

Uncovering a Georgian murder scene: the excavation of a Northumberland quilter's cottage

John Castling and Clara Woolford

SUMMARY

In September 2015, an archaeological excavation was undertaken by Beamish Museum to identify remains of a cottage known as 'Homer's House', near Warden, Northumberland. The cottage had previously been occupied by Joseph Hedley, a professional quilter who was murdered in 1826. These works were commissioned as part of the 'Remaking Beamish' project, funded by the Heritage Lottery. The excavation succeeded in identifying three of the building's four walls, its internal flagstone flooring and brick-built fireplace, a detailed sequence of contexts relating to the cottage's demolition, and a substantial number of artefacts. The work will form the basis of a recreation of the cottage at Beamish Museum and also provides an excellent understanding of the archaeological remains of one of the best recorded eighteenth-century small vernacular dwellings in the region. The full report for the excavation will be deposited with Northumberland County Council in due course.

INTRODUCTION

THE SITE IS LOCATED adjacent to Homer's Lane, near Warden, within the scrub woodland along the eastern edge of a large ploughed field on private land, centred at NY 91118 68360, and approximately 62 m above sea level.

The nearest settlements are Walwick Grange, just less than 1 km to the NNE, and High Warden 750 m to the south. The North Tyne passes the site approximately 200 m to the north, before bending east and then running south c. 400 m to the east of the site, a route that appears to have been unchanged since the mid-nineteenth century. The ground between the site and the river slopes gradually across the arable floodplain. To the west of the site the ground rises steeply across arable land towards the summit of Warden Hill, which is dominated by the Iron Age hillfort 850 m to the southeast of the site. A small Romano-British settlement overlies the north-western corner of this hillfort,¹ whilst the route of the Stanegate runs through the next field to the north. A geophysics survey of sections to the north and centre of the field containing the site (known locally as the 'coffin' field due to its shape), conducted in September 2014 as part of Tyne & Wear Museums' 'Wall Quest' project showed no significant archaeological features (Young, 2016).

In the early nineteenth-century the cottage identified as 'Homer's House' on the First Edition Ordnance Survey 1/2500 plan of 1863 was occupied by Joseph Hedley, a professional quilter. The cottage was destroyed in 1872, and although there is little to indicate where it stood, it was recorded in both plan and elevation sketches in 1826 (fig. 1).

This unusually detailed record of such a small, vernacular cottage was due to the brutal murder of the elderly Joseph Hedley (also known as 'Joe') on 3rd Jan 1826. His murder was never solved, despite making national news, and a substantial reward being posted.

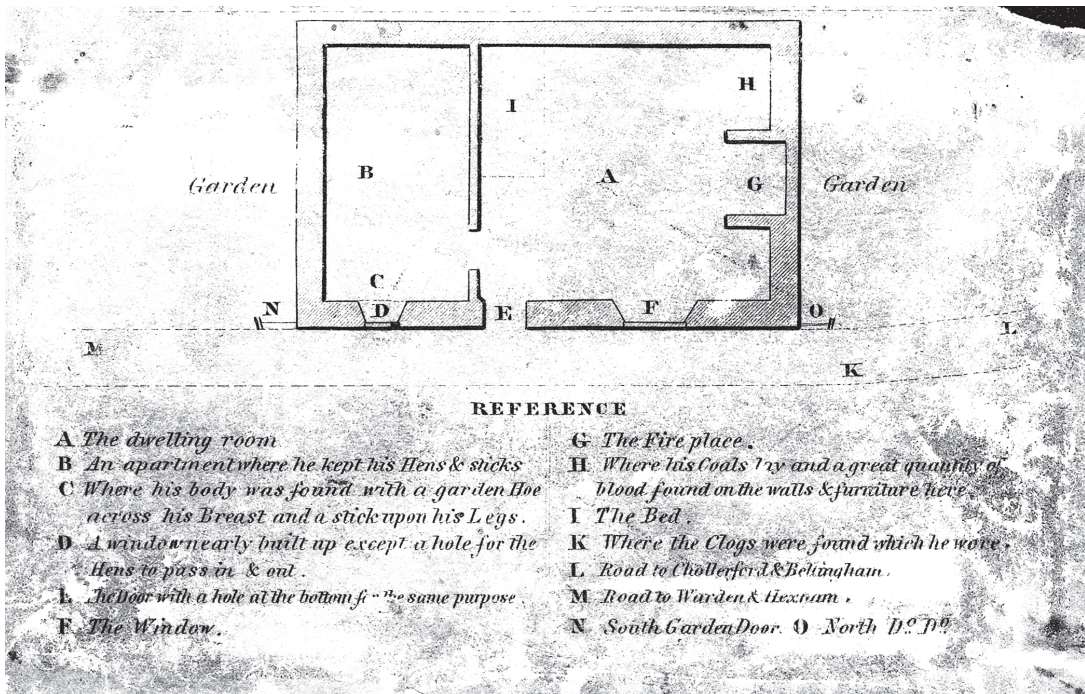
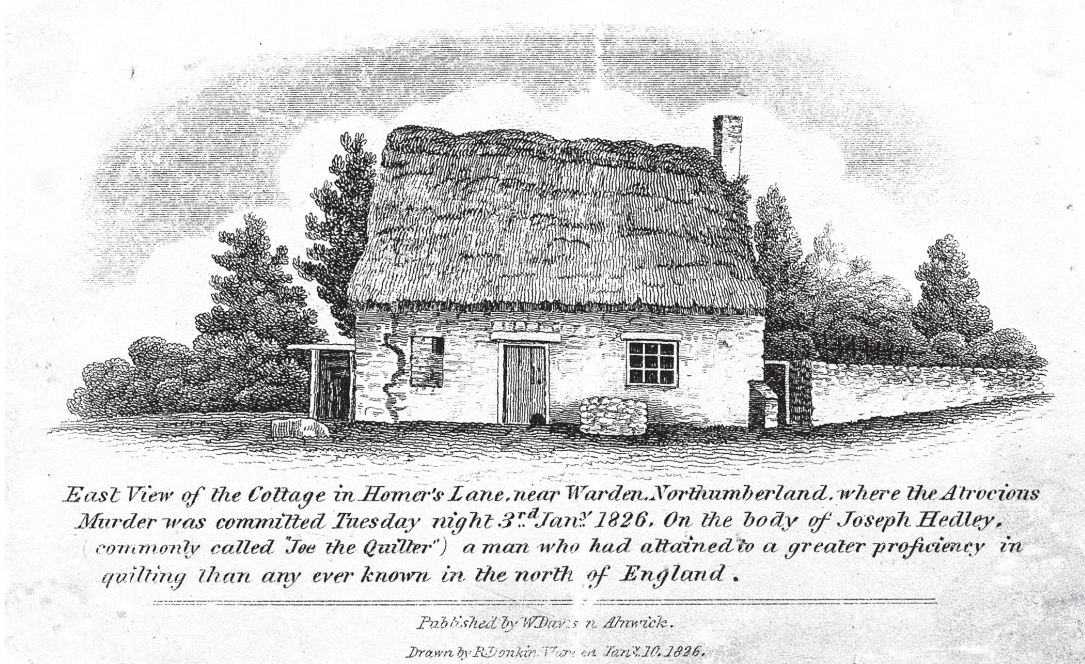


Fig. 1 Davison postcard (front and reverse) released at the time of Joe's murder.

The cottage was subsequently inhabited by at least three families or individuals: George Kirsop, a stone mason in 1828 (Parson and White, 1828, p.631), the Lawrence family, who feature on the 1841 and 1851 census returns, and the Routledge family, who are present on the 1861 census. The cottage was allegedly 'pulled down' in 1872, although the exact nature of the demolition and the condition of the building prior to this was not recorded.

The site has not been used since the cottage's demolition, and while the field above it has subsequently been ploughed — moving large field stones onto the site — the presence of large oak trees have protected it from ploughing and there has been little other disturbance besides vegetation.

In September 2014 an initial investigation was carried out by Beamish Museum to establish the exact location of the site, in advance of the full excavation that this report addresses.

The subsequent full investigation in September 2015 contributes to the research criteria relating to vernacular architecture and early industry of the post-medieval period set out in the 2006 North-East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment (Petts and Gerrard, 2006). It also adds to the discussion of the emergence of Proto-Industry in the region (Houston and Snell, 1984), and how small cottage industries contributed to larger developments further down the Tyne Valley.

Additionally it will form the basis of a planned recreation of the cottage to be located within the late Georgian landscape at Beamish Museum. The exhibit housed in the recreated cottage will seek to tell the story of Joe and the way of life he represents to the wide demographic that makes up the 700,000 visitors Beamish Museum attracts annually. It is intended that original architectural material recovered during the excavation will be incorporated into the recreation.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE RELATING TO THE COTTAGE AND THE STORY OF JOE THE QUILTER

Joseph Hedley was a renowned quilter, whose work was reputedly sent as far away as Ireland and America. However, it was his gruesome murder in 1826 that made him nationally famous. A remarkable outcry at its brutality spawned several pamphlets, which include plans of the murder scene, a tragic ballad, an auction notice advertising the sale of Joe's possessions, and even a rewards notice issued by Robert Peel, the then Home Secretary. This astonishing collection of documents, held across two collections at Beamish Museum and Woodhorn Museum, provide an extraordinary record of the life of an ordinary working class man and his home.

Joe is said to have 'lived [in Homer's House] from his infancy' (Scott, 1887, p. 221), and the parish records show that when he was buried on Jan 10th 1826 at Warden by the Curate G. Richmond, he was aged 76. This perhaps suggests that the cottage was built by 1750. As a working adult, Joe became well known for a type of border pattern that often occurred on his quilts, which became known as 'Old Joe's Chain' (Allan, 2007, p. 41). Beamish only has one quilt in its collections that is alleged to have been made by Joe, with a convincing provenance. It is a now incomplete, white cotton quilt, with a central star motif and a variation of 'Old Joe's Chain' around its edge. According to Beamish's records it was made in approximately 1820 and purchased directly from Joe by the English family.²

According to a ballad written by an A. Wright just after Joe's death, as well as a much later entry in *The Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend*, the quilter was known for

regularly taking in travellers, eloping couples and pedlars, as well as perhaps conspiring with smugglers, so his cottage became recognised as a local refuge.³ It was believed that Joe was murdered by a thief masquerading as one of these people in need, who killed him for the supposed wealth he had accumulated from his quilting business (Stephens, 1826). As Joe was an elderly craft-worker who was receiving parish relief at the time of his death, it is unlikely he really was secretly rich. However, the details of his horrific and seemingly amateurish murder (with a garden hoe being one of the reputed murder weapons) were reported widely and the mystery of his unsolved murder entered local legend.

Amongst the graphic descriptions of the murder in the contemporary pamphlets that were produced soon after the event, are details about and plans of his cottage, largely intended to create a sensationalised depiction of the murder scene. In particular, a pamphlet printed by W. Davison of Alnwick that includes an elevation and plan of the cottage, etched by R. Donkin, gives an invaluable insight into the rough layout of the building. It suggests that internally the cottage was divided into a main domestic room and a storage room/animal shelter. The front (and only) door is shown as leading immediately into the main room, in which is depicted a recessed fireplace. This plan also gives additional details, including that the bed was located in the south-west corner of the main room and that Joe kept his coals to the west of the chimney breast. Additionally, it denotes small, un-bordered garden areas at either side of the cottage. Another plan of the cottage exists and was printed by *The Newcastle Chronicle* in January 1826. It corresponds with the Davison plan in that it shows that the cottage was divided into two rooms, and that the main living room had a fireplace against the north gable. Its spatial proportions also correlate with the Davison plan. Whether either illustrator actually visited the cottage for themselves is unknown, but conceivably, Davison's illustrator Donkin could have visited it, as Davison was very productive, deeply interested in recording the events of Northumberland, and, importantly, known to employ a regional network of illustrators, including Thomas Bewick.

The elevation by Donkin of the cottage shows a very vernacular building constructed from loosely coursed stone rubble, with a central plank door (with a small hole cut out of it on the bottom corner, which was presumably to give access to the hens and cat that according to the ballad shared his house), a fixed nine pane window to the north and a smaller blocked up window to the south, indicating the division of the cottage's interior into a living space and store room. There is a substantial crack to the south that runs the height of the building and small buttress to the north, suggesting subsidence, presumably due to a lack of foundations (as would have been usual for a building of that age). The steepness of the pitch of the roof suggests that it would have probably been thatched with heather. Heather roofs need a pitch of about 50–60 degrees to throw off the rain and snow, compared to the 40–45 degrees required for straw thatch. Joe's cottage was located in front of an open stretch of moorland that was probably filled with heather, making it an obvious choice for its roof covering. Laying the heather thatch authentically will be a particular challenge during the recreation of the cottage.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EXCAVATION

The objectives of the excavation were as follows:

- To accurately identify the location of the cottage using documentary evidence and the material included in field boundaries.
- To determine whether any buried remains of the cottage were identifiable.
- To, if possible, establish the accuracy and authenticity of the recordings of the building from around the time of the 1826 murder.
- To expand understanding of how the multiple functions as both homes and proto-industrial workshops of such small vernacular buildings can be identified in their archaeological remains.
- To retain and remove any appropriate material, for use in the reconstruction of the cottage at Beamish Museum.

THE PROCESS OF THE EXCAVATION

The excavation was largely hand dug, with a machine being used only to clear the surface boulders and vegetation. The site was excavated until the building remains had been recovered, alongside enough archaeological material to allow the other objectives to be accomplished. Excavation and recording was conducted stratigraphically, with single context recording being undertaken. An extension to the north of the initial area of excavation was added in order to identify both the length of the cottage, and recover datable material from the deposits beyond the northern gable. The size of the excavated area was determined by physical limitation in the form of a field boundary and tree root systems, and an estimation of the length of the building based on Davison's 1826 plan.

The work was undertaken over 21 days during September with weather conditions being mostly dry and mild. The site is sheltered from the wind, but the trees which overhang it are not, and it is therefore very easy to see how the cottage might have become buried beneath accumulated leaf matter over the past 150 years. There was very little in the way of turf, the site having been covered by large field stones and boulders covered with moss, between which nettles and other vegetation had grown up. This covering was sloped severely towards the field boundary — with the depth at the roadside edge of the trench being less than 100 mm, while on the field edge it was up to 2 m deep. The sandy silt of the sub-soil was uniform and extended across the whole site beneath these boulders, ranging from 50 mm to 200 mm in depth. This was heavily disturbed by the root matter and field clearance stone on top of it, and was set directly on top of archaeological features.

THE EXCAVATED AREA AND INITIAL INTERPRETATION

The features identified composed of three of the four walls of the cottage, several areas of flagstone flooring internally, remains of a brick-built fireplace, several contexts relating to the cottage's destruction, and a substantial amount of pottery from the garden areas to the north and south of the building (fig. 2). The fourth wall of the cottage and the eastern third of the building were outside the excavation's eastern section — formed by the field boundary wall. Where the features were related to the demolition layers there was little to define a discrete

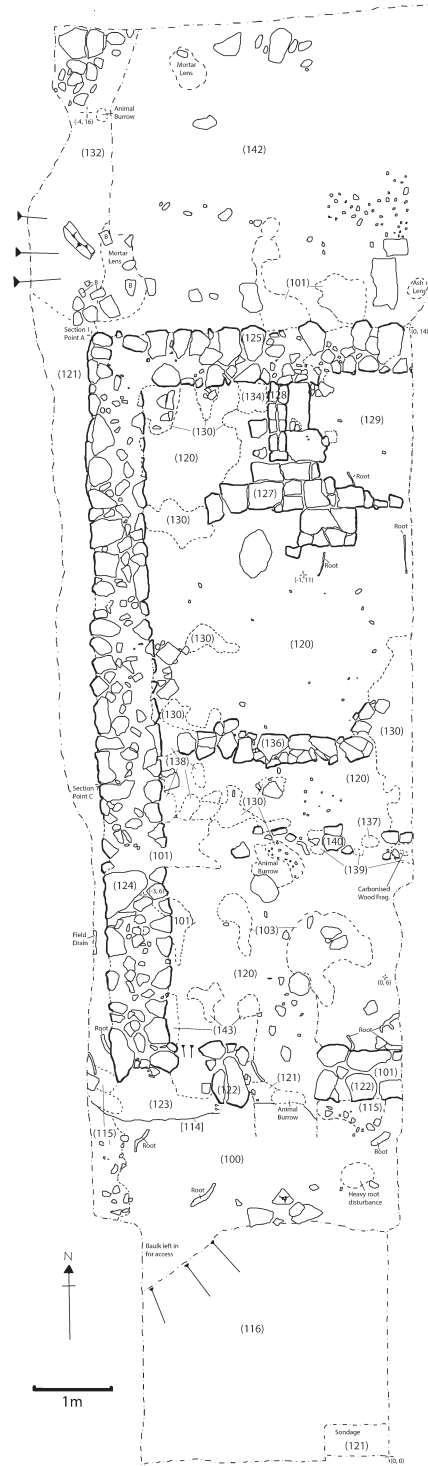


Fig. 2 Joe the Quilter's Cottage, excavation site plan showing excavated features (drawn by John Castling).

Phases	Features
Post-Demolition Phase	<i>Agricultural activity:</i> 115; 131; <i>Naturally accumulated material:</i> 100; 119; 123.
Demolition Phase	<i>Material from Wall Demolition:</i> 101; 105; 110; 113; 114; <i>Material from Chimney Demolition:</i> 126; 133; <i>Burnt Material:</i> 103; 138; 139; 143.
Occupation Phase	<i>South Garden:</i> 116; <i>North Garden:</i> 132.
Construction Phase	<i>Walls:</i> 122; 124; 125; <i>Fireplace:</i> 128; 129; 144; <i>Sub-floor:</i> 102; 120; 130; 134; 137; <i>Flagstones:</i> 127; 136; 140.

Fig. 3 Excavation phases and features.

edge between the overlying sub-soil and these features. The firm, brownish orange sandy clay natural was encountered at an average height of 61.20 m above sea level.

A total of 45 contexts were assigned, although a number of these were later combined with others. All the features were dated, by associated finds, to the post-medieval or modern periods, with no clear evidence of earlier activity being observed on the site. The features can be divided into four phases; a construction, occupation, demolition and post-demolition phase (fig. 3). A full description of each context and phase is available in the full excavation report.

Construction Phase

The most obvious features uncovered in the excavation were the walls of the cottage. The rear (west) wall was identified along its entire length (9.3 m), save for the southernmost stone on the return with the southern wall. In two sections along the outer skin of this wall there were two courses, which demonstrated the random rubble coursing of the structure. The lowest course of the northern gable end wall was fully identified between the rear wall and the existing field boundary at the eastern trench edge (a length of c. 2.6 m). A number of stones had been robbed from the southern wall, but the alignment was clear, and ran between the rear wall and the field boundary, c. 2.3 m in length. The walls were all of reasonably uniform width, being approximately 0.7 m wide and constructed of two skins with rubble fill and occasional larger stones acting as ties between the two skins. The blocks appeared to be mostly unmodified irregular sandstone field boulders that had occasionally been split or scarred by ploughing. They were loosely bonded, with a mortar containing dark black inclusions — suggesting that coal-dust or wood-ash may have been used as an aggregate. These inclusions were larger and more significant than would be expected from residual fuel ash remaining from the production of the lime mortar. There was no evidence of any foundations, with the stones having been laid upon the natural sub-soil directly beneath the eighteenth-century top-soil, with the sub-floor constituted of compacted natural material.

As well as the walls, the excavation uncovered a small pier of handmade bricks three complete and one incomplete course high. The lower two courses sat beneath the floor level of the cottage on a large, roughly cut flagstone beneath acting as a foot. These courses of brick

sit 1.524 m inside of the rear wall of the cottage, projecting from the north gable, in roughly the same position as the chimney breast is shown on the Davison plan, suggesting that they could be the remains of the west side of the chimney breast. The bricks themselves are laid as stretchers (bar the first and last brick of the top course, which are laid as headers) suggesting that the chimney breast walls were only ever two stretchers wide, therefore about 228 mm wide. On the Davison plan the sides of the chimney breast are indicated as being a similar width, further confirming that these uncovered bricks do relate to the chimney breast that was present at the time of Joe's occupation, rather than a later addition. These remains suggest an internally built brick chimney breast, which if it followed architectural convention, would have risen along the height of the gable wall, probably corbelling inwards as it reached the loft space. The brickwork of the chimney itself would have probably been ragged into the stonework of the gable end, as no tie-in was found at ground level.

Towards the northern end of the interior of the cottage was an area of sandstone flagstones, situated around the remaining courses of the brick wall of the fireplace. Inside the fireplace, where the grate would have been, there were no flagstones, but the sub-floor here showed no other signs of burning, and so presumably was covered by a hearth stone or a grate, which had been removed leaving no trace. The assumed date of the bricks (largely evidenced from their widths and composition) suggest that the opening would have contained an open grate built into stone or brick 'hobs' or 'cheeks' on either side (abutted to the inner sides of the chimney breast) rather than a free standing basket grate or a more sophisticated cooking range. In one flagstone, which sat just inside of west side of the chimney breast, were two small adjacent holes tarnished with an iron residue suggesting that they were once the sockets for a cooking crane. Given the footing on the base of the brick pier, the flags must have been laid later than construction of the chimney breast, although presumably only a short time after. The presence of a crane also allows the height of the fireplace lintel to be guessed (at around 1.3 m above the floor height) to allow for its use. It is assumed that when the house was in the process of being demolished, the grate and crane were removed for reuse elsewhere.

The flags were laid directly onto either the natural sub-floor below, or onto areas of mortar levelling. Some evidence of lime plastering and lime mortar was also visible on the inner face of the rear wall, suggesting that the cottage had a thin skim of lime mortar or a number of layers of accumulated lime wash on the internal faces.

Across the centre of the building was a line of small, broken flagstones which are interpreted as the remnants of a full flagged floor. Approximately 4 m north of the south wall ran an east-west line of small heavily cracked, irregular flagstones. It is likely that these formed the furthest row of flagstones from the hearth within the main room of the building.

Occupation Phase

In the area to the north and south of the building, which, on the nineteenth-century plans are identified as gardens, there was little in the way of stratified material, with the top-soil overlaying a very similar loose sandy silt that filled the full extent of both areas. Within these contexts were found a significant assemblage of ceramics (both pottery vessels and clay pipes), a number of items of metalwork, and other finds that are summarised below. At approximately 0.6 m both contexts became sterile, and so were not fully excavated. An exploratory sondage in the south-east corner of the excavated area revealed the depth of the

sandy silt context here, and confirmed that this sub-soil lay directly above the silty clay natural, which was encountered at a height of 61 m above sea level. Given the similarities of with the northern end of the trench, this stratigraphic sequence was extrapolated here too.

Demolition Phase

A number of features were identified relating to the cottage's demolition, which was said to have taken place in 1872. The clearest of these were observed as spreads of mortar that are interpreted as the material disturbed from the structure of the walls and trampled as they were demolished. A thin (20 mm) but distinct lens of sandy silt within this mortar, which represents material incorporated into the loose mortar during a single phase of demolition, illustrates the careful deconstruction of the walls in the 1870s. Several contexts of mortar spread were identified across the central and southern sections of the building that represent part of the wider demolition phase. These were stratigraphically above the burnt material discussed below and thereby indicate that any fire happened before the pulling down of the walls.

Running parallel to the southern wall was identified a probable robber cut that although heavily truncated by animal burrowing and root activity is nevertheless assumed to be responsible for the occasional absence of stones in the southern gable end, rather than there being any previously unknown doorway in this wall.

There were a number of areas of burnt material recorded. A third of the way from the inner skin of the southern wall was a linear spread of burnt material, interpreted as representing the remains of a timber partition wall indicated on Davison's 1826 plan. Within the carbonised organic material and ash was what appeared to be a burnt stake, *c.* 230 mm in length and *c.* 50 mm in diameter, alongside a small cylindrical fragment of carbonised timber (10 mm length, 5 mm diameter). These are interpreted as a stake and part of the woven lattice of a wattle and daub partition.

Wattle and daub was an almost free means of construction, which could be made using found materials, which Joe would have easily been able to get hold of. While its use as a significant construction material for exterior walls did not survive in the North East into the eighteenth-century (unlike in parts of the South and East Anglia),⁴ its use as a means of creating stud partitions probably did occur in poorer homes, but more comparative work needs to be done to fully confirm this.⁵ As the remains of the stake that was uncovered suggests that the uprights for the divide were socketed straight into the ground rather than into a floorplate or sill, it is likely that for ease of construction the top ends were jointed into the underside of the tie beam of a truss rather than into an independent header. If so, this indicates the position of one of the cottage's trusses.

On the south side of this partition there was no evidence of flagstones. The floor appears to have been of hard packed natural, although the burnt material upon it may represent a floor covering such as reed or textile matting. Alternatively it could indicate part of a burnt, collapsed mezzanine floor, or quite possibly both of these interpretations — analysis of the samples recovered may illuminate this. This apparent change in floor surface, shown by the absence of flagstone and levelling mortar in the southern half of the cottage, in addition to the evidence of a wattle and daub internal divide, suggests that the Davison plan showing the cottage's interior as being separated into a main living space and store is correct. Indeed, the spatial positioning of the divide seems to correspond with that indicated in the plan.

Towards the north of the cottage's interior were two brick and mortar filled silt contexts beside, and extending away from, the fireplace to the southwest. These contexts are interpreted as the remains of the collapsed chimney. Bricks from both have been analysed, and results are discussed below. This material was largely directly on top of the sub-floor, but did overlay some of the remaining flagstones — suggesting that, had flags been across the whole area, they had been removed prior to the collapse of the chimney and fireplace.

Post-Demolition Phase

Apart from the building-up of vegetation and some material having moved onto the site from higher ground during the agricultural use of the adjacent field, a closer inspection of the adjacent field boundary wall suggests that material from the cottage was reused in the construction of this wall. This wall runs along the edge of the modern road, overlying the southern edge of the cottage. At approximately the point where the cottage's south wall passes under the field boundary its material changes, and the boundary wall becomes far less evenly coursed, the blocks are less regular (resembling fieldstone) and it features a number of bricks. This continues along the length of the wall until approximately 10 m north of the cottage, where the walling type returns to well quarried material. It is suggested that in the process of constructing the wall from imported stone, the wall-builders came across rubble from the cottage partially buried or concealed by vegetation. Preferring to use this to bringing more stone, they incorporated it into their wall until the material ran out further along the lane, and removed what trace of the cottage may have been visible above ground.⁶

The location of the cottage as shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey plan is on a narrow strip of land between the road and the field boundary, which is also a township boundary — a typical location for a squatter's cottage (see discussion in the conclusion below). By the 1890s edition of the Ordnance Survey plan the cottage is not visible, and the field boundaries either side of the road have narrowed to their current positions, suggesting that either at the point of the cottage's demolition or in the subsequent two decades, the boundary was moved toward the road and the new wall constructed using material from the demolished building.

FINDS

The vast majority of finds recovered came from either the top-soil or one of the two 'garden' areas. Alongside the objects listed below, three fragments of flint, two pieces of metalworking slag, and several environmental samples were recovered, which will not be discussed here, but are described in the full excavation report.

In total, 170 fragments of clay pipe were recovered alongside 1246 sherds of pottery. These ceramics were distributed in a similar pattern to that of the whole assemblage (i.e. concentrations in the contexts in the south and north gardens, and the top-soil). Pottery sherds were passed through a 1.25 mm sieve to remove micro fragments, with the remaining assemblage of 718 sherds (total weight 3.298 kg) being examined by Lucy Anne Robinson of Pre-Construct Archaeology. The conclusions of this examination are summarised below, the full report can be found as an appendix of the full excavation report.

In addition, 209 individual iron nails were identified — they were generally either shorter than 80 mm in length and round in section (with a copper nail also meeting this criterion), or

longer than this and largely square in section. It is suggested that the former represent small furniture items and whereas the latter are more likely to be from structural timbers. Other iron objects that were not so corroded as to inhibit identification included a number of fragments of farming equipment and machinery, several horseshoes and boot heel plates, hafted gardening or farming tools, woodworking tools including a chisel and possible axe head, several knife blades and a spiked gutter bracket. However, given that the heather thatched roof would not have required a gutter, and following examples found at other vernacular cottages this is suspected to have been used to hold rotten timber door or window frames in position, probably at a date later than Joe's occupation.

Four pieces of lead were identified, three of which are waste off-cuts, with the other being a roughly made square of lead *c.* 40 mm² and *c.* 15 mm thick. A square hole has been crudely punched, off-centre, through the middle — presumably to create a hanging weight, the function of which is unknown.

An almost complete dark-green glass beer bottle was recovered from within the demolition mortar. The largest percentage of other glass was of flat, white-glass, presumably from window panes. A minimum number of six different thicknesses were identified, ranging from 1–3 mm. A further 139 fragments of white and coloured glass from a minimum of sixteen distinct vessels were recovered, but have not been the subject of detailed study.

The recovered bones, teeth and shell appear to represent small mammal including rodents, birds (most likely chickens) and medium sized mammals, most frequently sheep or goats. Interestingly no fish remains were identified. This may be due to the size of such bones making them unlikely to be recovered, but if it is a genuine pattern, is surprising given the proximity of the North Tyne. It is acknowledged that the presence of bone and teeth could be due to natural processes; however the inclusion of shell is, considering the inland location of the site, assumed to be deposited by human agency.

The majority of the building material is mentioned above in the description of the features that were identified. It is suggested that the better quality blocks that had not been previously removed during or following the cottage's destruction were incorporated into the field boundary wall, as discussed above. A possible remnant of this is indicated by the presence of one block, discovered amongst the rubble at the base of the northern gable wall, which had a square enough section to convincingly be Roman. Given the cottage's location close to Hadrian's Wall, other Roman blocks may have been used in the construction of the cottage.

As with all handmade bricks, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of those recovered from this site. The bricks are all roughly 230 mm × 112 mm × 60 mm (9" × 4³/₈" × 2³/₈"). Local building historian Richard Young suggests from his research into buildings around the Warden area, that they largely follow the pattern of brick sizes in the rest of the North East; in that bricks greater than 57.15 mm (2¹/₄") thick occur post 1740, those over 63.5 mm (2¹/₂") thick are after 1784 (when the brick tax was introduced and bricks increased in depth to avoid paying excess tax), and those greater than 76.2 mm (3") occur after 1840 (Richard Young, pers. comm., October 2015). This suggests that bricks from the chimney breast date to the latter two thirds of the eighteenth-century, which would place the construction of this fireplace within, or slightly before, Joe's lifetime.

SF066 – Ag alloy coin

From the top-soil above the fireplace a small, silver alloy four-pence coin (19 mm in diameter) was recovered. The faces, especially the edges, are worn. Consultation with numismatist Peter Ryder suggests it is a four-pence of William and Mary, with the crown form indicating a specifically Maundy issue, between 1689 and 1694 (Spink 3446) (Peter Ryder, pers. comm., September 2015). It is unclear how this coin came to be on the site, and its location within the top-soil sadly offers no further evidence.

SF004, SF006, SF014, SF120 and SF131 – Bone Buttons

Five bone buttons were recovered, all of which had four holes. They varied in size from 17 mm to 27 mm in diameter and 3 mm to 5 mm. The buttons do appear to be hand-made, with the holes being asymmetrical, but the button shape having been turned. On several of them, a slight indentation in the middle suggests where they may have been held by a lathe. Bone buttons were used in great quantities in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries before gradually being replaced by other materials (Peacock, 1978, p.56). Lathe turning would be the most usual method of making buttons in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and they would commonly be made from cattle shin bones (Hughes and Lester, 1981, p.8). These buttons were most likely to have been made by a local craftsman or a travelling peddler, and while four-holed buttons are not as common as five-holed ones (Epstien, 1968, p.25) there is little to identify these utilitarian buttons any further, although they offer an insight into the status of the site's inhabitants.

SF037 – Cu Alloy Name Plate

A small (50 mm in length) copper alloy plate was recovered from the top-soil outside of the rear of the building, between the rear wall and the western trench edge. The plate was slightly curved, and bore two protruding studs on the internal, rear curve. An extremely small amount of decayed fibrous material discovered alongside the artefact suggested it may have been set into a leather item, and it is thus interpreted as having been a saddle mount — given that these protrusions are ubiquitous on leather mounted horse-harnesses and saddles. The inscription of the front reads 'Revd R Clarke, Walwick' a presumed reference to the object's owner, and his possible residence at the nearby village of Walwick, 2.4 km to the north of the site. Further investigation revealed that the Revd R. Clarke is recorded in an 1826 account of Joe's life, and in fact saved his life in a snow storm of 1823, before the clergyman's death prior to 1826.⁷ Remarkably therefore, it seems that the name plate could belong to a personal acquaintance of Joe, tantalisingly offering the interpretation that the artefact could have been either bequeathed to Joe or lost on the site by Revd Clarke.

Examined Pottery Assemblage

The examined assemblage consisted of 718 sherds weighing 3.298 kg. Overall the assemblage was in considerably poor condition with 391 sherds identified as abraded and 7 sherds burnt. The average sherd weight within the assemblage is under 10 g, with many highly fragmented sherds indicating redeposition may have taken place. The majority of the ceramics are utilitarian, coarse wares used typical of a domestic assemblage of the late eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries. The most common date range is 1830–1850, after the date of Joe's death. The fabrics and forms indicate a relatively unpretentious, rural domestic lifestyle; though the few fragments of china and porcelain suggest the acquisition of one or two relatively high-quality items.

Comparison with Derwentcote Steel Workers Cottages

The examined assemblage of ceramics was compared with that recovered from the 2012 and 2013 excavations of Derwentcote Steel Workers Cottages (led by Dr Webster of Newcastle University), in the Derwent Valley near Rowlands' Gill, approximately 24 km to the South East of Homer's House. The two assemblages show remarkable similarities in terms of both fabrics and forms and are definitive examples of working class consumption in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Although the working classes would have had little disposable income, they were still purchasing, using and disposing of refined and decorative ceramics to some extent. However, it is the utilitarian coarsewares and functional vessels which dominate both assemblages, showing a higher regard for practicality and functionality over aesthetic.

CONCLUSIONS

The programme of excavation has convincingly accomplished four of the five objectives outlined above, given that the cottage was located, identified, recorded and removed. However, until a more complete analysis of the recovered assemblage of finds and samples is conducted, it remains difficult to add meaningfully to the understanding of how the multiple functions of both the living quarters and proto-industrial workshops of such small vernacular buildings can be identified in their archaeological remains. That being said, an interpreted sequence of occupation, demolition and abandonment for the site is now possible.

The first evidence of occupation is the construction of the cottage, essentially in its final form. This form and its location are extremely typical of a squatter's cottage. These tend to be located a reasonable distance from other dwellings, often sat right next to, or even encroaching into a road. In this case, the field boundary behind the cottage is also the boundary between the townships of High Warden and Walwick Grange, and Nether Warden. The linear plan, including the north and south gardens, is typical of a dwelling inserted on a narrow plot between the road and the property (in this case moorland) behind it (Ward, 2002). In many cases squatter's cottages can develop from a more temporary hut or shelter, but as mentioned above, there is no obvious evidence of earlier occupation than that within and after Joe's lifetime. The full form of the excavated cottage: constructed from loosely course field-stone with two small rooms internally, a flagged floor and brick-built chimney breast, corresponds with the contemporary 1826 plans and descriptions.

The occupation phase reveals a tantalising connection to the persons recorded in the story of Joseph Hedley's life — by the discovery of the Revd Clarke's name plate. Apart from this detail, the occupation phase is characterised by the finds assemblage recovered largely from the two gardens. This concentration suggests the majority of household rubbish was deposited here and the cursory identification these finds have received confirms the interpretation of the site as a lower-status rural and domestic one, with the recovered four-pence piece the only indicator of greater wealth.

The demolition phase of the cottage may have begun with a fire in the southern store-room, which possibly caused the collapse of a potential mezzanine, or alternatively with the removal of the furniture, objects and some flagstones. Following this activity, the chimney breast fell, deliberately or otherwise, into the cottage, and the walls were then stripped, with some building material removed. Subsequently the remaining building material was utilised in the construction of a new field boundary wall along the edge of the road. It is unclear whether these phases of demolition followed one another directly, or whether they took place at an interval of several years between the last known occupation in 1861, the 'pulling-down' of the cottage in 1872, and the clearance of the site and realignment of the field boundary undertaken before the revision of the Ordnance Survey plan conducted in 1892. Following the realignment of the field boundary, some ruinous stone may have remained visible into the early twentieth-century (see note 6), but hereafter vegetation and material from agricultural clearances in the adjacent field claimed the site.

The evidence uncovered during the excavation has given us an excellent grounding upon which to base the recreation of the cottage at Beamish Museum. The courses of masonry that were revealed have been recorded in situ and numbered, before being transported to Beamish. They have been reincorporated into the recreation of the cottage in, as far as possible, their former location on the original building. This recreation is, at time of writing, still under construction. The pottery sherds and other finds will help to inform curatorial decisions about what objects are displayed inside the recreated cottage. In terms of extrapolating the original size of the building, the positioning of the chimney breast provides a good indication that it accommodated a conventionally sized late eighteenth-century cooking grate which was positioned centrally in the room. Taking the length of the remains of the back wall and an estimation of the length of the gables from the positioning of the chimney breast, Joe's cottage would likely have had a footprint of approximately 6.7m × 10.3m (22' by 34'). Promisingly, this gives roughly the same proportions (despite a small increase in size) as an initial scaling of the 1826 Davison plan undertaken prior to the excavation, suggesting that such plans may well be a reliable resource.

The excavation confirms most of the details shown in this plan and elevation, through the discovery of the partition, flagstones and the brick wall of the chimney breast. A doorway was not found in the rear wall or the parts of the gables that were discovered, suggesting it was, as depicted, in the front wall. As stated previously, the plan gives additional details, including that the bed was located in the south west corner of the main room and that Joe kept his coals to the west of the chimney breast. Evidence of the former can be tentatively inferred from the presence of a distinct area of burning and ash here, but confirmation of this is impossible without further analysis of the samples taken.

The excavation has also given us a useful understanding of the archaeological remains left by a late eighteenth and nineteenth-century vernacular cottage. The low-status of the inhabitants that is known from documentary evidence can clearly be identified on the site, which shows that the relatively brief life of such a site can be reasonably accurately reconstructed by careful investigation.

The curatorial research undertaken prior to the construction of the recreated cottage was completed using comparative studies with other still standing, recorded or photographed buildings of a similar age and size, as well as speaking to architectural historians, local experts and craftspeople. It is hoped that the recreation will provide an opportunity to revitalise traditional methods of construction, including the creation of cruck-frame trusses

and the authentic thatching of the roof using heather and turf sods. The work undertaken to facilitate an accurate reconstruction of the cottage, much of which is included in the full excavation report allows further comparative study to be undertaken around this form of vernacular dwelling.

The detailed analysis of the ceramics also allows a more comprehensive understanding of eighteenth and nineteenth vernacular dwellings to be undertaken. The limited comparison with the Derwentcote Steel Workers Cottages suggests that there are strong similarities between the pottery used by working class people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries despite the different types of work the occupants of these small vernacular cottages are known to have undertaken. Derwentcote housed industrial workers, whereas Homer's House is known to have been home to craftspeople such as Joe and subsequently a stone mason, as well as agricultural labourers, a gardener and a hawker — all of which are more strongly associated with a rural than an industrial community. The similarities between rural and industrial pottery assemblages is not unexpected considering the small domestic scale of many 'proto-industries' in the region during this period (Houston and Snell, 1984). Such a strong correlation between comparable dwellings requires further evidence to allow exploration of the similarities between domestic sites of this period. It is hoped that the excavation of Homer's House can add a significant example to the body of work available to those discussing the archaeological remains of vernacular working-class cottages.

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NOTES

¹ Historic England List Entry: Hillfort on Warden Hill, 1 km north-west of High Warden <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1011421> (accessed 3 November 2015).

² See Beamish Museum's object file, accession number [1979-442].

³ See Tyne and Wear Archives record [DX891/41] *Joe the Quilter, Verses ...* by A. Wright, 1826.

⁴ Due to the North East's abundance of building stone, lesser provision of timber and harsher climate.

⁵ The next step would be to confirm the use of wattle and daub in a contemporary building in the area.

⁶ The date of this boundary wall is unknown, although it obviously post-dates the demolition of the cottage and is recorded in its present alignment on the 1892 revision of the Ordnance Survey plan. The object information file for the quilt that is said to have been made by Joe in the Beamish Collections includes an account from 1979, in which the donor recalls having seen the cottage as a ruinous pile of stones in his childhood in the early twentieth-century. It is possible that some demolished stone remained uncovered for several decades, or that the memory is recorded by a donor in his late nineties who is remembering the early 1890s, but more likely that he mistakenly interpreted the accumulations of stone from field clearance as the remains of the cottage.

⁷ See Northumberland Archives record [SANT/BEQ/o6/o6/o2/o8e-f]. *The Hermit of Warden, or, the Tragedy of Homer's Lane. Containing some anecdotes of the life and character of Joseph Hedley, commonly called Joe the Quilter; and a particular account of his most horrible murder, committed Tuesday, January 3 1826* by M. Barker.

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John Castling and Clara Woolford, The Auckland Project, Vinovium House, Saddler Street, Bishop Auckland, DL14 7BH.

john.castling@aucklandproject.org

clara.woolford@aucklandproject.org