

NORTHERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATES LTD
ONE STRAWBERRY LANE OFFICE DEVELOPMENT, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
Negative Watching Brief Report

Site name: One Strawberry Lane Office Development **Grid reference:** NZ 2450 6450

District: Tyne and Wear **County:** Tyne and Wear

Administrative authority: Newcastle-upon-Tyne District **Development:** Commercial

Client: Home Group Ltd **Contractor:** BAM Construction Ltd.

Planning application reference: 2019/1635/01/DET

Supervisor: Andrew Durkin **Project manager:** Dave Fell

Fieldwork Date(s): 18/01/21 to 12/02/21 **NAA project number:** 2038 **Site code:** SPN21

NAA report number: 21-16 **Report date:** 01 March 2021

Reasons for watching brief

Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd (NAA) was commissioned by Home Group Ltd to carry out archaeological monitoring of groundworks and site preparation during the development of an area of land at Strawberry Lane, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Fig. 1). Site clearance and monitoring was undertaken between 18 January and 12 February 2021.

The site is located directly north of the Grade I Listed St. Andrew's Church and the Gallowgate area of Newcastle's Scheduled medieval town defences, comprising a section of the curtain wall and town ditch. Although documentary evidence and intrusive 19th-century industrial premises indicated that the potential for the presence of earlier archaeological features was low, the location of the site warranted the investigation of the possible survival of buried features undisturbed by development (NAA 2019).

The specification for the archaeological watching brief supplied by Tyne and Wear Archaeology Service (2020, 2–3) determined that '*Ground disturbing work (including site preparation, foundation and service trenching) must be monitored by an archaeologist as a Watching Brief, in order that any archaeological remains can be recorded. Remains pre-dating the 19th century are of primary interest.*' In the event that such remains were discovered, reference to regional and thematic research frameworks should be included in the report.

Results

The topology of the site slopes generally from north to south from c.56m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on Strawberry Place to c.51m aOD in the south-east of the development. Prior to recent development, the site comprised four separate parking areas at varying levels, divided by retaining walls. These areas were designated as Plots A to D (Fig. 2) and the results of monitoring within these plots are described below.

Plot A

Plot A was situated to the east of The Strawberry public house and fronted onto Strawberry Place at the north end of the development site. The area was 24m from south-west to north-east, was 18m wide, and lay at an elevation of 56.7m aOD. Ground clearance work commenced with the removal of the carpark surface and underlying crushed brick rubble prior to ground reduction by an average of 0.6m, which was followed by consolidation with imported stone and gravel. Until recently, the eastern half of the area was the site of two tenement buildings terraced into the hillside with frontages level with the street to the north. The brick foundations (1, Fig. 2) of these buildings formed part of the boundary wall within the carpark, with a substantial drop of over 3m to the lower level of Plot C (Plate 1).



Plate 1: brick retaining wall for 19th-century properties to the east of The Strawberry in Plot A.

The ground within this retaining wall was highly disturbed by building demolition, services and a number of internal dividing walls. Some of the reduced brick walls survived above the level of the carpark to form low dividing walls within the space. Beneath this layer of disturbance, dark grey/black silty sand (2, Fig. 2) was observed in the north of the area. This thick homogenous deposit appeared to be without finds or any substantial stone content and was probably the original 'garden soil' of the hillside prior to the 19th-century development. Across this part of the site, the same deposit lay below the level of excavation and was only observed during removal of intrusive former services along the adjacent roadside.



Plate 2: reinforced concrete wall and brick rubble infill in the western half of Plot A.

Ground reduction in the western half of Plot A uncovered the brick rubble infill behind a 20th-century reinforced concrete retaining wall (4, Fig. 2). Any remains of the former building occupying the north-eastern area of Plot A lay below the level of excavation and were not observed during the site works (Plate 2).

Plot B

Plot B was at the same elevation as Plot A and situated to the south-east of (behind) the public house. The area was approximately 18m by 12m and occupied the footprint of a building plot originally fronting onto Strawberry Lane. As with Plot A, this area was reduced and consolidated without disturbance to any building structures below the excavated ground level.

Removal of the modern access ramp in the south of the area uncovered a brick wall (7, Fig. 2), which was located immediately behind the reinforced concrete retaining wall of the carpark access ramp – the intervening area having been infilled with brick rubble. This wall appears to be part of the northern extent of the demolished public baths that occupied the lower half of Strawberry Lane (Plate 3).



Plate 3: remains of 19th-century terrace wall in the southern extent of Plot B, with reinforced concrete wall on the right.

Plot C

Plot C accounted for the majority of the development site, measuring up to 47m from north-west to south-east and 36m wide. The northern half of the area was terraced into the hillside around the south-east of Plots A and B, to a level of 53.5m aOD. Beneath the modern carpark surface an extensive concrete yard surface (5, Fig. 2) was uncovered (Plate 4). The yard surface lay over a thin bed of crushed brick rubble, which lay directly on the truncated natural clays of the hillside. The concrete was laid in sections and impressed to form a semblance of stone setts, which aided the drainage of the yard. This process had removed all potential deposits within this area (Plate 5).

The eastern extent of Plot C was highly disturbed by a substantial brick boundary wall showing phases of rebuilding and alteration and the lower courses of this wall formed part of the ‘Saw

Mill' noted on the 1860 OS map (NAA 2019). The foundations of the sawmill (3, Fig. 2) and its ancillary buildings covered the south-eastern area of the site and the 1m-wide and 0.6m-thick concrete foundations of the main structure were bedded into the underlying clay. Two rows of foundation blocks, each measuring 1.2m by 0.6m, formed the foundations for sandstone plinths with cast-iron pillars within the building footprint.



Plate 4: concrete yard surface beneath the modern carpark in Plot C.



Plate 5: natural boulder clay beneath the concrete yard surface, with stone pillar supports for the sawmill during removal.

The natural slope of the hillside in the southern extent of the site had not suffered from truncation, and a deposit of the dark garden soil (deposit 2) noted in the north of Plot A remained undisturbed in this area (Plate 6). In this location, garden soil 2 was up to 1m thick in areas where it remained undisturbed by later buildings. It constituted a rich stone-free garden soil, which was gradually removed with a ditching bucket to reveal any possible features within the soil matrix. No pottery sherds or animal bone were visible within this deposit and occasional fragments of clay tobacco pipe stem were the only artefacts noted during the excavation of the material.



Plate 6: depth of garden soil 2 surviving within the walls of the 19th-century sawmill.

Two partially demolished brick structures (6, Fig. 2) formed the south-east corner of the site and retained the level of the carpark with a surrounding modern earth bank forming a slope to the ground below (Plate 7). This area of the development overlies the tunnel for the underground Metro line and is outside the building footprint. The remains of the sawmill midden and sawdust store were demolished to the required level and the earth bank was removed in order to grade the southern extent of the site. A small amount of pottery sherds and tobacco pipe stems were recovered from the deposits around these structures although no finds pre-dated the 19th century and no animal bone was observed during removal. It seems likely that this midden-like material was deposited as infill behind the retaining walls in this corner of the site rather than being the direct result of occupation in that location.



Plate 7: demolition of the 19th-century midden and removal of the modern earth bank in the southeast on the development.

Plot D

Plot D occupied the south-western corner of the development area at the level of the current road surface and was situated above the Metro tunnel and therefore outside the footprint of the building development. No excavation was necessary in this area and it awaits landscaping and paving on completion of the project.

Discussion

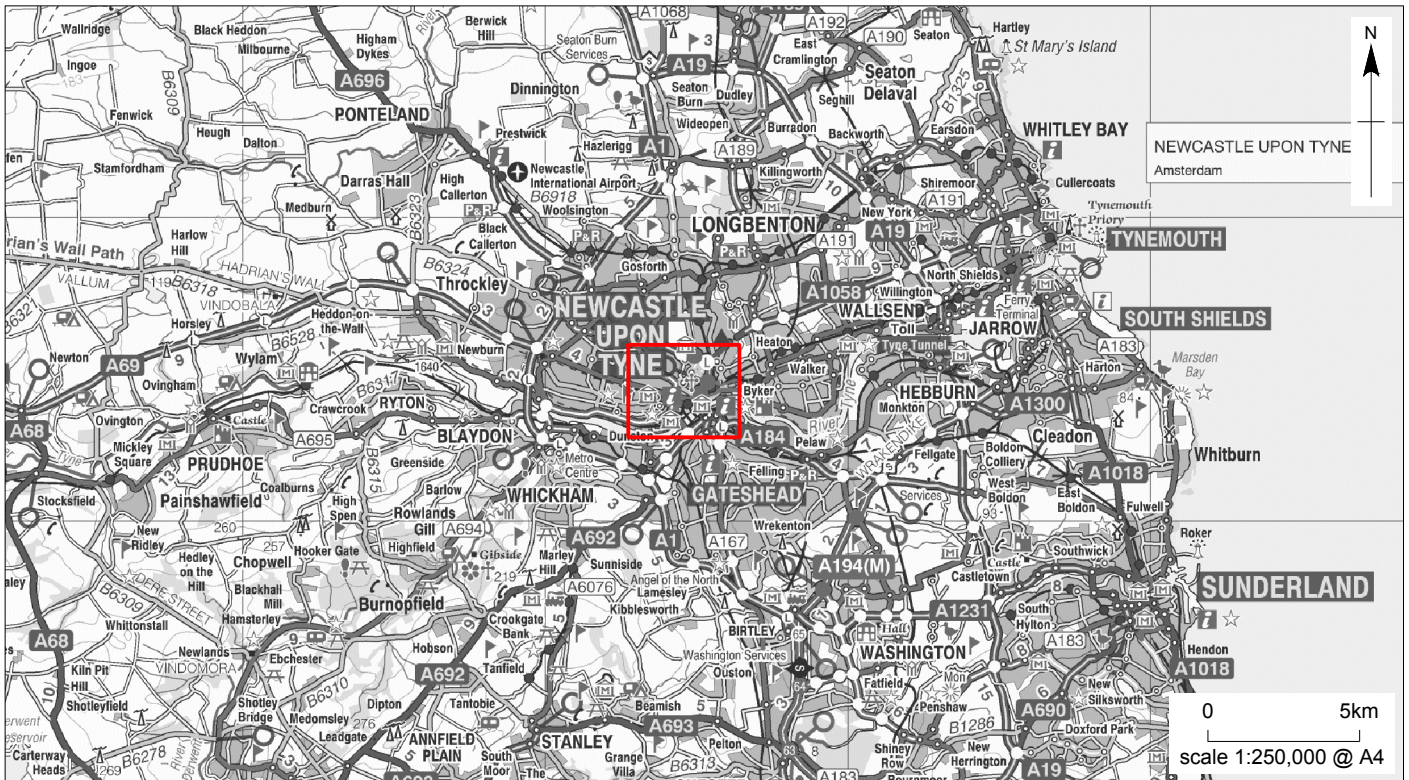
Archaeological monitoring within the site confirmed the results of the map regression described in the Desk-Based Assessment (NAA 2019) and no features or artefacts pre-dating the 19th century were encountered during the scheme of works. Terracing of the hillside during construction of the earlier sawmill had removed a large area of the original landscape and the earliest archaeological deposit encountered was a homogenous dark grey garden soil surviving intermittently in the extreme north and south of the site. The lack of any finds attributable to occupation activity, (except for just a few broken tobacco pipe stems) appears to confirm that Strawberry Place had remained undisturbed as a garden area on the southern edge of the Town Moor for decades/centuries until commercial development in the 19th century.

Archive deposition: The digital archive will be deposited with the Archaeological Data Service

References

NAA (2019) *One Strawberry Lane Office Development, Newcastle upon Tyne: Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*. Northern Archaeological Associates Report No. 19/125.

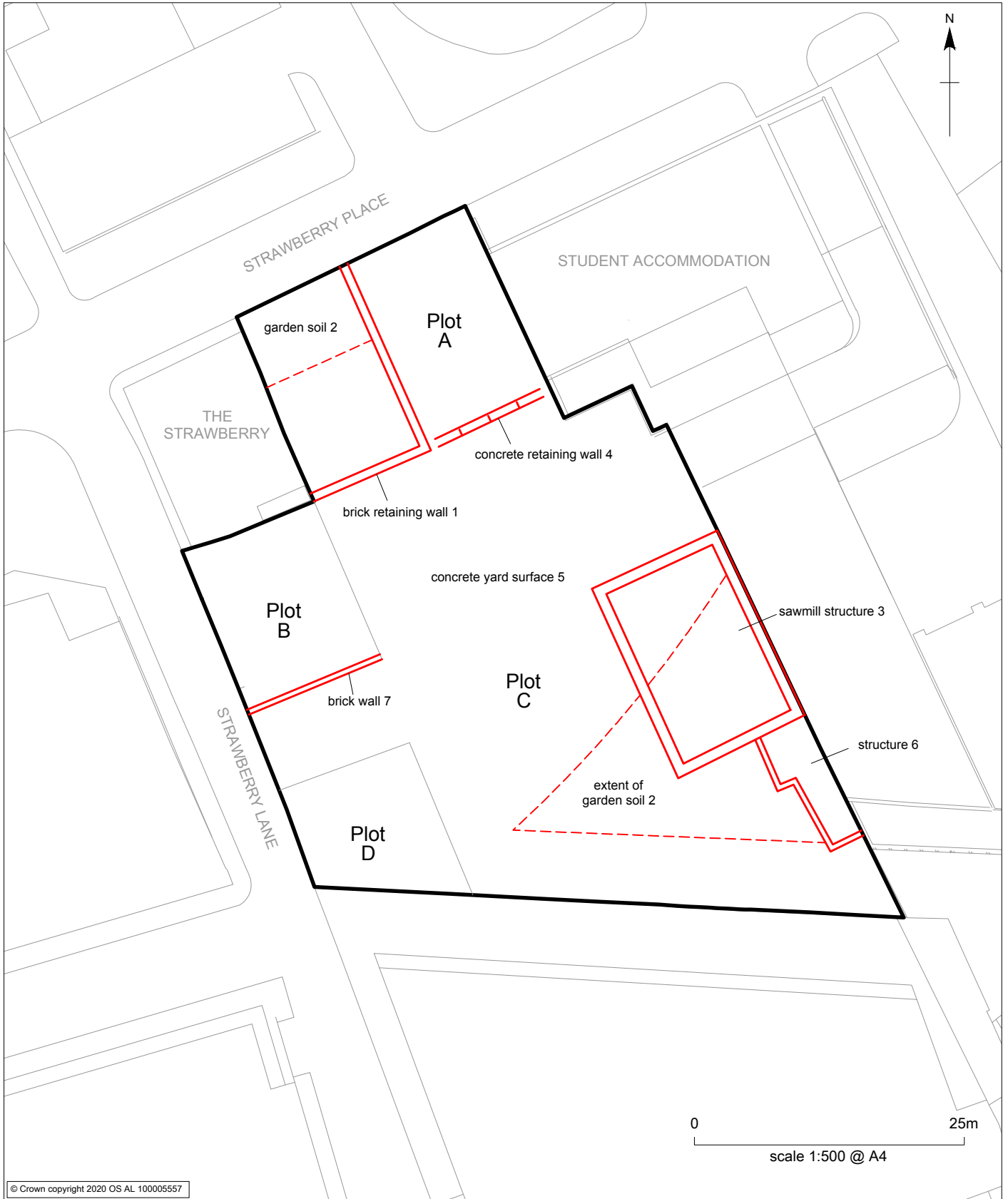
Tyne and Wear Archaeology Service (2020) *Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief at land at the junction of Strawberry Place and Strawberry Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne*. County Archaeologist's Reference Number: MON 16911.



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One Strawberry Lane Office Development: site location

Figure 1



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One Strawberry Lane Office Development: results of monitoring

Figure 2