

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Greenwell Road car park, Alnwick, Northumberland



Excavation of the trench through the car park tarmac.

ARS Ltd Report No. 2015/176
OASIS ID - archaeol5-233774

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Executive Summary

In November 2015 Archaeological Research Services Ltd was commissioned by Northumbrian Water Ltd to undertake an emergency archaeological watching brief at the Greenwell Road car park in Alnwick, Northumberland. A mains sewer had collapsed requiring immediate repair work. The proximity of the car park to Alnwick Castle meant that the possibility of uncovering archaeological remains was high. A trench measuring 1.5 x 3m was excavated through the car park tarmac to a depth of 4m where the collapsed sewer was located and was able to be repaired.

Alnwick Castle was built during the Early Medieval period. It is believed that the earliest phase was probably a motte and bailey castle with more fortifications added in the 12th century. The fortified gatehouse is one of the best in the country. The castle boasts pleasure gardens, a walled garden and a landscaped park.

There were no archaeological finds or features encountered during the watching brief.

1. Introduction

1.1 In November 2015 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd) was commissioned by Northumbrian Water Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the Greenwell Road car park, Alnwick, Northumberland. Northumbrian Water Ltd was required to carry out an emergency repair on a collapsed mains sewer pipe.

1.2 A single trench was excavated through the car park deposits in order to locate the collapsed section of sewer pipe and repair it.

1.3 The car park is situated approximately 0.18km to the south of Alnwick Castle which originated in the Early Medieval period. The castle is a Grade I Listed Building.

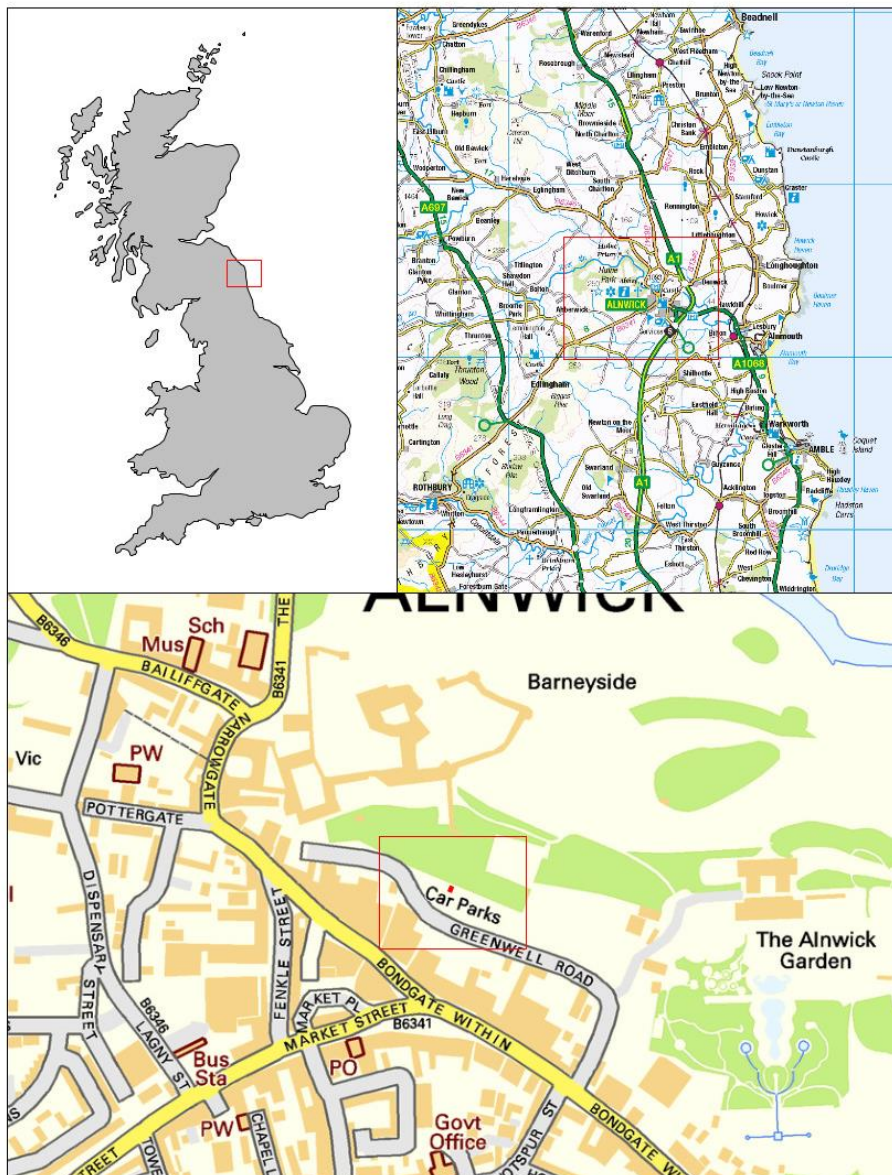


Figure 1: Site location Ordnance Survey data copyright OS, reproduced by permission, Licence no. 100045420.

2. Location and Geology

2.1 The site is located at NGR NU 18762 13403 and is situated approximately 1.9km to the west of the A1 road (Figure 1). The solid geology of the area is Scremerston coal member consisting of sandstone, siltstone and mudstone. The overlying drift geology comprises till deposits (British Geological Survey 2015).

2.2 The trench was located in the car park to the north of Greenwell Road (Figure 1).

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

3.1 The earliest evidence for occupation in Alnwick is a Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead that was discovered in 1939 in a field to the west of the town. However this is the only evidence from this period. A number of Bronze Age burials are known from the area, including stone-lined graves otherwise known as cists, although there is no direct evidence for occupation. The Iron Age period is well represented by several homesteads, some of which include evidence of ramparts.

3.2 The town of Alnwick has its origins in the Anglo-Saxon period although there is no known archaeological evidence for occupation from this time. The name, Alnwick, means 'settlement by the Aln', but it was not recorded until about 1160. It is thought that the town developed around the point where a number of early trackways crossed the river.

3.3 After the Norman Conquest the town was gifted to Lord Gilbert de Tesson and it is probable that he built the first motte and bailey castle there. However, Lord Gilbert was forced to give up his lands to Yvo de Vescy when he joined a rebellion against the King, and Vescy began building Alnwick Castle in 1096. The following decades saw the castle become the focus of a number of conflicts including when it was besieged by Malcolm III soon after the Norman Conquest. Both Malcom and his son lost their lives as a result (Catnach 1800). The king of Scotland, William the Lion, also besieged the castle in 1172 and again in 1174. The second siege resulted in William's forces being ambushed and he being captured. Once the final member of the De Vescy family had died the castle was sold to Henry Percy in 1309.

3.4 The Percy family were responsible for adding towers and the great hall to the castle as well as for developing the town. They added a town wall for defence and built a number of churches, shops and houses.

3.5 The castle fell in to disrepair in the 16th and 17th centuries although the 7th Duke of Somerset returned in the early 18th century and his son later began a restoration project. The gardens and parks were also developed in the 18th and 19th centuries in order to make them more ornamental than before.

3.6 The town itself also grew during the Later Medieval and Post-Medieval periods as it was an important staging point on the Great North Road, with a number of inns which would have provided food and drink for travellers. The town became home to many small industries such as leather working, textiles, rope making and fishing tackle works.

4. Aims and Objectives

4.1 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the groundworks in the event that any remains relating to the castle or to the early development of the town of Alnwick were encountered. If this did occur, sufficient information to establish the extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological features and deposits within the area of the groundworks would need to be gathered.

5. Methodology

5.1 The monitored groundworks involved the excavation of a single trench within the Greenwell Road car park.

5.2 All archaeological fieldwork, recording of archaeological features and deposits and post-excavation analysis was carried out to acceptable standards as set out in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (2014a) and *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation* (2014b).

5.3 Groundworks were undertaken using an excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under the direct and continuous monitoring of a suitably qualified member of staff from ARS Ltd.

5.4 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.

5.5 Site drawings were produced at an appropriate scale; 1:20 where complex deposits were present or 1:50 in areas of lesser complexity (omitted if the excavation area was completely blank).

5.6 A photographic record was maintained including photographs of all significant features and overall photographs as appropriate. All images were taken in digital format, and contained a graduated photographic scale.

6. Results

6.1 A single trench was excavated through the car park adjacent to Greenwell Road. The trench measured 1.5 x 3m and was orientated northeast to southwest. The trench passed through the makeup of the car park which included a 0.1m deep layer of tarmac (001) and was overlying compacted grey chippings (002) and stone chippings in coarse sand (003), which had a combined depth of 0.3m. Beneath the car park surface makeup was a deep layer of mixed clay which contained broken brick and stone inclusions, and yellow sand (004). Beneath this deposit was a red/brown clay containing large sandstone blocks (005). This overlay more red/brown clay containing whole bricks (006). The trench reached a depth of 4m where the collapsed sewer pipe was located. At this point, however, the trench began to fill with water from the broken pipe which

made observing the base of the trench very difficult. As a result, the cut for the pipe was not visible (Figure 2).

6.2 There were no archaeological finds or features encountered during the watching brief.

7. Discussion

7.1 The deposits recorded during the watching brief are indicative of the levelling and creation of the Greenwell Road car park. Deposits (004), (005) and (006) were most probably deposited during this process by using unwanted/waste material from elsewhere to build up the site prior to the car park tarmac being laid. The car park is bounded to the north by a wall, beyond which is the castle estate. This wall steps down part of the way along its length so that the top of the wall is at the same level as the surface of the car park (Figure 3). This could indicate that the level of the ground where the car park is now situated was once much lower and that the deposits encountered during the watching brief were used to build the car park up to the desired height and to make it level.

8. Publicity, Confidentiality and Copyright

8.1 Any publicity will be handled by the client.

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

9. Statement of Indemnity

9.1 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.

10. Acknowledgements

10.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved with this work, in particular Ben Ralston from Northumbrian Water Ltd for commissioning the watching brief and Nick Best, Assistant County Archaeologist with Northumberland Conservation, for his advice.

11. References

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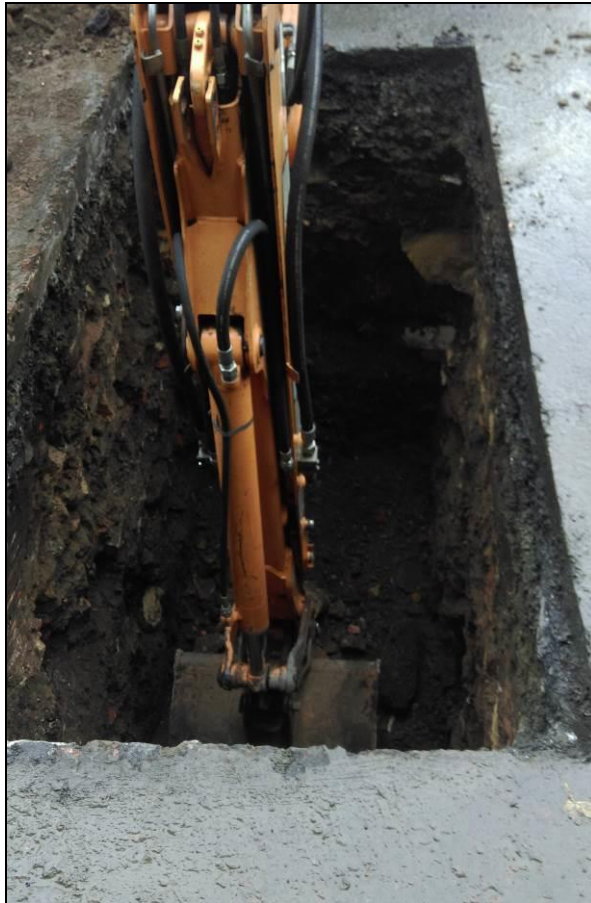


Figure 2: A shot of the trench during excavation demonstrating its depth.



Figure 3: The wall to the north of the car park showing where it steps down.