

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Dark Lane, Morpeth



Stone lined culvert containing a ceramic pipe

ARS Ltd Report 2012/17
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2012 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by Balfour Beatty to undertake an archaeological watching brief on Dark Lane, Morpeth. During excavations for gas mains improvements a stone lined culvert containing a large ceramic pipe for part of its length was discovered. The culvert was still in use and was therefore recorded and covered over before backfilling commenced. The drain is thought to date to the 19th century with the ceramic pipe being a later repair or diversion.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Location and Scope of Work

1.1.1. In February 2012 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by Balfour Beatty to undertake an archaeological watching brief on Dark Lane in Morpeth where a stone lined culvert containing a ceramic pipe for part of its length had been discovered in a trench during gas mains improvements.

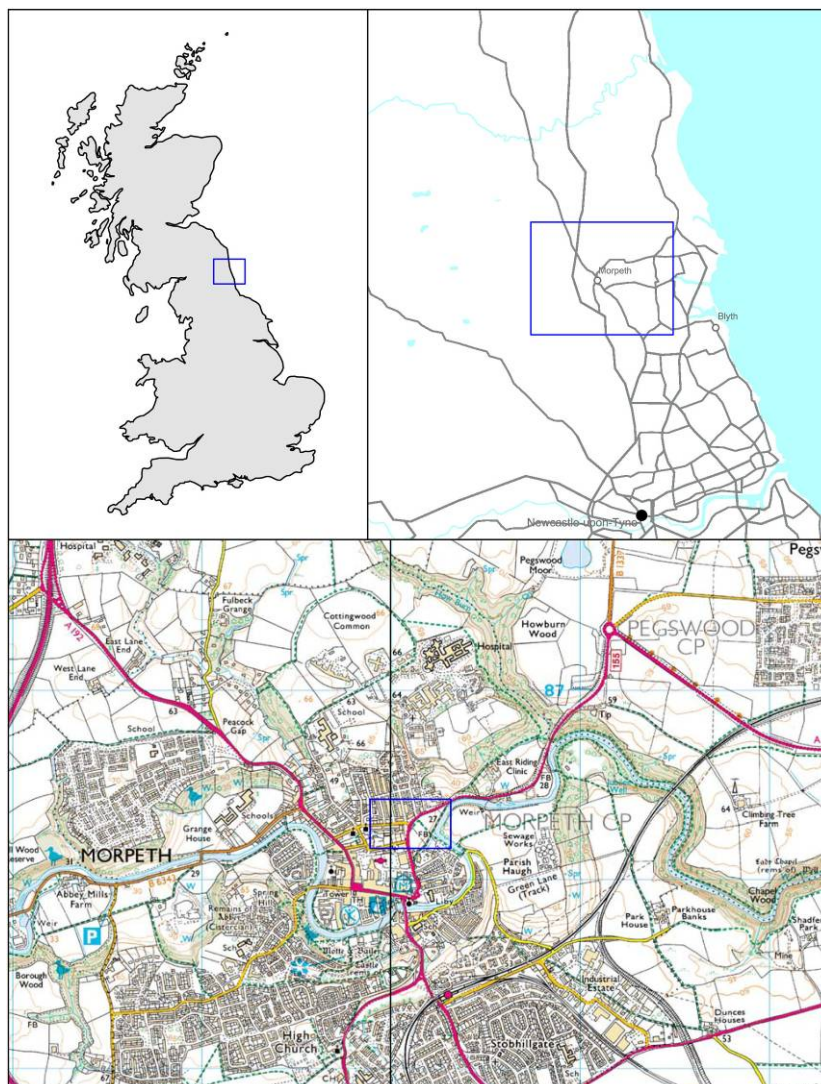


Fig. 1 Location of site.
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1.2. Geology

1.2.1. Dark Lane is centred at NZ 20101 86296. The solid geology of the area is Pennine lower coal measures formation consisting of mudstone, siltstone and sandstone. This is overlain by river terrace deposits consisting of gravel, sand and silt.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.2. An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on Dark Lane, Morpeth during groundworks for gas mains improvements. A trench measuring approximately 22.5m² was dug to a depth of approximately 1.2m to expose the gas main.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Early Prehistoric

3.1.1. In the 1820s, well-preserved waterlogged deposits were discovered in trenches that were cut for the construction of the gaol to the south of the Wansbeck (HER 11616; Hodgson 1832a, 60 cited in Northumberland County Council, 2009, 9). Included in the finds were deer horns, large trunks of oak, hazel branches and hazel nuts. There was no evidence that the deposits were created through human activity however this cannot be completely discounted.

3.1.2. Not much evidence for early prehistoric activity has been discovered in and around the area of Morpeth. A Neolithic Langdale stone axe was found south of the river (HER 11703), however the item may have simply been lost or discarded and its discovery does not prove that there was a settlement there. There is also a possible Bronze Age burial consisting of a cairn and a cist (HER 11122) on Haw Hill but again this does not indicate the presence of a settlement as the site may have purely been chosen for its prominence.

3.2. Later Prehistoric and Roman

3.2.1. Aerial photographs have shown evidence for possible Romano-British enclosures in the area surrounding Morpeth, however this evidence becomes thin closer to the town (Event Nos 245 and 13426). Excavations carried out in 1830 at Haw Hill by Woodman (Hodgson 1832a, 25 cited in Northumberland County Council, 2009, 10) located an earthwork that is thought to represent the remains of a prehistoric enclosure, probably dating to the late Iron Age or Romano-British period. Material culture providing evidence for Iron Age/Roman occupation of Morpeth is scarce and only consists of a copper-alloy button and loop fastener, probably from a horse harness, that were discovered by metal detectorists at Coopies Lane (Northumberland County Council, 2009, 10; HER 11562).

3.3. Medieval

3.3.1. There is no archaeological or documentary evidence for pre-Conquest occupation at Morpeth. The earliest evidence for a settlement at Morpeth is from 1080 when William I granted the barony of Morpeth to one of his followers, William de Merlay. The evidence is in the form of an earthwork castle on Haw Hill. It is believed that the castle was built by de Merlay after he acquired the barony. It is not certain when settlement began to the north of the River Wansbeck but it was probably before 1199 when a charter to hold a regular market was granted to the de Merlays.

3.3.2. Morpeth was burnt in 1216 when King John was marching against the rebellious northern barons. The Melrose Chronicle provides an account of the battles and the destruction that was inflicted on the town (Hodgson 1832a, 117 cited in Northumberland County Council, 2009, 8). Possibly soon after 1216, another castle was built on a site close to Haw Hill. While both the castle and the church were located on the south side of the river, almost all residential settlement on this side disappeared and reappeared on the north bank that was reached by a two arched stone bridge. The three main streets in Morpeth, Bridge Street, Oldgate and Newgate all radiated from the Market Place and remains the main streets of the town to this day. Although Morpeth has expanded, its historic core highlights its Medieval origins (Northumberland County Council, 2009, 8).

3.3.3. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries there was little development of the town and the castle suffered extensive damage in 1644 from cannon fire during the Civil War siege. In 1689, fire destroyed a large number of properties and many were rebuilt in stone.

3.4. Post Medieval

3.4.1. Morpeth developed an important role as a livestock market in the late Medieval/Post-Medieval period as it served the majority of the surrounding rural areas. Cattle and other livestock were droved to the town from Scotland and Northumberland where they were sold on. Morpeth's reputation as a livestock market was well known as Samuel Simpson, writing his *Compleat English Traveller* in 1746, described Morpeth's cattle market as 'the greatest for live cattle excepting Smithfield' (Northumberland County Council, 2009, 9). Its location on the Great North Road also meant that Morpeth became an important stop for coaches travelling along the route. Both the cattle market and its location along the busy coach route meant that there was a demand for more inns however Morpeth never became a successful industrial town as its tanning and cloth industries declined and practically disappeared throughout the first half of the 19th century (Northumberland County Council, 2009, 9). Post-Medieval Morpeth would not have looked too different from the town during the late Medieval period as growth halted and the population froze at around 4000. The livestock market of Morpeth declined and Newcastle's railway allowed it to become the new regional market. Most recently, Morpeth has become an important administrative centre for the county but also a popular place to live.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The trench on Dark Lane was dug through turf and topsoil (001) that had a depth of 0.7m. The topsoil was a mid brown clayey silt with a fine texture and was sitting above a layer of tarmac from a previous road surface (002). Underneath the tarmac was a layer consisting of cobbles and bricks (003) with a depth of 0.25m. Discovered in the eastern side of the trench was a stone lined culvert which, for part of its length, contained a large brown ceramic pipe. The culvert was capped by large, roughly squared, yellow sandstone blocks with an average size of 0.65m x 0.5m x 0.2m. More yellow sandstone blocks, measuring on average 0.38m x 0.15m x 0.18m, lined the sides of the culvert (005) (fig.5). The stones had been roughly faced and were laid with a stretcher bond. A large ceramic pipe (006) (fig.6) ran along part of the length of the culvert,

presumably where it had been repaired or diverted at some point in the past. This was evidenced by the fact that the stones of the culvert seemed to have been disturbed and replaced where the ceramic pipe was inserted. The pipe then continued beyond the limit of the excavation on a different alignment to that of the original sandstone culvert structure.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. The stone lined culvert containing the ceramic pipe that was discovered in the trench on Dark Lane was still in use and had fresh water running through it. The original culvert is thought to date to the 19th century, judging by the facing of the stones, while the ceramic pipe that is thought to be a repair or diversion probably dates to the early 20th century.

6. PUBLICITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT

6.1. Any publicity will be handled by the client.

6.2. Archaeological Research Services Ltd will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act (1988).

7. STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY

7.1 All statements and opinions contained within this report arising from the works undertaken are offered in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

8.1. Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved in this project, in particular Lee Convery of Balfour Beatty and Nick Best of Northumberland County Council.

9. REFERENCES

Northumberland County Council, 2009. *Morpeth, Northumberland Extensive Urban Survey*

Websites

British Geological Survey

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>

Figure 2:
A plan of Dark Lane and a plan of
the trench showing the location of
archaeological features

Key:

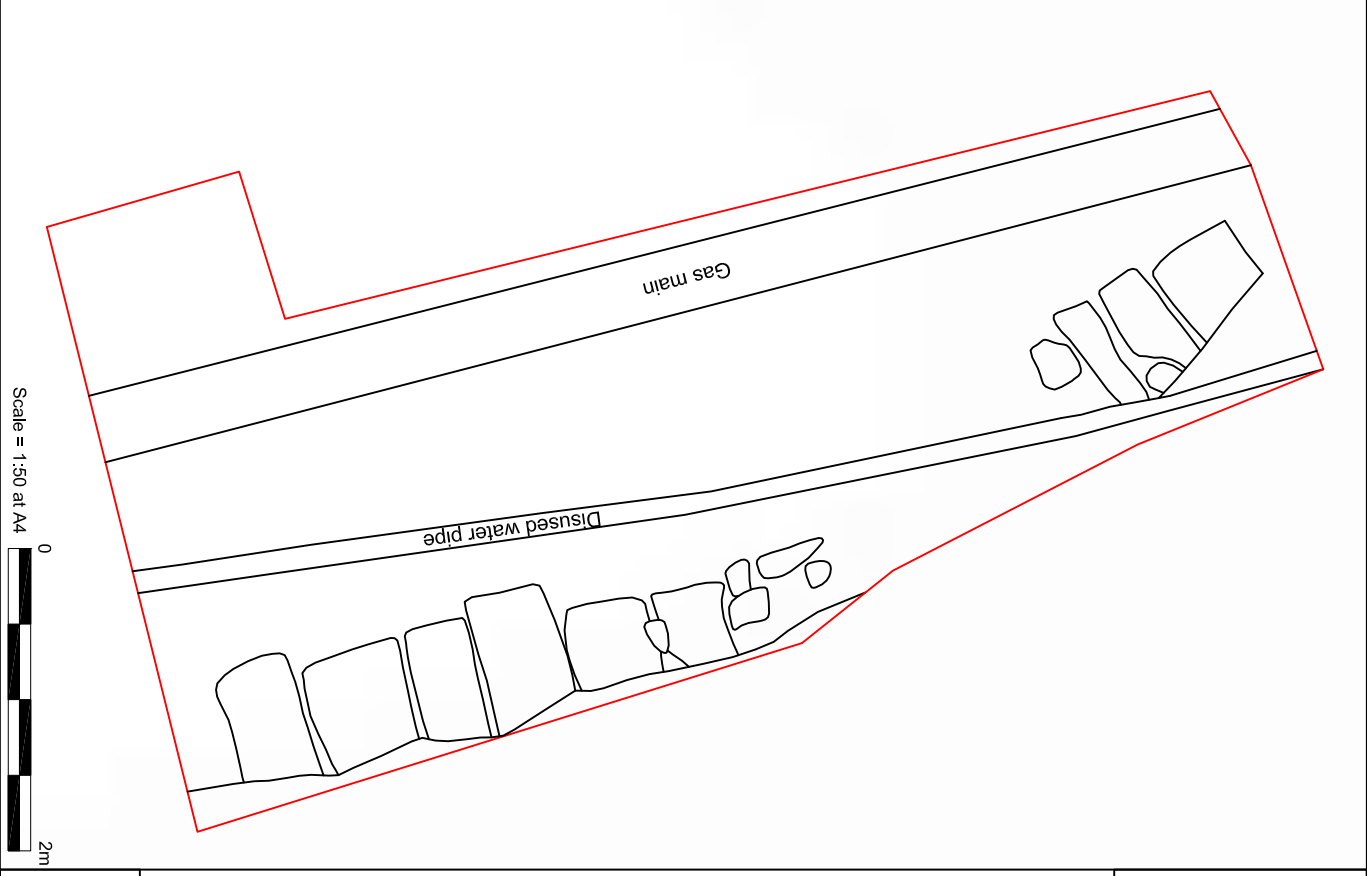
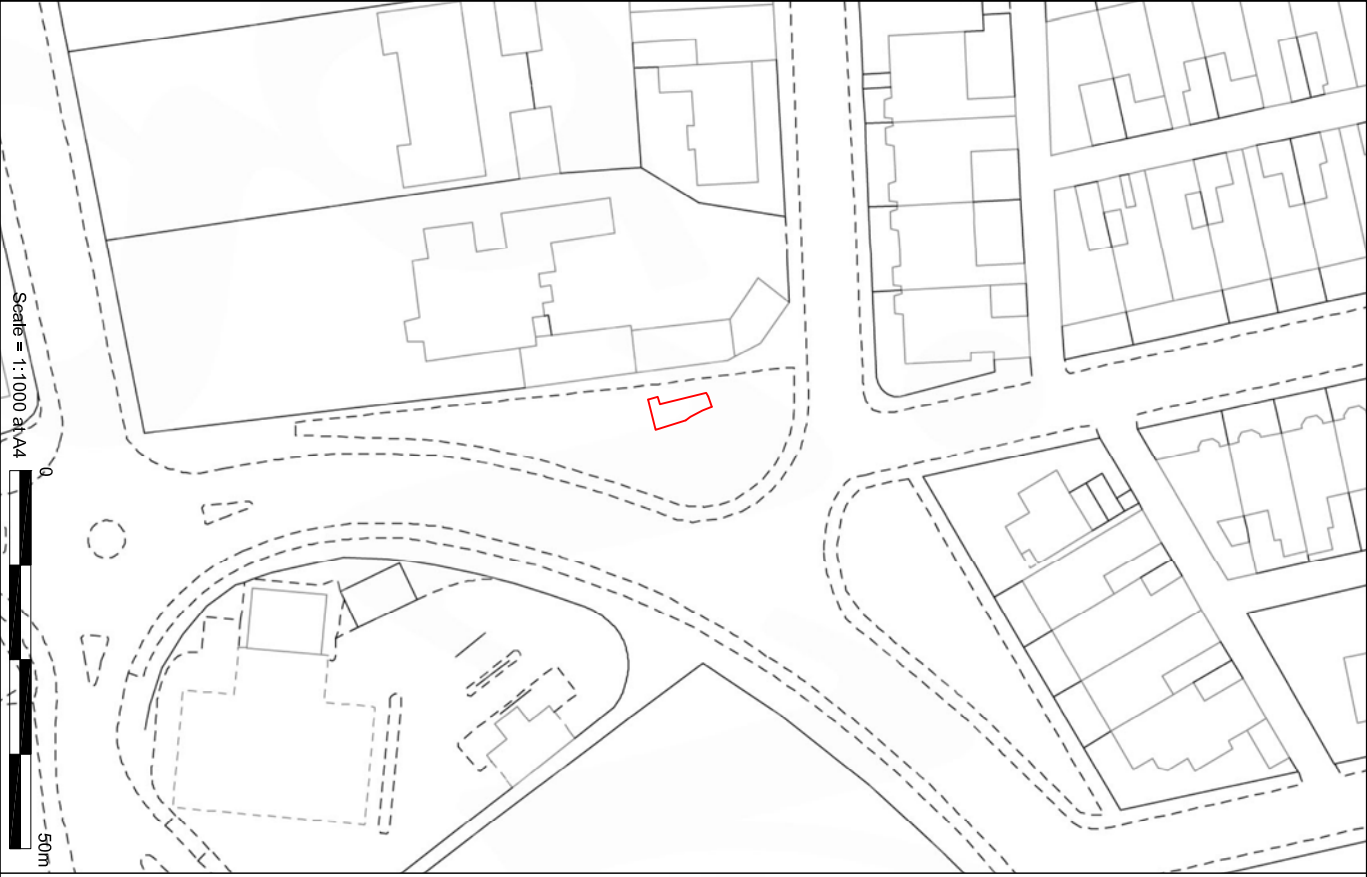




Figure 3. Section of trench showing exposed sandstone blocks and ceramic pipe.



Figure 4. Close-up photograph showing sandstone blocks and ceramic pipe. Scale = 1m.



Figure 5. Sandstone capping stones covering culvert. Scale = 1m.



Figure 6. Stone lined culvert containing ceramic pipe. Scale = 1m.

APPENDIX II: CONTEXT REGISTER

Context Register

Context No.	Context Description	Provisional date
001	Turf and topsoil	Modern
002	Tarmac	Modern
003	Cobbles and bricks	Modern
004	Sandstone capping stones	19 th century
005	Sandstone blocks lining sides of culvert	19 th century
006	Ceramic pipe in culvert.	Early 20 th century