

## VI

Excavations carried out in January and June 2003 at Stowell Street,  
Newcastle upon Tyne*Sophia Adams*

## SUMMARY

*The archaeological evaluation and excavation conducted by AOC Archaeology Group revealed a sequence of archaeological deposits and features dating from the late medieval period to the nineteenth century. The site appears to have been an open area just to the east of the town wall and on the edge of the Lam Burn during the late medieval period. It became incorporated within garden plots, which were probably part of the Blackfriars land by the early post-medieval period. A building was constructed on the site by 1830 and this was extant until the latter half of the twentieth century.*

earliest features dating to, at the latest, the medieval period. The finds were consistent with those expected to be present in a medieval to post-medieval urban context including pottery, animal bone, clay pipe fragments and pieces of ceramic building material. The low quantity of finds suggests that the main domestic middens were outside the excavation area. This report is presented as a continuous narrative incorporating a number of specialist finds reports, which form part of the site archive. The complete archive will be deposited with the Museum of Antiquities, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. All of the historic maps mentioned in the text can be viewed at Northumberland Record Office.

## INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation and excavation was conducted by AOC Archaeology Group (AOC 2003) in the car park to the rear of the Co-op store on Stowell Street, central Newcastle, National Grid Reference NZ 424484 564319, on behalf of the North East & Cumbrian Co-op (fig. 1). During the evaluation four 5 m by 5 m trenches (Trenches 1–4) were excavated, with only Trenches 1 and 2, excavated in the upper car parking area, revealing deposits of archaeological significance. Trenches 3 and 4 excavated in the lower car parking area revealed only modern structural remains truncating the natural clay. Any earlier features had been destroyed by modern construction. In light of this information, a further excavation trench (Trench 5), measuring 9 m by 7 m, was located in the upper area. Trenches 1, 2 and 5 contained a similar sequence of deposits, with the

## MEDIEVAL

The natural geological deposit at the base of the trenches was greyish brown gravelly clay. In Trench 5 the natural sloped down towards the north. This was in the direction of the original location of the Lam Burn which ran along the approximate line of Darn Crook before it was later culverted. The slope may have formed the south bank of the burn and this suggests that the banks originally sloped gradually down to the stream.

The earliest dateable features and layers were from the medieval period. The earliest feature appeared to be the remains of an east-west aligned sandstone drain [1011] found in Trench 1. This was dated to the late fourteenth century based on pottery sherds from the thirteenth to late fourteenth century found within the fill of the construction cut [1012]. The known structures in the vicinity at this time

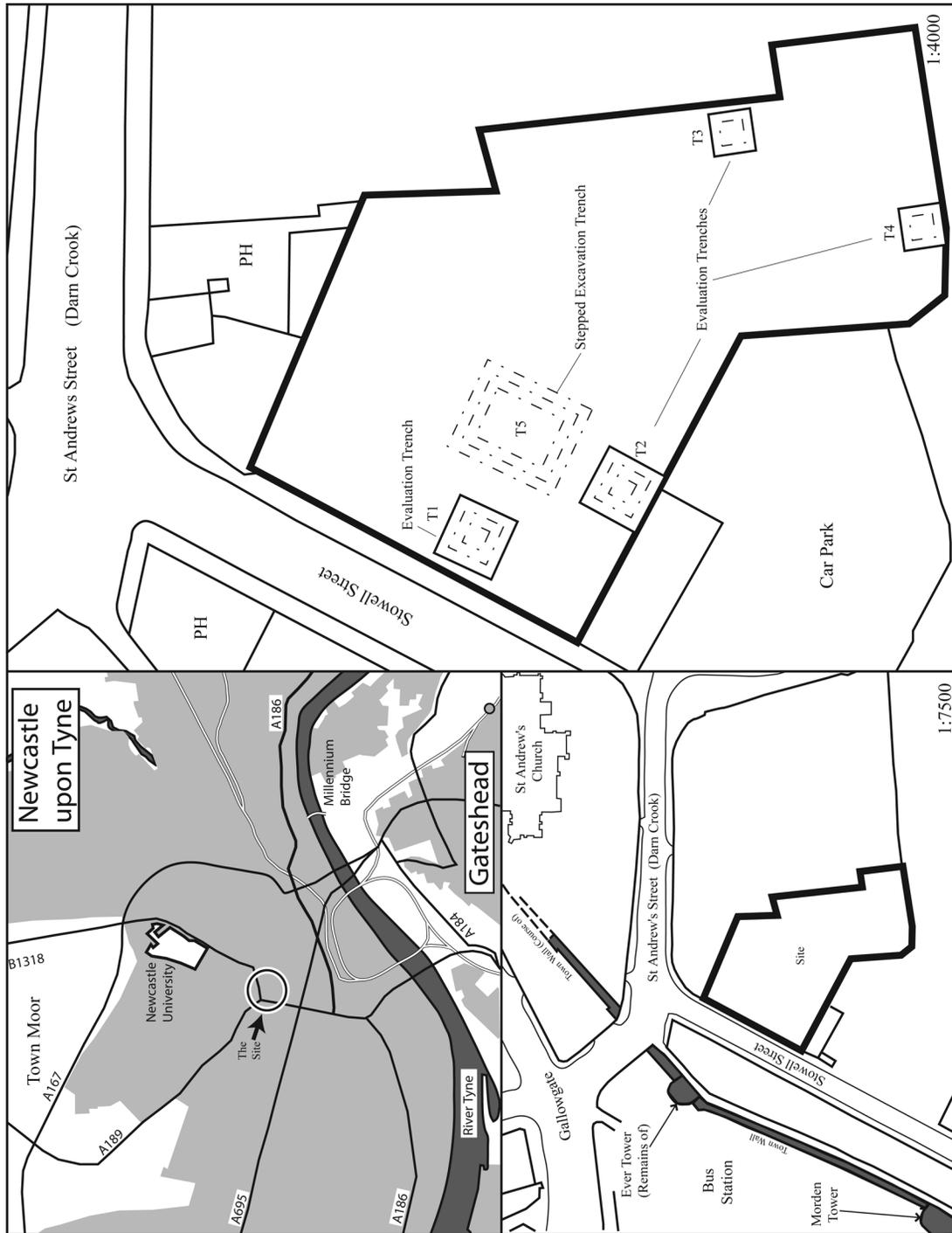


Fig. 1 Stowell Street site and trench location maps.

were Blackfriars to the south, St Andrew's church to the north and the town wall to the west. It is possible that the drain may relate to the town wall considering its alignment but this could not be confirmed within the boundaries of this site.

Cutting the natural clay in Trench 5, southeast of Trench 1, were a few small features that contained no dateable finds. From the stratigraphical location we may deduce that they were, at the latest, medieval in date. However it is possible that these were the only surviving remains of earlier activity within the site.

Overlying these undated features in Trench 5 was a cess-rich silty clay layer (5028) filling the incline towards the Lam Burn. It contained fragments of late medieval or possibly Tudor bricks; an early medieval iron socketed and barbed arrowhead and sherds of various pottery vessels, including jugs and jars, dating from the thirteenth century up to the later fourteenth or fifteenth century. This dump of settlement debris and cess indicated either a narrowing of the stream or at least the building up of the banks, perhaps to protect the area from flooding during the late medieval period. The deposit was cut by two rubbish pits [5036 and 5040], one possibly containing industrial waste (5035) and a small oval pit [5048] and possible posthole [5038]. The finds from these features indicate the land was being used in the late medieval period for waste disposal perhaps next to a temporary structure. This activity must have taken place fairly soon after the deposition of layer (5028).

At around the same time as layer (5028) was deposited, three phases of dumping took place in the area of Trench 1. The lowest of these was a sandy silt (1010), which contained a few undiagnostic medieval pottery sherds. The top of this layer was at approximately the same level as the top of (5028). It may therefore have been part of the same process of developing the bank of the Lam Burn. Overlying (1010) were two organic-rich layers possibly reflecting further dumping activity or perhaps the start of a horticultural land use associated with the gardens of Blackfriars.

## POST-MEDIEVAL

Cutting the top of the medieval layers in Trench 5 was an open ditch [5033] that was perhaps used as a drain and then backfilled in the seventeenth century. Two enclosed drains [5027 and 5029] were constructed across the area of Trench 5 overlying the earlier ditch [5033] (fig. 2). Although not parallel, they both ran in the approximate direction of the Lam Burn. Drain [5027] was brick built and originally supported a narrow boundary wall. Drain [5029] had a sandstone slab base and a roof supported by bricks. The remains of an east-west aligned sandstone culvert were also found in Trench 2 within layer (2012). Both the Trench 5 drains and the drain in Trench 2 were covered by garden soil. The organic content and even distribution of the few pottery sherds, clay pipe fragments and occasional butchered animal bones within these layers is suggestive of well-tilled garden soils. The finds spanned the thirteenth to eighteenth century together with a single (possibly Roman) brick. Gardens in this area were probably part of the Blackfriars land and are illustrated on Speed's Map of 1610 and James Corbridge's map from 1723-4. It is possible that lines marked in this area on Hutton's Plan of 1770 represent these drains. On this map the boundary wall constructed on top of drain [5027] appears to be marked running approximately north-south along the eastern edge of two garden plots up to Darn Crook. The boundary wall was demolished during the late eighteenth century, perhaps to create larger garden plots. The drains were probably required for transporting waste and water from buildings that must have existed to the south and southwest of the excavation area (namely Blackfriars) into the Lam Burn to the north. No drains were found in Trench 1 but after a period of silting, possibly as a result of flooding, garden soils built up in this area.

The garden soil layers were sealed by clay levelling layers. Cutting into the top of the clay levelling in Trenches 2 and 5 were two sandstone block walls (fig. 3). These foundation walls were probably parts of the same building

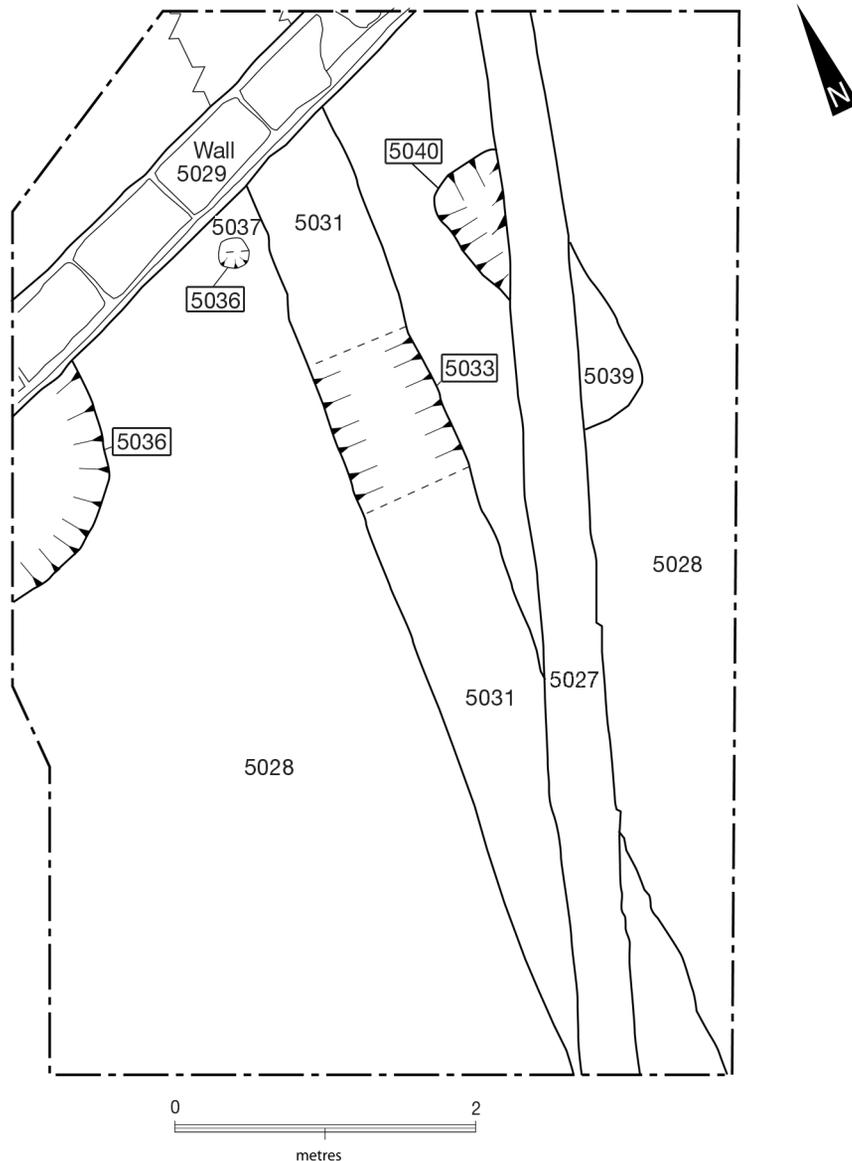


Fig. 2 Trench 5. Late medieval and early post-medieval features (1:50).

based on their similar structure and height. Wall [2009] was aligned approximately north-south and wall [5015], which is clearly an external wall, was aligned east-west. A further sandstone block wall [5016] was found at the east section of Trench 5 abutting [5015]. This

was probably part of the [5014] structure. The fact that no walls were found in Trench 1 suggests the western extent of structure [5014] was somewhere between the two trenches and the land beyond was retained for horticultural use. When seen in plan, walls [5015], [5016] and

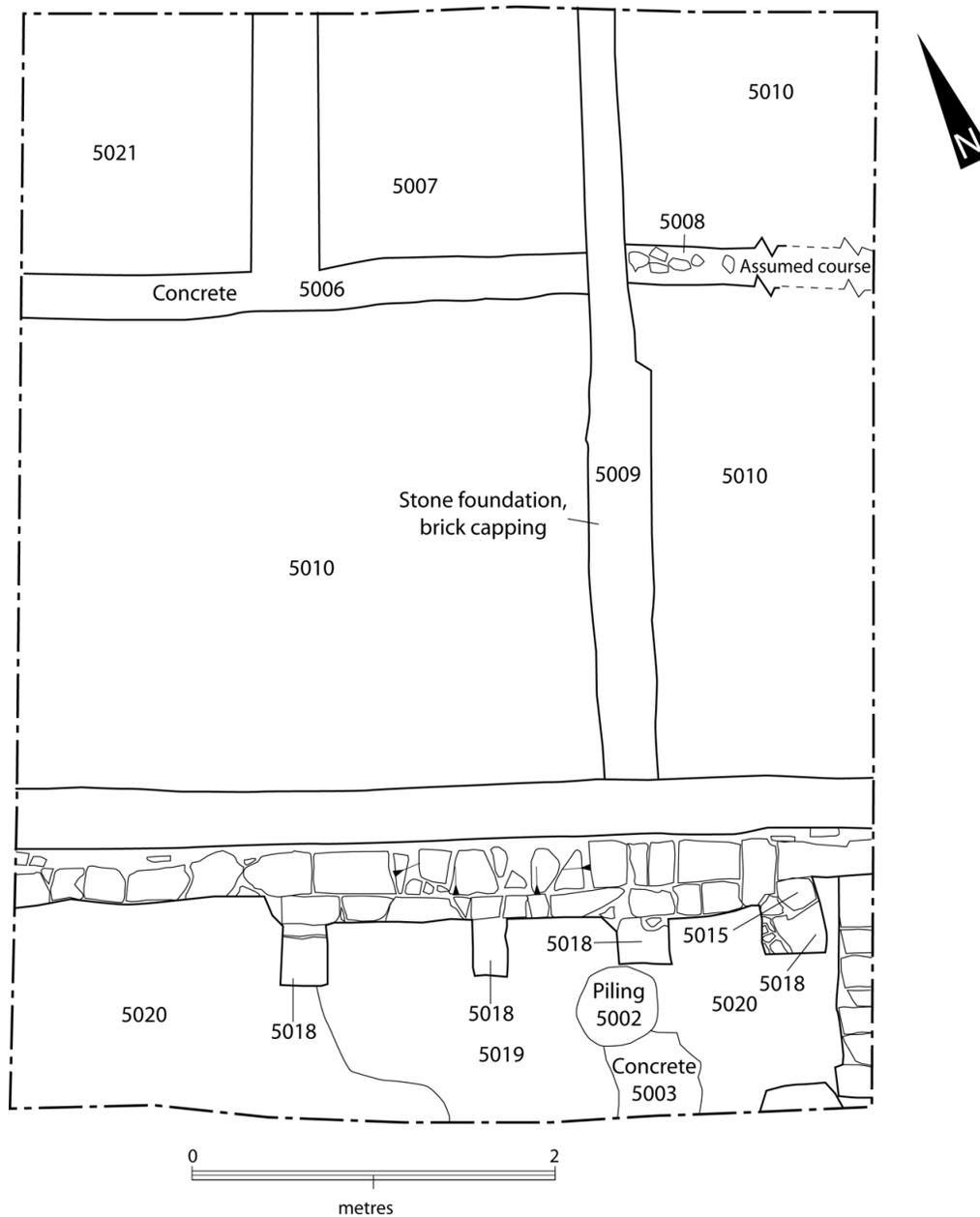


Fig. 3 Trench 5. Later post-medieval features (1:40).

[2009] seem to be identifiable as part of the western section of a building marked on Oliver's Plan of 1830. This building was located

to the east behind the Stowell Street properties and west of a horticultural land plot. The main body of the building appears to be constructed

north to south with two narrow extensions from either end towards the east. The property is still visible on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1861 to the west of the timber yard, although the outline has there been simplified for ease of illustration. The Ordnance Survey Map of 1951 shows that the west side of the building has retained much of its original shape but the east side has been filled in to create warehouses. The Stowell Street properties in this area had been demolished by 1951. The nineteenth century building may have been partly constructed from blocks of sandstone left over from the demolition of a section of the town wall at the time of the construction of Stowell Street. The brick-built properties fronting Stowell Street were constructed contemporary with the street in 1824.

#### MODERN

From the top of the walls in Trenches 2 and 5 and sealing the garden soils in Trench 1 were layers of modern demolition debris. In Trench 2 this was covered by a yard and in Trench 5 concrete foundations, services and a tiled floor were built on the area. One concrete and brick foundation wall [5012] was built against the remains of [5014] (fig. 3). The development of the [5014] structure into warehouses by the time of the 1951 Ordnance Survey map may have been achieved through strengthening the

structure with modern, deeper, concrete foundations of which [5012] was a part. The whole site was eventually flattened and covered with hardcore and tarmac to construct the Co-op car park.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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