

**An Archaeological Watching Brief At
Balmoral Hotel, Worley Street, Westgate
Road, Newcastle**



Rear view of the Balmoral during demolition

Archaeological Research Services Ltd Report 2008/39
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd) were commissioned by M. K. Builders (North East) Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the Balmoral Hotel, Westgate Road, Newcastle. The study area was levelled and taken down to 2m below the surface. Foundation trenches were then excavated to a further .50m, subsequently hitting bedrock. The only deposits recorded in the area were that of building debris left by the construction and subsequent demolition of the housing which once occupied the site prior to the construction of the Balmoral Hotel itself.

The lack of archaeological evidence is undoubtedly due to the extensive ground works carried out previously on the site, and any evidence is likely to have been robbed out during that period. The work reported here indicates that no archaeological remains of national importance, which could merit preservation in-situ, survive on the site of the Balmoral extension.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Location and scope of work

1.1.1. In April 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd (ARS Ltd) were commissioned by M. K. Builders (North East) Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the Balmoral Hotel, Worley Street, Westgate Road, Newcastle. (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 NZ 235 642 in the heart of Newcastle, half a mile from the city centre, one mile north of the river Tyne, and one and a half miles northeast from Gateshead. The Balmoral hotel is situated just off Westgate Road, one of the oldest roads in the city which follows the course of Hadrian's Wall. Evidence of this can be seen from traces of a milecastle found during groundwork's previously on the road.

1.1.3. The work was carried out prior to the extension of the existing Balmoral hotel. The foundation trenches were monitored to assess if any archaeological evidence existed.

1.2. **Geology and preservation**

- 1.2.1 The solid geology of the area consists of Westphalian coal measures and sandstone bedrock. The drift geology is made up of glacial till and alluvial clay, silt and 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 situated along the site of Hadrian's Wall.
- 2.1.1 The ground work involved excavating an area 5m wide by 10m long on the ground adjoining the north east of the existing structure. A foundation trench was dug around the circumference of the area in order to fill with cement to provide a solid foundation for the extension. The earth was removed using a machine as well as hand tools and all ground work 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 work. A photographic register can be found in appendix III and the photographic archive is held at the HER.

3. **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. *Prehistoric*
Although evidence does exist for prehistoric activity within the Newcastle area, there has been no recorded evidence in or around the immediate vicinity of the study area. In 1844, while levelling the ground in the garden of Crag Hall, a gardener found two cists, beneath stone lids, set 8 foot 3 inches apart. In the cists were four food vessels containing bone and fine earth.
- 3.2. *Romano-British*
Roman activity in the area is high. Around 120ad the first bridge was built to span the Tyne. Its name was *Pons Aelius* meaning 'Bridge of Aelius' *Aelius* was the family name of the Emperor Hadrian. The Emperor Hadrian was also responsible for building the wall which bears his name. Following a visit from the Emperor Hadrian in AD 122, the Romans began work on the wall and once complete it had an approximate length of 80 miles. The route ran roughly parallel to the 'Stanegate', the main Roman supply road from east to west running from Corbridge to Carlisle (Forde-Johnston 1978). The wall runs directly through Newcastle and Westgate Road follows its course. Evidence of roman activity around the study area include that of milecastle 4, a Hadrian's wall milecastle, some of which is still partly visible on the site which is now the Newcastle Arts centre. In 1929, during some ground works along Westgate road, pottery, bone and roof tiles were uncovered dating back to the roman period (HER 1454). In 1898, during excavations for Cooper's horse repository south of the General Post Office on the north side of Westgate Road, an amphora was recovered. (HER 1458). The remains of a small temple to the native god 'Antenociticus', can be found in the Vicus of the Roman fort at Benwell around half a mile west of the

study area. Nearby is a stone-built causeway, where the road from the south crossed the Vallum earthwork on its way to the fort.

3.3 *Medieval*

Although there is no evidence of medieval occupation in and around the immediate study area to date, there is within a two mile radius, the most famous example being that of the Keep (HER 101) not far from the city centre. William the Conqueror's eldest son, Robert Curthose, after an unsuccessful encounter with the Scot's, erected a wooden fortress called the 'New Castle upon Tyne' in 1080. The castle was scarcely complete when it was secured to protect against the rebellion of Earl Mowbray towards William Rufus, William's successor in England. In 1095 the king marched against it and took it by storm. He then built new walls around the city and constructed a castle of stone using old stone from the Roman ruins (Charlton 1885). Another example of an existing medieval building is the Chapel of St Mary located in Jesmond which dates back to the twelfth century and is grade 2 listed.

3.5. *Post-medieval*

During the 19th century the area was developed intensively to house the increasing population of Newcastle. Terraced houses were built on and around the study area that existed until around 1970 when the area was cleared and the Balmoral Hotel (which now occupies the site) was constructed.



Fig. 4 1949 map showing housing on the study area

FIG 2

FIG 3

4. RESULTS

- 4.1. The demolition to the rear of the Balmoral hotel was undertaken before the excavation phase took place. Once the building was secure the earth was removed from the entire site down to a level 2m below the top of the slope (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Rear of the Balmoral hotel showing demolition and depth of excavation.

- 4.2 Topsoil existed to a 1m depth around the site, being replaced by orange silty/sandy natural clay which contained sandstone. The foundation trench (fig. 3) around the site was excavated to around 2.5m below the original surface (fig. 6), which was .50m below the already lowered ground. The ground was excavated until the natural bedrock was located (fig. 7). At the north side of the site there is evidence of modern made ground. Building rubble, bricks, tarmac and concrete exist to a depth of 1.5m (Fig. 8).



Fig. 6 Part of the foundation trench showing bedrock at the southwest side of the study area.



Fig. 7 Sandstone bedrock in the north section of the study area.



Fig. 8 North edge of site showing building debris in topsoil.

5. Discussion

- 5.1 No archaeological remains were encountered during the excavation of the foundation trench. The only deposit encountered was that of the building debris at the north side of the study area, this is most certainly the backfill from the demolition of the houses which occupied the site up until the 1970s and their construction and consequent demolition may account for the lack of any archaeological evidence.

The work reported here indicates that no archaeological remains of national importance, which could merit preservation *in-situ*, survive on the site of the Balmoral extension.

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

Websites

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

Pictures in Print <http://www.dur.ac.uk/picturesinprint>

Tyne & Wear Sitelines HER <http://www.twsitelines.info/>

APPENDIX I: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Film One: Black and White

Shot No.	Photograph content
1	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
2	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
3	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
4	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
5	General shot including trench looking south. Scale = 2m
6	General shot including trench looking south. Scale = 2m

Film Two: Colour Transparency

Shot No.	Photograph content
1	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
2	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
3	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
4	Foundation trench looking south. Scale = 2m
5	General shot including trench looking south. Scale = 2m
6	General shot including trench looking south. Scale = 2m