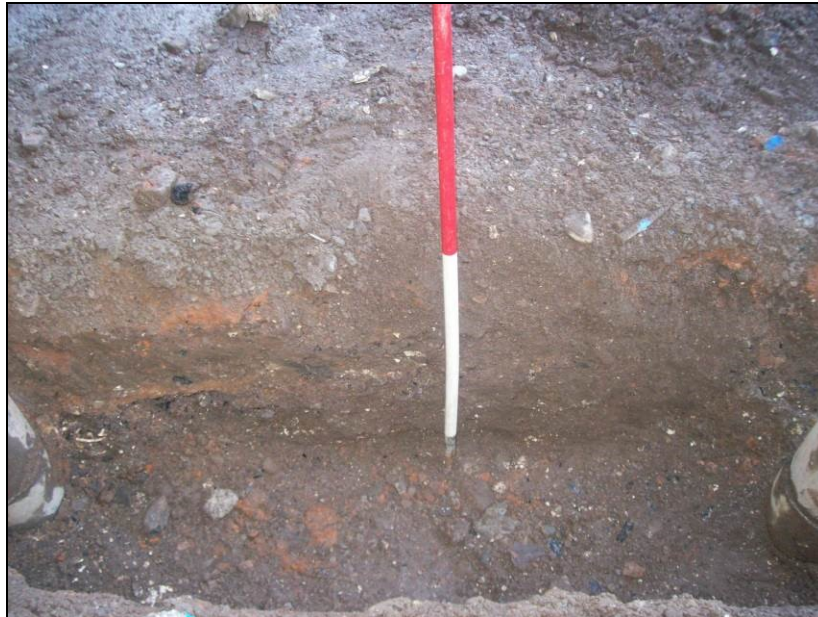


Figure 6. Section showing demolished building material



Figure 7. Modern material within the lift shaft footprint

The same sequence was repeated on the southern and eastern site sections.

The western section was badly disturbed by services and filled with concrete and pea grit.

Within the shaft footprint, a dark grey organic layer of little depth was visible that may have possibly been an original soil surface, subsequently truncated in order to provide the construction level for the mid-20th century Fire Station.

An east-west aligned trench (figure 3) was also inserted beside a set of driven piles (figure 8). This trench penetrated to a depth of 0.50m but revealed only a rubble horizon 0.20m in thickness above a concrete layer 0.30m in thickness.



Figure 8. Trench alongside piles

5.3 Discussion

The ground operations undertaken at the Old Fire Station suggested that the 20th century construction of the Old Fire station have obliterated any putative archaeological remains.

The area had been previously occupied by a 19th century tenement but even this relatively recent activity had been removed.

The dark ash deposit may be consistent with the industrial activity associated with a Victorian smithy HER 41081 although it may not be *in situ* deposition but rather re-distribution of spoil.

Based on these observations, there was no evidence for Roman or Medieval occupation. However, both natural drift geology and solid geology were not observed and it is possible that deposits of greater antiquity may exist beneath the finished construction level.

5.4 Finds and environmental analysis

Other than modern surface finds, no artefacts were present that warranted collection.

No environmental samples merited collection.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Mr Philip Brooks for commissioning the project and for his assistance with the plans and development details. I would also like to thank Jo Beaty for undertaking the fieldwork, the staff of Carlisle Library with my research into the local history of the area and the staff of Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle with the map regression and other documentary research.

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