



ROCKLIFFE HALL, DARLINGTON  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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# ROCKLIFFE HALL, DARLINGTON

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION

### Summary

1.0	Introduction	1
2.0	Location, Topography and Geology	1
3.0	Archaeological and Historical Background	2
4.0	Aims and Objectives	3
5.0	Methodology	3
6.0	Results	4
7.0	Finds and Environmental	10
8.0	Discussion	10
9.0	Archive Deposition	11
	References	11

### Figures

- 1 Site location
- 2 Location of trial trenches

### Plates

- 1 Trench 1 looking north-west
- 2 Trench 2 looking north
- 3 Trench 3 looking north
- 4 Trench 4 looking west
- 5 Trench 5 looking east
- 6 Trench 5, natural channel **115** looking east
- 7 Trench 6 looking north-east
- 8 Trench 6, tree throw **120** looking north



# ROCKLIFFE HALL, DARLINGTON

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL TRENCH EVALUATION

### *Summary*

*This document presents a report on the results of an archaeological trial trench evaluation carried out on land at Rockliffe Hall, near Darlington in Co. Durham (NZ 429792 509262). The work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates (NAA) on behalf of Rockliffe Hall Ltd in March 2017 to fulfil planning conditions for development of new gardens and leisure facilities at the site.*

*Geophysical survey of the evaluation site identified only linear features related to post-medieval agricultural use of the area (NAA 2016). The trial trenching was therefore targeted to investigate areas of potential disturbance by groundworks associated with the planned development.*

*No archaeological features or deposits were observed in the trial trenching, and the results of all archaeological work to date suggest low potential for survival of archaeological deposits at the site. It is considered that no further archaeological work in mitigation of the development is necessary.*



## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This document presents a report on the results of an archaeological trial trench evaluation carried out on land at Rockliffe Hall Hotel, Hurworth Place, Darlington DL2 2DU (NZ 429792, 509262) (Figure 1). The work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates (NAA) on behalf of Rockliffe Hall Ltd between 13th and 15th March 2017.
- 1.2 The evaluation was required to fulfil conditions 14 and 15 of Darlington Borough Council (DBC) planning permission ref. 16/01174/FUL, dated 25 January 2017. The proposed development is for the creation of a number of new garden areas, children's play zones, and tennis courts, which will provide amenities for the existing hotel at the site.
- 1.3 All archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (NAA 2017) approved by Durham County Council Archaeology Section (DCCAS). The WSI proposed that six trial trenches totalling 300m<sup>2</sup> would be excavated, which targeted the locations of structures for the new development or areas otherwise requiring significant groundworks. The evaluation was completed to relevant professional standards and guidance issued by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) (2014a; 2014b; 2014c).
- 1.4 The locations of the trial trenches identified in the WSI were subsequently amended to more accurately reflect the impact of the ground and structural works (Figure 2). The repositioning was enacted in consultation with Xsite Architecture LLP and took into account discrepancies in the coordinate systems used to define the trench locations by NAA and the coordinate system employed by the architects. The total area of the sample of the site remained at 300m<sup>2</sup>, an approximate 3% sample of the site.

## **2.0 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

### **Location**

- 2.1 At the time of the works, the evaluation area comprised c. 2.5ha of arable farmland to the east of Rockliffe Hall. The site is located at the foot of the river terrace on which the village of Hurworth-on-Tees stands (Figure 1), and lies to the north-west of High Rockliffe Farm and to the south of Pilmore Mews.

### **Topography**

- 2.2 The site slopes gently from north-to-south between 46m and 39m above Ordnance Datum. The north boundary to the site is defined by a large ditch, whilst to the west and the south the site was bounded by fencing. Open arable farmland lies to the east.

### **Geology**

- 2.3 The underlying geology of the area of the evaluation consists of sandstones of the Sherwood Sandstone Group. The sandstones are overlain by Devensian and Diamicton Till and river deposits (British Geological Survey 2017). The soils are mapped as Crewe Association (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983), consisting primarily of reddish clayey and fine loamy soils, over clayey soils, prone to seasonal waterlogging (Jarvis *et al.* 1984, 145–7).

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The archaeological and historical background to the site is presented in the WSI (NAA 2017), and only a summary of information relevant to the archaeological investigations is given here.
- 3.2 No heritage assets are recorded in the area of the proposed development on the Durham County Council Historic Environment Record (DCCHER). A geophysical survey undertaken in support of the planning application for the scheme identified no anomalies that might relate to earlier settlement or occupation (NAA 2016). The survey results were dominated by linear anomalies, which were largely agricultural in nature, representing modern ploughing events, drains, and earlier ridge and furrow cultivation.
- 3.3 The area of the proposed development appears to have been agricultural land throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. Examination of the 1856 6-inch First Edition Ordnance Survey map shows the evaluation area as two fields. The boundary between the two fields is preserved today as the large ditch noted in 2.2. The 1899 edition of the Ordnance Survey map shows the development area as part of the parkland pertaining to Pilmore Hall (now Rockliffe Hall).



#### **4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

4.1 The main aims of the work were to confirm whether archaeological remains were present within the proposed development. Where remains were found to be present, the trial trenching aimed to confirm their location, extent, nature, date and significance in order that an appropriate mitigation strategy could be determined.

4.2 The principal objectives of the archaeological evaluation were:

- to investigate and record any archaeological remains exposed within the trenches;
- to recover and assess any associated artefactual and environmental evidence;
- to determine which areas may require further archaeological mitigation;
- to prepare an illustrated report on the results of the archaeological monitoring to be deposited with DCCHER and the Archaeological Data Service; and
- to undertake a scheme of work that meets national and regional standards (Historic England 2015a; ClfA 2014a; West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service 2011).

#### **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

5.1 The methodology for the evaluation followed that presented in the WSI where the approach to the works is set out in full (NAA 2017).

5.2 Six trenches, each measuring 25m x 2m, were excavated to provide a 3% sample of the development area in accordance with the WSI (NAA 2017) and client-advised amendments (see 1.4). The trench locations are shown in Figure 2.

5.3 The topsoil and anthropogenic subsoil in each trench was excavated using a 13-tonne tracked excavator equipped with a toothless bucket under constant supervision and direction of an experienced archaeologist. Mechanical excavation of each trench continued until the top of natural geological deposits was reached. Possible archaeological deposits were identified at the level of the natural geology in Trenches 5 and 6 only. The deposits were hand cleaned, excavated, and recorded.

5.4 A photographic record of the site was made using 35mm monochrome negatives, and 10MP digital image files using a digital SLR camera.

## 6.0 RESULTS

### Trench 1

- 6.1 Trench 1 was located in the north part of the development area, was aligned northwest to southeast, and measured 25m x 2m (Plate 1). The topsoil **100** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.3m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **101** that was up to 0.25m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. Natural geological deposits at the base of the trench consisted of firm reddish grey clay **102**. Ceramic field drains were noted on a north to south alignment spaced *c.* 8m apart at *c.* 0.35m below ground level. No archaeological features or deposits were present.



*Plate 1. Trench 1 looking north-west*

### Trench 2

- 6.2 Trench 2 was located in the central part of the development area, was aligned north-northwest to south-southeast, and measured 25m x 2m. The topsoil **109** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.3m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **110** that was up to 0.25m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. Natural geological deposits at the

base of the trench consisted of firm reddish grey clay **111**. Two ceramic field drains were noted on a northeast to southwest alignment spaced *c.* 8m apart at *c.* 0.35m below ground level. A further single ceramic field drain was observed, aligned north to south, in the north part of the trench. No archaeological features or deposits were identified.

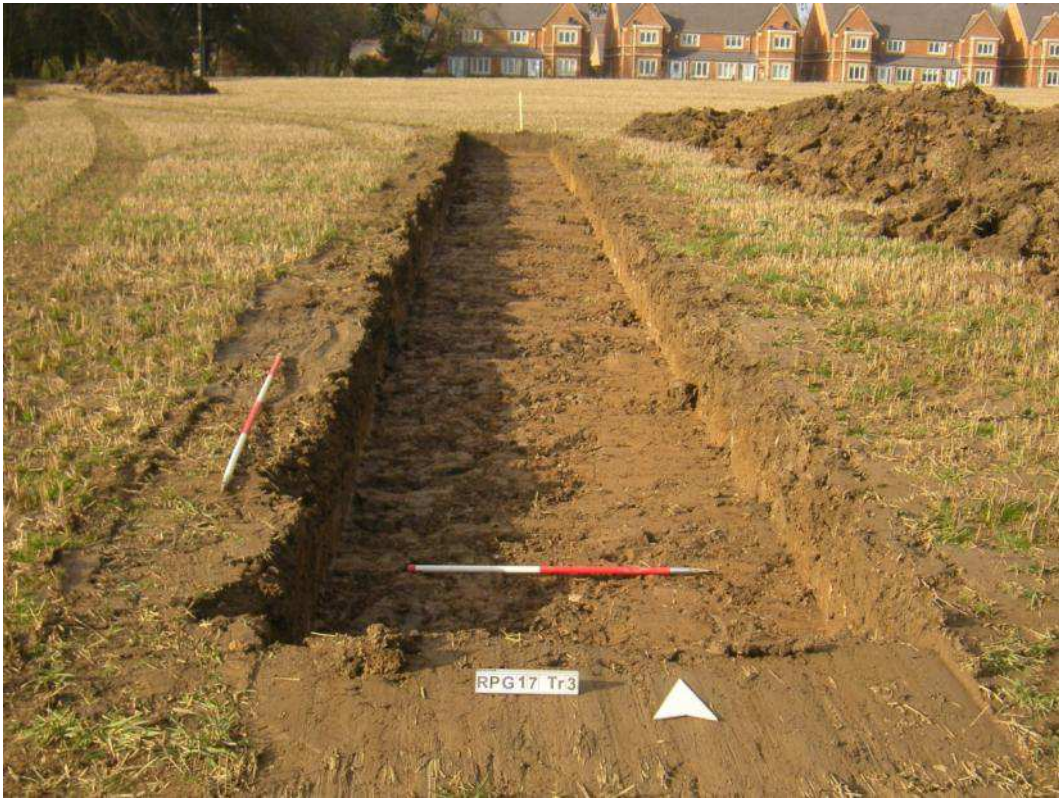


*Plate 2. Trench 2 looking north*

### **Trench 3**

- 6.3 Trench 3 was located in the central part of the development area, was aligned north to south, and measured 25m x 2m. The topsoil **106** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.3m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **107** that was up to 0.20m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. Natural geological deposits at the base of the trench consisted of firm reddish grey clay **108**. A single ceramic field drain was noted on a north to south alignment at *c.* 0.35m below ground level. No archaeological features or deposits were observed.

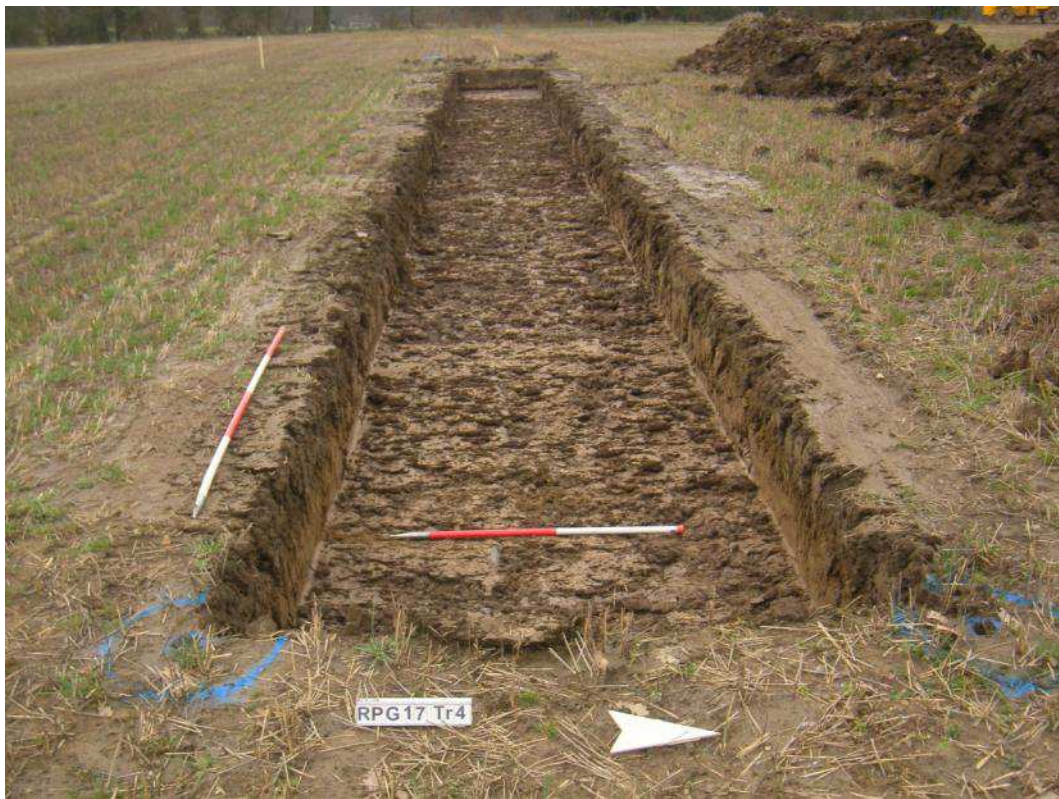




*Plate 3. Trench 3 looking north*

#### **Trench 4**

- 6.4 Trench 4 was located towards the south of the development area, was aligned east to west, and measured 25m x 2m. The topsoil **103** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.3m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **104** that was up to 0.25m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. Natural geological deposits at the base of the trench consisted of firm reddish grey clay **105**. Two ceramic field drains were noted on a northeast to southwest alignment spaced c. 6.5m apart at c. 0.35m below ground level. Three further ceramic field drains were observed, aligned north to south, spaced 4.0m apart, 0.35m below ground level. No archaeological features or deposits were recorded.



*Plate 4. Trench 4 looking west*

### **Trench 5**

- 6.5 Trench 5 was located in the south of the development area, was aligned east to west, and measured 25m x 2m. The topsoil **112** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.35m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **113** that was up to 0.2m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. Natural geological deposits at the base of the trench consisted of firm reddish grey clay **114**. Approximately 7m from the west end of Trench 5, the clay overlaid natural sandy deposit **116**. At the interface of the deposits, a natural channel **115** – believed to have been created by water action – ran northeast to southwest, measured 0.26m deep x 0.8m wide and was filled by the natural clay **114**. It is likely that the sand is no more than an isolated lens of material within the thick superficial geological deposits that underlie the development area. Six ceramic field drains were noted on a north to south alignment spaced c. 4.0m apart at c. 0.35m below ground level. A single further ceramic field drain was observed, aligned northeast to southwest, 0.71m below ground level. No archaeological features or deposits were present.





*Plate 5. Trench 5 looking east*



*Plate 6. Trench 5, natural channel 115 looking east*

## **Trench 6**

- 6.6 Trench 6 was located towards the west of the development area, was aligned east to west, and measured 25m x 2m. The topsoil **117** covering the trench was mid-brownish grey silty clay and was up to 0.3m deep. The topsoil sealed a layer of light yellowish brown sandy silt subsoil **118** that was up to 0.25m deep and which extended across the entire area of the trench. A tree throw **120** located 15m from the east end of the trench was investigated to ascertain its character. It measured 2.47m x 1.07m x up to 0.55m deep, with irregular diffuse edges and a single sterile fill **121**. Natural geological deposits at the base of Trench 6 consisted of firm reddish grey clay **119**. A single ceramic field drain was noted on a northeast to southwest alignment, located 12m from the east end of the trench at *c.* 0.35m below ground level. Three further ceramic field drains were observed, aligned north to south, spaced 4.0m apart at *c.* 0.35m below ground level. No archaeological features or deposits were identified.



*Plate 7. Trench 6 looking north-east*





*Plate 8. Trench 6, tree throw 120 looking north*

## **7.0 FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL**

7.1 No archaeological finds were recovered by the evaluation and no samples for the recovery of palaeoenvironmental material were taken.

## **8.0 DISCUSSION**

8.1 The trial trenching achieved all of the principle objectives for the evaluation and together with this report fulfils conditions 14 and 15 of DBC planning permission ref. 16/01174/FUL.

8.2 The trial trenching supports the conclusion drawn by the geophysical survey report, which highlighted the recent agricultural character of the development land (NAA 2016). The survey recorded linear magnetic anomalies related to the post-medieval use of the area for agriculture, but recorded no evidence for any other activity of archaeological origin. The trial trenching recorded no archaeological features other than defunct land drains and natural features.

8.3 The potential survival of archaeological deposits and features within the development area is considered to be very low. Whilst it remains possible that archaeological deposits do survive in parts of the development area that were not investigated by trial



trenching, it is considered that further archaeological work at the site would not be productive.

## 9.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

9.1 A copy of the final version of this report and the full site archive will be deposited with an appropriate museums service, for example the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, within six months of completion of the post-excavation work and all reporting.

9.2 The OASIS number for this project is northern1-283379 and a pdf copy of the final report on the evaluation will be uploaded to OASIS once it is approved by DCCAS.

## REFERENCES

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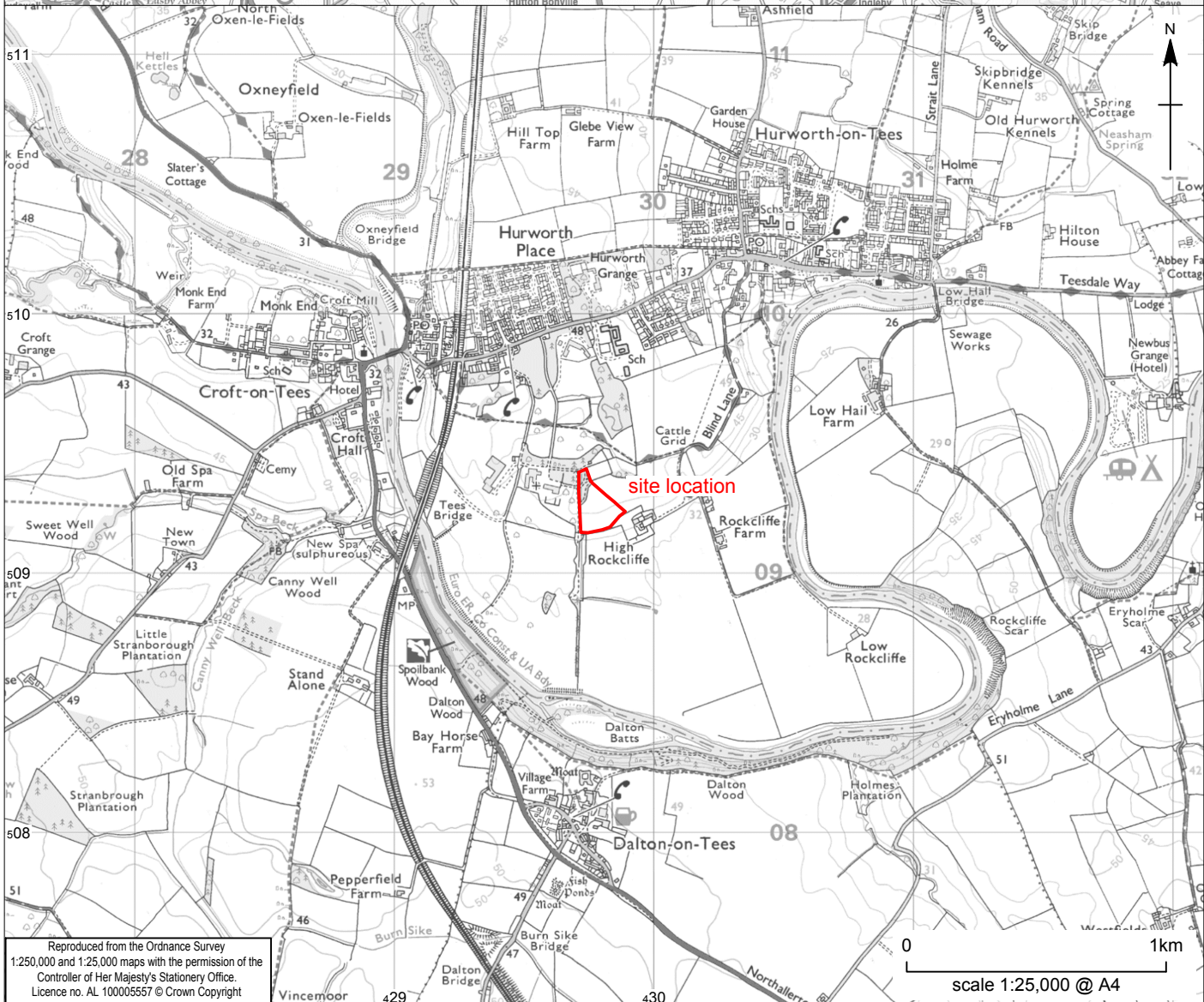
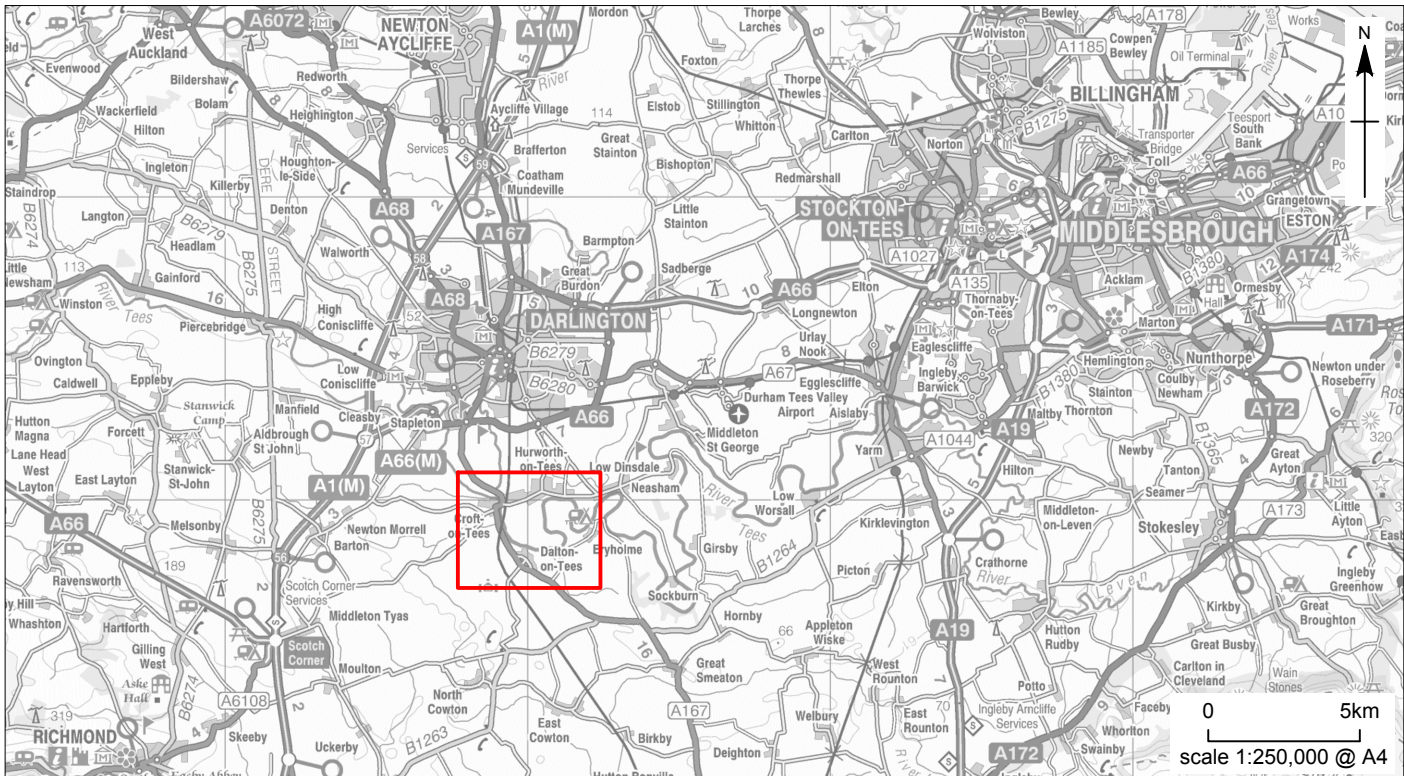
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APPENDIX A  
CONTEXT CATALOGUE

Context	Trench	Interpretative description
100	1	Topsoil
101	1	Subsoil
102	1	Natural
103	4	Topsoil
104	4	Subsoil
105	4	Natural
106	3	Topsoil
107	3	Subsoil
108	3	Natural
109	2	Topsoil
110	2	Subsoil
111	2	Natural
112	5	Topsoil
113	5	Subsoil
114	5	Natural clay
115	5	Cut of natural feature
116	5	Natural sandy deposit
117	6	Topsoil
118	6	Subsoil
119	6	Natural
120	6	Cut of tree/bush hole

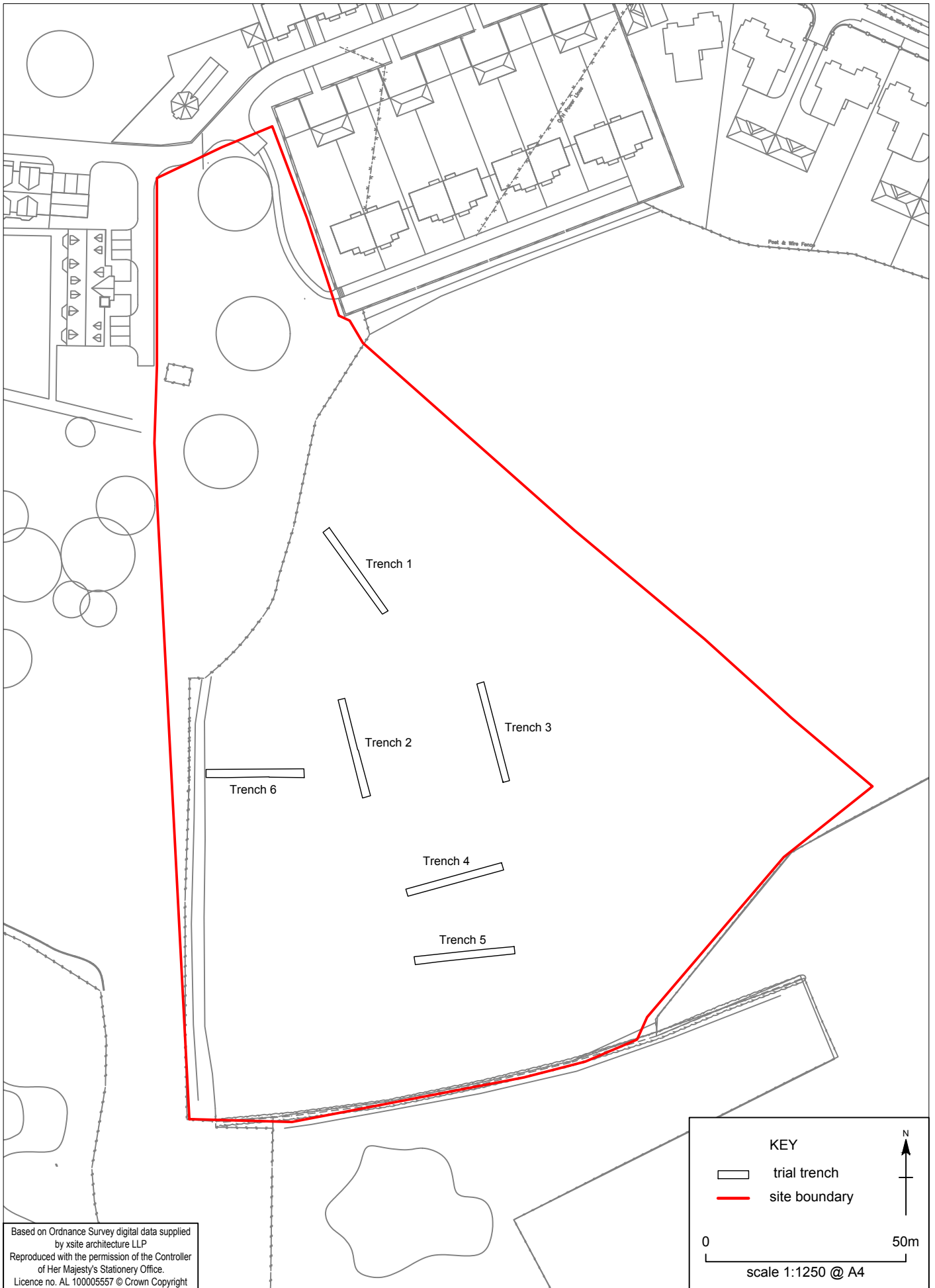


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Rockcliffe Park, Darlington: site location

Figure 1



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Rockliffe Hall, Darlington: location of trial trenches

Figure 2