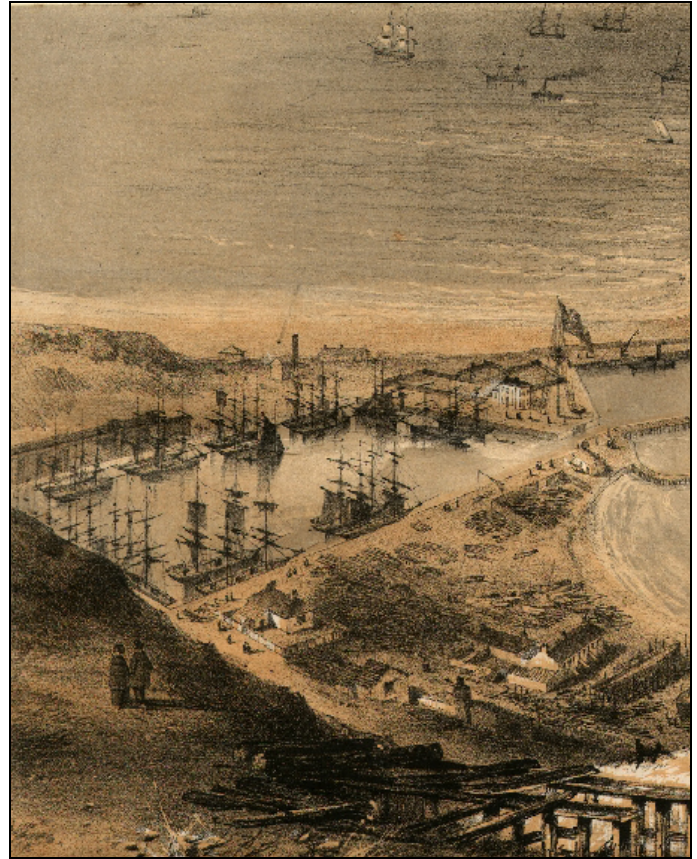


An Archaeological Watching Brief At North Dock, Sunderland



Thomas Meik's illustration of 1849 showing North Dock

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During November 2007, Archaeological Research Services Ltd carried out an archaeological watching brief at North Dock Sunderland on behalf of Northern Construction Solutions Ltd. The watching brief comprised monitoring the excavation of a 4m x 4m pit for foundations for a new davit crane behind the original dock wall to enable the RNLi lifeboat to be lifted in and out of the river and placed on the promenade. This area which has been previously used as dockyards has been heavily landscaped and is now a developed area for houses and small businesses, as well as the RNLi lifeboat station. The construction area is situated on the site of the old dock walls. This watching brief was undertaken to ensure that any archaeological remains were not destroyed without first being adequately recorded.

No archaeological remains were encountered during the excavation of the foundation pit. The only deposit encountered was a homogenous mid-brown gravelly backfill which contained no archaeological finds and is almost certainly of very recent date. If earlier dock walls were present, they were either outside the area impacted by the works, or at a greater depth than that necessitated by the foundation pit excavation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Location and scope of work

1.1.1. In November 2007 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd) were commissioned to undertake an archaeological watching brief at North Dock, Brunel Drive, Sunderland on behalf of Northern Construction Solutions Limited (Fig. 1).



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

1.1.2. The site is centred at NZ406585 at the mouth of the River Wear and one mile from Sunderland city centre. It lies at approximately 5m AOD in an old river dockyard facility.

1.1.3. The work was to be carried out prior to the construction of a davit on a reinforced concrete base, which will enable the RNLI lifeboat to be lifted in and out of the river and placed on the promenade. This area which has been previously used as dockyards has been heavily landscaped and is now a developed area for houses and small businesses, as well as the RNLI lifeboat station. The construction area is situated on the site of the old dock walls. This watching brief was undertaken to ensure that any archaeological remains were not destroyed without first being adequately recorded.

1.2. **Geology and preservation**

- 1.2.1. The solid geology of the site consists of magnesium limestone which is overlain by glacial till and clay with pockets of sand (British Geological Survey 2007).

2. **METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1. There was potential for archaeology on the site, given that the surrounding area has had a diverse history, and the study area itself having been used extensively since the 18th century as a port. The site was heavily landscaped and ground levels were raised in the late 20th century. It is likely that these developments will have destroyed any remaining archaeology on the site.
- 2.1.1 The ground work involved excavating the 4m x 4m pit, in order to prepare the foundations for the new davit crane behind the original dock wall. The earth was removed in layers, using hand tools including shovels and mattocks and this was monitored in order to identify any archaeological features that may be present. A number of photographs were taken in black and white print and colour transparency in order to record the ground work. A photographic register can be found in appendix III and the photographic archive is held at Tyne and Wear HER.

3. **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

3.1. *Prehistoric*

There have been a number of sites revealed in the area which date to the prehistoric period. In 1905 excavations by R. Paxton uncovered a flint scatter on Grindon Hill to the south of the study area which is thought to date from the Mesolithic period. A Neolithic cursus and causewayed enclosure were identified through aerial photography to the south-west of the study area on Hastings Hill. A Bronze Age round barrow is located to the south-west of the study area which contained ten burials along with pottery of Neolithic and Bronze Age date and bone and flint tools. There is no direct evidence for prehistoric activity within the study area itself.

3.2. *Romano-British*

Wearside was less Romanised than other parts of Britain, comprising only a militarised zone which contrasted greatly with southern Britain. The closest town at Corstopitum (Corbridge) was many miles away and the nearest known villa was just to the south of present day Durham City (Dodds 1995). At this time Newcastle was only occupied by a station point (Pons Aelius). In contrast to other towns and villas however, military installations are to be found to immediate north of the study area at Arbeia (South Shields) and Congangium (Chester-le-Street). A small bronze statue of the smith god Jupiter Dolichenus was discovered in Wearside but nothing has been recovered from the study area.

3.3. *Early Medieval*

The name Sunderland is reputed to come from '*Soender-land*' *soender/sunder* being the Anglo-Saxon infinitive, meaning "to part" (Cameron 1977). It is likely that the name refers to the valley carved by the river Wear that runs through the heart of the city. In 674 AD Benedict Biscop established the monastery of Wearmouth

and dedicated the church to St. Peter. The church tower is the main architectural feature and contains several unique examples of Saxon architecture. The first recorded instance of glass manufacture in England states that Benedict Biscop brought over skilled Frankish workmen who made glass for the windows of the church (Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery 1965, 1).

- 3.3.1. The Venerable Bede was born at Wearmouth in 673 AD and devoted his life to writing and teaching at the monastery of Jarrow until he died in 735 AD. The area on the north side of the river where this monastery was located became known as Monkwearmouth (*ibid.*).
- 3.3.2. From the ninth to the eleventh centuries the town suffered from successive invasions by the Danes and Scots. In 930 AD Athelstan of England granted land on the south bank of the river to the Bishop of Durham. Shortly afterwards the Church of St. Michael was founded and the area was known as Bishopwearmouth (*ibid.*).
- 3.4. *Medieval*

In 1154 Sunderland was made a town and was granted a charter allowing the towns people certain rights including one to hold a weekly market. In 1247 Henry III granted an important charter to Sunderland establishing a Merchants Guild (*ibid.*).
- 3.4.1. The first mention of shipbuilding in Sunderland occurs in 1346 where it is recorded that Thomas Menvil “occupied a certain place at Sunderland called Hendon for the building of ships, paying to the Bishop an annual rent of two shillings” (Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery 1965, 2). Coal was first exported from the town in 1396 and by 1565 Sunderland was described as “a fishing town which has thirty householders, and is governed by Robert Bowes under the Bishop of Durham” (*ibid.*).
- 3.4.2. Around 1669, permission was granted for the building of a pier and lighthouse and in 1717 a Board of Harbor Commissioners was appointed to develop the port and its facilities. In 1796 the first bridge over the River Wear was opened. With its span of 236 feet it was then the widest single span cast-iron bridge in the world. It was remodelled and widened in 1859 and remained in use until 1929 when the present wider bridge was opened (*ibid.*).
- 3.5. *Post-medieval*

Sunderland grew in size and importance and in 1719 it was made into parish independent from Bishopwearmouth. In 1807 Bishopwearmouth Parish Church was rebuilt on the site of the ancient church which had existed since the 10th century (Whellan 1894). A drawing produced in 1787 shows the original structure (Fig. 2) and a drawing produced in 1824 by Kerr (Fordyce 1827, 392) shows the rebuilt structure. By the 19th century, the port of Sunderland had grown to absorb Bishopwearmouth and Monkwearmouth and under the Reform Act of 1832 Sunderland became a Parliamentary Borough. It became a Municipal Borough in 1835 and gained County Borough status in 1888. John Rennie’s map of 1826 (fig. 3) shows the study area prior to development, and Robert Stevenson’s map of 1829 (fig. 4) shows a proposed design for a large wet dock on the site north dock was to be later constructed on. The Wearmouth Dock Company was set up in

1834 by royal charter; the original 'North Dock' was designed in the same year by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and opened in 1837. North Dock is depicted in Thomas Meik's 1849 illustration (fig. 5.). It had an area of 6 acres with a 1 ½ acre tidal basin (fig. 8). In a painting dated 1850 (artist unknown), Messrs. Armstrong & Co. creosoting works are depicted as being one of the businesses which occupied the North Dock area (fig. 6.).

- 3.5.1. The York and Newcastle Railway Company took over the dock in 1847 and subsequently became North Eastern Railway. By the Second World War, Sunderland was the biggest shipbuilding town in the world (fig. 7). Due to its size, and location the dock was not a commercial success, and was partially infilled, in the 1950's. The remaining walls of the 6 acre dock are listed grade 2, as well as the walls and four mooring posts to the North Dock basin. Sunderland became a city in 1992 and in 1998 the church of Bishopwearmouth became Sunderland Minister. In the late 1990's the study area was heavily landscaped, with the construction of housing, small businesses and a small scale marina for recreational vessels.



Fig. 2 1787 drawing of St. Michael's Church prior to rebuilding



Fig. 3. John Rennie's map of 1826
Showing the mouth of the River Wear and the study area.



Fig. 4. Robert Stevenson's map of 1829 showing wet docks at the study area



Fig. 5. Thomas Meik's Illustration of 1849 showing 'North Dock'.

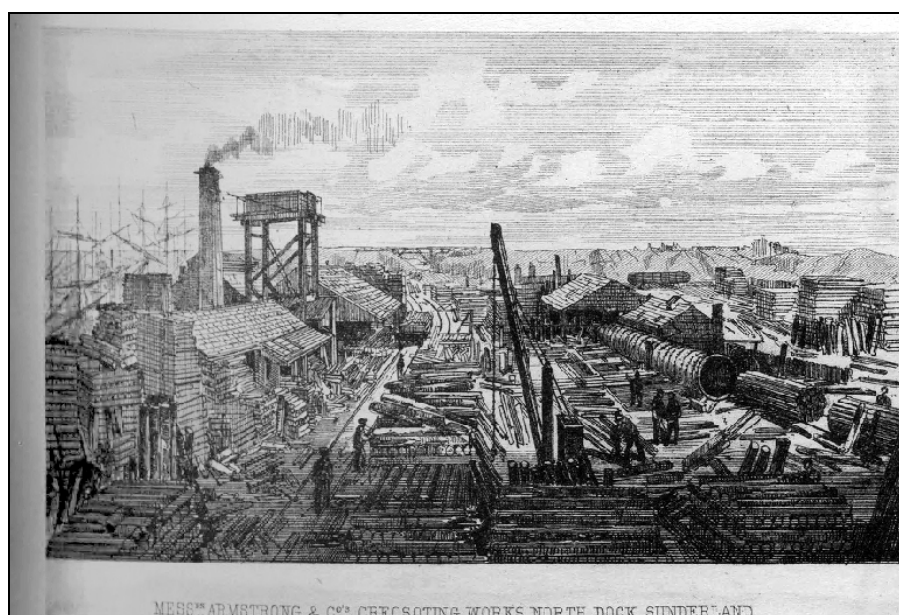


Fig. 6. 1950 Artist unknown. Messrs. Armstrong & Co. creosoting works at North Dock



Fig. 7. (Anonymous) picture showing the bridges of Sunderland and dock workings of 1908.

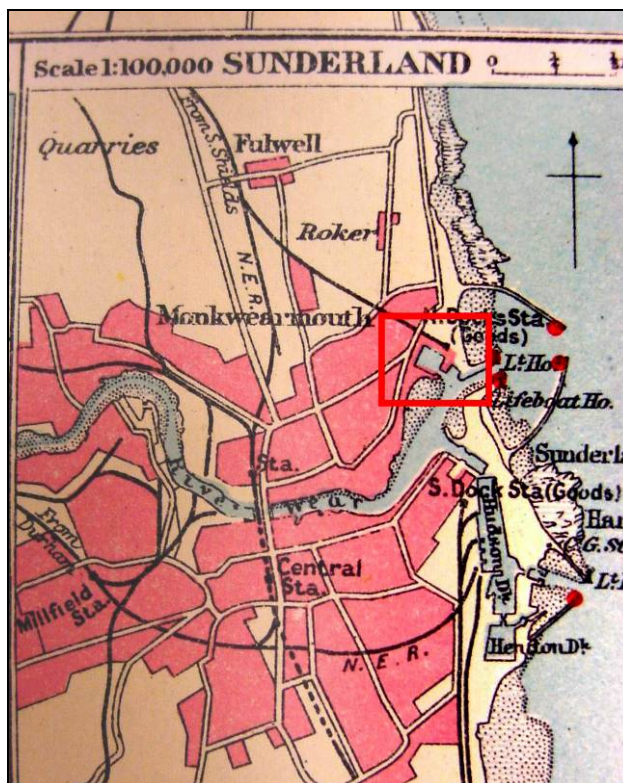


Fig. 8. George Phillip's map of 1920, showing 'North Dock' prior to its partial infilling.

4. RESULTS

- 4.1 The ground work involved excavating the 4m x 4m pit, in order to prepare the foundations for the new davit crane behind the original dock wall. A loose mid brown gravel backfill was encountered immediately following removal of paving slabs. This deposit was clearly modern and of no archaeological interest. After approximately 1m depth excavation was discontinued due to the presence of live services. No archaeological remains were discovered.



Fig. 9. Hand excavation of the foundation pit looking east

Three further visits were made to the site in order to monitor the final part of the excavation of the foundation pit but no further archaeological remains were encountered. A number of photographs were taken in black and white print and colour transparency in order to record the ground work. A photographic register can be found in appendix I and the photographic archive is held at Tyne and Wear HER.

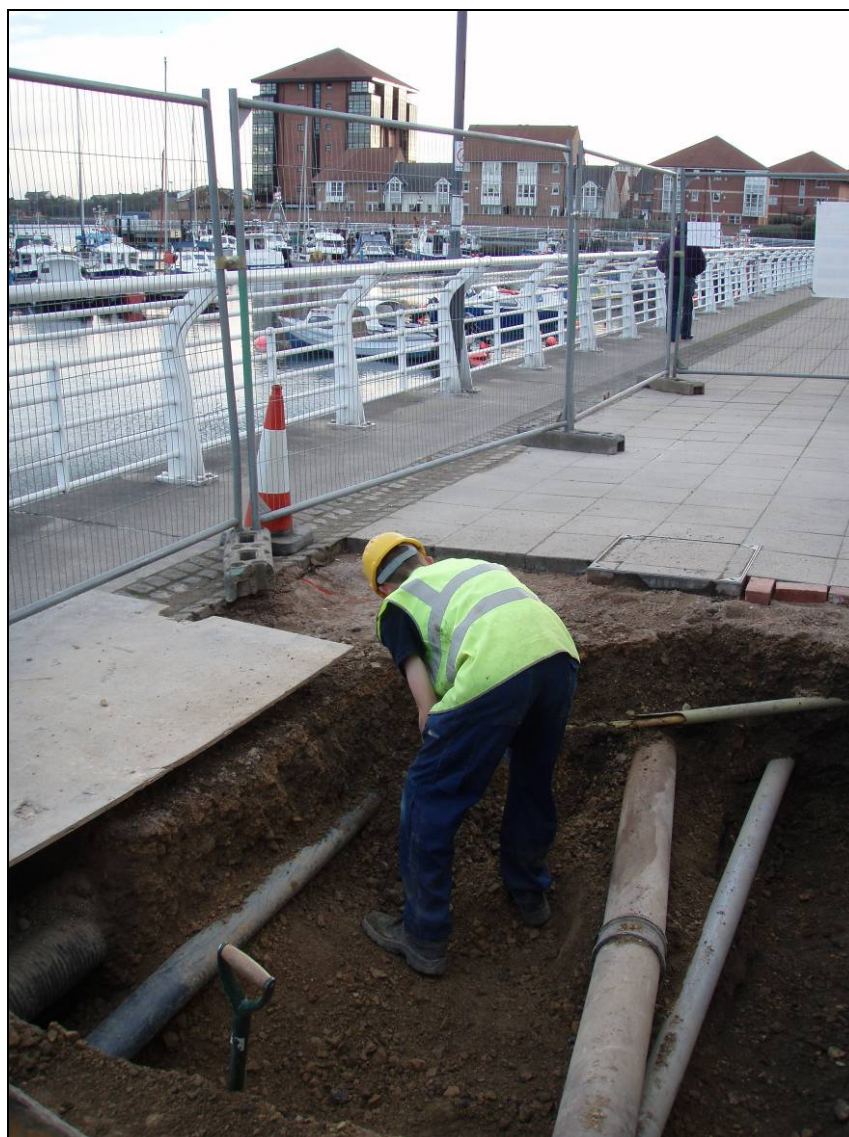


Fig. 10. Hand excavation of the foundation pit looking west

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 No archaeological remains were encountered during the excavation of the foundation pit. The only deposit encountered was a homogenous mid-brown gravelly backfill which contained no archaeological finds and is almost certainly of very recent date.

6. SOURCES

Cameron, K. 1979. *English Place Names*. London: Book

Fordyce, W. 1827. *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham*. Vol. II

Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery 1965. *A History of Sunderland*. Sunderland: Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery.

Websites

British Geological Survey <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>
Pictures in Print <http://www.dur.ac.uk/picturesinprint>

APPENDIX I: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Film One: Black and White

Shot No.	Photograph content
1	Excavation of foundation pit, looking west
2	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
3	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
4	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
5	Working shot
6	Working shot
7	Working shot
8	Working shot

Film Two: Colour Transparency

Shot No.	Photograph content
1	Excavation of foundation pit, looking west
2	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
3	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
4	Excavation of foundation pit, looking east
5	Working shot
6	Working shot
7	Working shot
8	Working shot