



THE WEST WING SERVICE COURT,  
REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
MONITORING

SEATON DELAVAL HALL,  
NORTHUMBERLAND

prepared for  
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*Summary*

*Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd was commissioned by the National Trust to undertake archaeological monitoring (watching brief) during the installation of new small power, lighting and data services to the potting sheds, on the west side of the west service range court at Seaton Delaval Hall, Northumberland. This work took place on the 12th and 13th of October 2020 and fulfilled Condition 3 of Northumberland County Council planning consent 20/00980/FUL.*

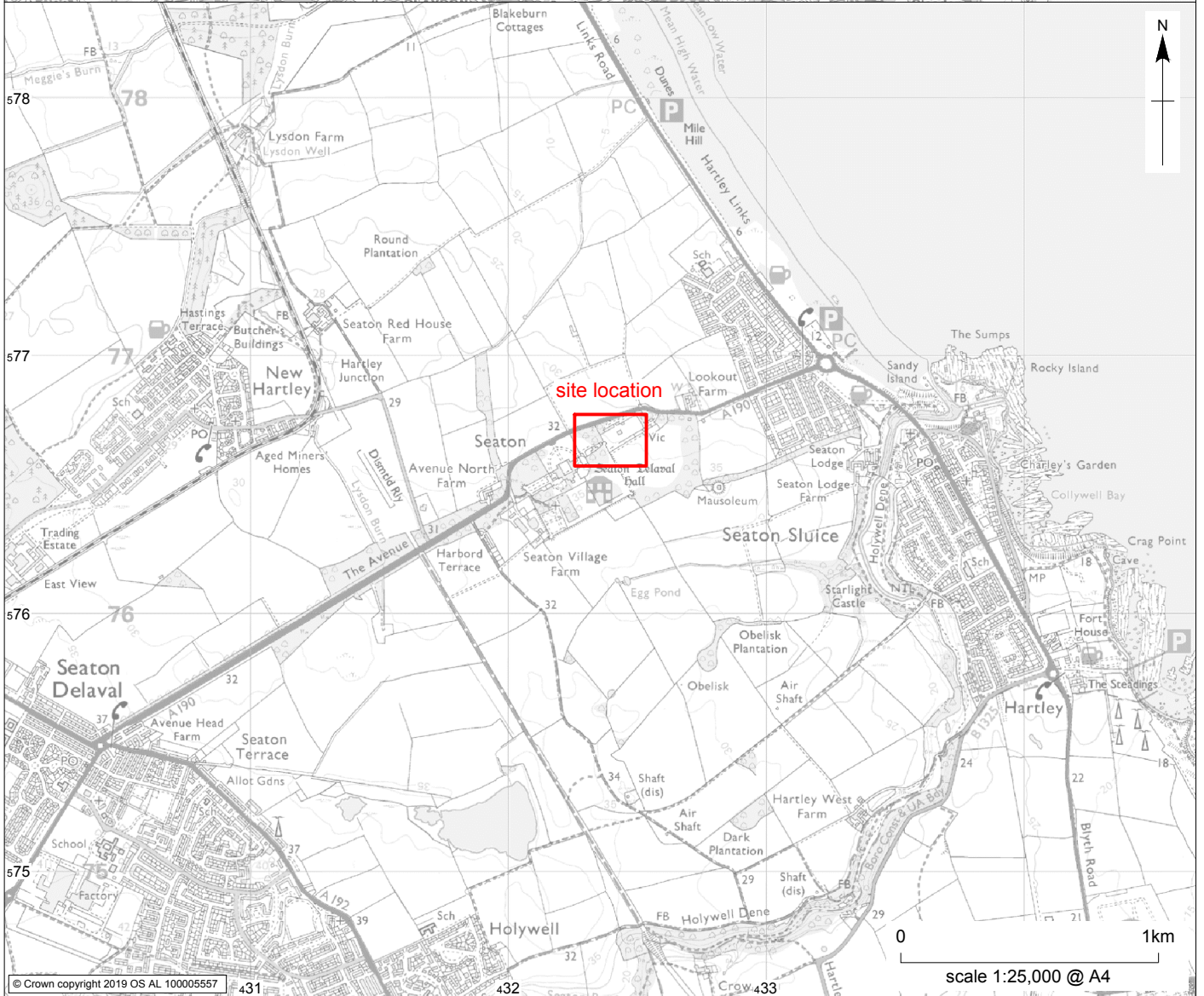
*The west service range court (also known as the kitchen court) is an enclosed courtyard adjoining the west wing of the hall. It is a gravel court that measures approximately 30m by 30m. It dates to the construction of the hall in the early 18th century and is bounded to the east by the west wing of the mansion, the south by the rose garden wall and potting shed, and the west by the east wall of the parterre garden. To the north there is a westward extension to the west wing; in the north-west corner of the court there is a modern garage that houses the mains electric supply. Access is from the north-west through the main courtyard gateway and drive that leads to the front of the hall.*

*Archaeological monitoring was conducted during the machine excavation of a c.19m service trench running from the south-east corner of the garage to the central doorway of the potting shed. At the base of the trench, the natural sandstone bedrock was observed to slope gently down from the potting shed at the southern end towards the garage at the north. This was on a gradient of approximately 1 in 40. The rose garden wall, which forms the rear wall of the potting shed, is located at what would have been a high point along the top of the rise of the bedrock. The alignment of the wall and potting shed is believed to date to the late 16th or 17th century, providing further evidence of the form the pre-Vanbrugh landscape. The later foundations and internal flagstone floor of the potting shed were bedded directly onto levelled glacial clay that sat above the bedrock.*

*At the northern end of the trench, the modern gravel court surface was found to overlie a thick deposit of mixed ash, coal dust and cinders. This served to reduce the natural slope of the area, levelling the ground within the court, and probably dates to the early 18th-century construction of the west wing. However, this interpretation does not adequately account for the high frequency of ash and cinders. One possibility is the deposits are associated with a phase of*

*clearance after either the 1752 or 1822 fires. However, little evidence of building rubble or demolition debris was observed, although the extent of excavation was limited. Alternatively, the material may relate to the use of the range of buildings that formerly stood along the west wall of the court, shown on the 1897 Second Edition historic OS map. These were probably cold frames, potting sheds and workshops. Ash from the hall and kitchen fireplaces may have been sent to the area to be used to fertilise the soil for the young plants and seedlings. Again, this interpretation does not account for the depth and extent of the accumulated ash deposits along the front of the building.*

*Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered to date any element of the site. It is recommended that any future interventions within the west wing service court should be monitored to determine if the mixed ash layer extended across the whole court, or was localised on the west side of the yard.*



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Seaton Delaval Hall: site location

Figure 1

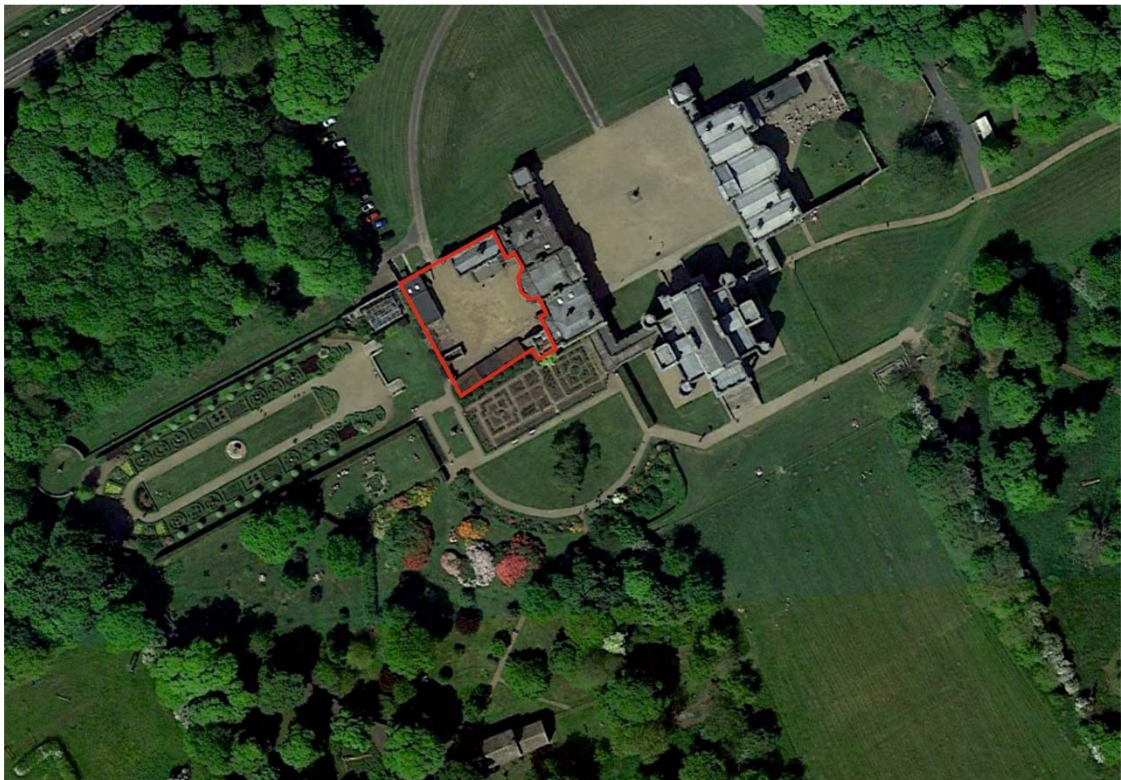


## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report details the results of archaeological monitoring (watching brief) undertaken during the installation of new small power, lighting and data services to the potting sheds, on the south side of the west wing service court at Seaton Delaval Hall (NZ 32182 76521; Fig. 1). The work was undertaken on the 12th and 13th of October 2020 and fulfils Condition 3 of Northumberland County Council planning consent 20/00980/FUL.

1.2 All work was undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed and approved in advance by the Northumberland County Council Assistant County Archaeologist (NAA 2020a).

## 2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION



*Figure 2: detailed site location showing the west wing service court. Image Google 2018.*

### Location

2.1 Seaton Delaval Hall is between Seaton Delaval and Seaton Sluice, approximately 5km south of the Port of Blyth (Fig. 1). The west wing service court (also known as the kitchen court) covers an approximate 900m<sup>2</sup> area located on the south-west side of the hall

complex. It is bounded by the west wing to the east, the north wall of the rose garden to the south, the east wall of the parterre garden to the west, and the courtyard wall to the north (NGR NZ 32181, 76519; Fig. 2). The main access is from the north, through a gateway leading to the west service court drive passing through the courtyard wall towards its north-west corner.

### **Geology and soils**

- 2.2 Seaton Delaval Hall is located above Devensian Diamicton: poorly sorted glacial till deposited during the last ice age. This layer lies above the Carboniferous Pennine Middle Coal Measures Formation – a compilation of mudstones, siltstones and sandstones created in shallow seas (BGS 2020).

### **Topography and land use**

- 2.3 The area is a gravel court, most recently used for parking by National Trust staff when the property was not open to the public (Simpson and Brown 2017, 107; fig. 3). It formed part of the construction of the 18th-century hall, located to the rear of the west wing service range, and has always been a working yard. The associated buildings are therefore characteristically utilitarian in function, including a garage in the north-west corner, which also houses the mains electric supply to the hall. On the south side is the Grade II listed ‘potting shed’; a single-storey mid-18th century rubble-built structure (NAA 2019). An extension to the north range of the west wing occupies the north-east corner of the yard. Historic OS maps (not all reproduced here) show a series of sheds built along the west wall of the court, only fragments of which remain extant.
- 2.4 The average height of the area is c.35m above Ordnance Datum.

### **Previous archaeological works**

- 2.5 A watching brief was conducted in the west wing service court in December 2012 (ARS 2013). This identified several features that were probably associated with the construction of the early 18th-century Seaton Delaval Hall, including a culvert and courtyard surfaces. The report concluded that there was a high probability for the survival of other remains associated with both the construction of the hall and subsequent use of the kitchen court.
- 2.6 The course of the culvert was identified on a below-ground services scan, conducted as part of recent groundworks across the wider site. The proposed drainage route between



the garage and potting shed was designed assiduously to avoid this feature.

### **Designations**

- 2.7 The west wing service court forms part of the curtilage of the Grade I Seaton Delaval Hall (NHLE: 1041321) and Grade II listed potting shed (NHLE: 1041322), both of which are granted statutory protection under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 2.8 The gardens and park are designated Grade II\* on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England (NHLE: 1001052).

## **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### *Pre-medieval*

- 3.1 No finds of prehistoric or Roman deposits or features have previously been recorded within the boundary of the NT estate. However, there is extensive evidence of activity in the wider vicinity indicating occupation and settlement of the surrounding coastal plain during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods. At Lookout Farm, c. 1km east of Seaton Delaval Hall is a possible Neolithic causewayed enclosure or prehistoric farmstead; c.1km to the south a Neolithic or Bronze Age cist burial was recorded near to a possible Iron Age or Romano-British farmstead, and other undated cropmark enclosures are recorded to the north-west and north-east of the site. In Seaton village, c.2km east of the hall, a timber structure, tentatively dated to the prehistoric or Roman period, was identified during geophysical survey and evaluation at Blackhaugh Drive in 2002. Neolithic flint artefacts were recovered from the same area (Copp 2012).

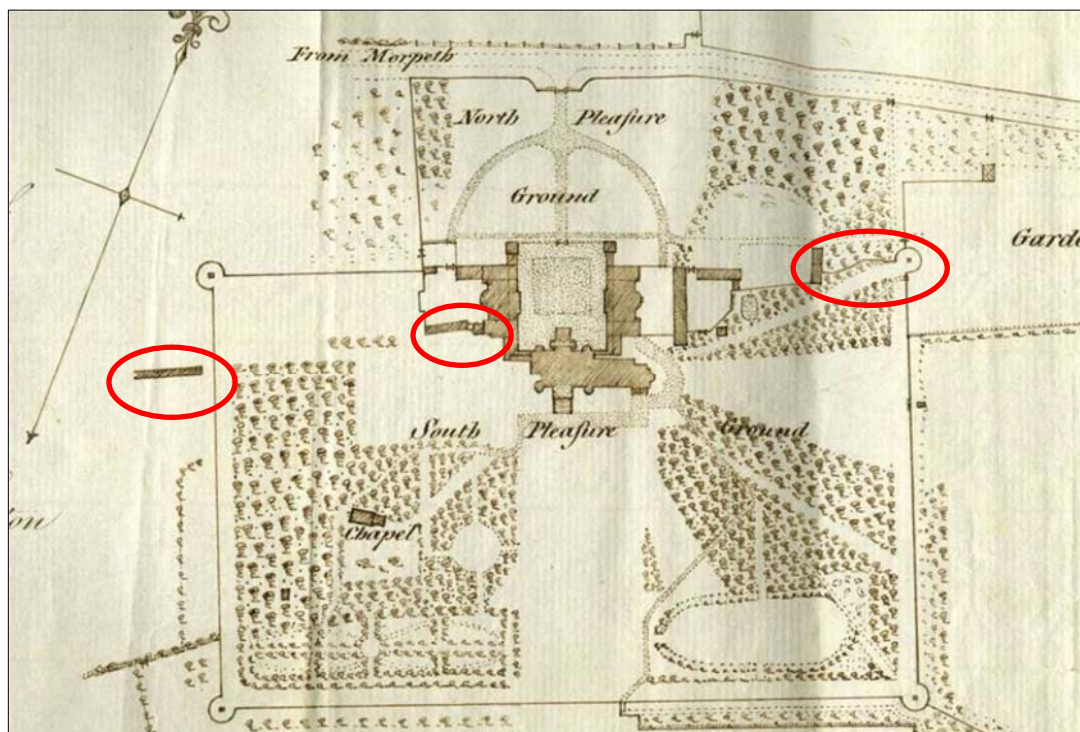
### *Medieval*

- 3.2 After the Norman Conquest the area around Seaton Delaval was granted to the De Laval family. By the end of the 11th century, Guy de Laval is known to have constructed a private chapel at the site, which now forms part of the Church of Our Lady. This is located to the south-west of the hall, and is the only extant remains associated with the medieval settlement (Simpson and Brown Architects 2017, 24).
- 3.3 A tower is thought to have existed on the site by the early 15th century, this was expanded in the mid-16th century with the addition of a Tudor mansion. The 1860 First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map (not reproduced) places the 'supposed site of the Castle' to the south-west of the Church of Our Lady. However, the location of the

medieval manor house has never been archaeologically established and may lay beneath the present hall building.

- 3.4 In the early 17th century, Sir Ralph Delaval (1577–1628) made considerable modifications to the house and estate, building a large Jacobean hall around the core of the Tudor mansion. This featured a forecourt and back-court surrounded by three gardens and included a bakehouse, brewhouse, stables and dovecot. The old medieval tower was retained (Simpson and Brown Architects 2017, 25; Newman 2017, 5).
- 3.5 By 1660, Sir Ralph Delaval (1622–1691), first baronet of Seaton, had inherited the estate. His eldest son died without issue in 1696. In 1717, after a period of legal wrangling, the estate was sold to Admiral George Delaval (1668–1723), a member of a cadet branch of the family. Soon after purchase the Admiral commissioned the construction of a new house by the architect Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726) (NHLE: 1001052). However, prior to its completion the Admiral died after a fall from his horse, and the estate passed to his nephew Captain Francis Blake Delaval (1692–1752). Work continued on the first phase of construction and was completed in 1728.
- 3.6 The 18th-century house was U-shaped in plan with an ornate central hall overlooking a large courtyard and flanked by two service ranges – the east and west wings. To the rear of these were two service courts featuring workshops and outbuildings that were hidden from public view.
- 3.7 The west wing service range was damaged by a fire in 1752. This started in the kitchen chimney and gutted the rooms to the south. In 1814–1815 John Dobson reroofed this part of the building, although it is unlikely that the wing would have remained open to the elements in the intervening period. On the 3rd January 1822 another devastating fire destroyed much of the central hall and subsequently led to the demolition of the south-east wing of the main hall. The west wing and east wing service ranges remained largely unscathed. There followed further phases of restoration by John Dobson in 1862–3, including the reroofing of the central hall (NHLE: 1001052).
- 3.8 The potting shed appears on the earliest surviving plan of Seaton Delaval Hall, prepared in 1781 (NRO 740/Box 14; Fig. 3). The alignment of the building is notably different from that of the main 18th-century hall complex, more closely correlating with that of the brewhouse bastion wall, the great west avenue and the medieval village of Seaton, which are all elements associated with the pre-Vanbrugh estate (Newman 2017). The

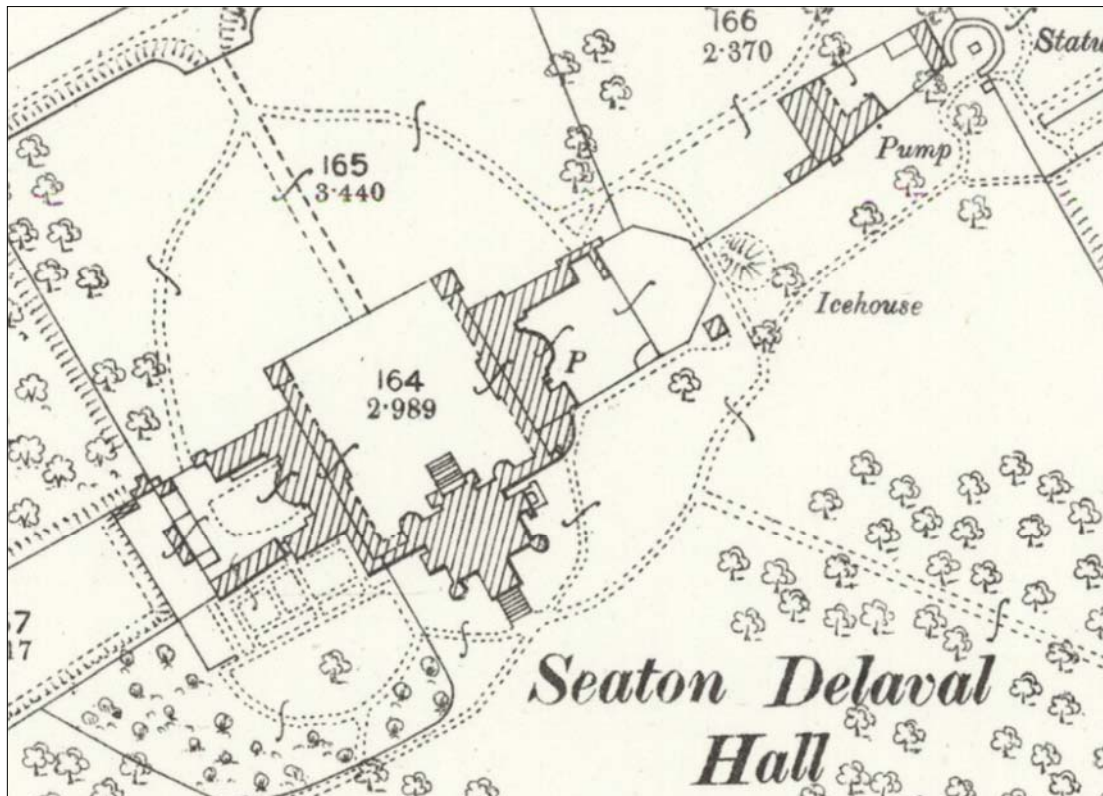
redbrick north wall of the rose garden, which forms the rear wall of the potting shed, may have been built in the late 16th early 17th century during the expansion of the Jacobean manor.



*Figure 3: extract from the 1781 plan of the estate showing those elements (ringed in red) potentially pre-dating Vanbrugh's 18th-century hall (NRO 740/Box 14).*

- 3.9 A small extension to the south range of the west wing is depicted on the 18th-century map, separated from the potting shed by a narrow passage. The west extension to the north range had also been constructed by this period and a small building in the north-west corner of the court is shown, fragments of which may be incorporated into the later garage. By the publication of the First Edition six-inch OS map in 1860 (not reproduced), the small building had been incorporated into a range of structures extending along the west wall of the court; possibly cold frames, planting beds or animal pens. These are also shown on the Second Edition 25-inch OS map, published in 1897 (Fig. 4).
- 3.10 A semi-circular area occupying much of the centre of the west wing service court is demarcated on the 1897 map. This might be a herb or kitchen garden adjacent to the distinctive apsidal end of the main kitchen. Alternatively it could be demarking perimeter gravel surfacing or hard standing. By the publication of the Third Edition OS in 1922 (not reproduced), the buildings on the west side of court had fallen out of use and are depicted as semi-ruinous.





*Figure 4: extract from 25-inch Northumberland (Old Series) LXXXI.6, published 1897.*

3.11 Based on the documentary and previous archaeological evidence, there was a high potential for archaeological remains to be encountered during the excavation of the potting shed service trench; they could have been associated with the building of the 18th-century hall, later phases of construction and use of the west wing service court over time. There was also the low potential for the survival of material pre-dating the hall.

#### **4.0 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

4.1 The aim of archaeological monitoring was to 'preserve by record' any archaeological remains identified during the groundworks. In achieving this aim the following objectives were identified and met:

- to establish the presence, nature, extent, preservation and significance of any archaeological remains;
- to provide a detailed record of any such remains;
- to recover and assess any associated structural, artefactual and environmental evidence;

- to undertake a programme of investigation that meets with national and regional standards (Historic England 2015a; ClfA 2020a–d; and
- to prepare an illustrated report on the results of the archaeological monitoring to be deposited with the Northumberland County Council Historic Environment Record (HER) and National Trust Sites and Monument Record.

## **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

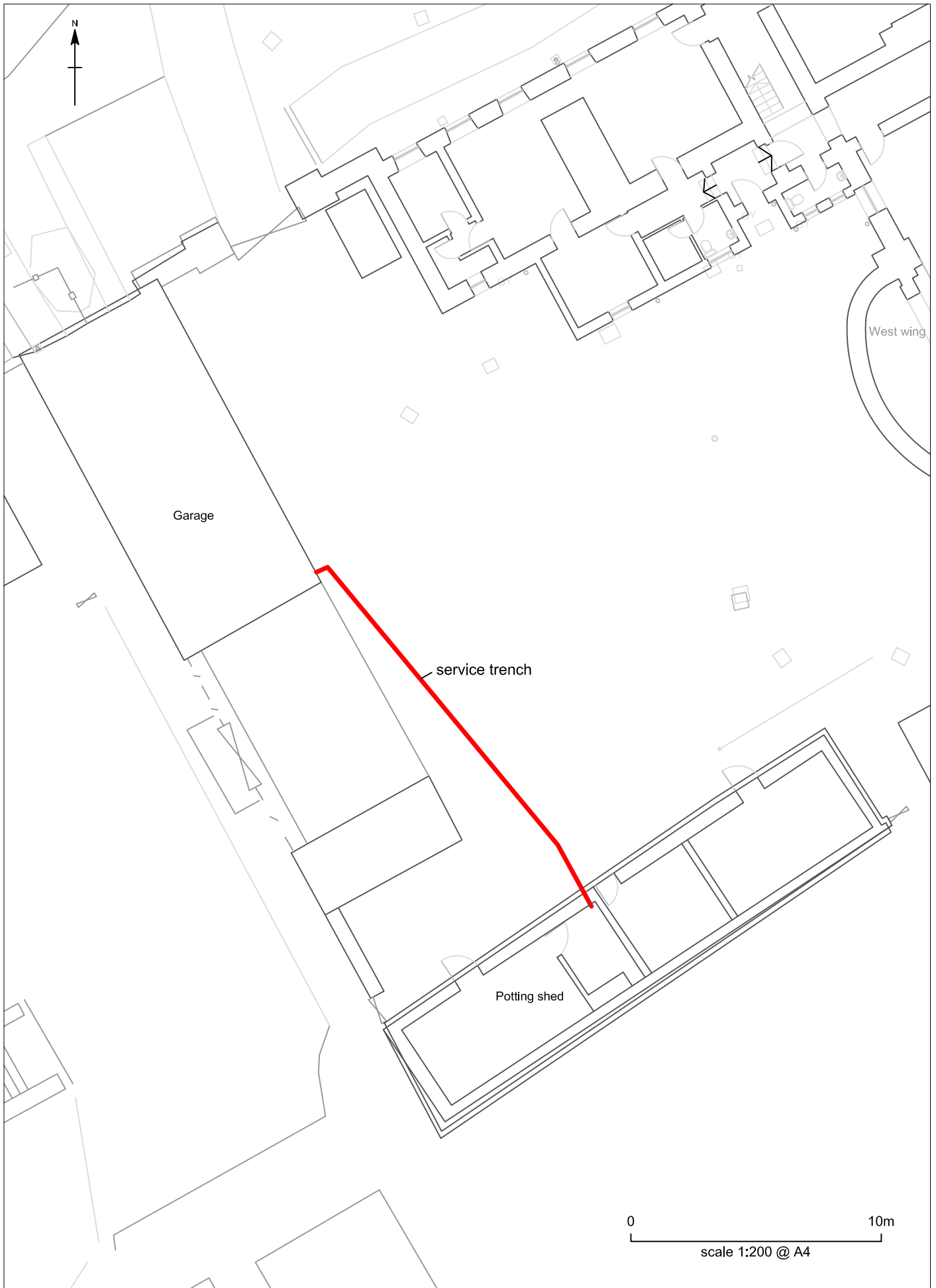
5.1 The groundworks comprised the machine excavation of a trench running from the main power supply in the garage to the central doorway of the potting shed (Fig. 5). This was c.19m long, 0.75m wide and reached a depth of 0.45m. Excavation was initially conducted using a 0.3m toothless ditching bucket, as stipulated in the WSI. However, at the southern end of the trench the natural sandstone bedrock was encountered close to the surface, necessitating the use of a 0.5m toothed bucket. At the northern end of the trench, excavation proceeded in controlled stages using a toothless bucket to assess accurately the stratigraphic relations within the trench.

5.2 The flagstone surface at the front of the potting shed and the area inside the building was hand-excavated at a much-reduced width of 0.2–0.25m to minimise disturbance to the listed structure. The flagstones were recorded prior to removal. The aim was originally to mole beneath the threshold; however, due to a pre-existing weakness of the stone, this proved impossible. The threshold was carefully removed and the trench excavated from the surface. The stone was retained for reinstatement.

5.3 A continuous archaeological watching brief was maintained throughout the excavation. A photographic record of all stages of the work was maintained and the archaeological features located and recorded on pro-forma sheets using a number sequence that was specific to the scheme in order to avoid confusion with previous work conducted as part of The Curtain Rises project.

## **6.0 RESULTS**

6.1 Natural sandstone bedrock (3001) was encountered in front of the potting shed at the southern end of the trench at 0.3–0.35m below ground level (bgl). It sloped down to the north, the upper surface recorded at a depth of 0.45m bgl at the northern end of the trench (Plates 1 and 2). A rough estimate, given the length of the trench, suggests an approximate gradient of 1 in 40.





- 6.2 A layer of fractured or crushed sandstone (**3002**), with small lenses of light brown sandy silt up to 0.1m thick, lay directly over the natural sandstone (**3001**). This extended across the whole trench. Close investigation of the upper surface of the sandstone showed signs of weathering and possible frost damage.
- 6.3 Directly above the sandstone at the southern end of the trench was a thick deposit of compacted glacial clay (**3003**). This was more than 0.3m thick in the area excavated and was a pink-grey in colour, including lenses of cream and grey clay. The deposit appeared to be natural, although it had been levelled as part of the construction of the potting shed building.
- 6.4 The internal flagstone floor of the building (**3005**) was bedded directly onto a levelled clay surface (**3003**). The flagstones averaged 0.5m by 0.6m by 0.12m.



*Plate 1 (left): service trench as excavated, with (deposit 3004 visible in its northern extent; Plate 2 (right): natural sandstone (3001) exposed at the southern end.*

- 6.5 In front of the potting shed was a flagged surface (**3006**) which extend along the north elevation of the building. It was 1.5m in width and constructed of sandstone flags that measured 0.6m by 0.7m with an average thickness of 0.12m. This was bedded into a 0.2–0.25m-thick levelling layer (**3007**) of mixed mid-brown clay with some angular stones (averaging 0.15–0.25m in diameter) and frequent brick rubble. The brick

fragments were small (ranging from 0.08–0.1m) and were orange-red in colour with traces of white mortar. No fragments of a suitable size survived to provide an indication of the brick dimensions.



*Plate 3: potting shed wall and floor bedded onto clay layer 3003, with foundation cut 3008 on the left.*

- 6.6 The construction cut (3008) for the flag surface (3006) was dug vertically at the front of the potting shed, effectively destroying the physical relationship between clay deposit 3003 recorded within the building interior and deposit 3004 in the courtyard. The construction trench was c.0.35m deep and 1.6m wide. The mixed nature of the primary fill (3007) suggests the surface was the last of a series of historic interventions along the front of the building.
- 6.7 At the northern end of the service trench, a gradual build-up of gritty and friable dark material (3004) was recorded across the excavated area. This varied in thickness from 0.08m at the southern end, adjacent to surface 3006, to over 0.4m at the northern end next to the garage. The deposit comprised a dark friable material with interleaving lenses of grey, purple and black ash, cinders and coal dust. No clearly discernible sequence of deposition was observed.





*Plate 4: pathway 3006 prior to hand excavation.*

6.8 At the northern end of the service trench, a channel was cut through the concrete floor of the garage, beneath this was a modern groundwater drain that ran along the front of the building.

## 7.0 THE FINDS

7.1 No dateable artefacts were recovered during the excavation of the service trench. The white-mortared brick fragments in bedding material 3007 were too small to be diagnostic. One fragment of clay tobacco pipe-stem was observed in the modern backfill of the drain at the corner of the garage.

## 8.0 DISCUSSION

8.1 Although limited in scope, the archaeological monitoring work has provided information on the nature of deposits on the west side of the west wing service court. It has also informed a greater understanding of the construction of the potting shed.

8.2 The natural sandstone geology (3001) was shown to slope gently down from the south to the north on a gradient of approximately 1 in 40, with the rose garden wall located at the top of the rise. The wall is believed to date to the late 16th or 17th century,



providing further evidence of the form pre-Vanbrugh landscape. The potting shed was later constructed against the north face of the garden wall. The foundations of the building and internal flagstone floor were bedded directly onto the levelled glacial clay (3003).

8.3 At the northern end of the trench, the modern gravel court surface overlay a thick deposit of mixed ash, coal dust and cinders (3004). This served to reduce the natural slope of the area, levelling the ground within the court, and may date to the early 18th-century construction of the west wing. However, this does not adequately account for the high frequency of ash, cinders and coal dust.

8.4 Another interpretation is that 3004 could be associated with a phase of clearance following either the 1752 or 1808 fires. However, there was little evidence of building rubble or demolition debris observed, although the extent of excavation was limited. Alternatively, the deposit may relate to the use of the buildings located along the west wall, shown on the Second Edition historic OS map (Fig. 4). These were probably cold frames, potting sheds and workshops. Ash from the hall and kitchen fireplaces may have been sent to the area to be used to fertilise the young plants and seedlings. Again, this interpretation does not account for the depth and extent of the accumulated ash and cinders along the front of the building.

8.5 Alternatively, the material encountered in the trench could simply be attributed to the continuous use of the area over a prolonged period of time, and various phases of releveling in the 19th century using imported clinker, perhaps from the Seaton Sluice industrial complex (Newman, *pers. comm.*)

8.6 Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered to date the deposit. Future interventions within the west service court should be monitored to determine if 3004 extends across the whole areas, or if it is localised on the west side of the yard.

## 9.0 ARCHIVE DEPOSITION

9.1 The full archive from the archaeological investigations, including paperwork, drawings, photographs, and digital data, will be deposited with the National Trust as part of The Curtain Rises archive. Copies of the report will be loaded onto OASIS and provided to Northumberland County Council

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APPENDIX A

CONTEXT CATALOGUE

Context	Interpretative description	Type	Area
3001	natural bedrock	solid geology	service trench
3002	weathered fractured upper surface of 3001		service trench
3003	boulder clay overlying 3001/2	drift geology	service trench
3004	domestic ash dumping from kitchen	occupation layer – levelling	service trench
3005	internal floor to potting shed	occupation layer – structure	Potting Shed
3006	external flagged surface along front of potting shed	modern intervention – pathway	service trench
3007	bedding material beneath path 3006		service trench
3008	cut for pathway 3006/7		service trench