



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MONITORING

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REPLACEMENT GAS MAIN

615 WEST ROAD

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

on behalf of

Northern Gas Networks

Project No.: 1251

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REPLACEMENT GAS MAIN, 615 WEST ROAD, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

Summary

This report presents the results of archaeological monitoring during the replacement of a small section of gas main at 615 West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne. At this junction, West Road follows the course of Hadrian's Wall, which is preserved at the surface some 150m to the north-west of the site.

The archaeological work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd for RSK Group plc on behalf of Northern Gas Networks on 12 May 2015.

The development was within the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site (WHS), comprising the Wall and adjacent ditch, the Military Way and the Vallum, various sections of which are protected as Scheduled Monuments.

The area of archaeological monitoring comprised two trenches on the south side of West Road, one at the junction with Thorntree Drive and the other at the junction with Baroness Drive; both of which lay close to the predicted line of Hadrian's Wall.

The monitoring did not identify an evidence of the remains of Hadrian's Wall or any associated defences or settlement, and no artefacts were observed. However, both trenches contained unstratified 'chunks' of sandstone which were likely to have derived from Hadrian's Wall.

It appears probable that at this point the Wall had been removed entirely; whether this was for recovering building materials or as a consequence of more recent road and house construction remains an open question.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the results of archaeological monitoring during the replacement of a small section of gas main at 615 West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne (NZ 2035 6533; Figure 1). At this location, West Road follows the course of Hadrian's Wall.
- 1.2 The monitoring was undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by David Heslop, Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist. A Written Scheme of Investigation produced by RSK Group (RSK 2105) for a repair on Westgate Road determined that, although the renewal works were of a small scale, they could produce significant new data that might contribute to the overall knowledge of Hadrian's Wall and its ongoing management.
- 1.3 The archaeological work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd for RSK Group plc on behalf of Northern Gas Networks on 12 May 2015.

2.0 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 West Road, which becomes Westgate Road, is the principal road leading westwards from the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne (Figure 1). The work on West Road was some 3km west of the city centre. Number 615 West Road is Denton Burn Methodist Church (Figure 2).
- 2.2 West Road / Westgate Road ascends a relatively steep slope, rising from c. 30m OD in the city centre to a high point of approximately 125m OD at Benwell. From here, the road descends to 64m OD at Denton Burn. The church stands at an elevation of 72m OD.
- 2.3 The solid geology of the area consists of Carboniferous coal measures, with sandstone outcropping to the south of Benwell, and coal occurring at or near the surface for some distance to the west (BGS 1981). With the exception of the river terraces, comprising alluvium and sands and gravels, the drift geology consists of boulder clay (BGS 1977). The soils within the built-up areas are unmapped, but to the north there are slowly permeable fine loams of the Dunkeswick 1 association (Jarvis *et al.* 1984, 165–8).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The following is a summary taken from a WSI (RSK 2015). The development was within the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site (WHS), comprising the wall and adjacent ditch, the Military Way and the Vallum, various sections of which are protected as Scheduled Monuments. Hadrian's Wall was constructed in the early 2nd century on a line between the Tyne and the Solway and represented, at various times, the northern frontier of Roman Britain.
- 3.2 The wall was a composite military barrier that, in its final form, comprised several separate elements: a stone wall fronted by a V-shaped ditch, and a number of purpose-built stone garrison fortifications such as forts, milecastles and turrets. A large earthwork and ditch, built parallel with and to the south of the wall (the Vallum), and a metalled supply road linking the garrison forts, known as the 'Roman Military Way' were also integral to the defensive system.
- 3.3 Standing remains of a section of wall footings are preserved some 150m to the north-west of the gas repair.

4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The aims of the archaeological monitoring were to identify and record the presence and condition of any surviving archaeological features or deposits.
- 4.2 Based on the scheme's location, its archaeological potential and a review of the Hadrian's Wall Research Framework (Symonds and Mason n.d.), the following outline research questions were proposed:
- Is evidence of remains of the Wall or any features associated with it observable within the pipe trench and are these remains dateable?
 - Has road construction removed all traces of the Wall at this location or have any remains survived its construction?
 - What impact does the replacement of existing utilities services have on the survival of archaeological remains?
 - What is the state of preservation of any remains encountered?
 - Is there any evidence for archaeological features related to other elements of the Hadrian's Wall complex of military defensive installations?
 - Is there any observable evidence for Romano-British civilian settlement activity within the vicinity of Hadrian's Wall?

5.0 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 Archaeological monitoring was undertaken during the machine-excavation of two trenches (Figure 2) on the southern side of West Road, adjacent to Denton Burn Methodist Church. The trenches were excavated to sufficient depth to allow maintenance of the existing gas mains. Initial excavations were undertaken using a small 360° excavator, with additional hand-excavation around existing services, all under archaeological supervision.
- 5.2 The monitoring archaeologist was allowed sufficient time to examine, photograph and record the excavations.
- 5.3 No artefacts or palaeoenvironmental samples were recovered.

6.0 RESULTS

Trench 1

- 6.1 Trench 1 was located on the western corner of the junction of West Road and Thorntree Drive, and measured 2.62m x 1.25m and up to 1.17m deep. There were no remains of archaeological significance, and the natural subsoil comprised a mid brown clean sandy, silty clay.
- 6.2 Overlying this was a deposit of random sandstone fragments, blending with the hard-core road bedding beneath the modern tarmac. The sandstone fragments varied in shape and size from small angular chips to medium-sized (c. 150mm) blocks. Two lenses of dark purple/ black silt were visible in the side of the trench and there were patches of a similar material at the base; these were considered to be natural.

Trench 2

- 6.3 Trench 2 was on the opposite side of the Methodist Church, on the western corner of the junction of West Road and Baroness Drive. The trench measured 4.24m x 1.84m in an approximate 'T' shape and was excavated to a depth of 1.15m.
- 6.4 Again, no features of archaeological significance were identified. However, as with Trench 1 there were random sandstone fragments ranging from small to larger blocks located directly beneath the modern tarmac, these were very frequent. The sandstone was located within a mixed matrix of dark grey silt, grit, coal and shale suggesting use of colliery waste as levelling material for the modern road surface. This is further supported by the underlying natural which appeared to have been levelled beneath the sandstone matrix. Some of the sandstone blocks showed signs of rough shaping but no visible dressing marks, suggesting that they may have derived from Hadrian's Wall. The sandstone matrix had a depth of 0.49 m and ran the length and width of the trench. The underlying natural was the same as in Trench 1.

6.5 No archaeological features or artefacts were identified in either trench.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 The monitoring did not identify an evidence of the remains of Hadrian's Wall or any associated defences or settlement, and no artefacts were observed. However, both trenches contained unstratified 'chunks' of sandstone which were likely to have derived from Hadrian's Wall.

7.2 It appears probable that at this point the Wall had been removed entirely; whether this was for recovering building materials or as a consequence of more recent road and house construction remains an open question.

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615 West Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne: site location

Figure 1





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*615 West Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Trench 1,
natural clay and re-used sandstone*

Plate 1



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*615 West Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Trench 2,
general view showing re-used sandstone*

Plate 2