

## Archaeological Watching Brief at Palace House, Holy Island, Northumberland



Ducting work on Fenkle Street

**ARS Ltd Report No. ARS 81**

November 2008

OASIS ref: archaeol5-520740

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*In November 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by BT Openreach to undertake an archaeological watching brief during telecommunication ducting works on Holy Island, Northumberland. The majority of the ground works involved the excavation of ground which had been disturbed previously by electrical cable ducting works. The ground works involved 6 individual excavations, one of which was excavated from the services box in the east of St Cuthbert's Square. This involved excavating through a tarmac car parking area and ran south to the nearby house. This ground had not been disturbed by ducting previously but had been during the creation and laying of the tarmac surface.*

*There were no surviving in-situ archaeological remains in the areas of the watching brief. The lack of archaeological remains in an otherwise archaeologically rich area can probably be attributed to the disturbance caused by the construction of the modern roads and the laying of services and other cables prior to this one.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Location and Scope of Work

1.1.1 In November 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by BT Openreach to undertake an archaeological watching brief during telecommunication ducting works on Holy Island, Northumberland (Fig. 1). The site is centred at NU 126 419, approximately 1km to the west of Lindisfarne castle and approximately 100m north of Lindisfarne priory.



Fig. 1 Site location

## **1.2. Geology and soils**

- 1.2.1. The solid geology of the area consists of Carboniferous, Namurian, Millstone Grit Series and the drift geology consists of glacial till (British Geological Survey 2007).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1. An archaeological watching brief was undertaken to establish whether any archaeological features were affected by the ground works and to assess the depth and condition of any features present. The ground work involved the lifting of the current road surface and excavation down to the level of the telecommunications duct.
- 2.2. The ground works involved 6 individual excavations (Fig. 2). Three small trenches measuring 0.50m in length by 0.30m in width were excavated along the southern section of Fenkle Street (the southern extent of the study area). One trench was excavated in the northern section of Fenkle Street (the northern extent of the study area) measuring 1.4m in length by 0.30m in width. One L-shaped trench was excavated at the western end of St Cuthbert's Square which measured 3.2m in length along the road by 0.30m in width, then turned 90 degrees to the south where it continued for a further 1.5m. At the eastern side of St Cuthbert's Street an irregularly shaped trench was excavated running both west and east of the services box (laid previously). To the west the trench ran for 6.2m in length until turning south for a further 3m. To the east of the service box the trench ran for 2.5m.
- 2.3. All trenches were opened by machine using a toothless bucket under close archaeological supervision.

## **3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 Prehistory**

- 3.1.1. The earliest known activity close to the study area dates from the Mesolithic period where a flint blade was discovered at Castle Rock (Buckley 1935). A Neolithic axe head and Bronze Age spear were also discovered on the island.

### **3.2 Romano-British**

- 3.2.1. The only finds on the island of Roman origin are two pieces of Roman pot found within a midden situated near 'Jenny Bell's Well'. The midden mostly comprised of medieval deposits.

### **3.3 Medieval**

- 3.3.1. Lindisfarne priory exists on the site of a former Anglo Saxon monastery of which no physical evidence has been yet found (Thompson 1949). Knowledge of the priory comes from 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century historic records which state that the monastery was founded in 634 by Aidan, a bishop from Iona. Its most famous bishop was

St Cuthbert who ruled here from 685 to 687. Vikings invaded the island in 793 and as a result of the continuing attacks on the island the monks were forced to leave and settled in Durham in 995. The monks returned and re-founded the priory in 1081.

- 3.3.2. Lindisfarne castle was constructed during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) and replaced a look-out tower which had occupied the site previously

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

- 3.4.1. The Post-Medieval period saw the development of the village and houses on Holy Island with the land being used for farming and the coast utilized for fishing.

### **4. RESULTS**

- 4.1. The site was made up from various stratigraphic layers. These were as follows:

4.1.1. *Tarmac* (001)

The groundwork was located on modern road systems with a layer of tarmac covering them

4.1.3. *Hardcore* (002)

A layer of blue/ green hardcore underlay the tarmac (001)

4.1.4. *Made ground* (003)

Underlying the hardcore layer (002) was a layer of modern made ground which contained brick and plastic debris.

- 4.2. Each of the six trenches had the same stratigraphy which comprised a layer of tarmac (001) with underlying hardcore (002) which overlay made ground (003). The trenches were placed over areas which had been previously excavated for the insertion of electric cables (with the exception of the trench to the east of St Cuthberts Square from the service box). The trenches were excavated down to a depth varying between 0.25m and 0.40m and the ducting was laid within the made ground. The trench from the services box in the east of St Cuthbert's Square was excavated through a tarmac car parking area and ran south to the nearby house. This ground had not been disturbed by ducting previously but had been disturbed during the creation and laying of the tarmac surface.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1. There were no surviving *in-situ* archaeological remains in the area of the watching brief. The lack of archaeological remains in an otherwise archaeologically rich area can probably be attributed to the disturbance caused by the construction of the modern roads and the laying of previous services.

### **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 all those involved in this project, in particular David Brown of BT Openreach.

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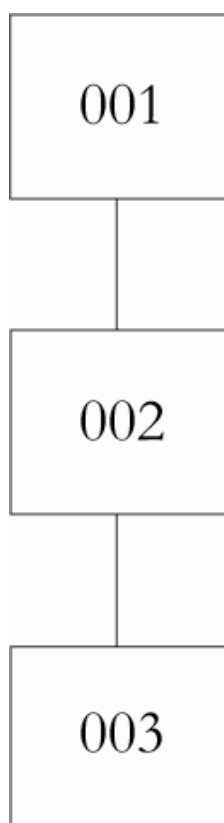
Northumberland Communities <http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk>

Keys to the Past <http://www.keystothepast.info/>



## Appendix I: Harris matrices

All Watching brief trenches:



## Appendix II: Context register

Context No.	Trench	Description
001	-	Tarmac
002	-	Hardcore
003	-	Made Ground

**Appendix III:**

**Fig 2**



Fig. 3 Service box and Trench to the east of St Cuthberts Square



Fig. 4 Trench for ducting to be laid.



Fig. 5 Trench to the west of St Cuthberts Square



Fig. 6 Trench at the North of Fenkle St.



Fig. 7 Small Trench at the south of Fenkle St.