

## An Archaeological Watching Brief at Tarbits, Branxton, Cornhill-on-Tweed



Excavation on site at Tarbits

**ARS Ltd Report 2011/65**  
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**CONTENTS**

List of Figures.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. Scope of Work.....	5
1.2 Location and Topography.....	5
1.3. Impact of works.....	6
2. Methodology .....	6
3. Historic Background.....	6
4. Results.....	7
5. Conclusion.....	8
6. Publicity, confidentiality and copyright.....	8
7. Statement of indemnity.....	8
8. Acknowledgements.....	8
9. References.....	8

Appendix I: Figures  
Appendix II: Context Register

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**LIST OF FIGURES**

1.	Site location.....	5
2.	Site plan.....	9
3.	The site after levelling and excavation .....	10
4.	Figure 4: Excavated service trench to the front of the site.....	11

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*In September 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by Mr. Toby Rutter to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Tarbits, Branxton, Cornhill-on-Tweed. This work was carried out during the first phase of ground works for the construction of a dwelling.*

*Two evaluation trenches were placed within the proposed development area but no features of interest were recovered. The natural level was found at depths ranging between 1.2m to 1.50m deep in both trenches.*

*In September 2011 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were re-commissioned by Mr. Toby Rutter to undertake an archaeological watching brief on remaining ground works for the construction of the dwelling. This involved large scale excavation of the majority of the site for levelling, services and foundations.*

*No archaeology was found within the site and no further work is recommended.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Scope of work

- 1.1.1. In June 2011 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by Mr. Toby Rutter to undertake an archaeological watching brief on land adjacent to Tarbits, Branxton, Cornhill-on-Tweed (Fig. 1). The work was carried out during the second phase of ground works for the construction of a dwelling.

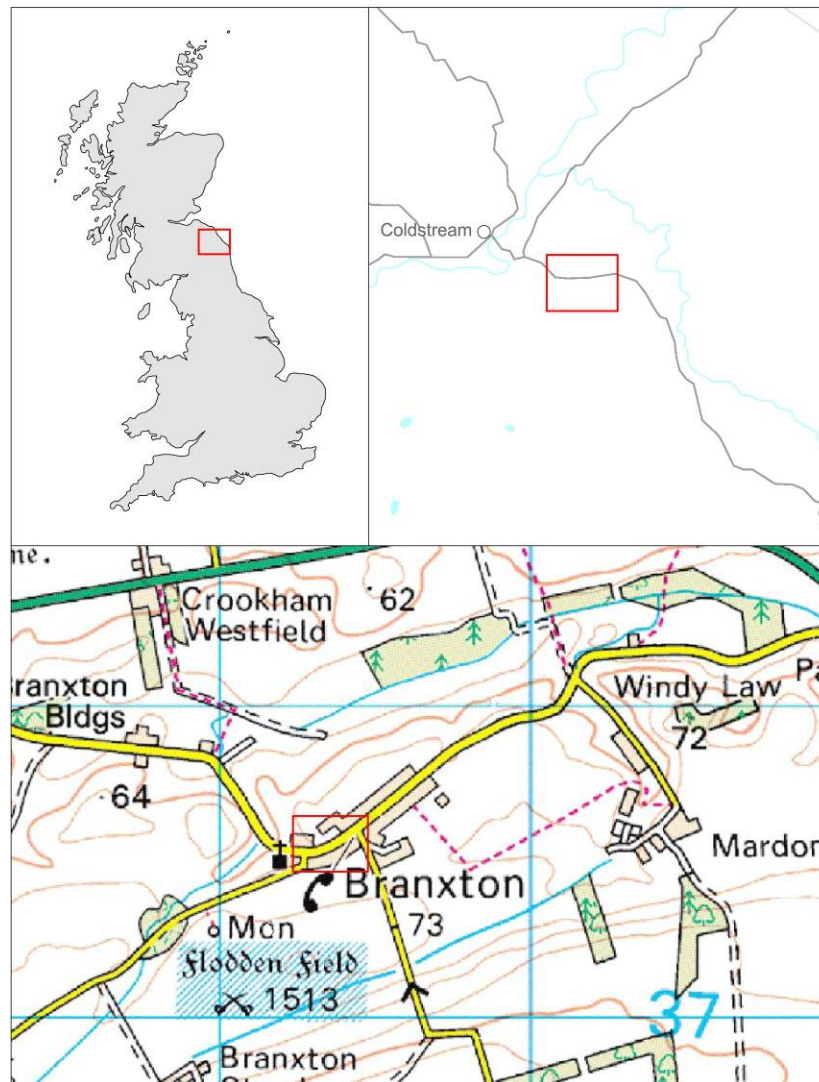


Fig. 1 Location of site.

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### 1.2. Location and topography

- 1.2.1. The parish of Branxton lies in north Northumberland close to the Scottish border. The site is centred at NT 89366 37576 (Fig. 2) in the centre of Branxton, lying to the north of the main road through the village. Branxton lies near the base of a north-facing slope at approximately 65m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). The slope rises to a height of approximately 160m aOD to the south.

- 1.2.2. The solid geology of the area comprises Carboniferous Limestone, which is overlain by glacial sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 2008).

### 1.3. **Impact of works**

- 1.3.1. The site is located within an archaeologically sensitive area which has had limited archaeological investigation. Evidence to date suggests that the Battle of Flodden was fought to the west of the Medieval settlement. It is unlikely that burial pits or remains associated with the battle will be found within the modern settlement but this cannot be ruled out.

- 1.3.2. The modern village layout reflects the Medieval settlement pattern with the main road and many of the property boundaries remain mostly unaltered. Archaeological investigations of similar sites throughout the county have revealed an increasing amount of evidence of domestic activity, including rubbish pits and industrial activity.

- 1.3.3. The potential for Medieval and Post-Medieval remains to exist within the study area is high. Any archaeological remains in this area have the potential to provide important information about the development of the village from the Medieval period onwards, the different range of activities that took place within the plots, and the life and diet of the people who lived there. It has therefore been requested by Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) that all ground works associated with the proposed development should be monitored by an archaeologist in order to identify and record any such remains.

## 2. **METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1. The first phase of works involved the excavation of two trial trenches (Fig. 2) in order to assess the stability of the ground and the depth of the topsoil. Trench one measured 2.5m long x 0.50m wide with a depth of 2 meters and was located in the north of the site. Trench two again measured 2.5m long x 0.50m wide with a depth of 2.10m and was located in the south of the site.
- 2.2. The second phase of work involved the excavation and levelling of the site, as well as the excavation of service trenches and a soak away. The excavation was undertaken by a machine using a toothless ditching bucket, in level spits down to the natural geology.

## 3. **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### 3.1. **Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic**

There are many sites in Northumberland which can be dated back as far as the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. However, there is no evidence to suggest activity within the vicinity of the study area.

### 3.2. **Iron Age and Romano-British**

The earliest evidence of settlements within the vicinity of Branxton can be dated to the Iron Age/Romano-British periods. The settlements are sub-rectangular or sub-circular enclosures and would have been defined by a simple bank and ditch, with the remains of houses and yards inside. These survive as cropmarks and have been discovered through aerial photography.

### **3.3. Medieval**

Very little is known of the area during the Early-Medieval period and it is not until after the Norman Conquest that evidence exists. The modern village of Branxton lies on the site of a Medieval settlement, which was first recorded in 1296. Branxton is the only recorded Medieval village in the parish and the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century Church of St Paul, although rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, still retains its Medieval chancel arch. The modern village has not altered much since the Medieval period with buildings fronting onto the street with land to the rear.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Battle of Flodden was fought in fields in and around the village of Branxton between an English army of 26000 men under the Earl of Surrey, and a force of 35000-40000 men led by King James IV of Scotland. The battle was fought on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1513 and is also known as the Battle of Branxton Moor. The Scots were defeated with heavy losses including the king and a large number of the Scottish nobility. Some traces of the battle have been found within the church yard and in fields to the south-west and comprise metal and stone cannonballs, as well as burial pits. Given the heavy losses during the battle the potential for further burial pits to survive around Branxton is high. The site is a Registered Battlefield and remains the most historically significant event at Branxton. A memorial cross was erected in 1910.

### **3.4. Post-Medieval**

The Post-Medieval period welcome more peaceful times and the settlement focused around Branxton village. The common lands and common waste were enclosed in the 18th century. Today, the surrounding fields are agricultural.

## **4. RESULTS**

- 4.1 Excavations for the whole footprint of the proposed dwelling and associated works, such as service trenches and a soak away, were observed as part of this watching brief (Fig. 2). This involved the excavation of almost the entire site down to the natural drift geology. These excavations encountered fine dark brown (10yr 2/2) silty topsoil (101) to a depth of 0.80m. Directly beneath the topsoil (101) existed a light brown/ orange (10yr 4/6) subsoil (102) to a depth of 0.40m. Directly below the subsoil (102) existed natural brown/ orange (10yr 5/8) sandy clay (103) with a depth beyond that of the excavation. No evidence of archaeology or artefacts of historic interest were found on the site.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1. Given the close proximity to areas of known archaeological importance, namely Flodden Hill, it was possible that the study area may have contained features of archaeological interest. As the excavations observed have been extensive across the site, and have yielded no archaeological features or artefacts of historic interest, it is recommended that no further work is required.

## **6. PUBLICITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT**

- 6.1. Any publicity will be handled by the client.
- 6.2. Archaeological Research Services Ltd will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act (1988).

## **7. STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY**

- 7.1. 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.

## **8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 8.1. Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank Mr. Toby Rutter and Nick Best of Northumberland County Council for their help during the works.

## **9. REFERENCES**

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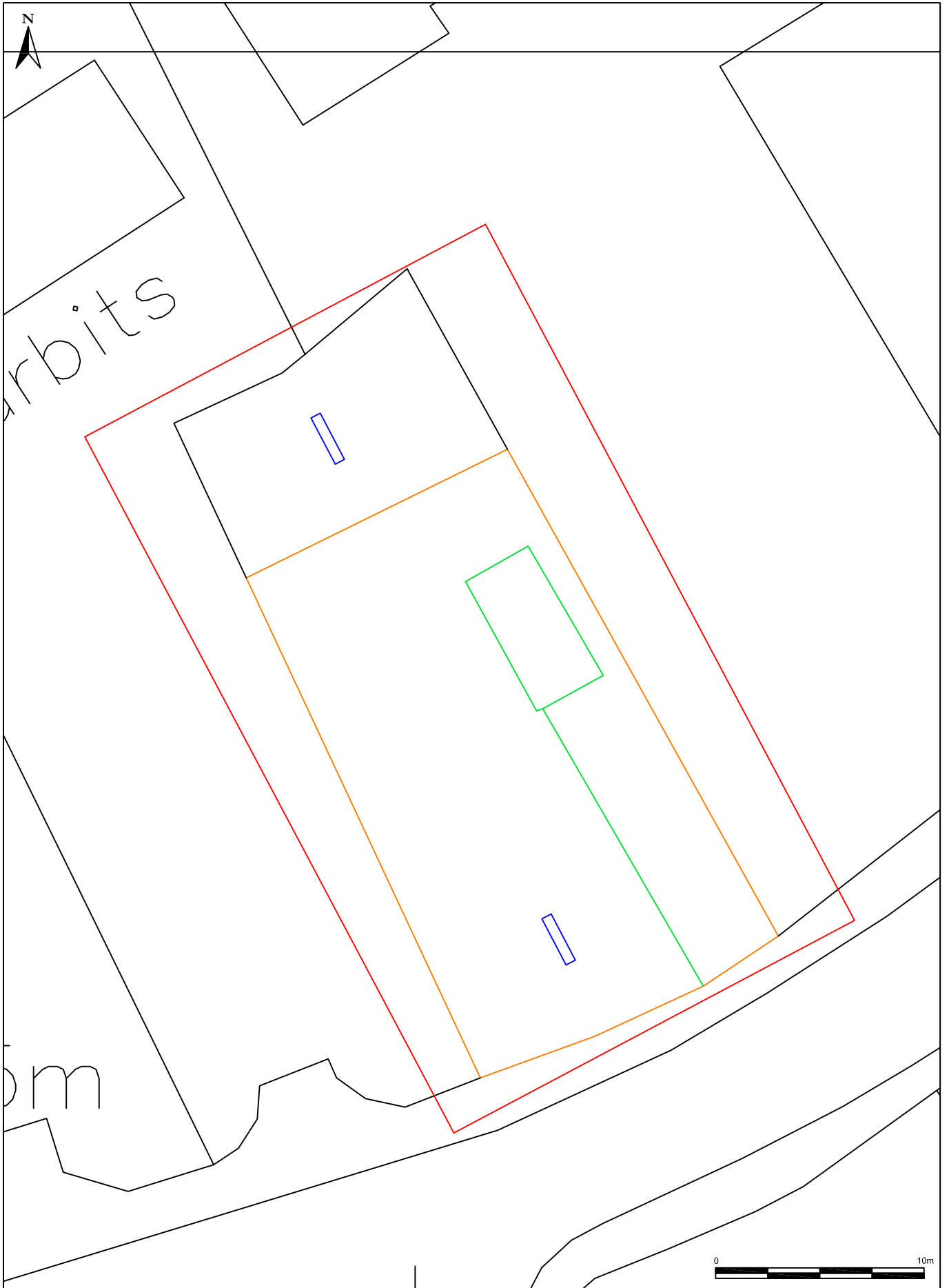
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



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**Title:**  
 Figure 2: Site plan showing the site boundary and the areas observed during the watching brief

Key:	
	Site boundary
	Ground investigation trial trenches dug in 2008
	Location of building that has now been demolished
	Area of groundworks observed during 2011 Watching Brief

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Figure 3: The site after levelling and excavation



Figure 4: Excavated service trench to the front of the site

**APPENDIX II: CONTEXT REGISTERS**

<b>Context No.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Finds</b>
101	Dark brown topsoil	-
102	Light brown/ orange subsoil	-
103	Brown/ orange natural sandy clay	-