



ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING  
BRIEF

PLOT 2, STATION PLACE  
MERCHANT PARK  
NEWTON AYCLIFFE  
CO DURHAM

prepared for  
Merchant Anglo (Amazon Park)  
Property Holdings Ltd

NAA 21/70  
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Client Merchant Anglo (Amazon Park) Property Holdings Ltd

Location Plot 2, Station Place, Merchant Park, Newton Aycliffe, Co Durham

Grid Ref NZ 26930 22412

Planning authority Durham County Council

Planning reference DM/20/02064/FPA

OASIS reference northern1-427454

**PLOT 2, STATION PLACE, MERCHANT PARK, NEWTON AYCLIFFE**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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PLOT 2, STATION PLACE, MERCHANT PARK, NEWTON AYCLIFFE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

*Summary*

*Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd was commissioned by Merchant Anglo (Amazon Park) Property Holdings Ltd to carry out archaeological monitoring during soil-stripping at Plot 2, Station Road, Merchant Park, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham (NZ 26930 22412). The work was required to fulfil two conditions attached to the planning consent (DM/20/02064/FPA) to construct two industrial start-up units with associated vehicular and pedestrian access, car parking and yard.*

*Archaeological works in 2013, in advance of construction of the Hitachi Rail factory immediately to the south-west, recorded an extensive palimpsest of archaeological features including Bronze Age burials, quarrying, two long-lived late Iron Age/Romano-British settlements and associated field systems. It was considered possible that these remains could have extended into the area of the current development. Geophysical survey, which included the current development area, showed a widespread pattern of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, divided into strip fields to the north of Demon's Beck with larger open fields to the south.*

*Following soil-stripping, several linear features were identified within Plot 2. The area was crossed from south-west to north-east by a palaeochannel of Demon's Beck. An undated curvilinear feature cutting this probably represented a final iteration of the channel, although geophysical survey results to the west of the site raised the possibility that this could have been an anthropogenic feature. The stripped area was crossed from north to south by two parallel ditches, one of which may have been twice re-cut, although these slight secondary features could alternatively have been plough furrows. The space between the ditches was crossed by a sequence of three shallow intercutting ditches, which probably represented an east-west subdivision of the strip-field defined by the north-south ditches. Several of the ditches and furrows contained post-medieval pottery and ceramic building materials (brick and tile).*

*The ditches are considered to represent an eastward extension of the pattern of medieval or post-medieval strip-fields which until recently survived immediately to the west. All finds recovered from several of these features were post-medieval, but the boundaries had been removed prior to the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1858. Given the small size and entirely post-medieval character of the finds assemblage it is recommended that they be discarded. Several*

*soil samples recovered during the work have not been processed and it is recommended that these are also discarded.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the results of archaeological monitoring (a 'watching brief') undertaken in July 2021 during soil-stripping, in advance of construction of two industrial start-up units with associated vehicular and pedestrian access, car parking and yard at Plot 2, Station Place, Merchant Park, Newton Aycliffe DL5 6QG, centred at NGR NZ 26930 22412 (Fig. 1). It has been prepared by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd on behalf of Merchant Anglo (Amazon Park) Property Holdings Ltd.
- 1.2 The archaeological work was undertaken in order to fulfil Conditions 7 and 8 of the planning consent for the development (DM/20/02064/FPA, approved 27/11/2020):

### ***Condition 7***

No development shall commence until a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) setting out a programme of archaeological work in accordance with 'Standards for All Archaeological Work in County Durham and Darlington' has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The programme of archaeological work will then be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme of works.

*Reason: To safeguard any Archaeological Interest in the site, and to comply with part 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Required to be a pre-commencement condition as the archaeological investigation/mitigation must be devised prior to the development being implemented.*

### ***Condition 8***

The development shall not be occupied until the post-investigation assessment has been completed in accordance with the approved Written Scheme of Investigation. The provision made for analysis, publication and dissemination of results, and archive deposition, should be confirmed in writing to, and approved by, the Local Planning Authority.

*Reason: To comply with Paragraph 199 of the NPPF, which requires the developer to record and advance understanding of the significance of heritage assets, and to ensure information gathered becomes publicly accessible.*

## 2.0 LOCATION, TOPOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY

### Location

- 2.1 The site was approximately 1.3km west of Aycliffe village, immediately north-east of the Hitachi Rail train factory and west of Heighington railway station. The development area was an irregular rectangle 1.5ha in size (Fig. 2). To the north and north-west the development area was separated from Heighington Lane by a strip of woodland. The boundary to the east was defined by a hedge line and to the south lay Demon's Beck (a tributary of the River Skerne), while to west lay an open area of undeveloped land (Fig. 2).

### Topography

- 2.2 The development area was almost level, the surface at the eastern edge lying at a height of c.92.8–93m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) and rising very gently to c.93.4m aOD at the western edge.

### Geology

- 2.3 The underlying bedrock is sedimentary Dolostone of the Permian Ford Formation, overlain by Devensian till (BGS 2021).

## 3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Prior archaeological work in the vicinity of the site included a geophysical survey (GSB Prospection 1999) and trial trench evaluation (NAA 2002) for the wider development area then called 'Heighington Lane West Industrial Area'. At that stage, the planned development area comprised Plot 1, which has subsequently been developed as the Hitachi train factory, and Plot 2, which was similar but slightly larger than the current development area. Only one trench was excavated within the footprint of the current development, which did not identify any archaeological features. The area was subsequently included in a second geophysical survey (GSB Prospection 2012), which identified a possible ditch crossing the area from east to west (Fig. 3, showing all survey for Plots 1 and 2). A linear trend running from north-west to south-east across Plot 2 was of a differing character to nearby ridge and furrow recorded in Plot 1, and probably represented a pattern of modern land drains.
- 3.2 In advance of construction of the Hitachi factory, extensive excavations were undertaken by Wardell Armstrong Archaeology within Plot 1 (Churchill 2014). As part of this work, a small area (designated Area AA2) immediately to the west of the current

development was soil-stripped under archaeological supervision (Fig. 2). This work identified the western terminal of an undated ditch which began to curve to the north-east before passing beyond the stripped area. Other recorded features included a modern land-drain cut by a ditch (which was therefore also modern) and a modern pit (*ibid.*, 42 and fig. 18).

- 3.3 Two Early Bronze Age cremations were found to the eastern part Plot 1, one of which had Early Bronze Age flint tools within the charred remains.
- 3.4 Two previously unknown Late Iron Age settlements had been discovered during the 2002 evaluation (NAA 2002) and were fully investigated in the 2013 excavation. The northernmost of these settlements was c.160m south-west of Plot 2 and comprised 11 structures and associated features (Churchill 2014). The settlement was contained within an extensive series of ditched enclosures. The southern settlement lay c.180m south-southwest of the current development area was more severely truncated by later agricultural practices. Intrusive and unstratified Romano–British finds suggested continued occupation of the landscape into the 2nd century AD.
- 3.5 The geophysical survey showed that during the medieval period the whole of Plot 1 had been under arable cultivation, represented by ridge-and-furrow ploughing (Fig. 3); however, this was not observed in Plot 2. Where plough furrows were examined during the 2013 excavation, they produced an assemblage of 12th- to 14th-century pottery (Churchill 2014).
- 3.6 With the exception of construction of the adjacent roundabout on Heighington Lane, the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1858) shows the field layout in the vicinity of the development area as unchanged.

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

- 4.1 As laid out in the WSI, the main aim of the archaeological monitoring was to preserve by record any sub-surface archaeological remains that might be impacted by construction activities related to the development.
- 4.2 The objectives of the archaeological monitoring were to:
- establish the presence, nature, extent, preservation and significance of any archaeological remains within the development area;
  - provide a detailed record of any such archaeological remains;



- recover and assess any associated structural, artefactual and environmental evidence;
- prepare an illustrated report on the results of the monitoring to be deposited with the Historic Environment Record (HER) held by DCCAS in order to satisfy paragraph 199 of the NPPF (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019); and
- undertake a scheme of work, in line with current professional standards (English Heritage 2008, ClfA 2014a–d).

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

### Standards and guidelines

- 5.1 The archaeological work was undertaken following published regional and national standards and guidelines, including:
- *Standards for All Archaeological Work in County Durham and Darlington* (DCCAS 2021);
  - *Yorkshire, the Humber & the North East: A Regional Statement of Good Practice for Archaeology in the Development Process* (South Yorkshire Archaeology Service 2018);
  - *Code of Conduct* (ClfA 2014a);
  - *Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014b);
  - *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014c);
  - *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives* (ClfA 2014d);
  - *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Historic England 2015a);
  - *A Strategy for the Care and Investigation of Finds* (English Heritage 1995);
  - *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson and Neal 2001).
- 5.2 Soil-stripping was undertaken by a mechanical back-acting excavator using a straight-edged bucket and operating under archaeological supervision. Topsoil and subsoil was removed down to the top of natural deposits or the first archaeological horizon whichever was encountered first.

- 5.3 Where archaeological features were encountered, time was allow for the archaeologist to investigate and record those features. Features were hand-cleaned, assessed, excavated by hand where appropriate, sampled and recorded following the criteria laid out in *Standards for All Archaeological Work in County Durham and Darlington* (DCCAS 2021) and in order to fulfil the aims and objectives of this project.
- 5.4 Features were located with the National Grid using GPS and the information transferred to AutoCAD software and reproduced for incorporation within this report. Levels were tied-in to Ordnance Datum. A drawn record of all archaeological features was made. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and their location accurately identified on the appropriate trench, while plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20. Drawings included appropriate data on levels relative to Ordnance Datum.
- 5.5 Written descriptions of archaeological features/deposits were recorded on pro-forma context sheets employing standard archaeological recording conventions.
- 5.6 A photographic record of all contexts was taken in digital format at a minimum resolution of 12 megapixels and followed current guidance (Historic England 2015b).
- 5.7 A very small number of finds were recovered; however, these were all post-medieval in date and no further work has been carried out on the material. Similarly, several bulk palaeoenvironmental soil samples were recovered from contexts which proved to be of post-medieval date, and these have therefore not been processed.

## **6.0 RESULTS**

- 6.1 The investigated area was a slightly irregular rectangle measuring up to *c.*180m from east to west, and up to *c.*100m from north to south (Fig. 4). It was covered by mid-brownish grey sandy clayey silt topsoil (1), which was up to 0.3m thick. Below this was a layer up to 0.15m thick of light to mid-brown sandy clayey silt subsoil (2). These deposits were removed by machine to reveal natural mid-yellowish brown or grey boulder clay (3) containing occasional small pockets of sandy clay or gravel.
- 6.2 The possible ditch recorded by the geophysical survey was not identified following soil-stripping.
- 6.3 The earliest feature recorded cutting the boulder clay was natural palaeochannel 25, which presumably represented a former course of Demon's Beck. It crossed the eastern part of the stripped area running from north-east to south-west over an observed length

of c.110m. It was c.11–15m wide with a shallow 'U'-shaped section and, where investigated, was c.0.2m deep (Fig. 5, Sections 13 and 14). The feature was filled with brownish grey silty clay **26/29** from which a post-medieval iron horseshoe was recovered, indicating that it had probably finally infilled during that period.

- 6.4 The palaeochannel had been cut by feature **27** (Plate 1; Fig. 5 Section 13). To the west this petered out before reaching boundary **4**, although on the geophysical survey its alignment may have been continued westwards beyond the investigated area as was potentially indicated by an anomaly running in a relatively straight line for c.50m before curving to the south-west and intersecting the modern beck. Within the stripped area, at its eastern end feature **27** turned to the north-east to follow the south-eastern edge of the palaeochannel for a short distance. Where investigated, feature **27** was 2.45m wide but only 0.13m deep, and filled with mid-greyish brown, slightly silty, slightly sandy clay (**28**). No finds were recovered from this feature and it remained undated, although it was cut by boundary **17**.
- 6.5 Feature **27** probably represented a final iteration of the palaeochannel which had been truncated to the north-east, and the character of the fill supported this. However, if the feature recorded by the geophysical survey to the west of the stripped area was a continuation of **27**, its straightness raised the possibility that the excavated feature was anthropogenic. If so, it was unlikely to have been designed for drainage since the beck flows from west to east meaning that at times of high-water feature **27** would have served to introduce water into the area of palaeochannel **25** rather than to drain it. Alternatively, feature **27** could have been created as a boundary of some sort, but without further investigation in the area to the west of the stripped area its origin and function must remain uncertain.
- 6.6 The stripped area was crossed near its western side by north–south ditch **4**. This was recorded over a length of 73m, but continued to south beyond the site, and its line can be seen on the geophysical survey extending to the beck (Fig. 3). To the north it terminated within the stripped area (Fig. 4). The ditch was typically 1.1m wide and 0.5m deep with steep, slightly convex sides and a rounded base (Plate 2; Fig. 5 Section 1). Where investigated it had either two or three distinct fills consisting of mid-grey or blue-grey slightly silty clay (**7/13/16**), mottled reddish brown and grey silty clay (**6/12/15**) and an upper fill of mid-brownish grey silty clay (**5/14**). None of the excavated segments contained any dateable finds.

- 6.7 Adjacent to ditch **4** were two much shallower linear features **8** and **10** (Plate 3). The shallow depth of these features prompted their interpretation as plough furrows, although given the absence of similar features nearby it is possible that they were shallower re-cuts of boundary **4**. Feature **10** certainly post-dated the infilling of ditch **4** since to the north it cut across its line (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, Section 1). Feature **10** was observed running from north to south across the full width of the stripped area (c.100m). It was c.0.6m wide but only 0.09m deep (Fig. 5, Section 6) and filled with mid-brownish grey silty clay (**11**). Immediately to the east, Feature **8** also crossed the full width of the stripped area from north to south. Where investigated it was 1.7m wide and 0.18m deep (Fig. 5, Section 5) and had a similar fill (**9**), which contained post-medieval pottery, post-medieval ceramic building material fragments and a piece of slag (not retained).
- 6.8 Approximately 65m to the east of ditch **4** was a second ditch (**17**) running from north to south. This was observed over a length of 68m, truncated to the north and continuing beyond the stripped area to the south. It cut (and therefore post-dated) the fills of palaeochannel **25** and feature **27**. Ditch **17** was 1.06m wide, 0.19m deep and filled with mid-brownish grey silty clay (**18**) (Plate 4) which did not contain any finds.
- 6.9 The area between ditches **4** and **17** was crossed from east to west by a group of linear features; **19**, **21** and **23** (Plate 5). These ran approximately at right angles to the longer ditches and, although they did not meet, apparently respected (and were constrained by) them, indicating that all of the features probably represented a single phase of activity. Despite Features **19**, **21** and **23** intercutting, due to the similarity of their fills, no stratigraphic relationship or sequence could be determined. Feature **19** was 0.75m wide and 0.1m deep (Fig. 5, Section 9), Feature **21** was 0.68m wide and 0.14m deep (Plate 6; Fig. 5 Section 12), and Feature **23** 0.76m wide and 0.1m deep (Fig. 5, Section 11). All three were filled with mid-brownish grey silty clay (respectively contexts **20**, **22** and **24**). Fills **22** and **24** both contained fragments of post-medieval ceramic building materials (brick and tile).

## 7.0 DISCUSSION

- 7.1 Desk-based assessment, geophysical survey and the trial trench evaluation of the development undertaken previously had not indicated the presence of archaeological remains, other than one possible ditch. The results of this recent work have therefore validated the mitigation methodology recommended by DCCAS, with monitoring of soil-stripping of the whole development area.

- 7.2 None of the identified features were recorded on the 1858 Ordnance Survey map and they therefore presumably pre-dated the mid-19th century. Some of the features remained undated, although most probably represented episodes belonging to a single (although probably protracted) phase of agricultural activity. To the west of the current development the area between Heighington Lane and Demon's Beck was occupied by a series of north to south aligned strip-fields of probable medieval origin and containing evidence for ridge and furrow (Fig. 3). Although no similar ridge and furrow was recorded within the current development area, the two north-south ditches (ditches **4** and **17**) probably represented an eastwards extension of this pattern, and ditch **4** can be seen on the geophysical survey to have extended southwards to the beck. These features could therefore be of medieval or early post-medieval origin, but which had been backfilled and the boundaries removed prior to the mid-19th century to create a single larger field. The boundary represented by ditches **19**, **21** and **23**, which (almost) linked the north-south boundaries (**4** and **17**), but which were not recorded extending beyond them to the east and west, therefore presumably represented a sub-division of this enclosure system, and these produced post-medieval ceramic building materials. The ditch recorded by the geophysical survey, but not identified following soil-stripping, ran parallel to ditches **19/21/23** and also appeared to have been constrained at either end by boundaries **4** and **17**, suggesting that it was also a subdivision of the same enclosure system.
- 7.3 The palaeochannel crossing the area presumably represented a former course of Demon's Beck of unknown date. The presence of a horseshoe within its fill suggested, however, that although largely infilled it had survived as a shallow earthwork into the post-medieval period.

## **8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 Severe truncation of the development site as a result of past agricultural activity meant that there was only limited survival of archaeological features within the area. All of the recorded archaeological features probably related to medieval and post-medieval agricultural activity. The ditches are considered to represent an eastward extension of the pattern of medieval or post-medieval strip-fields, which until recently, survived immediately to the west. All of the finds recovered from several of these features were post-medieval although the boundaries had been removed prior to the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1858.

- 8.2 Given the small size and entirely post-medieval character of the finds assemblage it is recommended that they be discarded. Several soil samples recovered during the work have not been processed and it is recommended that these are also discarded. The remainder of the site archive (written, drawn and digital) is currently held by NAA at its offices in Barnard Castle. The physical archive will be deposited with County Durham Archaeological Archives (CoDAA) at Sevenhills, Spennymoor and the digital archive will be deposited with the ADS.
- 8.3 An OASIS record (northern1-427454) is available via the ADS.
- 8.4 It is not considered that the results of the work merit publication.

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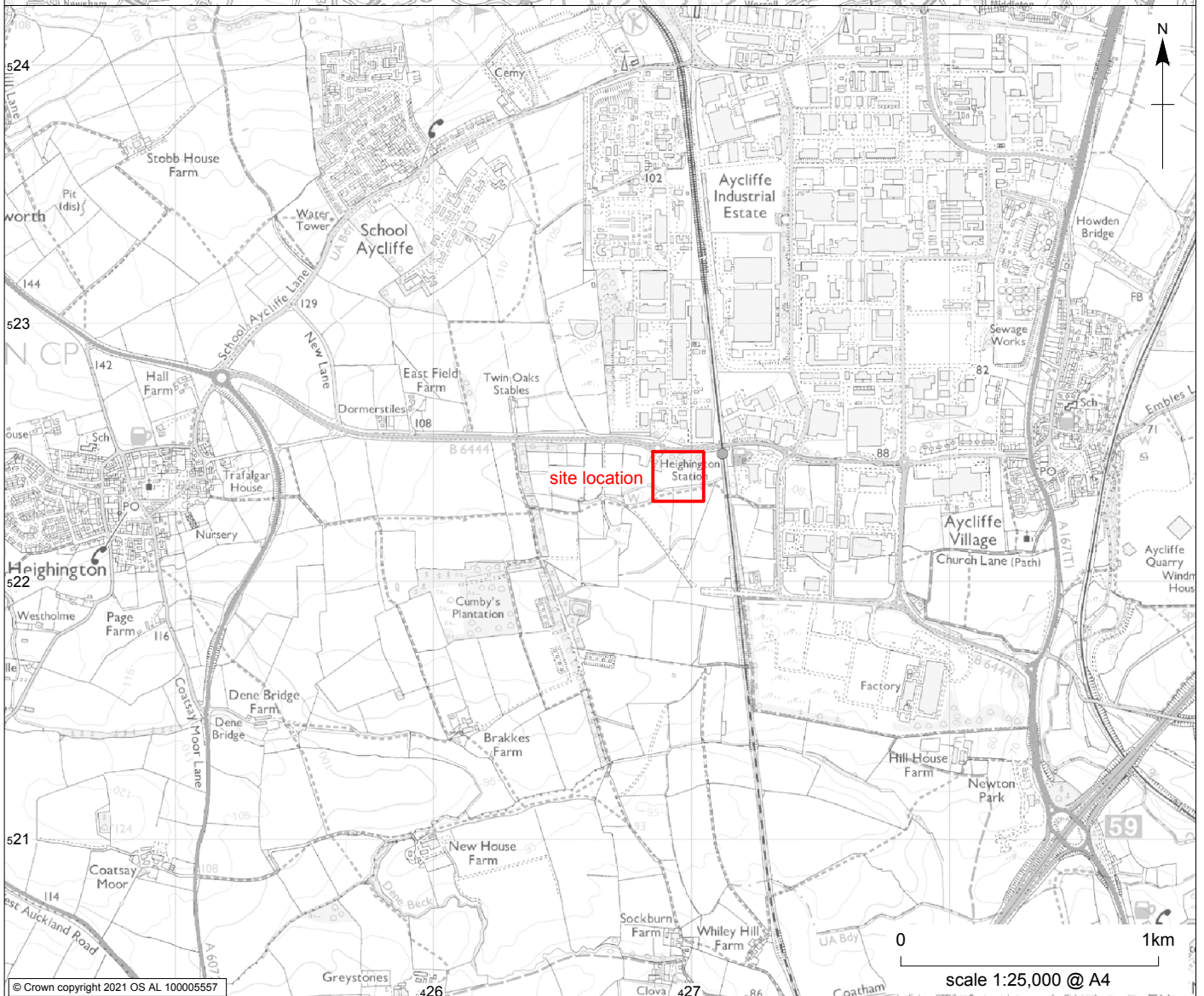
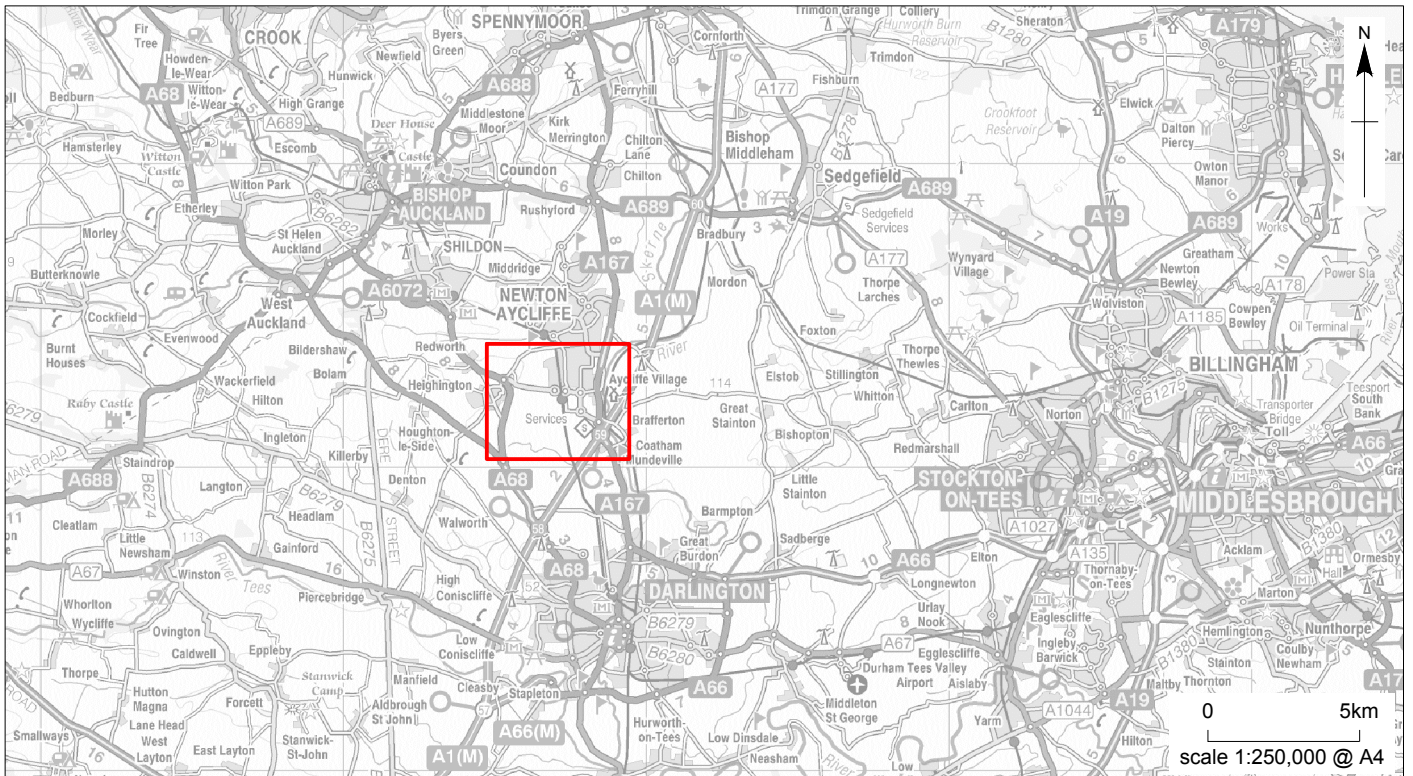
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**APPENDIX A**  
**CONTEXT AND FINDS CATALOGUE**

Context	Interpretative description	Stratigraphic relationships	Finds information
1	Topsoil	Above 02	
2	Subsoil	Above 03 and feature fills	
3	Natural		
4	Cut of ditch	Excavated in 3 segments. Cut 03	
5	Tertiary fill of ditch 04 segment 1	Above 06	
6	Secondary fill of ditch 04 segment 1	Above 07, below 05	
7	Primary fill of ditch 04 segment 1	Below 06	
8	Furrow	Filled by 09	
9	Fill of furrow	Fill of 08	PM pottery and CBM
10	Furrow	Filled by 11. Cut 05	
11	Fill of furrow	Fill of 10	
12	Upper fill of ditch 04 segment 2	Above 13, sealed by 02	
13	Lower fill of ditch 04 segment 2	Below 12	
14	Tertiary fill of ditch 04 segment 3	Above 15, sealed by 02	
15	Secondary fill of ditch 04 segment 3	Above 16, below 14	
16	Primary fill of ditch 04 segment 3	Below 15	
17	Cut of ditch	Cut 28, filled by 18	
18	Fill of ditch 17	Filled 17, sealed by 02	
19	Cut of ditch	Cut 03, filled by 20. Relationship with 23 not determined	
20	Fill of ditch 19	Filled 19, sealed by 02	
21	Cut of ditch	Cut 03, filled by 22. Relationship with 23 not determined	
22	Fill of ditch 21	Filled 21, sealed by 02	PM CBM
23	Cut of ditch	Cut 03, filled by 24. Relationship with 19 and 21 not determined	
24	Fill of ditch 23	Filled 23, sealed by 02	PM CBM
25	Palaeochannel	Cut 03, filled by 26/29	
26	Fill of palaeochannel 25	Filled 25, cut by 27	Fe horseshoe
27	Cut of shallow linear feature	Cut 26, filled by 28	
28	Fill of linear feature 27	Filled 27, cut by 17	
29	Fill of palaeochannel 25	Same as 26. Cut by 27	



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Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: site location

Figure 1





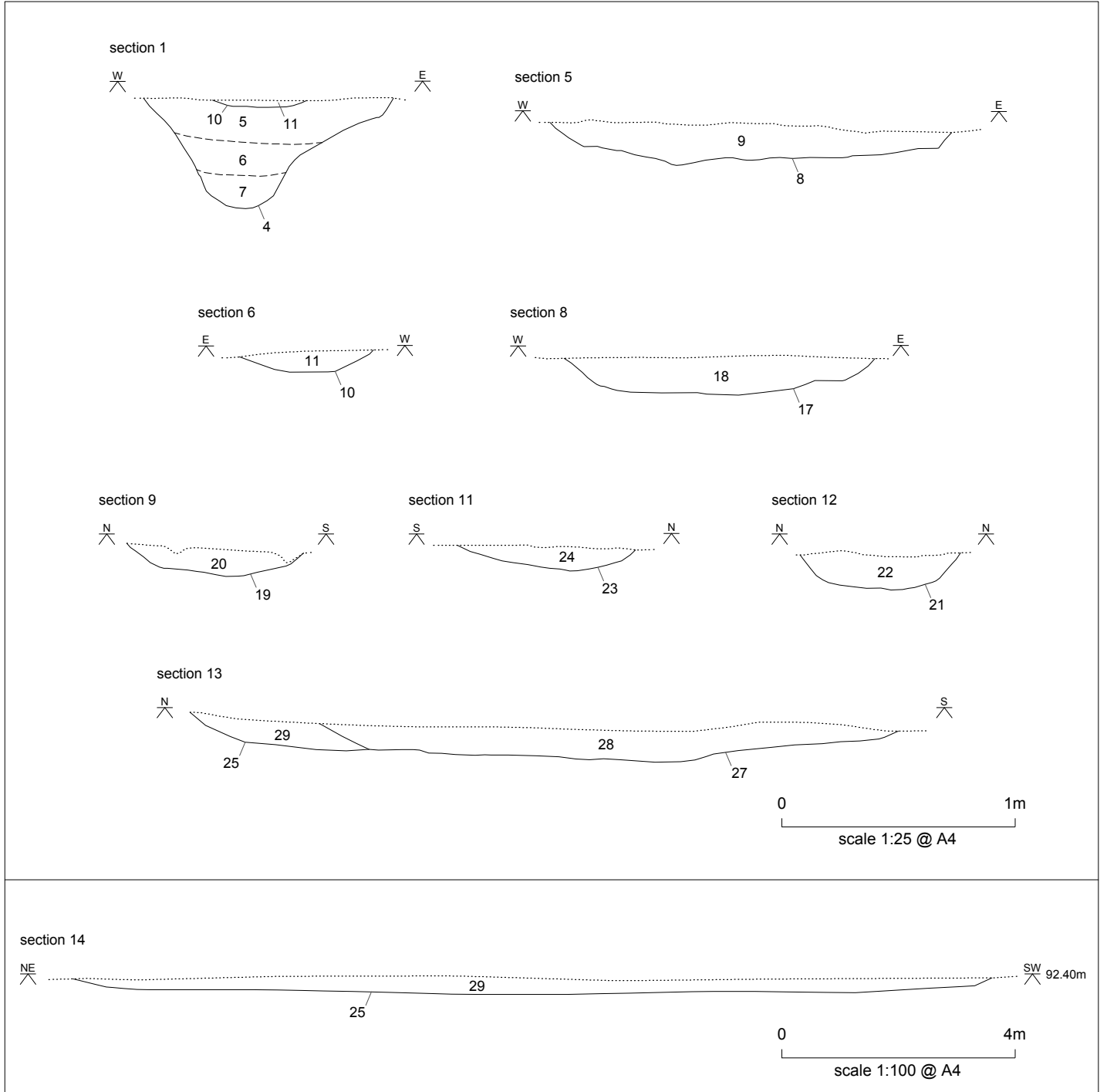
Based on geophysical survey data  
 supplied by: GSB Prospection Ltd  
 ref: 2012/29 Figure 3  
 © Copyright GSB Prospection Ltd

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Merchant Place, Plot 2: recorded features (red) overlain on geophysical survey results for the whole area

Figure 3







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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: west-facing section  
across palaeochannel 25 (left) and feature 27 (right),  
facing north-east, scale 2m*

*Plate 1*



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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: Ditch 4,  
south facing section, scale 0.5m*

*Plate 2*



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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: Ditch 4 (right) and features 8 and 10 (left), facing south*

*Plate 3*



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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: Ditch 17, north-facing section, scale 0.5m*

*Plate 4*





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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: west-facing section  
across (left to right) ditches 19, 23 and 21, scale 0.5m*

*Plate 5*



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*Merchant Place Plot 2, Newton Aycliffe: east-facing section  
across ditch 21 (scale 0.5m) with continuing  
machine-stripping beyond*

*Plate 6*