

An Archaeological Evaluation at White House, Benwell, Newcastle.



Trench 2, looking north

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Executive Summary

In June 2009 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by Brightblue Studio on behalf of White House Community Group to carry out an archaeological evaluation on land surrounding White House in Benwell, Newcastle. Initially the evaluation involved the excavation of six trenches however, due to the presence of services running across the site, the number of trenches was reduced to three, one of which measured 6.5 x 2.7m, one of which measured 9 x 2m and another of which measured 6 x 2m.

The course of the vallum of Hadrian's Wall was believed to run in the area north of White House. The building is due to be extended to the north and to the east. Therefore the purpose of the evaluation was to establish the presence, condition, extent and date of any archaeology, particularly dating from the Roman period, and to record it before development was carried out on the site.

Consultation of old maps showed the area around White House to have been the location of a former 'clay pit'. Trenches 1 and 3 contained back-filled clay and loose shale deposits dumped during site levelling at the end of the 19th century. Trench 1 contained a circular sandstone structure that is also believed to have been connected to the clay pit. No material culture or dating evidence was retrieved from in-situ contexts and no evidence of any Roman activity was found on-site. The extensive services, for sewerage, electricity and gas will have also badly disturbed or destroyed any surviving archaeological deposits.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document reports the findings of an archaeological evaluation undertaken by Archaeological Research Services Ltd, commissioned by Brightblue Studio on behalf of The White House Community Group on land surrounding White House in Benwell, Newcastle. The purpose of the evaluation is to inform on the presence of archaeology prior to the development of the site.

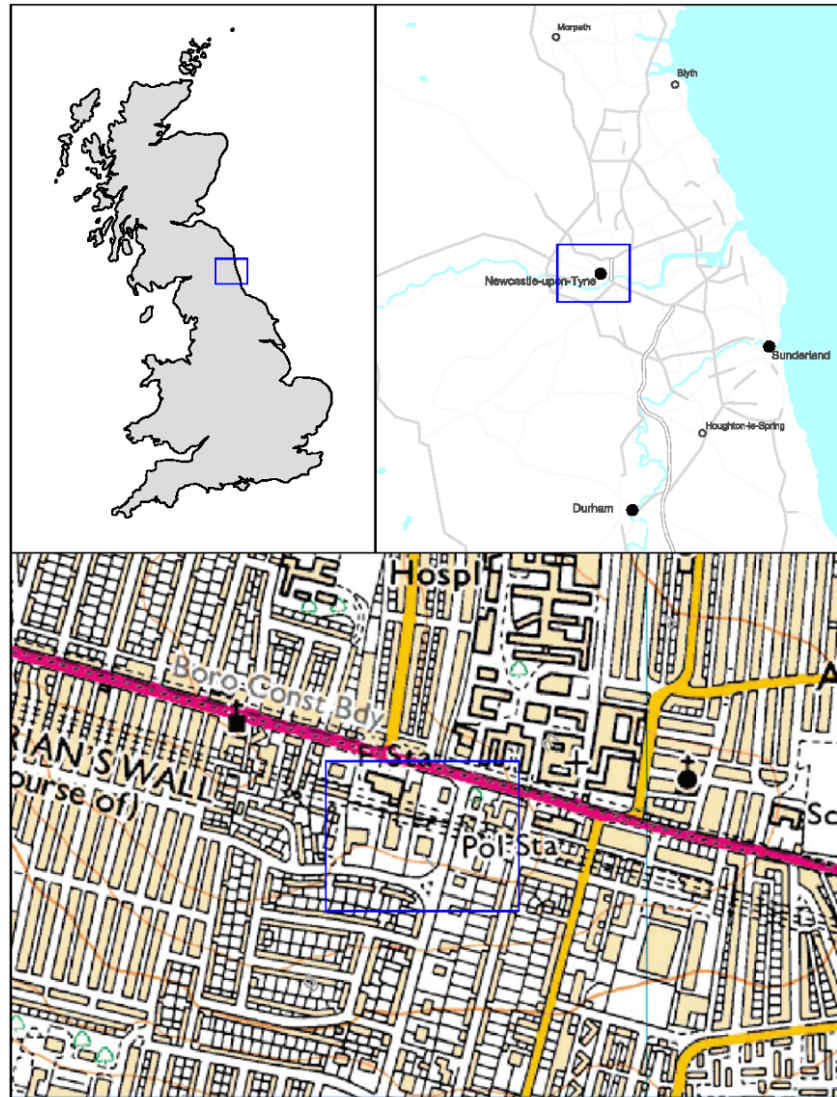


Fig. 1 Location map of the development site.

2. Location and Geology

- 2.1 The area is situated in Benwell, Newcastle centred at NZ 226 643, less than a mile to the north of the northern bank of the River Tyne. The solid geology of the area is Westphalian coal measures and sandstone bedrock. The overlying drift geology comprises glacial till and alluvial clay, silt and sand (British Geological Survey 2008).

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Prehistoric

- 3.1.1 The earliest evidence of prehistoric activity discovered in the vicinity of the study area is a Neolithic stone axe (HER 1376) that was found in 1853 at the Roman fort at Benwell.

3.2 Romano-British

- 3.2.1 Hadrian's Wall is a World Heritage Site. The study area is situated on what is believed to be the course of the Vallum of Hadrian's wall. A Roman fort is known to have existed approximately 1 kilometer to the west of the study area. In connection with the fort the remains of a bath house and a temple along with its associated burials. There is also evidence for a large Roman civilian settlement that lay to the south of the fort.

3.3 Medieval

- 3.3.1 The earliest reference to Benwell appears as Bynnewalle in around 1050 when it was a member of the barony of Bolbec.

3.4 Post-Medieval

- 3.4.1 Benwell remained a small rural village during the post-medieval period, however in 1644 a civil war camp was built in the area during the siege of Newcastle.
- 3.4.2 During the 18th/ 19th century, the area along Westgate road was utilized in the mining for clay, these also involved associated brickworks (see map regression below). Housing spread to accommodate workers and industrialists and transport systems were also expanded.
- 3.4.3 Before 1882 the site of White House was an open field and has been referred to as 'Clay Pits' on the First edition OS map of 1844 (Amat 2009). Given that the area was used as clay pits it is highly probable that any evidence of the *vallum* has been destroyed during the quarrying process.

4. Aims and Objectives

- 4.1 The aim of the archaeological evaluation was to gather sufficient information to establish the extent, condition, character and date of any archaeological features and deposits within the area of proposed development, and to record any features or deposits at an appropriate level.

5. Methodology

- 5.1 The archaeological evaluation originally took the form of six trenches. The trench locations had been determined by the direction in which the new building would extend. However, after a CAT scan was used to scan all areas, it was apparent that the presence of services running beneath the ground surface made it dangerous for excavation to go ahead. The number of trenches was reduced to three and these trenches were repositioned so as to avoid any underground services and/or drainage.

- 5.2 The trenches were opened by machine using a toothless ditching bucket in level spits until the natural level was reached, at which point the trenches were examined and cleaned by hand. In trenches 1 and 3 depths of over 2m were excavated without natural deposits being reached. Due to health and safety considerations and the fact that no significant archaeology had been found, excavations were stopped at this point. All machine excavation was carried out under careful archaeological supervision. Where trenches were located over tarmac, a 'pecker' was used to break and lift it before the trench was dug.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Each trench was planned at 1:50. Trench sides were also drawn in section at a scale of 1:20. All deposits and the base of each trench were levelled and heights are expressed in metres above Ordnance Datum.
- 5.7 A photographic record was maintained including photographs of each trench. All images were taken in black and white print, colour print and digital format, and contain a graduated photographic scale.

6. Evaluation Results

6.1 Trench One

- 6.1.1 Trench 1 measured 6.5 x 2.7m at its base and was stepped to the south-east to allow easy and safe access in and out of the trench. The trench was located to the north of White House on the modern car park surface and was orientated north-south. Once the upper layer of black (10yr 2/1) tarmac (001) had been removed, a layer of black (10yr 2/1) hardcore tarmac (006) was encountered which overlay another layer of orange/brown (7.5yr 5/3) hardcore (007). Below the hardcore was a layer of modern backfill (008) which consisted of a brown/black (7.5 yr 4/1) soil with stone inclusions. At this stage a layer of orange/brown (10yr 4/4) clay (012) was encountered that was similar in colour and texture to the natural but had at some point been re-deposited. When the southern end of trench 1 was being excavated a large dark deposit was encountered below the clay. The deposit was black and contained black and grey (10yr 2/1) shale (010) and had presumably been created when the land was excavated and backfilled during the period when the site was used to quarry clay.
- 6.1.2 As the mechanical digger was excavating towards the northern end of the trench a solid sandstone structure (009) was discovered that was cut within the re-deposited clay (012). The structure was circular in plan and had been constructed of sandstone slabs that had been arranged in courses. Some bricks were found towards the northern edge of the structure that indicated that another structure had been built on top of the sandstone. The extent of the sandstone structure was not visible as it continued towards the east beyond the limit of the excavation. Much of the sandstone was very fragmentary and came away as the trench was being excavated. The structure survived to 0.7m at its highest and 0.45m at its lowest. It is unclear what this structure was for, as no material culture or functional characteristics were observed, however it is thought to be associated with the extraction of clay from the area, perhaps forming a foundation footing.

6.2 Trench Two

6.2.1 Trench 2 measured 6 x 2m and was located to the north of White House. The trench was orientated north-south and lay between White House and the modern mosque. Once the tarmac car park surface (001) had been removed, a thin layer of black (10yr 2/1) hardcore (002) mixed with gravel was encountered. Beneath this was another layer of hardcore (003) that consisted of black (10yr 2/1) gravel with large sandstone blocks. A dark brown/grey (10yr 2/2) silt and clay subsoil (004) lay beneath the hardcore which then blended into the light brown/orange (10yr 4/4) clay natural (005). There were no archaeological features, deposits, buried land surfaces or small finds located within Trench 2.

6.3 Trench Three

6.3.1 Trench 3 measured 9 x 2m and was located to the north of White House. Trench 3 was a continuation of Trench 1 as the two were separated by a modern drain. The trench was orientated north-south. Once the upper layer of tarmac (001) had been removed, a layer of hardcore tarmac (006) was encountered which overlay another layer of orange/brown hardcore (007). Below the hardcore was a layer of modern backfill (008) which consisted of a brown/black soil with stone inclusions. At this stage a layer of orange/brown clay (012) was encountered that was similar in colour and texture to the natural but had at some point been re-deposited. Below and amongst the re-deposited clay were a series of dark patches that had the same texture as the deposit found in Trench 1.

7. Discussion

7.1 Given the industrial past of the site, and the nature of the deposits encountered, it is certain that the land had been disturbed before the archaeological evaluation. The dark deposits and re-deposited clay that were encountered were evidence that extensive clay extraction had occurred on the site of White House and subsequently been in-filled prior to the construction of the present buildings. As there was no dating evidence or structural information recovered from Trench 1 the date and purpose of the structure is not clear. However, it is likely that the sandstone feature is connected to the clay pit that once lay on the site. The circular structure was cut into the re-deposited clay backfill which implies that it post-dates a later phase of the clay extraction. It is possible that the structure was built into a pit once extraction had ceased and another pit had been opened on the site. The brick found in Trench 1 indicates that the sandstone structure may have been used as a footing for another building but it is not clear whether or not this was its original purpose. It may be the case that the brick was added later and was simply using the sandstone as a base.

8. Conclusions

8.1. During the archaeological evaluation no evidence was found of Hadrian's Wall or the *vallum*. All features and deposits that were encountered appear to have dated from the Victorian period when the site was used for clay extraction. However, as no dating evidence was recovered a more specific date can not be obtained. The proposed development on the site of White House will not extend far enough to the east to encroach on the feature found in Trench 1 and the excavation of trenches 2 and 3 did not reveal any archaeological

features, deposits, buried land surfaces or small finds that will be impacted upon by the development.

9. Publicity, Confidentiality and Copyright

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

10. Statement of Indemnity

- 10.1 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.

11. Acknowledgements

- 11.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved with this work, in particular Henry Amos of Brightblue Studio, Mr Majah Zia, Mr Haji Mustafa and Mr Abdul Basith of White House Community Group, David Heslop, Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist and Mike Collins of English Heritage.

12. References

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British Geological Survey, 2008, *Sunderland – Solid and Drift Edition*, 1:50 000 Series, Sheet 21

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

APPENDIX I – CONTEXT & LEVELS REGISTERS

Context Register

Context No.	Trench	Description
001	1, 2, 3	Tarmac car park surface
002	2	Thin layer of hardcore
003	2	Hardcore with dark gravel and sandstone blocks
004	4	Dark brown/grey subsoil
005	5	Light brown/orange natural
006	1, 3	Hardcore tarmac
007	1, 3	Orange/brown hardcore
008	1, 3	Dark brown/black modern backfill with stone inclusions
009	1	Circular sandstone structure
010	1	Dark fill of feature
011	1	Cut of (009)
012	1, 3	Re-deposited clay
013	3	Dark shingle as a result of quarrying

Levels Register

Level No.	Bench mark	Level aOD
1	111.9	111.9
2	111.9	110.71
3	111.9	109.9
4	111.9	111.9
5	111.9	110.72
6	111.9	111.9
7	111.9	109.8
8	111.9	110.6

APPENDIX II – FIGURES

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

FIGURE 5



Fig 6 Overall shot of trench 1, looking north showing the sandstone structure and dark deposit (scale = 2m)



Fig. 7 Sandstone structure in trench 1, looking north (scale = 2m)

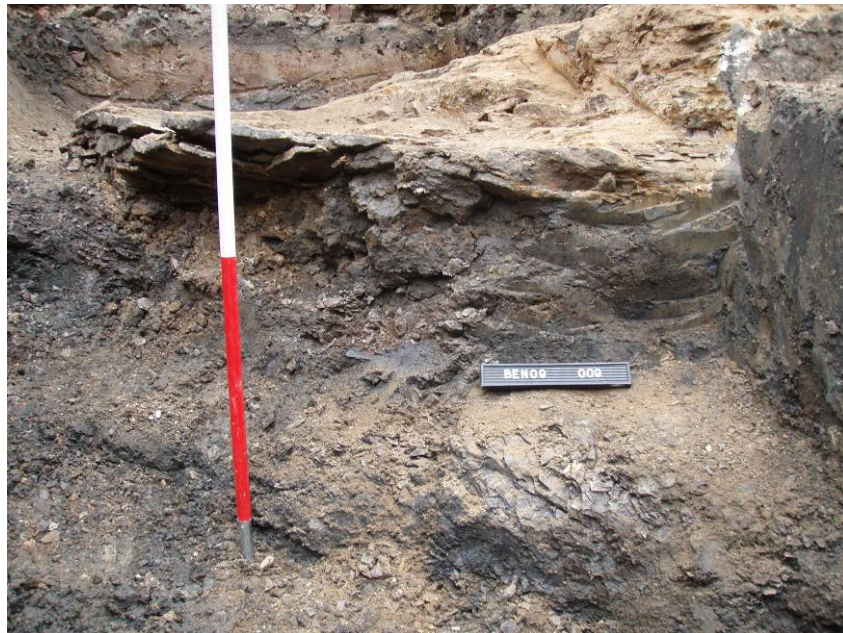


Fig 8 Section of sandstone structure in trench 1 (scale = 2m)



Fig 9 Overall shot of trench 2, looking north (scale = 2m)

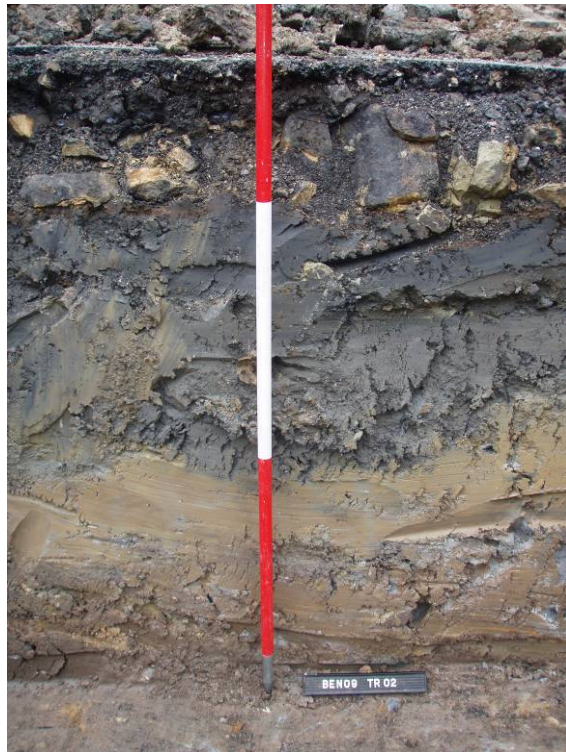


Fig 10 West facing section of trench 2 (scale = 2m)



Fig 11 Overall shot of trench 3, looking north (scale = 2m)

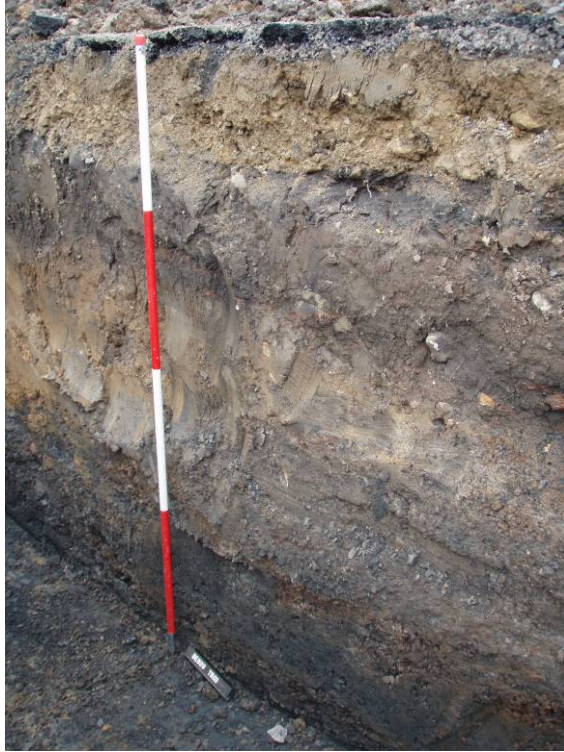


Fig 12 West facing section of trench 3 (scale = 2m)

APPENDIX III - PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

FILM ONE: BLACK & WHITE PRINT

Shot No.	Description	Scale	Date	Name
1	Overall shot of trench 2, looking north	2m	17.6.09	PC
2	West facing section of trench 2	2m	17.6.09	PC
3	Overall shot of trench 1, looking north	2m	18.6.09	PC
4	Sandstone structure in trench 1, looking north	2m	18.6.09	PC
5	Section of sandstone structure in trench 1	2m	18.6.09	PC
6	Overall shot of trench 3, looking north	2m	18.6.09	DA
7	Overall shot of trench 3, looking north	2m	18.6.09	DA
8	West facing section of trench 3	2m	18.6.09	DA

FILM TWO: COLOUR PRINT

Shot No.	Description	Scale	Date	Name
1	Overall shot of trench 2, looking north	2m	17.6.09	PC
2	West facing section of trench 2	2m	17.6.09	PC
3	Overall shot of trench 1, looking north	2m	18.6.09	PC
4	Sandstone structure in trench 1, looking north	2m	18.6.09	PC
5	Section of sandstone structure in trench 1	2m	18.6.09	PC
6	Overall shot of trench 3, looking north	2m	18.6.09	DA
7	Overall shot of trench 3, looking north	2m	18.6.09	DA
8	West facing section of trench 3	2m	18.6.09	DA

APPENDIX IV – HARRIS MATRIX

