

An Archaeological Watching Brief at West Fenwick Farm, Northumberland



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Executive Summary

In August 2014 Archaeological Research Services Ltd was commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Irving to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of trenches for drainage pipes to the rear of a former barn (Plot 6) at West Fenwick Farm in Fenwick, Northumberland. The work involved the archaeological monitoring of groundworks associated with new drainage arrangements for a residential redevelopment of the pre-existing agricultural building.

A significant amount of groundwork had already taken place prior to the arrival of the monitoring archaeologist and this is detailed where possible within the body of this report.

No archaeological finds or features were encountered during the watching brief.

1. Introduction

1.1 In August 2014 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd.) was commissioned by Mr and Mrs K. Irving to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the development of Plot 6 at West Fenwick Farm, Northumberland (Figure 1). The requirement for an archaeological watching brief was outlined as Condition 16 of the approved planning permission (ref. no. 13/03515/FUL) and a brief for said works was issued by Northumberland Conservation (NC ref CM13/06:18513 dated 17/12/13). A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by Alan Williams Archaeology and was approved by Northumberland Conservation prior to the commencement of site works (Williams, 2014).

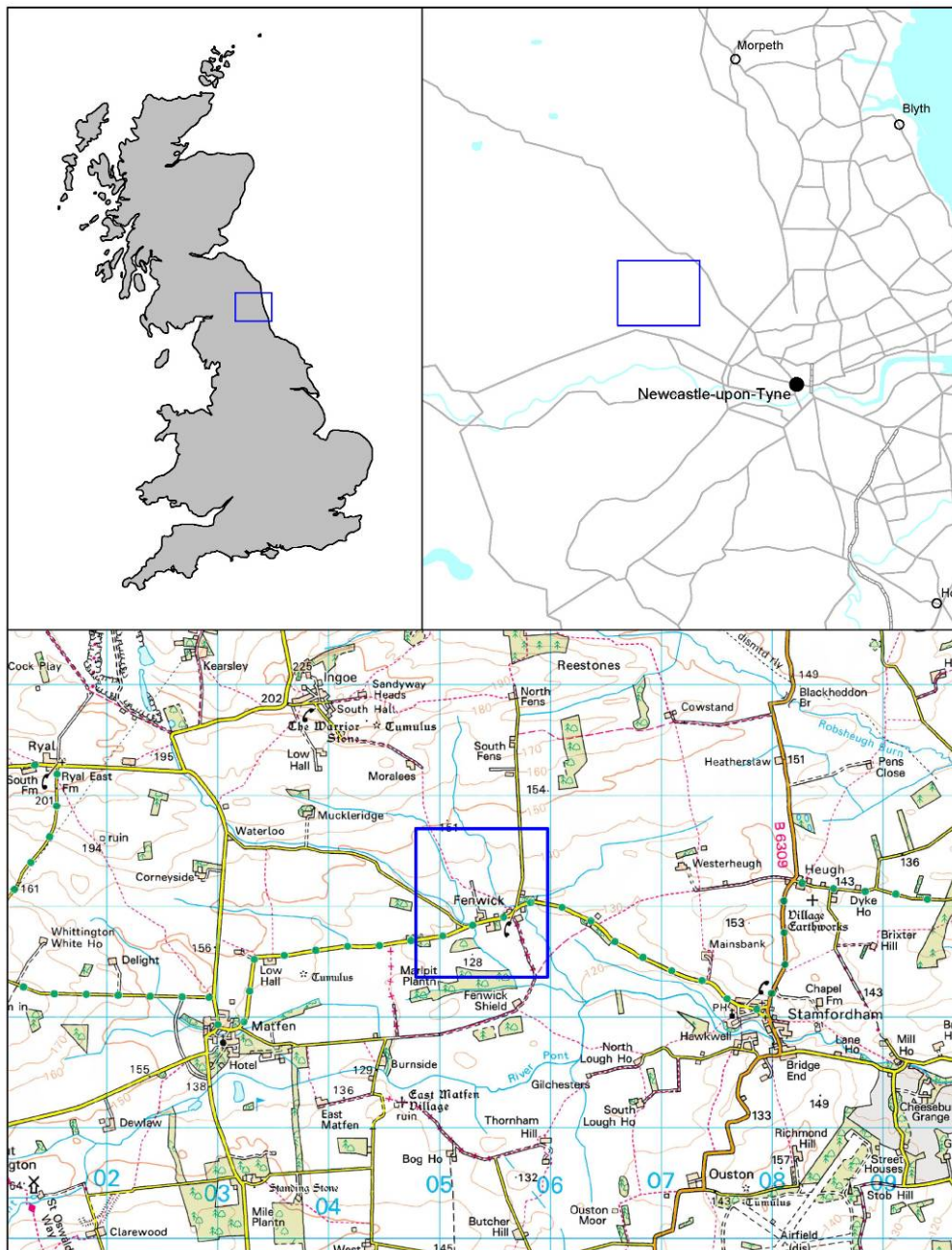


Figure 1: Site Location. (Ordnance Survey data Copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence No. 100045420).

2. Location and Geology

2.1 The site is located at the west end of the village of Fenwick, which lies 10km west of Ponteland. The site lies within West Fenwick Farm on the south side of the road, centred at NGR NZ 05496, 72837 (Figure 2).

2.2 The solid geology of the area consists of Sandstone of the Stainmore Formation, overlain by Devensian Till (BGS 2014).

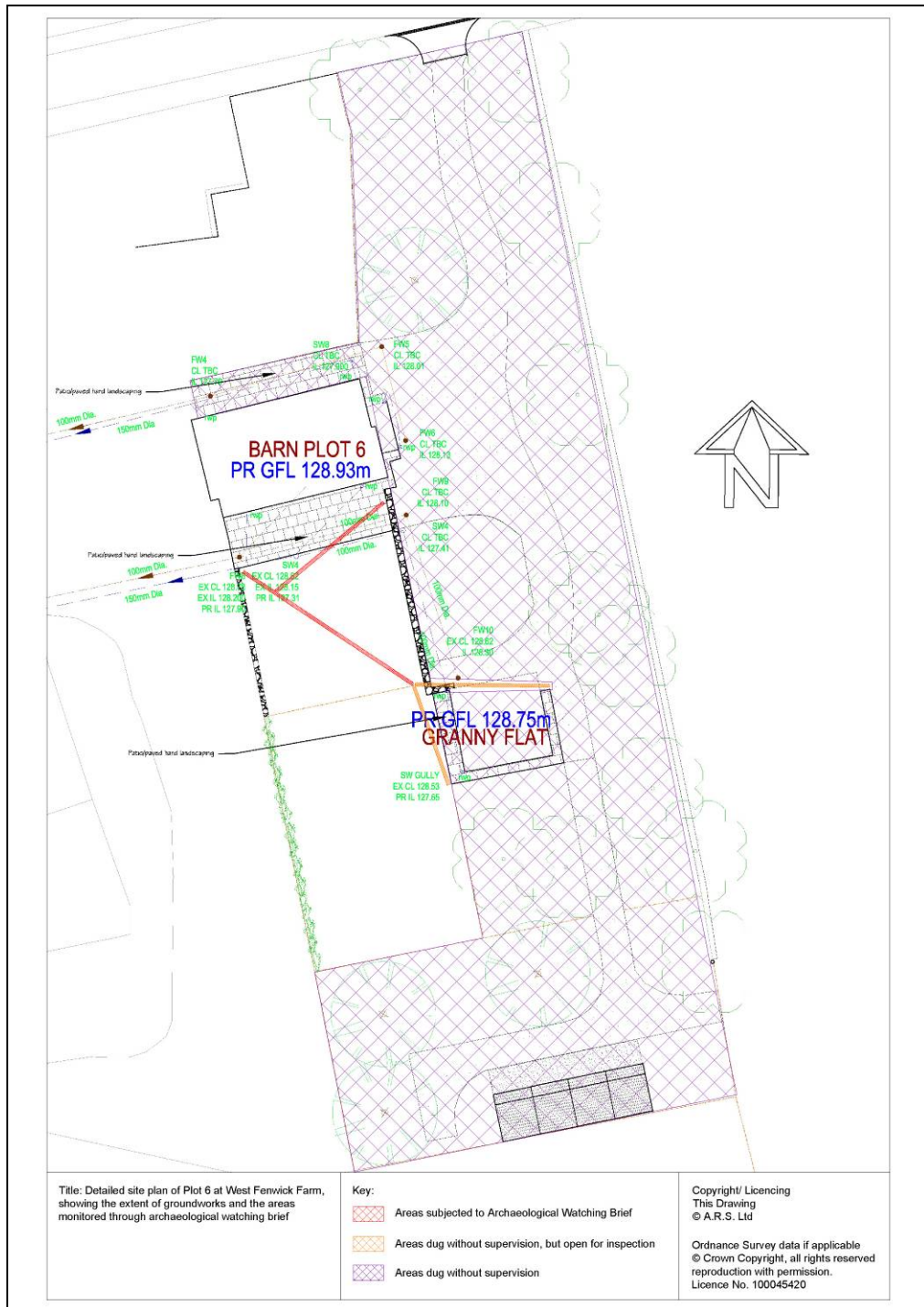


Figure 2: Detailed site location. Ordnance Survey data copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence no. 100045420

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

3.1 The word Fenwick translates as 'dwelling on the fen' from Old English and the village of Fenwick began as a medieval township (Wrathmell 1975, 383-4; HER: 10371). It is first mentioned in historical documentation in 1140 when formed part of the Barony of Bolbec that was granted to William de Lisle. The Lisles held the township until the 13th century when it was sub-infeudated to the Fenwick family (Williams 2013, 8). The Fenwicks remained in control of the area through the medieval and into the post-medieval period, before being sold to Sir William Blackett in 1689.

3.2 Earthworks around Fenwick, visible on aerial photographs, have been plotted as part of the National Mapping Programme. They show that the medieval settlement was of two-row form - with house plots on each side of a thoroughfare or green (the same line as the present east-west road through the settlement) - surrounded by agricultural earthworks including garths enclosed by banks and more extensive open-field systems with traces of ridge and furrow surviving in the surrounding fields (Williams 2013, 8). Traces of the historical development of Fenwick are still visible around the village in the form of the Grade II Listed Fenwick Tower at the east end (NHLE: 1370708 HER 10358), the Grade II Listed farmhouse at North Fenwick (NHLE: 1042776; HER 10385), and the bastle house at West Fenwick Farm (HER: 10386). Burials discovered through excavation also testify to there having been a church or chapel in the village.

3.3 West Fenwick Farm, where the watching brief is focused, retains a standing bastle house (HER 10386) at its core. The farm complex has been subject to a building recording at English Heritage Level 2 undertaken by Alan Williams Archaeology (Williams 2013). The building recording report includes a historical study of the development of the farm and provides a description of all standing buildings. Plot 6, the focus of the present investigation, lies immediately to the west of the bastle house (HER 10386).

4. Methodology

4.1 The watching brief area comprised two trenches measuring 11m in length x 0.27m in width and 15m x 0.27m, both with a maximum depth of 0.6m (Figure 2).

4.2 All relevant groundworks were undertaken with a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket. All digging related to these two trenches 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 The trench was planned at 1:20. Trench sides were also drawn in section at a scale of 1:10. A photographic record was maintained including photographs of the trench. All photographs were of digital format.

4.5 A note was made of likely areas of recent previous disturbance not subject to archaeological monitoring (Figure 2).

5. Results

5.1 The trench for a north-east-south-west aligned drain (Figure 4) measured 11m in length, 0.27m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.6m. It was dug on a roughly north-east-south-west orientation and was situated to the rear of the redeveloped former agricultural building. The trench was dug in order to facilitate the installation of new drainage for the new residence being created. Another trench for a north-west-south-east aligned drain (Figure 3), measuring c.15m in length, 0.27m in width and with a maximum depth of 0.6m was also excavated during the archaeological monitoring.

5.2 A topsoil layer (001) was present within the excavations for both trenches to a maximum thickness of 0.15m and was evidently well disturbed through modern interventions as the dark brown loam included broken brick, stone and modern plastic waste (Figures 3 & 4). Below this, a grey brown silty clay (002) was encountered, which had a maximum depth of 0.4m. Finally, a yellow/grey clay (003) natural substrate was encountered where the trenching exceeded 0.55m in depth.

5.3 Both trenches were dug with a fall from east to west, and were generally 0.2m deeper at their western extents than at the east, at which point both were c. 0.35m-0.4m in depth.



Figure 3. North-west facing view of pipe trench.



Figure 4. West facing view of pipe trench.

5.4 Two previously excavated drain runs, with an associated chamber, were inspected, immediately adjacent to the building marked “Granny Flat” on Figure 2. These were excavated to a maximum depth of c.0.2m and did not seem to have penetrated (001), nor had they apparently disturbed any identifiable archaeological layers (Figure 4).



Figure 5. South-east facing view of in-situ pipe trenches.

6. Discussion

6.1. The watching brief at West Fenwick Farm did not encounter any archaeological finds or features. The drainage channel described above was the only part of the groundworks for the current development that were observed by an archaeologist.

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.

10. References

British Geological Survey <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/>

Williams, A. 2013. *West Fenwick Farm, Fenwick, Northumberland; Historic Building Survey*. Alan Williams Archaeology Report. OASIS Ref: alanwill1-143901

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