EPICAUM ROMAN FORT, CASTLE NOOK, ALSTON, NORTHUMBERLAND

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALAUTION

Interim Statement

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On behalf of

Epicaum Ltd

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALAUTION

Summary

An archaeological evaluation in advance of planning was undertaken on the proposed site of a new tea room and associated car park at Castle Nook Farm near Alston, Northumberland. The site of the proposed development was subject to an evaluation because it lay in close proximity to complex and extensive archaeological remains associated with Epiacum Roman Fort and the later development of the area. Therefore it is in an area of potential archaeological significance.

The evaluation took the form of five trial trenches which totalled an area of 50m². The trenches were located in order to determine the nature of topographic or geophysical anomalies that had been identified in previous surveys. The site work was undertaken on 16th July 2018.

The results of the evaluation were generally negative with the anomalies proving to be modern drainage. The large feature running north-east to south-east was the result of the refurbishment of an earlier ceramic land-drain and the use of large stones to fill the widened trench. This drain could be seen to run cross slope to connect with a roadside drain. In addition a modern plastic land-drain was located which also connected to the roadside drainage system.

The other anomalies could not be definitively located. However, marked variations in the depth of the underlying mineral soil and small concentrations of stone and gravel appear to have been the cause of the anomalies.

The only artefactual remains recovered was a very small amount of later 19th to early 20th century pottery from the backfill of the refurbished land-drain.

Overall the results of the evaluation were slightly surprising in that it revealed nothing in the way of archaeological remains, given the proximity of the wealth of archaeological remains to the west and north-west. This would seem to show that the area of the proposed development lies outside the focus of archaeological activity.

No other archaeological finds or features were recorded during the evaluation.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation by trial trenching on the proposed site of a car park and tea room on land to the south of Castle Nook Farm, nr Alston (NY 69778 48861). The site is in Knaresdale with Kirkhaugh civil parish in Northumberland.

1.2 The evaluation was conducted by JB Archaeology Ltd for Mrs E Edgar of Epiacum Ltd and was carried out on the 16th July 2017.

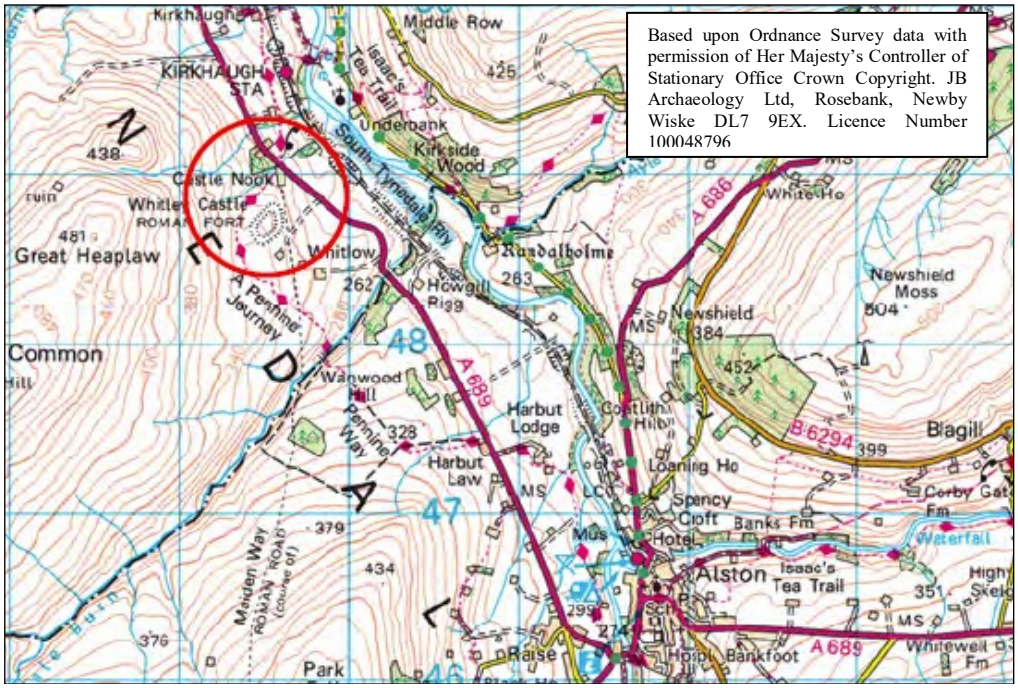

Figure 1. Site Location

2.0 BACKGROUND

Archaeological and Historic Background

2.1 The site of Epiacum Roman fort (also known as Whitely Castle) and its environs contain evidence for a long and complex archaeological history. The earliest evidence for human activity in the area has come from occasional finds of lithic artefacts along with several known and potential sites covering the period from the Mesolithic to Iron Age. With the creation of the Roman fort, the area became a focus of activity which continued for the duration of the Roman period. This activity was obviously focussed on the fort and its immediate vicinity. However there is a high potential for other fort related sites to be located away from the main complex.

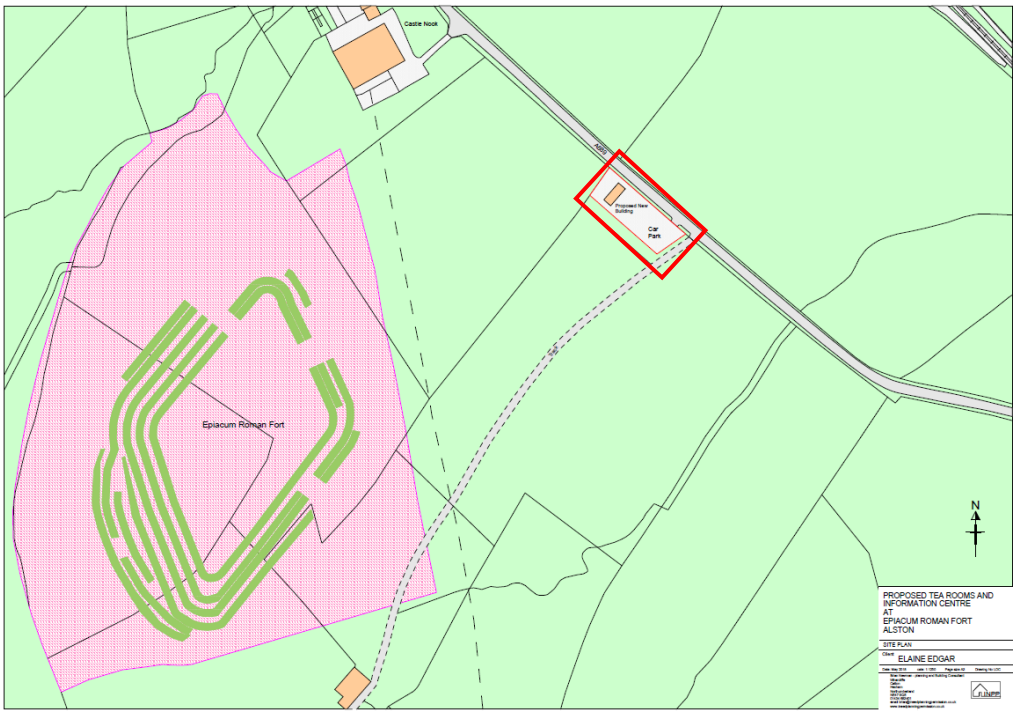

Figure 2. Detailed Site Location (Drawing Brian Newman)

2.2 Often eclipsed by the Roman features, a wide range of early post-Roman, medieval and post-medieval remains have been identified in and around the fort and in the surrounding landscape. The detailed geophysical and topographic surveys which have been carried out and are summarised in the *Epiacum Research Framework* (The Archaeology Practice, 2018) clearly show a developed and changing post-Roman landscape, which includes farmsteads and mineral extraction, developing outside the focal point of the fort. For details of the geophysical and topographic surveys along with the various other strands of research into Epiacum and its environs see The Archaeology Practice, 2018, *Epiacum Research Framework*.

2.3 The geophysical and topographic surveys mentioned above along with the LiDAR data for the area show a diversity of sites and features across the landscape as a whole. Of these sites and features a number were recorded as being in or adjacent to the location of the proposed car park and tearoom (see Figure 3 for locations) and it was these features that were targeted by the evaluation (see also the previous Written Scheme of Investigation for details, Buglass, 2018).

Geology and Soils

2.4 The underlying geology of the site and the surrounding area is Tournaisian and Visean limestone (British Geological Survey, 2001). Overlying this, the quaternary geology is one of glacial deposits (British Geological Survey, 1977). The soils which have developed from these deposits have been classified as the Brickfield 3 association which is a slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged fine loamy soil (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

Topography and Land-use

2.5 The southern portion of the site is an area of generally level ground which rises steadily to the north-west. It lies on the south-eastern side of the A689 at a height of *c.*280mOD and is currently used as a car park. The surrounding landscape is entirely agricultural.

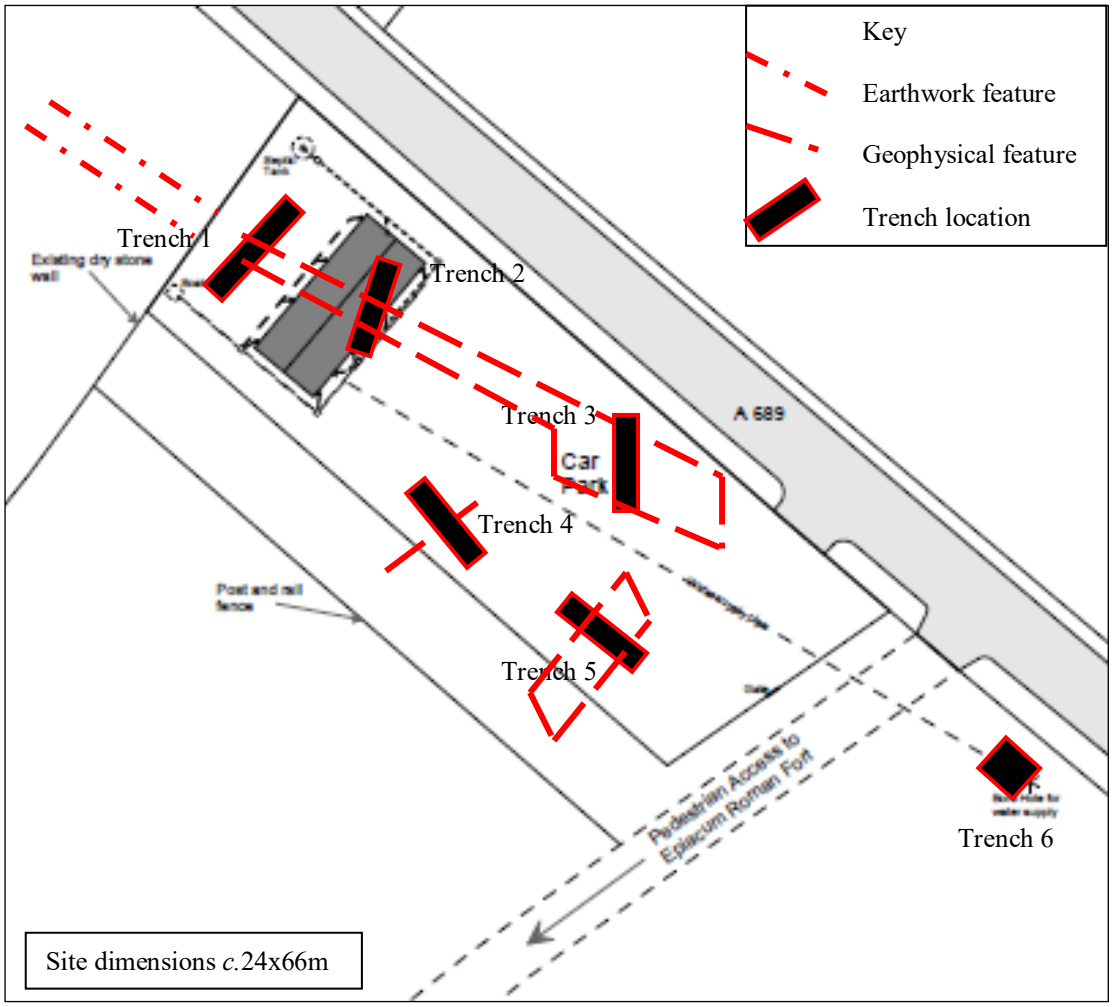

Figure 3. Location of Trial Trenches superimposed on geophysical results Not to scale
(Drawing Brian Newman)

3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 The objective of the evaluation was to identify, map, record and sample excavate any features of archaeological interest revealed during the excavation of the various evaluation trenches. The specific aims of the evaluation were to:

- archaeologically record (written, graphic, and photographic records) any archaeological features revealed in the trial trenches and as a result of any sample excavation
- recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental material exposed by the evaluation

3.2 All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with Historic England guidelines (2006a) and the Chartered Institute *for* Field Archaeologists

Standards and Guidance (2014a; b) and to a previous submitted written scheme of investigation (Buglass, 2018).

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The initial excavation of the various trenches was carried out by contractors using a tracked mini-digger with a toothless 'ditching' bucket under direct archaeological supervision.

4.2 During all of the excavations, the exposed ground surfaces were inspected for archaeological features and the resulting topsoil stockpiles were monitored for archaeological artefacts.

Trench Descriptions

- Trench 1 – 5x2m (10m²) located to investigate the north-western end of the geophysical anomaly and its possible relationship to the earth-work in the adjacent field.
- Trench 2 – 5x2m (10m²) located to investigate the geophysical anomaly within the footprint of the proposed building.
- Trench 3 – 5x2m (10m²) located to investigate the geophysical anomaly.
- Trench 4 – 5x2m (10m²) – located to investigate the geophysical anomaly running to the south-west.
- Trench 5 – 5x2m (10m²) – located to investigate the geophysical anomaly running to the south-west.
- Trench 6 – 3x3m (9m²) – located to investigate the proposed location of the borehole

4.3 Due to no archaeological features being recorded in Trenches 1-5 and the fact that this field was under crop, Trench 6 was not excavated.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 The results of the evaluation were generally negative, with no archaeological features being encountered during the evaluation. All five evaluation trenches were successfully excavated down to the natural underlying geology. The whole of the site was covered in a *c.*0.2m thick topsoil which directly overlay the glacial clays of varying thickness – *c.*0.2-0.35m. These clays in turn overlay the mineral soil formed by the weathering of the underlying solid geology. The topsoil was a moderately to well compacted mid to dark brown, clayey soil with a high organic content. The underlying clays were very compacted, mid to dark grey clayey silts with localised patches of small stones and occasional cobbles.

Trench 1 (Figure 3; Plates 1 – 3)

5.2 Trench 1 was at the north-western end of the site and located to investigate part of a geophysical anomaly and its possible relationship to the earth-work in the adjacent field. The excavation of the trench revealed a linear feature towards the western end of the trench that was filled with large, angular stones. A section excavated through these feature revealed the remains of a ceramic land-drain. It

appears that the original land-drain had become blocked and it was then dug out and replaced in parts with the angular stone. A small assemblage of late 19th/early 20th century ceramics was noted in the backfill.

Plate 1. Trench 1, looking north-east, scales 1m

Plate 2. Trench 1, looking north-east, scale 1m

Plate 3. Trench 1, ceramic assemblage, scale interval 0.1m

Trench 2 (Figures 3; Plates 4 & 5)

5.3 Trench 2 was located to investigate a further section of the geophysical anomaly within the footprint of the proposed building. This trench recorded the same stratigraphic sequence as described above, along with the continuation of the same stone and ceramic land-drain. From the alignment of the drain in the two trenches, it could be seen to be heading to a roadside drain in the adjacent roadway.

Plate 4. Trench 2 looking north-west, scales 0.5 & 1m

Plate 5. Trench 2, land-drain, scale 0.5m

Trench 3 (Figure 3; Plate 6)

5.4 Trench 3 was located to investigate the geophysical anomaly within the area of the proposed car park. The excavation of this trench revealed a modern plastic land-drain in a trench that had been backfilled with stone chippings. There was a secondary gravel feature which also appears to represent an attempt at drainage. At the north-eastern end of the trench there was an area of very humic clayey soil which represents the discharge from the down-slope end of the land-drain noted in Trenches 1&2. Immediately adjacent to the north-eastern end of this trench, there is a gully under the roadside wall which leads to the drain in the roadway.

Plate 6. Trench 3, land-drains, looking north-east, scales 1m

Trench 4 (Figure 3; Plate 7)

5.5 Trench 4 was located to investigate the geophysical anomaly running to the south-west. No archaeological features were recorded in this trench. It was noted however that the underlying mineral soil and stony deposits are higher in the stratigraphic sequence here, which may have caused the anomaly seen in the geophysical survey. It should also be noted that this geophysical anomaly was located very close to a gateway into the area of the proposed development and it is possible that farm traffic through this gateway has created the anomaly.

Plate 7. Trench 4, looking south-east, scales 1m

Trench 5 (Figure 3; Plate 8)

5.6 Trench 5 was located to investigate the geophysical anomaly running to the south-west. As with Trench 4 no archaeological features were recorded in this trench, although it was noted that the underlying mineral soil and stony deposits are higher in the stratigraphic sequence here which may have caused the anomaly seen in the geophysical survey. Interestingly in both Trenches 4&5 the anomalies run down slope to the east and would appear to probably be part of the natural draining of the site.

5.7 No other archaeological finds or features were encountered during the evaluation.

Plate 8. Trench 5, looking north-west, scales 1m

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 From the results described above, it can be seen that the site of the proposed development does not contain any archaeological remains. The various anomalies identified on the geophysical survey could all be seen to be either man-made or natural drainage features. The most obvious feature was the repair ceramic land-drain that had been backfilled with angular stone blocks. The back-fill of this drain produced the only finds from the evaluation – late 19th/early 20th century ceramics

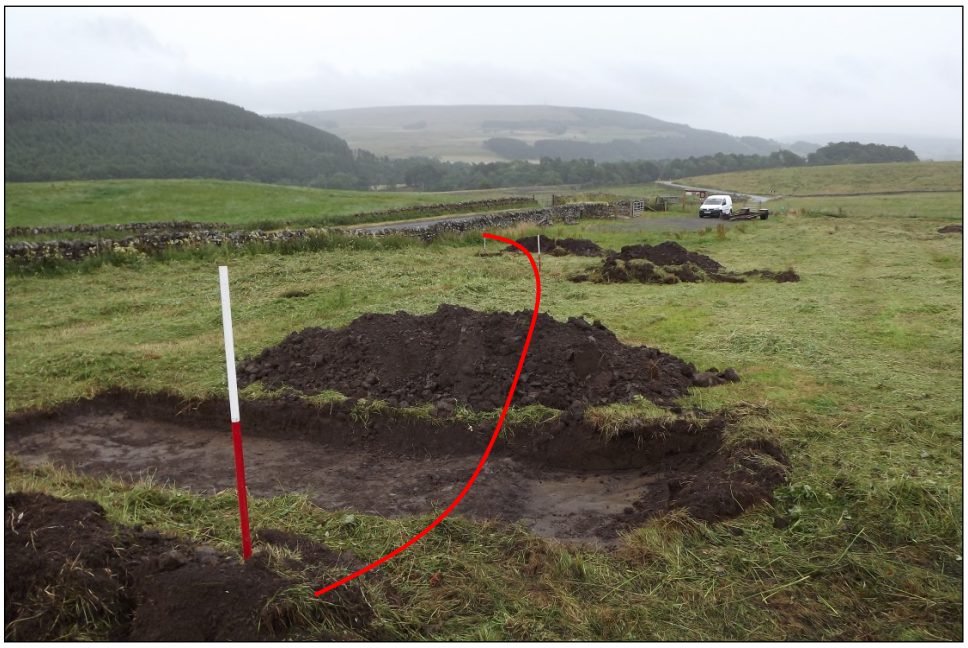

Plate 9. Trenches 1-3 showing line of the land-drain, looking SE, scales 1m

6.2 No further archaeological work is recommended in the site of the proposed development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elaine Edgar for inviting me to undertake the project and to also thank John Edgar for the grass cutting and Paul for his cheerful machine work.

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