

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Brynmor, Hill Street, Corbridge



ARS Ltd Report No. 2014/76
May 2014

OASIS no. archaeol5-179967

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Executive Summary

In May 2014 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd) was commissioned by Mr Miles Joyce to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with an extension to Brynmor in Corbridge, Northumberland. The work involved monitoring the excavation of foundation trenches for the extension. The extension is to be developed over the footprint of a previous building that had to be demolished due to subsidence caused by insufficient drainage.

The previous building had already been demolished by the time that an archaeologist arrived on site. The foundation course of the building still survived, however, and was recorded in order to provide an accurate plan. The foundation trenches were dug through a deposit of made ground, containing sherds of Victorian pottery, and into the natural orange/grey clay.

A narrow strip of what appeared to be a cobbled surface was found at the very northern extent of the excavation area. No other archaeological finds or features were found.

1. Introduction

1.1 In May 2014 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd.) was commissioned by Mr Miles Joyce to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Brynmor on Hill Street in Corbridge, Northumberland (Figure 1), as required in accordance with the brief provided by Northumberland Conservation (NC ref T13/24; 19273 dated 2/4/2014). The work was carried out following the approval of a planning application (ref. no. 14/00412/FUL) for the demolition of the current building and its replacement with a new rear extension.

1.2 The new extension will be developed over the footprint of a previous building that had to be demolished due to subsidence caused by insufficient drainage.

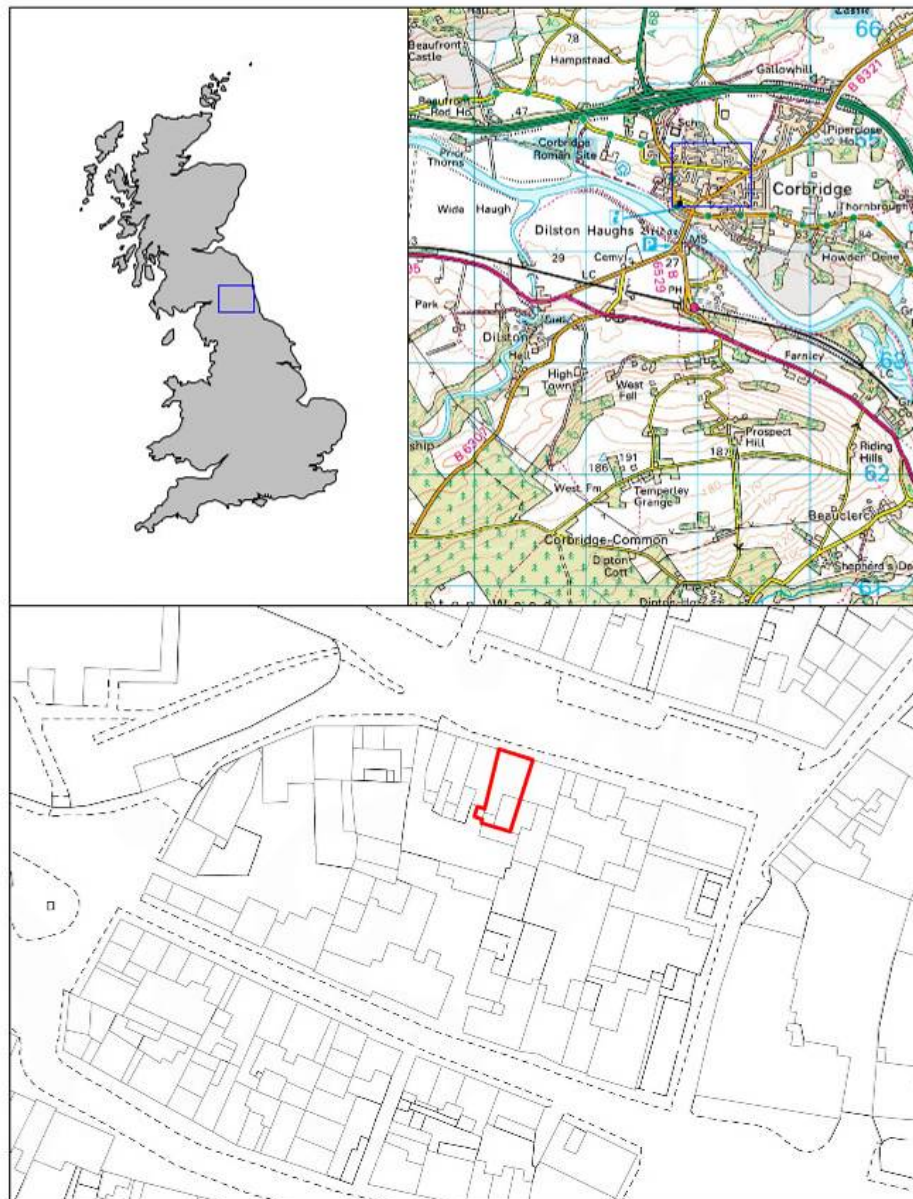


Figure 1: Site Location. (Ordnance Survey data Copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence No. 100045420).

2. Location and Geology

2.1 The building is located in the centre of Corbridge, Northumberland and the site is centred at NGR NY 98924 64402. The solid geology of the area consists of Sandstone of the Stainmore Formation, overlain by glacio-fluvial deposits of undifferentiated sand and gravels (BGS 2014).

2.2 The building is not listed, but is located within Character Area 1 of the Corbridge Conservation Area (Tynedale Council 2009).

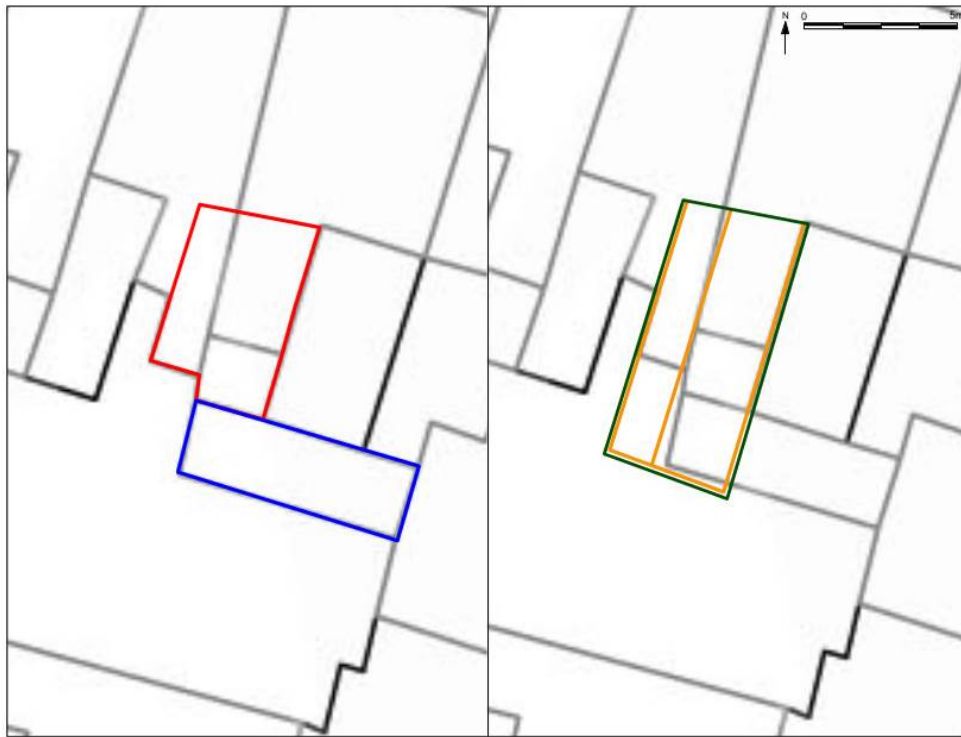


Figure 2: Excavation area. Previously demolished building is blue, buildings demolished for this development in red, excavation area in green and new foundation trenches in orange. Ordnance Survey data copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence no. 100045420

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

3.1 Corbridge town began as the Roman garrison town of Corstopitum which grew up at a crossing point of the River Tyne. This crossing point would doubtless have been an important focal point in the landscape prior to the Roman period, however, and there have been a relatively large number of finds of prehistoric date around the town. The Roman fort was established by Agricola on the western outskirts of the present town. It was one of the largest stations in the north of England and became an important supply base for the Roman military frontiers along Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. This function attracted a significant civilian settlement in the later period and whilst little is known of the immediate post-roman period in the area, there have been burials of fifth to sixth century date discovered post within the area of the previous roman settlement, testifying to some continuity of settlement in the area (NCC and EH 2008, 5-6).

3.2 The subsequent medieval village of Corbridge was established around half a mile to the east of the Roman fort, in the area of the present town. The development site is located within this area in a block where buildings will have fronted Hill Street to the north and Middle Street to the south with narrow burgage plots to the rear (NCC brief see Appendix 1). The village developed into an important market town and by the 13th century it was second only to Newcastle in terms of its population size and wealth. It was affected by Border conflict in the 13th and 14th centuries, when the Black Death was also affecting towns and villages across the county. It appears that the village then went into a long period of decline and in the 17th century the medieval bridge is recorded as being in a state of disrepair and the market had failed (NCC and EH 2008, 5-6).

3.3 During the 19th century the town was revived through tourism, industry and the arrival of the railway. The railway station was established on the south side of the river which prompted development and expansion of the town beyond the limits of the previous medieval settlement (NCC and EH 2008, 5-6).

3.4 The development site has the potential to impact upon remains of medieval date, and has a lesser potential to impact upon remains of Roman date. The most likely remains to be encountered would be medieval burgage plots which had a variety of uses from industrial activity to garden use and rubbish disposal.

3.5 An archaeological investigation to the rear of a property on Hill Street involved an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of foundations to a depth of $\approx 0.6\text{m}$ below current ground level. The groundworks did not exceed the depth of 19th century garden soils and as a result did not provide more detailed information about the nature, extent, density or significance of surviving archaeological remains in this area (NCC brief, see Appendix 1).

3.6 In November 2013 ARS Ltd were commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Lyncroft on Hill Street, immediately adjacent to the development site. Foundation trenches for a new extension were dug to a maximum depth of 0.85m. No archaeological finds or features were encountered during this watching brief (Huddart 2013).

4. Methodology

4.1 The watching brief area measured 40m² in total. The entire area was stripped to a depth of 0.4m before three narrow trenches running on a north-south alignment were excavated to depths of between 0.3m and 0.4m. A fourth trench was dug which connected the existing three at their southern extents.

4.2 All relevant groundworks were undertaken with a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket and where necessary, hand dug by the onsite contractors. All digging was carried out under archaeological supervision.

4.3 The deposits were recorded according to the normal principles of stratigraphic excavation. Each context was recorded on pro-forma records which included the following: character and contextual relationships; detailed description (dimensions and shape; soil components, colour, texture and consistency); interpretation and phasing as well as cross-references to the drawn, photographic and finds registers.

4.4 A photographic record was maintained including photographs of the trench. All photographs were of digital format.

5. Results

5.1 The excavation area was covered by a concrete slab which had already been removed by the time that an archaeologist arrived on to the site. The excavation area had been partially excavated to reveal the foundation courses of three of the walls from the previous building (003), (004) and (010). Beneath the concrete and its bedding layers, and between the walls, was a layer of very dark brown clayey silt, (005), containing sherds of Victorian pottery. A small area of possible cobbled surface, (008), was encountered at the northern extent of the excavation area, running underneath the foundations of the previous building (Figures 3 and 7). The cobbles covered an area of approximately 0.4m² and were sat amongst deposit (005), which produced Victorian pottery.

5.2 The wall foundations were removed before excavation of the new foundation trenches commenced. Each of the four trenches were dug through (005) into the natural orange/brown clay (011) beneath. The natural clay began at an average depth of 0.56m below current ground level. Deposit (005) had a maximum depth of 0.6m. The natural clay continued beyond the limits of the excavation. The current ground level of the site was at 42.3m aOD.

5.3 A modern plastic drainage pipe was encountered within a cut filled with pea gravel in the southwest corner of the excavation area.



Figure 3. Remnants of a possible cobbled surface.



Figure 4. Wall (003), looking west. Scale = 1m.



Figure 5. The excavation area and excavated foundation trenches, looking north.

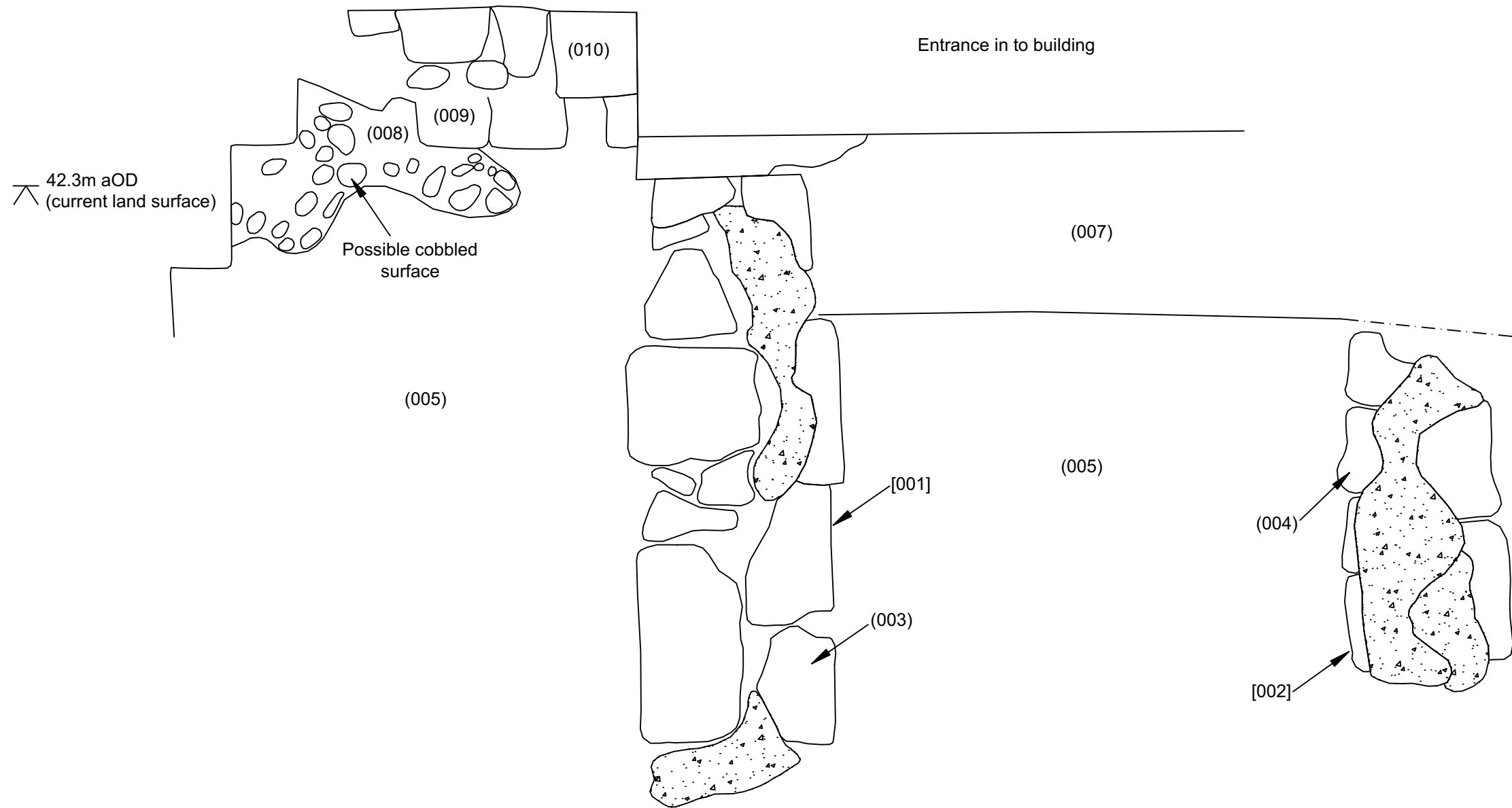


Figure 6. The excavation area and excavated foundation trenches, looking south.



Figure 7: A plan of the previous building foundations showing the remains of the possible cobbled surface.

Scale: 1:20 at A3



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6. Conclusion

6.1. A narrow strip of possible cobbled surface was found at the northern extent of the excavation area sitting amongst deposit (005), which produced Victorian pottery. This means that the cobbles are either contemporary with or post-date the Victorian period. No other finds or features of archaeological significance were encountered during the watching brief.

7. Publicity, Confidentiality and Copyright

7.1 Any publicity will be handled by the client.

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

8. Statement of Indemnity

8.1 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.

9. Acknowledgements

9.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved with this work, in particular Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist for Northumberland.

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