

**Blenkinsopp Castle, Greenhead, Northumberland:
Archaeological evaluation**

Data Structure Report

On behalf of: Mike Simpson
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Greenhead
Brampton
Cumbria
CA8 7JS

National Grid Reference (NGR): NY66484 64607

AOC Archaeology Project No: 4912

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1 NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group on ground subject to redevelopment at Blenkinsopp Castle, Greenhead, Northumberland. This work was commissioned by Robert Muckle Solicitors, on behalf of the developer. The evaluation works were designed to satisfy the requirements of the local planning authority, as advised by Mr. Nick Best of the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) and are in accordance with the principles inherent in PPG 16.
- 1.2 The objective of the archaeological works was to evaluate the archaeological potential of the development area. The work was carried out during December 2005 and conducted according to the terms of a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (AOC 2005a) which was agreed by NCCCT and approved by the planning authority. The evaluation consisted of five trenches totalling of 80 m² representing a total representative sample of 2% of the development area.
- 1.3 The western part of the site containing Trenches 3, 4 and 5 displayed truncation of the natural soil profile with modern made ground directly overlying the natural geology. However a buried soil of unknown date was seen to exist below made ground in the eastern part of the site within Trenches 1 and 2 leading to the conclusion that there is the potential for buried archaeological deposits

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 AOC Archaeology Group was commissioned by Robert Muckle Solicitors to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site of a proposed development of chalets and a visitor centre with associated parking on the site of a former drift mine. The southern half of the development impacts upon the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Blenkinsopp Castle. Currently the site is occupied by upstanding buildings relating to the former colliery. Apart from the castle a *Desk Based Assessment* (AOC 2005b) failed to identify any other sites of known archaeological significance within the development area. However a number of sites were located within the immediate environs of the site ranging from the prehistoric to the post-medieval and industrial periods. Together with the close proximity of the World Heritage site of Hadrian's Wall the possibility of unknown buried remains within the development area is high.

2.2 Site location

- 2.2.1 The proposed development site is centred on NGR: NY 66484 64607 (Fig. 1) It is bounded to the north by the A69 road and two existing properties. Blenkinsopp Castle to the south is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and to the

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west and the east are the remains of the drift mine complex. The development area covers an area of approximately 0.384 ha.

2.3 Site Geology and Topography

2.3.1 The underlying solid geology of the site comprises carboniferous limestone, shale and sandstone. The overlying drift geology consists of head and till with boulder clay and peat common (Jarvis et al 1984, 5).

2.3.2 The site lies on the southern slopes of a river valley and has undergone much landscaping during the 19th and 20th centuries. The western side of the site has been extensively terraced with a large revetment wall in place. The eastern side has a less amount of terracing with a very steep slope immediately behind the present standing building at the northern edge of the development area. The south-east of the site is close to the original mine entrance and has been much disturbed with associated landscaping.

2.4 Archaeological and historical background

2.4.1 Prehistoric (10000 BC - AD 43)

2.4.1.1 Whilst there are numerous examples of prehistoric activity from Northumberland there are no known sites present within the development area and only a single find spot present within the DBA study area.

2.4.2 Roman (AD 43-410)

2.4.2.1 The development area lies very close to the World Heritage site of Hadrian's Wall. The Hadrian's Wall Military Zone extends as far south as the railway that runs close to the northern edge of the development area. The development area itself contains no known Roman archaeology. However a Roman Road named the 'Maiden Way' passes within 100 m of the eastern edge of the development area. Numerous Roman finds are attributed to the 1 km study area with tombstones and milestones amongst the Roman artefacts recovered though none were recovered from the development area itself.

2.4.3 Early Medieval (AD 410-1000)

2.4.3.1 There are no documentary records that mention Blenkinsopp in this period.

2.4.4 Medieval (AD 1000-1600)

2.4.4.1 Blenkinsopp Castle first appears in historical archive sources in the early 14th century. In May 1340 Edward III granted a licence to crenellate the castle belonging to Thomas de Blenkinsopp. Further references to Blenkinsopp Castle occur throughout the 15th and 16th centuries in various surveys. The Blenkinsopp family moved residence from the castle during the latter 15th/early 16th centuries with a survey from 1541 stating that the castle was in decay.

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2.4.5 *Post-Medieval (AD 1600-1900)*

2.4.5.1 Blenkinsopp Castle continued in a poor state of preservation during the 17th and 18th centuries and in 1801 the ruins had become reused as a poor house. Development of the colliery and coal extraction led to the construction of a dwelling onto the eastern side of the castle ruins to house the colliery agent during the 1830's. Between 1877 and 1880 the castle was almost entirely rebuilt.

2.4.5.2 The 19th century saw a general expansion and modernisation of the colliery workings at Blenkinsopp. The Ordnance Survey maps show that by the mid 19th century much of the development area was encompassed by the colliery, with a number of buildings present within or adjacent to the proposed development area including 'coke ovens'.

2.4.6 *Modern (post-1900)*

2.4.6.1 The Victorian rebuilding of the castle saw it continue in use until in 1954 a fire destroyed much of the rebuilt castle. During the latter half of the 20th century parts of the remains were demolished as they were unsafe.

2.4.6.2 The coal workings within the development fell out of use with the main focus moving westwards. During the last half of the 20th century the works within the development area were brought back into use and new buildings such as those presently within the development area were built. During this period a large revetment wall along the western side of the development area was constructed. There was also a tunnel connecting the minehead outwith the development area to the south-east with the large flat area in the west of the development immediately north of the revetment wall. This tunnel has now been in-filled with concrete. It is clear that such extensive works associated with the mine workings have disturbed large parts of the development area.

2.4.6.3 The southern edge of the site behind the revetment wall has been subject to recent disturbance in the form ground breaking associated with the insertion of services. Extending from the building in the south-east corner of the site following behind the revetment wall there is a Council sewer which is still in use. This area of the site also has a live electricity service. Elsewhere extending from the site access point there are a number of overhead cables that lead south across the development area.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- i) determine the character, extent, quality, date and condition of any archaeologically significant remains within the development area;

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- ii)* Should highly significant archaeological deposits be discovered a mitigation strategy will be prepared, in consultation with Robert Muckle Solicitors and NCCCT.

4. METHOD

- 4.1 Five trenches (Fig. 1) on various orientations were dug covering an area of 80 m². Trench location varies from that in the Project Design due to the need to keep vehicular access areas free and to avoid large spoil heaps.
- 4.2 All trenches were excavated with a JCB type excavator fitted with a 1.6 m wide toothless ditching bucket. The overburden was removed in shallow spits until the first archaeological sediments, deposits, features or natural geology were encountered. All machine excavation was carried out under the direct supervision of an experienced field archaeologist.
- 4.3 The machine excavation was followed by hand cleaning where necessary. All trenches were recorded according to AOC Archaeology Group's standard practice.
- 4.4 The fieldwork was undertaken on Wednesday 14th December 2005 during dry but overcast conditions.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 The various data gathered from the evaluation are presented as a series of appendices:

- i)* Appendix 1 contains trench summaries;
- ii)* Appendix 2 contains the context register;
- ii)* Appendix 3 contains the photographic register;

5.2 Overview

- 5.2.1 No archaeological features or finds were seen or recovered from any of the trenches. Trenches 3, 4 and 5 all contained modern made ground containing modern brick rubble, coal and slag below the present surface of tarmac and concrete. These modern deposits directly overlay the natural drift geology indicating modern truncation removing any significant deposits.
- 5.2.2 Trenches 1 and 2 also contained made ground in the form of a thick layer of coal and slag debris likely to be associated with the mining operations. . In Trench 1, this layer (102) was 0.9 m thick while in Trench 2, the corresponding layer, (202) was 0.7 m thick. However unlike the previous trenches a buried soil was seen to exist below this layer. (103 in trench 1 and 204 in trench 2) This soil had the form of dark brown sandy silt but no

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dateable finds were recovered. The natural drift geology was seen to exist directly below this buried soil.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 No significant features or finds were located by the archaeological evaluation. This was due to the truncation down to the natural drift geology in the northern part of the site. However the presence of the buried soil seen within the southern part of the site may indicate that features, finds and deposits may still exist in this area. This is dependent on the buried soil being of ancient origins and that it is not a recent deposit following truncation. The presence of the made ground above the buried soil, which is surely related to mining activity must give a *terminus ante quem* date for this deposit relating to the onset of mining activity in the 19th century.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that an archaeological watching brief is undertaken on all ground breaking works in the area of archaeological potential (Fig. 1) over eastern part of the site.

REFERENCES

- AOC 2005a. *Blenkinsopp Castle, Greenhead, Northumberland: Written Scheme of Investigation*. AOC Archaeology unpublished project design.
- AOC 2005b *Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment, Blenkinsopp Castle, Greenhead, Northumbria*. AOC Archaeology unpublished report.
- Department of Environment 1990, *Planning Policy Guidelines 16 on Archaeology and Planning, PPG 16*.
- Jarvis et al 1984,5, *Soils And Their Use In Northern England*, Soil Surveys of England and Wales, Bulletin No. 10, Harpenden.

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APPENDIX 1: TRENCH SUMMARIES

Trench 1

<i>Dimensions</i>	Length (m) 4.0	Width (m) 1.6	Depth (m) 2.85
<i>Total Area</i>	6.4m ²		
<i>Orientation</i>	NW-SE		
<i>Topsoil</i>	Depth 0.84	Tarmac and Made ground. Made ground of coal and shale debris	
<i>Subsoil</i>	Depth 1.98m	Moderately compacted, Dark brown, sandy silt. Buried soil	
<i>Natural</i>	Orange sand and gravels		
<i>Significant features</i>	None		
<i>Finds</i>	None		

Trench 2

<i>Dimensions</i>	Length (m) 5	Width (m) 1.6	Depth (m) 1.7
<i>Total Area</i>	8 m ²		
<i>Orientation</i>	NW-SE		
<i>Topsoil</i>	Depth 1m	Tarmac and Made ground. Made ground of coal and shale debris	
<i>Subsoil</i>	Depth 0.6m	Moderately compact dark brown sandy silt. Buried soil	
<i>Natural</i>	Orange/brown clayish sand and gravels		
<i>Significant features</i>	None		
<i>Finds</i>	None		

Trench 3

<i>Dimensions</i>	Length (m) 6	Width (m) 1.6	Depth (m) 1.0
<i>Total Area</i>	9.6 m ²		
<i>Orientation</i>	NNE-SSW		
<i>Topsoil</i>	Depth 0.4m	Tarmac and modern made ground. Made ground contains coal and brick fragments.	
<i>Subsoil</i>	Depth 0.2m	Compact grey clay silt. (Modern pot found within)	
<i>Natural</i>	Orange/yellow sand and gravels		
<i>Significant features</i>	None		
<i>Finds</i>	None		

Trench 4

<i>Dimensions</i>	Length (m) 15.0	Width (m) 2.0	Depth (m) 0.8
<i>Total Area</i>	24 m ²		
<i>Orientation</i>	NW-SE		
<i>Topsoil</i>	Depth 0.8m	Tarmac and modern made ground. Made ground contains much coal debris and some modern brick rubble	
<i>Subsoil</i>	Depth 0.5m	Compact grey clay, sandy silt	
<i>Natural</i>	Orange/yellow sand and gravel		
<i>Significant features</i>	None		
<i>Finds</i>	None		

Trench 5

<i>Dimensions</i>	Length (m) 20.0	Width (m) 1.6	Depth (m) 0.8-1.0
<i>Total Area</i>	32m ²		
<i>Orientation</i>	E-W		
<i>Topsoil</i>	Depth 0.8m	Tarmac made ground. Made ground contains much brick and concrete rubble	
<i>Subsoil</i>	Depth	None	
<i>Natural</i>	Orange/Yellow sand and gravel		
<i>Significant features</i>	None		
<i>Finds</i>	None		

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APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT REGISTER:

Context	Trench	Type	Description	Thickness (m)
100	All	Layer	Natural drift geology. Orange/Yellow sand and gravels	
101	1	Deposit	Tarmac and made ground. Above (102).	0.3
102	1	Deposit	Coal and shale debris. Similar to (202) in trench 2. Above (103).	0.84
103	1	Deposit	Moderately compact dark brown sandy silt. Frequent inclusions of small to medium rounded pebbles. Similar to (204) in trench 2. Above (100).	1.98
201	2	Deposit	Tarmac and made ground. Above (202).	0.25
202	2	Deposit	Coal and shale debris. Similar to (102) in trench 1. Above (203).	0.75
203	2	Deposit	Thin band of crushed stone. Undated. Above (204).	0.1
204	2	Deposit	Moderately compact dark brown sandy silt. Frequent inclusions of small to medium rounded pebbles. Similar to (103) in trench 1. Above (100)	0.6
301	3	Deposit	Tarmac and made ground. Made ground contains coal and modern brick rubble. (Above 302)	0.4
302	3	Deposit	Moderately compact grey clay silt. Contains modern pottery. Similar to (402) in trench 4. Above (100)	0.2
401	4	Deposit	Tarmac and made ground. Made ground contains coal and modern brick rubble. Above (402)	0.8
402	4	Deposit	Moderately compact grey clay sandy silt. Similar to (302) in trench 3. Above (100)	0.1
501	5	Deposit	Tarmac	0.2
502	5	Deposit	Made ground. Contains much coal and some modern brick debris. Above (100)	0.6

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APPENDIX 3: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Black and White Print Film No.1

Shot	Area	Description	From
1		Registration	
2		Registration	
3	Trench 1	General shot	NW
4	Trench 1	General shot	NW
5	Trench 2	General shot	SE
6	Trench 2	General shot	SE
7	Trench 3	General shot	SW
8	Trench 3	General shot	SW
9	Trench 4	General shot	NW
10	Trench 4	General shot	NW
11	Trench 5	General shot	W
12	Trench 5	General shot	W

Colour slide Film No.1

Shot	Area	Description	From
1		Registration	
2		Registration	
3	Trench 1	General shot	NW
4	Trench 1	General shot	NW
5	Trench 2	General shot	SE
6	Trench 2	General shot	SE
7	Trench 3	General shot	SW
8	Trench 3	General shot	SW
9	Trench 4	General shot	NW
10	Trench 4	General shot	NW
11	Trench 5	General shot	W
12	Trench 5	General shot	W

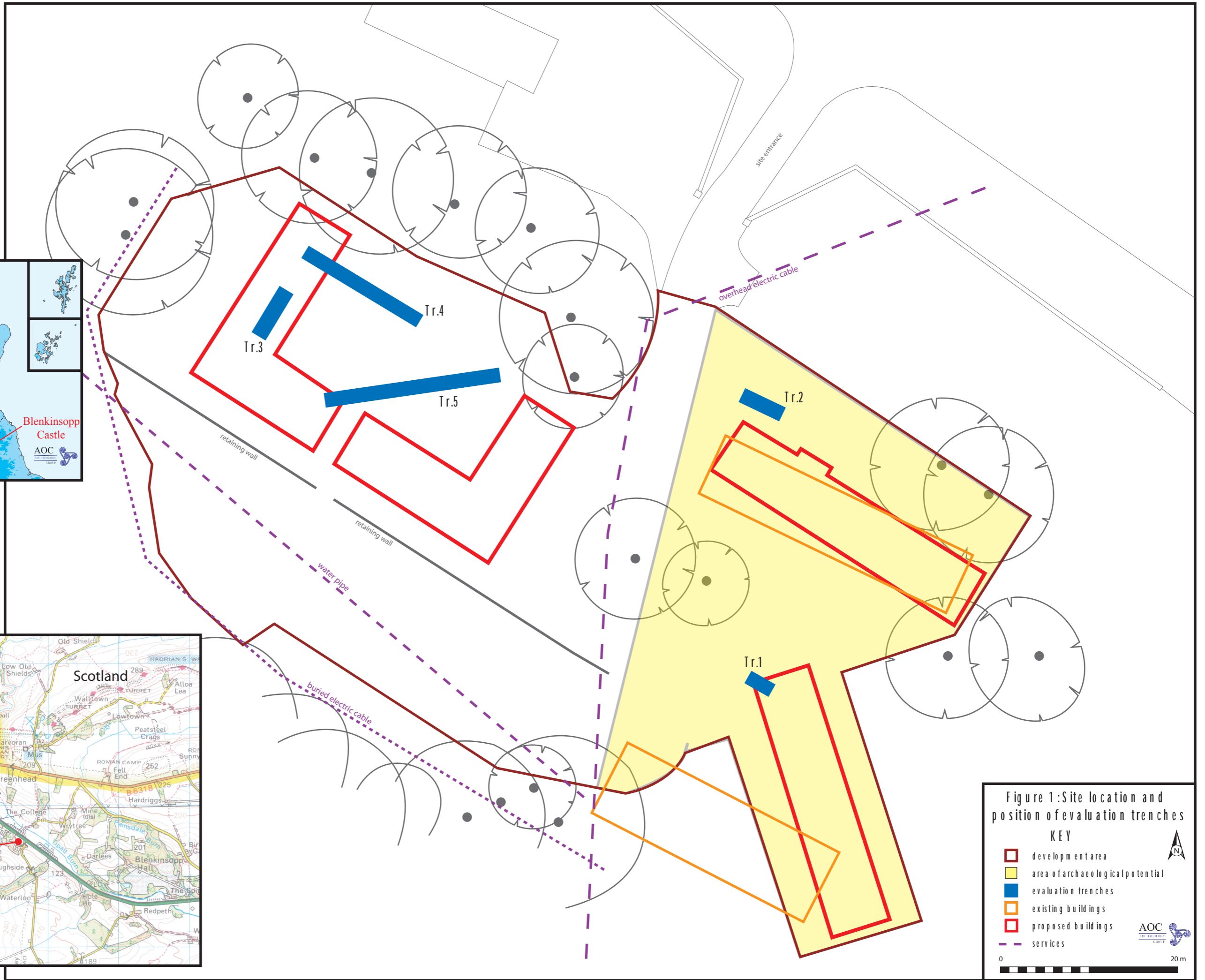
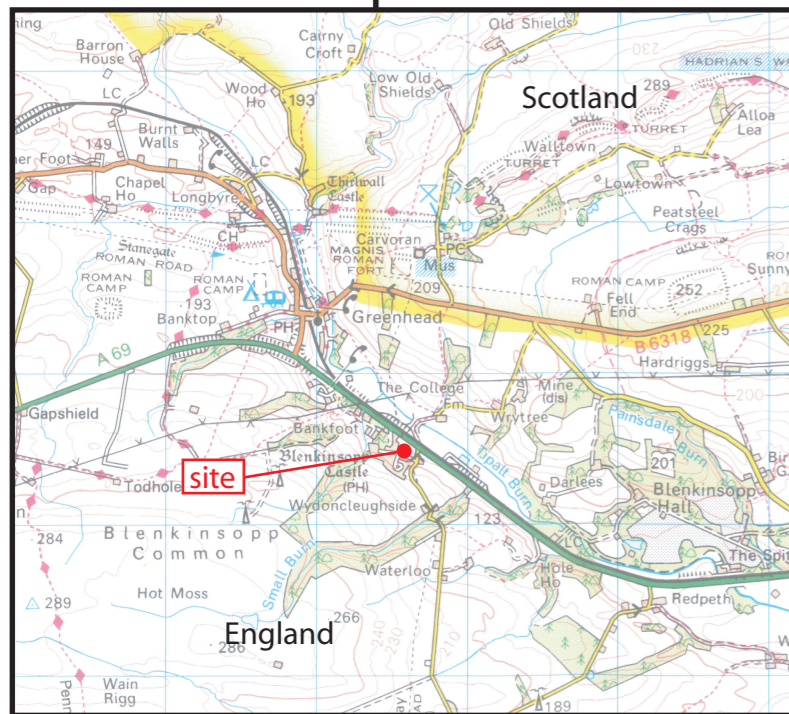
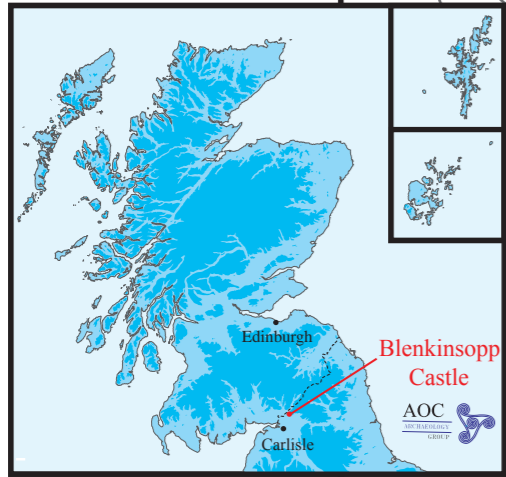


Figure 1: Site location and position of evaluation trenches

KEY

- development area
- area of archaeological potential
- evaluation trenches
- existing buildings
- proposed buildings
- services

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0 20 m