

# Morpeth County Hall

## *Morpeth, Northumberland*

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*Archaeological Desk Based Assessment*

*for*

Maple Grove Developments Ltd and Home Group Ltd  
November 2016



*Morpeth County Hall and carpark from the rear (photo 068)*

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Archaeology   Heritage Consultancy   Architecture

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# Morpeth County Hall

## Morpeth, Northumberland

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### *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment*

*Job number 2236.00*

*September 2016*

by Jenni Morrison

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# **Morpeth County Hall**

## *Morpeth, Northumberland*

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### *Archaeological Desk Based Assessment: November 2016*

#### *Executive Summary*

Addyman Archaeology was commissioned by **Maple Grove Developments Ltd and Home Group Ltd** to undertake an archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) of the site of Morpeth County Hall and adjacent land, Morpeth, Northumberland.

The desk-based assessment identified two sites recorded on the HER within the development area. Both sites were post-medieval in date. No further sites were identified during the walkover survey and site visit. However there are a number of sites of archaeological interest in the vicinity and it is possible that buried archaeological remains survive on the site. It is recommended that an initial assessment is carried out to identify those areas unaffected by the construction and landscaping related to the building of County Hall in 1984. Those areas which have not previously been disturbed, and therefore with potential for the survival of archaeological remains, should subsequently be the subject of an archaeological evaluation.

## ***1. Introduction***

### ***i. General***

Addyman Archaeology was contracted by Maple Grove Developments Lts and Home Group Ltd, to undertake a Desk-Based Assessment and walkover survey in advance of the redevelopment of the land currently occupied by Morpeth County Hall and adjacent land, on the southern edge of Morpeth, Northumberland.

An initial Desk-Based Assessment (DBA) was undertaken prior to the walkover survey in order to identify any known archaeological sites or other features of historic interest within the proposed development area. The DBA also included the consultation of historic maps and any aerial photographs readily available online.

A walkover survey of the land at Morpeth County Hall was undertaken on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2016 by Jenni Morrison. The weather was dry and bright, with excellent visibility. The ground conditions were good. A large part of the area was occupied by modern buildings, roads and carparks. The land around the County Hall was landscaped and had short grass over much of it, with areas of longer unmaintained grass and scrubby shrubs and trees to the south end of the site. The eastern, southern and south western edge of the site is bounded by a band of deciduous woodland. The southern boundary of the site is formed by the Cath Burn, a small winding stream.

The walkover survey aimed to assess the character, extent and conditions of any sites, monuments, and landscape features identified in the DBA, whilst also identifying and assessing any previously unidentified sites or features.

This report contains several maps reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland (NLS). To view these maps online, please visit [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk). This report is prepared in accordance with standard Addyman Archaeology procedures and in line with the guidelines established by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (*CIfA*).

### ***ii. Setting and geology***

The site lies to the south of Morpeth town centre, covers an area of 36 hectares and is roughly centred on NGR NY 2022 8432 (*figure 1*). The area proposed for redevelopment is irregular in shape and orientated roughly northwest to southeast. It is bounded by the main East Coast Railway line to the east, the Catch Burn to the south, the A197 to the west and an area of modern housing to the north. The ground is largely level with the exception of a low mound at the north east of the site which appears to have been the result of landscaping relating to the construction of the present County Hall buildings.

The underlying geology of the site is Sedimentary; predominantly Mudstone, Siltstone and Sandstone. (Information from [www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk))

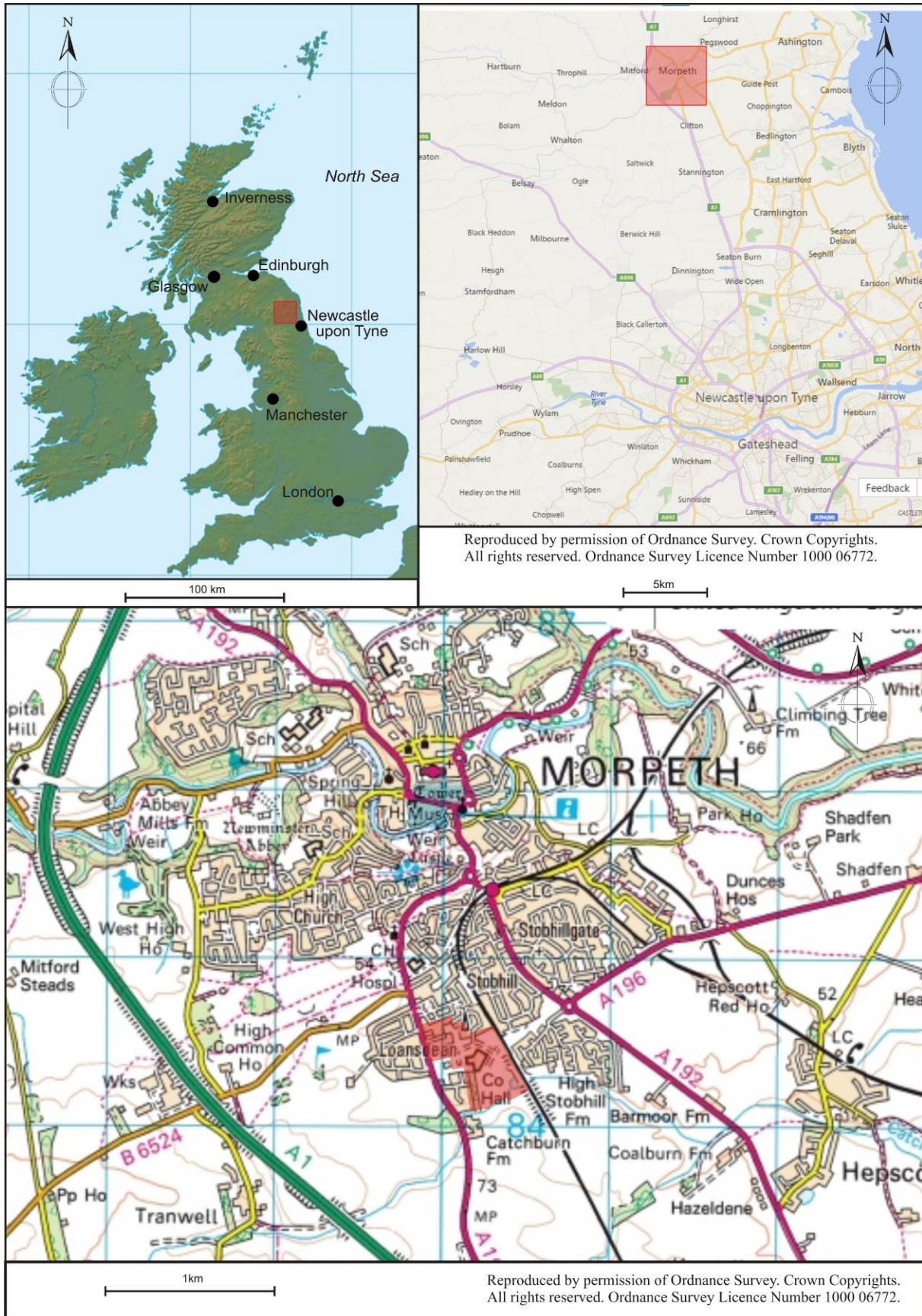


Figure 1 Site Location



## 2. Desk Based Assessment

### i. General

An analysis of readily available sources was undertaken to identify sites of archaeological or historical interest. These included:

- Northumberland Historic Environment Record (HER)- Keys to the Past
- Aerial imagery available on online platforms
- Map resources available from the NLS including all available OS maps
- National Heritage List for England (NHLE)
- Past Scape

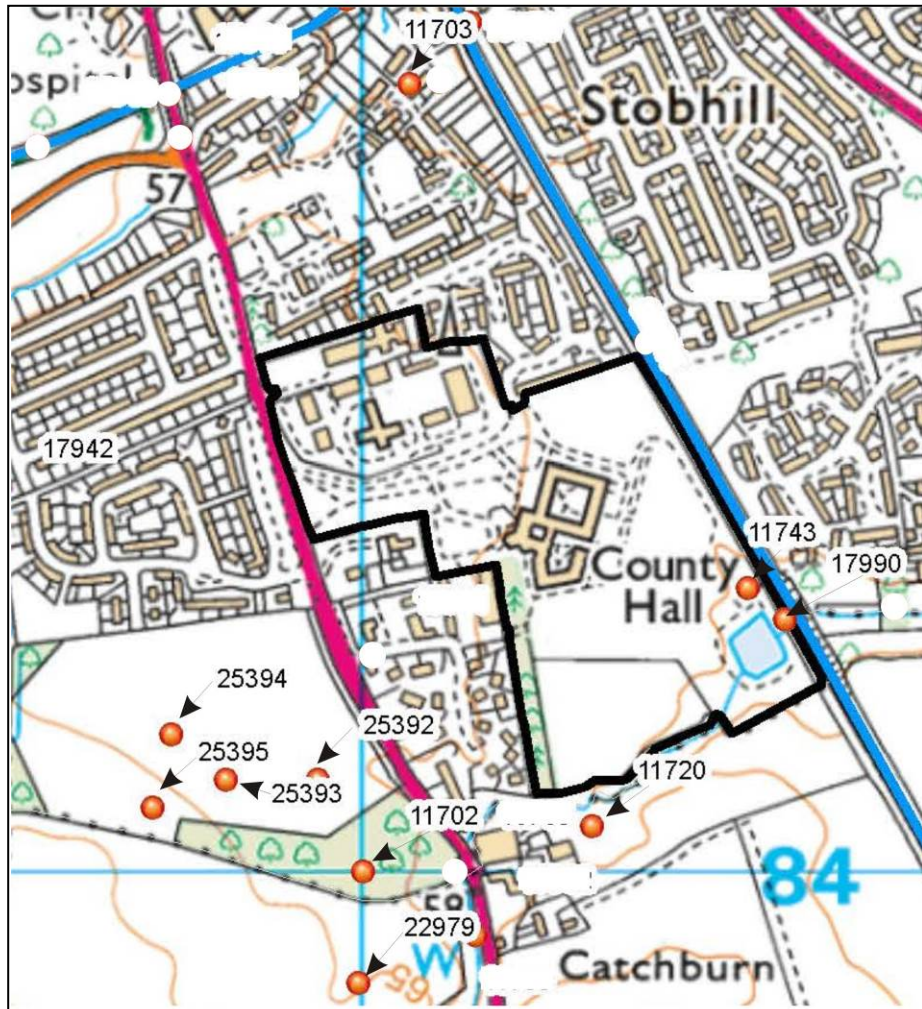
All sources consulted were the most up to date available.

Two known sites were identified within the development area as recorded in the Northumberland Historic Environment Record (HER); these sites are identified by their unique HER number and are detailed in *Table 1*. One late 19<sup>th</sup> or possibly early 20<sup>th</sup> century building was identified from the map consultation. Although the building is not of historic significance and is not listed, it was visited and photographed as part of the walk over survey and site visit.

There were no sites identified from the maps or aerial photographs consulted in addition to those already recorded in the Northumberland HER.

There are no Listed Buildings or Scheduled Monuments on or directly adjacent to the site of the proposed re-development.

None of the aerial imagery consulted showed any sites or features within the development area, either upstanding or as crop mark sites. A number of sites have been previously identified in the area on aerial photographs and these are recorded in the HER.



Key

● HER site and number

⬮ Site boundary



Figure 2 Location of HER discussed in this report © Crown copyright and database rights 2014 Ordnance Survey 100049048

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Table 1 Sites within the development area located during the DBA

<b>HER number.</b>	<b>Name, Feature</b>	<b>OS Grid Reference</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Description</b>
11743	Well	NZ 220428431	HER	Well shown on 1 <sup>st</sup> edition OS
17990	Cistern	NZ 2046184276	HER	Cistern to provide water for the railway appears on first edition OS

Table 2 Relevant sites adjacent to the development area located in the DBA

<b>HER number</b>	<b>Name, Feature</b>	<b>OS Grid Reference</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Period</b>
11702	Hospital of St Mary Magdalene	NZ2084 exact location not known	Medieval hospital known from documentary sources 1200-1363	Medieval
11703	Polished axe head	NZ20058486	Found in an allotment	Neolithic
11720	Catchburn Farm Enclosure	NZ20258405	Triangular (?) embanked enclosure respected by ridge and furrow	Prehistoric
22979	Rectilinear crop marks west of Catchburn	NZ1999483878	A series of cropmarks visible on AP's	Medieval or prehistoric
25392	Circular enclosures at Loansdean	NZ19958410	Overlapping circular enclosures found by geophysics, evaluation showed them to be geological	None
25393	Ditches at Loansdean	NZ19858410	Curving ditches found during geophysics	None
25394	Stone culvert at Loansdean	NZ19798415	Stone culvert found during evaluation	Post medieval
25965	Find spot at Loansdean	NZ19778407	Burnt flint flake found in a soil sample during evaluation	Prehistoric

ii. *The History of the development area*

The development area lies to the south and beyond the historic core of Morpeth. There are a number of sites recorded within the HER that indicate there has been activity from the prehistoric period onwards to the south of the town itself (*figure 2*).

Prehistoric activity is indicated by two stray finds; a polished stone axe head (HER 11703) and a burnt flint flake (HER 25965); the latter found during an archaeological evaluation to the west of the A197. There are also several cropmark sites which may suggest settlement in the area during the prehistoric period, though none of these have been excavated in order to confirm their date.

Medieval activity in the area is known from documentary sources, which describe the foundation of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene c1200AD by Roger de Merlay II at Catchburne. It has not been possible to establish the exact location of the hospital which was moved or dissolved before 1500AD. A crop mark site recorded in the HER to the west of Catchburn farm has also been attributed to the medieval period. Within the HER entry for 11720, Catchburn enclosure, there is mention of ridge and furrow, though this does not appear as a separate HER entry and was not visible on the ground.

The two HER sites within the development area are post medieval in date. The coming of the railway to Morpeth in 1847 resulted in a number of sites of interest along the east side of the site including the cistern (HER 17990) later expanded to form a reservoir and pumping station. The well (HER 11743) may be related to the building cistern. As a result of local authority reorganization in the mid 1970's Northumberland Council needed to construction a new headquarters. Morpeth was chosen as the best location and the current County Hall was designed by a team of in-house architects. The building was completed in 1984.

### 3. Map Regression

A wide range of maps were consulted in order to understand the historic development of the site. The Ordnance Survey maps show the site in the greatest detail. They also demonstrate how little the development area has changed until modern times.

The only two sites identified as lying within the development area are visible on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1865 shown below (*figure 3*). They were also highlighted in the Northumberland HER. The site of a well and cistern are depicted at the south eastern corner of the site. By 1896 the cistern has been greatly enlarged to form a rectangular pond and is labelled as a pumping station (*figure 4*). The well is no longer marked, but reappears on the following edition, which may mean it was simply omitted in error. The location and shape of the pond has remained unchanged until the present.

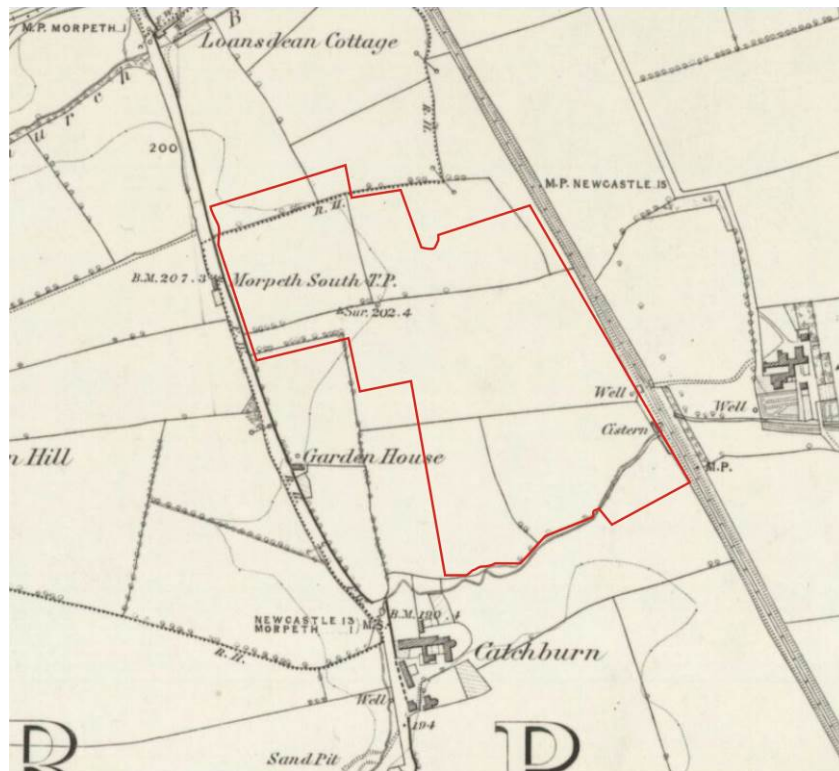


Figure 3 Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> edition. 6 inch to 1 mile. 'Northumberland' Sheet LXXII. Surveyed 1858-9, Published 1865. Site outlined in red.

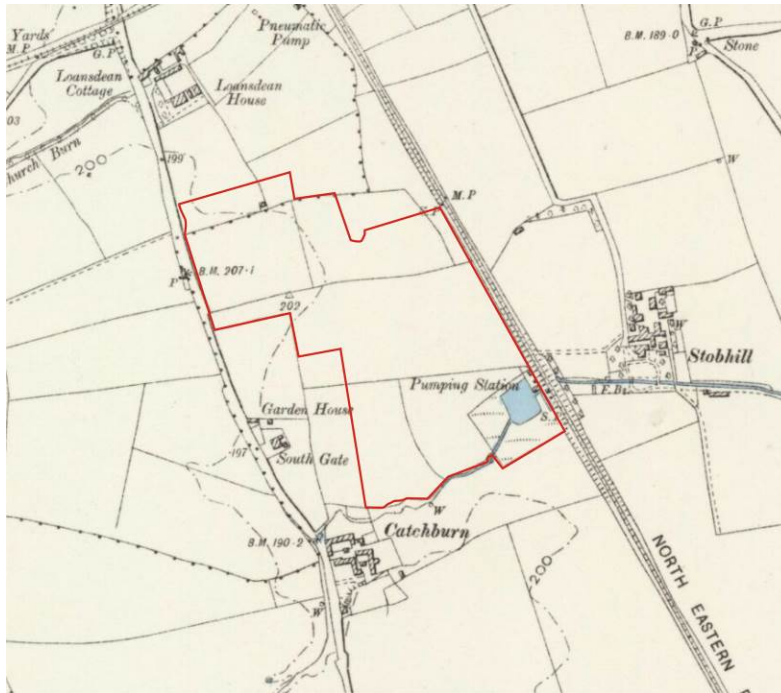


Figure 4 Ordnance Survey 6 inch to 1 mile. 'Northumberland' Sheet LXXII. Revised 1896, Published 1898. Site outlined in red.

There are no other changes within the development area until the Ordnance Survey of 1921, published in 1924. At some time between 1896 and 1921 Merlay Croft was built within laid out gardens at the northwest corner of the site (figure 5). This building is still upstanding, though much added to and altered and will be discussed later in the report. Within the same period of time two further detached houses set in gardens have been built along the east side of the A197, these however lie out with the development area.

There were no other changes prior to the Ordnance Survey of 1938 which was not published until after the war in 1947 (figure 6).

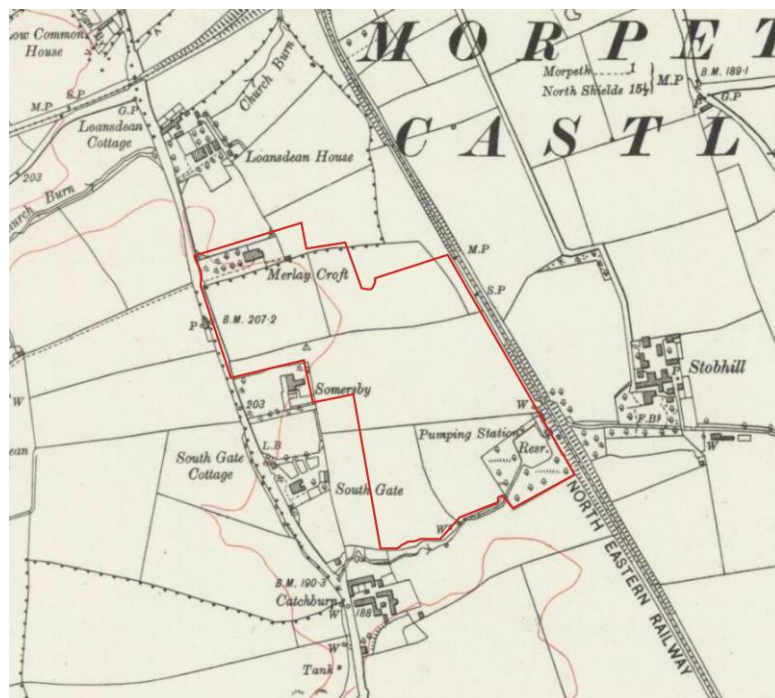


Figure 5 Ordnance Survey 6 inch to 1 mile. 'Northumberland' Sheet LXIX. Revised 1921, Published 1924. Site outlined in red.

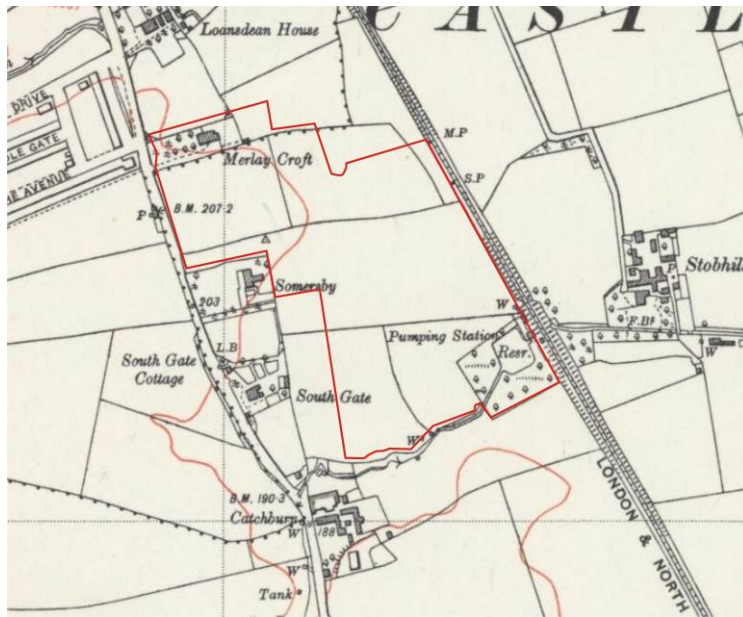


Figure 6 Ordnance Survey 6 inch to 1 mile. 'Northumberland' Sheet nLXIX. Revised 1938, Published 1947. Site outlined in red.

#### 4. Walkover Survey

A site visit and walkover survey were undertaken on Tuesday the 13th of September 2016. The weather was dry and bright with excellent visibility. The location of the two HER sites within the development area together with the enclosure directly to the south of the site boundary were visited. The building known as Merlay Croft, was visited and a photographic record of the interior and exterior was made.

The walkover survey was carried out in a methodical manner starting from the north area and moving in a clock wise direction. All areas were photographed including upstanding buildings. Open areas were walked over and inspected in more detail in order to identify any evidence of archaeological remains.

At the north east of the site there is a small hill covered in long scrubby grass. This hill appears to be the result of landscaping carried out at the time of the construction of County Hall, rather than a natural feature.



*Plate 1 Front elevation of Merlay Croft (020)*



*Plate 2 West elevation with square bay window (023)*



*Plate 3 Low grassy hill facing south towards County Hall (055)*

Along the east side of the site there was no evidence of the well (HER 11743) identified on the first edition Ordnance Survey map and HER. The cistern (HER 17990) which was initially built to provide water to the adjacent railway, and later enlarged, is now an overgrown pond. Its shape and size however matches that shown on the second edition Ordnance Survey map. There are no upstanding buildings relating to the associated pumping station. Stone and brick walls form the outflow from the pond, which is controlled by a sluice. The sides of the outflow appear to have been patched and repaired at various times.





*Plate 4 Outflow from reservoir facing south (059)*



*Plate 5 Site Outflow from reservoir facing north (061)*



*Plate 6 General view of short grass looking west (058)*



*Plate 7 General view showing contrast in vegetation (061)*

The central area of the site is dominated by short grass, whilst the south and eastern side has more natural tall grass and scrub indicating that this area has not been subjected to the same level of landscaping and maintenance.

Lying directly to the south of the site boundary across the Catchburn is HER site 11720. This site was described as an enclosure, which respected the ridge and furrow hence suggesting that the ridge and furrow was later than the enclosure. Neither the ridge and furrow nor the enclosure was visible on the ground.



*Plate 8 General view of location of Catchburn enclosure HER 11720 (065)*

With the exception of the narrow strip of woodland, the eastern side of the site has been heavily landscaped. There was no evidence of archaeological remains within the woodland.

## **5. Overall Conclusions and Recommendations**

The desk based assessment did not identify any sites of archaeological interest; furthermore none were identified during the walkover survey. The building called Merlay Croft identified on the map regression and photographed on the site visit is known to be very late C19th century or most probably early C20th in date. It has no historical or architectural merit and has been extensively extended and altered internally. As a photographic record has been made of the exterior and principal interior rooms and features no further recording work is recommended.

The desk based assessment has established that there are a number of archaeological sites ranging from the prehistoric period through to the postmediaeval period in the surrounding area. Therefore it is possible that hitherto unknown archaeological remains are present on the site. It is also possible that buried remains of the well (HER 11743) may be present on or close to the site boundary.

The site can be divided into three main zones in relation to the potential survival of buried archaeological remains. The areas that contain upstanding buildings would most likely have very low potential for archaeological deposits to have survived. The open areas around County Hall which have been heavily landscaped also have low potential for the survival of archaeological remains. In the areas of rough ground, particularly at the south end of the site, it is possible that buried archaeological deposits may survive.

In order to carry out a more detailed assessment of the archaeological potential of the currently undeveloped areas of the site, a combination of results from recent geotechnical investigations and information relating to the extent of landscaping could be used to identify areas where archaeological deposits may survive.

On the basis of this information it is recommended that a programme of trial trenching be undertaken only within these areas. The purpose of the trial trenching would be establish if remains of archaeological significance survive with the development area, and what mitigation should be undertaken to protect these remains in the event of them being impacted by future development.

## **6. Archiving**

Both a hard copy and a digital copy of this report in its final form will be submitted to Northumberland County Council. This will be accompanied by the project archive.

An entry has been created on the online OASIS platform to ensure public access to the research.

**Appendix A Photographic Register**

<b>Image No.</b>	<b>Direction Facing</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Initials</b>
001	SE	13.09.2016	Interior of main door into Merlay Croft	JMM
002	SE	13.09.2016	Floor tiles in front porch of Merlay Croft	JMM
003	E	13.09.2016	Main staircase Merlay croft	JMM
004	NE	13.09.2016	Angled view showing banister	JMM
005	NW	13.09.2016	Cornice detail main west room with square bay window	JMM
006	E	13.09.2016	Detail of above	JMM
007	W	13.09.2016	General shot of ground floor office	JMM
008	NW	13.09.2016	Small ground floor office, partitioned	JMM
009		13.09.2016	First floor office	JMM
010	W	13.09.2016	Corridor in east wing	JMM
011	W	13.09.2016	First floor hall	JMM
012	up	13.09.2016	Plain cornice detail on first floor	JMM
013	N	13.09.2016	First floor office general shot	JMM
014	NW	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
015	E	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
016	W	13.09.2016	Fire door partition first floor hall	JMM
017		13.09.2016	Void	JMM
018		13.09.2016	Void	JMM
019	W	13.09.2016	Fire door partition with flash	JMM
020	NW	13.09.2016	Exterior of Merlay Croft front elevation	JMM
021	NW	13.09.2016	Close up of front door	JMM
022	NE	13.09.2016	Front elevation and modern conservatory	JMM
023	E	13.09.2016	West elevation	JMM
024	E	13.09.2016	West elevation	JMM
025	E	13.09.2016	Close up of bay window	JMM
026	SE	13.09.2016	Rear elevation	JMM
027	NE	13.09.2016	Oblique view of rear elevation	JMM
028	SW	13.09.2016	Oblique view of rear elevation	JMM
029	SW	13.09.2016	East gable and extension	JMM
030	N	13.09.2016	Front, conservatory and extension	JMM
031	NW	13.09.2016	Conservatory	JMM
032	NW	13.09.2016	Extensions and conservatory	JMM
033	NW	13.09.2016	Close up of above	JMM
034	NE	13.09.2016	Modern buildings to the east	JMM
035	NW	13.09.2016	As above, opposite view	JMM
036	N	13.09.2016	Modern extension	JMM
037	NW	13.09.2016	Oblique view of frontage	JMM
038	NE	13.09.2016	General view of grounds/carpark	JMM
039	E	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
040	NW	13.09.2016	Loansdean area, ex-fire station	JMM
041	NE	13.09.2016	General shot Loansdean area	JMM
042	N	13.09.2016	As above, looking to back area	JMM
043	NE	13.09.2016	General view buildings	JMM
044	NW	13.09.2016	Parking area and offices	JMM
045	SE	13.09.2016	General view courtyard/parking area	JMM
046	NE	13.09.2016	Fire tower	JMM
047	E	13.09.2016	Rear of buildings	JMM
048	SW	13.09.2016	General shot of buildings	JMM
049	N	13.09.2016	East end of Loansdean area	JMM
050	W	13.09.2016	Grass and planting along south boundary	JMM
051	W	13.09.2016	North boundary of retained land	JMM
052	SE	13.09.2016	General view of county hall	JMM
053	E	13.09.2016	North boundary of retained land	JMM

054	E	13.09.2016	Area of rough grass north east corner of site	JMM
055	SW	13.09.2016	Area of rough grass north east corner of site	JMM
056	SE	13.09.2016	Woodland strip forming east boundary	JMM
057	E	13.09.2016	General shot of lawn to rear of county hall	JMM
058	SW	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
059	SE	13.09.2016	Outlet from cistern (HER 17990)	JMM
060	NE	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
061	NW	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
062	NW	13.09.2016	General view of cistern, now pond	JMM
063	E	13.09.2016	Close up of brick work/masonry	JMM
064	S	13.09.2016	View of site of HER 11720	JMM
065	SE	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
066	E	13.09.2016	General view scrubby ground at south, geotech pit location	JMM
067	NE	13.09.2016	Open area to west of the pond	JMM
068	NW	13.09.2016	Looking north towards county hall	JMM
069	NW	13.09.2016	As above	JMM
070	W	13.09.2016	Turf and rough ground, central section	JMM
071	N	13.09.2016	View towards carpark	JMM
072	E	13.09.2016	View along open area to south	JMM
073	N	13.09.2016	Grass area to west of county hall	JMM
074	N	13.09.2016	Woodland along west edge	JMM
075	SE	13.09.2016	Retained land, and visitor car park	JMM
076	N	13.09.2016	Grass on west edge of visitors carpark	JMM
077	E	13.09.2016	Grass at west end of retained land	JMM
078	N	13.09.2016	Grass at west end of retained land, bordering main road	JMM
079	E	13.09.2016	Grass at west end of retained land, bordering main road	JMM
080	N	13.09.2016	Wooded area at east end of Merley Croft Area	JMM
081	W	13.09.2016	Grass and trees, east end of Merley Croft Area	JMM
082	SE	13.09.2016	Plaque on base of Statue outside County Hall	JMM
083	E	13.09.2016	Front of Statue	JMM
084	W	13.09.2016	Rear of Statue	JMM
085			VOID	
086	SE	13.09.2016	View from building showing rising ground	JMM
087	S	13.09.2016	View of rough ground, with woodland along west edge	JMM
088	SE	13.09.2016	General view of south of site	JMM
089	SE	13.09.2016	Lawn with rough ground beyond, south of county hall	JMM
090	SE	13.09.2016	Looking towards wooded east boundary	JMM

*Appendix B Photographic Thumbnails*



2236\_001.JPG



2236\_002.JPG



2236\_003.JPG



2236\_004.JPG



2236\_005.JPG



2236\_006.JPG



2236\_007.JPG



2236\_008.JPG



2236\_009.JPG



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