

on behalf of
WallQuest
Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

Two sites near Target House
Acomb
Northumberland

archaeological evaluation

report 3630
December 2014

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1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation conducted as part of a research project near Target House, Acomb, Northumberland. The works comprised the excavation of 4 evaluation trenches over two areas of geophysical anomalies.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by WallQuest (Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums) and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

Results

- 1.3 No archaeological deposits were recorded in any of the trenches. The geophysical anomalies are interpreted as having been caused by variations in the geology.

Recommendation

- 1.4 As no significant archaeological resource was identified, no further scheme of archaeological works is recommended.

2. Project background

Location (Figure 1)

- 2.1 The two sites are located near Target House, Acomb, Northumberland (NGR centre: NY 9381 6596 and NY 9419 6567). The first site lies 300m north-west of Target House and covers an area of approximately 1400m². The site lies on the western side of a field of pasture, with a second pasture field to the west and The Ridings to the south-west. The second site lies 200m south-east of Target House and covers an area of approximately 750m². It lies near the centre of a field of pasture.

Objective

- 2.2 The objective of the scheme of works was to assess the nature, extent and potential significance of any archaeological resource within the area, so that an informed decision may be made regarding the nature and scope of any further scheme of archaeological works that may be required.

Methods statement

- 2.3 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a method statement provided by Archaeological Services Durham University (reference DS14.434) and approved by the planning authority.

Dates

- 2.4 Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th and 20th November 2014. This report was prepared for December 2014.

Personnel

- 2.5 Fieldwork was conducted by Adam Goodfellow, Beverley Still, Hannah Woodrow and Jamie Armstrong (supervisor). This report was prepared by Jamie Armstrong, with illustrations by David Graham. The Project Manager was Daniel Still.

Archive/OASIS

- 2.6 The site code is **NAB14**, for **Northumberland, Acomb 2014**. The archive is currently held by Archaeological Services Durham University and will be transferred to the Great North Museum in due course. Archaeological Services Durham University is registered with the **Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigations project (OASIS)**. The OASIS ID number for this project is **archaeol3-196799**.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

- 3.1 At the time of this assessment, the sites comprised 2 fields of pasture.
- 3.2 The first site was on a north-facing slope, close to the summit, with an elevation of approximately 90-94m OD. The second site was located towards the western end of a ridge, on the north face of a hillock, with an elevation of approximately 122-126m OD.
- 3.3 The underlying solid geology of the area comprises Stainmore Formation mudstone, sandstone and limestone of the Sherwood Sandstone Group, which are overlain by glacial drift deposits of clay and gravel

4. Historical and archaeological background

The prehistoric period (up to AD 70)

- 4.1 The earliest evidence for human activity in the Acomb area comes in the shape of the Oakwood Stone, one of the most southerly examples of a Neolithic/Bronze Age cup and ring marked stone in Northumberland. It was found at the edge of a field in the 1970s and is now located in the parish church of St John Lee. This may have formed the capstone for a cist burial or other form of stone burial chamber: Bronze Age cist burials have been found elsewhere along the eastern bank of the River North Tyne. While there is no evidence for activity in the study area, later prehistoric activity in the wider area indicates that archaeological deposits relating to prehistoric occupation or activity have the potential to be present.

The Roman period (AD 70 to 5th century)

- 4.2 The sites lie over 3km to the south of Hadrian's Wall, the most permanent of the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire. The Stanegate (HER 12391), a Roman road between the forts at Carlisle and Corbridge which formed a temporary frontier between occupied and unoccupied Britain in the later 1st century, passes within in the study area on a north-west / south-east alignment. An iron spearhead (HER 8608) of possible Roman date was found at Acomb (Anon.), although its precise location is unknown. A possible Roman altar (HER 8580) which had been reused for a medieval carving was found at Warden, on the north bank of the North Tyne, but now lies at Acomb House (Taylor and Collingwood 1929).
- 4.3 There is no evidence of occupation of the study area in the Roman period, but the presence of the Stanegate road and of other finds in Acomb indicates that archaeological deposits relating to Roman occupation or activity have the potential to be present.

The medieval period (5th century to 1540)

- 4.4 The earliest documentary mention of occupation in the Acomb area dates to 1226 and refers to Acomb Mill, which was located on or near the "*Kirkburne*" (later "*Birkeburne*" and is now the Birkey Burn). Ten tenants of Acomb contributed around 10 shillings to the Subsidy Roll of 1295 where it was listed as part of the Regality of Hexham. It is possible that the original settlement was located 700m to the south, close to the presumed original church of St John of Beverley (formerly St John Lee; HER 8566). It was ravaged by the Scots in 1315, and burnt by a marauding party in 1467. The prior and convent [of Hexham] had a tithe grange and garden for which Peter Gunnerton paid a rent of 12 shillings in 1479. The muster roll of 1538 records the village as being "*Acum*" and listed 33 individuals as being members of the muster (Hodgson 1897). Documentary evidence therefore indicates that the village was established by the later medieval period.

The post-medieval period (1541 to 1899)

- 4.5 Acomb is first depicted on Speed's map of Northumberland of 1610, where it is named as "*Acam*" and is shown to be separate from St John Lee, approximately 550m south-west of the study area.
- 4.6 Armstrong's map of 1769 depicts "*Aycomb*" as a series of buildings along a main road, but with no detail. The Riding house to the west was built around 1800. The Tithe Map of 1840 shows the study area in reasonable detail and is fairly accurate. No development of either site is depicted, although the northern site is marked as

part of an estate belonging to T. Dodd esq, and this area appears to have been omitted from the tithe map, as The Riding is not depicted. The 1st edition Ordnance Suvery map of 1860 is the earliest accurate depiction of both sites, and shows that both were undeveloped at that time. The southern field is shown as being divided into two equal fields.

- 4.7 The 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1897 shows little alteration to the study areas. A north-east / south-west track is marked on the northern field, but is likely to have been in existence during previous surveys. The southern field had been reconfigured, with a western half of the site being shrunk into a smaller rectangle. Target House had been constructed, and at around the same time two gun emplacements had been created along the northern edge of the southern field to allow artillery training: the earthworks of these still survive.

The modern period (1900 to present)

- 4.8 By the time of the 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map of the 1920s the subdivision of the southern field had been removed and the fields had achieved their present layout. No further alterations are shown on later maps.

Previous archaeological works

- 4.9 A geophysical survey was recently conducted of the two fields to determine whether the Stanegate could be identified in this vicinity (report forthcoming).

5. The evaluation trenches

Introduction

- 5.1 The four trenches were located in two pairs forming crosses over the centre of the geophysical anomalies. Trenches 1 and 2 were in the northern field, and trenches 3 and 4 in the southern.

Trenches 1 and 2 (Figure 2)

- 5.2 Trench 1 was 60m long and 2m wide, and was located on a north-west / south-east alignment over several linear geomagnetic anomalies. Trench 2 measured 40m by 2m, was perpendicular to trench 1, and was also placed over several linear geomagnetic anomalies. The trenches crossed at the centre. Glacial subsoil [3] comprised mottled yellow and grey sand and clay, and was found at 0.3-0.45m below ground level. A potential pit and gully were identified: the 'pit' was 3m north-west of the centre of Trench 1, and proved to be an irregular feature filled with very soft sand similar to that seen elsewhere in the glacial subsoil; the 'gully' was at the south-east end of Trench 1 and proved to be ephemeral. Both are interpreted as natural features. Overlying the glacial subsoil was a brown sandy-clay subsoil [2: 0.1-0.15m thick]. Above this was a grey-brown clayey-silt topsoil [1: 0.3m thick]. No archaeological features were identified and no finds recovered: the anomalies are therefore presumed to derive from geological features below the glacial subsoil.
- 5.3 Trench 3 was 60m long and 2m wide, and was located on a north-east / south-west alignment over several linear geomagnetic anomalies. Trench 4 measured 40m by 2m, was perpendicular to Trench 1, and was also placed over several linear geomagnetic anomalies. The trenches crossed at the centre. Glacial subsoil [3] was very changeable, comprising bands of yellow, orange and grey gravel with pockets of clay and stone intermixed with outcropping sandstone. It was found at 0.25-0.4m

below ground level. Several potential features were identified, including a possible ditch or furrow and a possible gully. Excavation of the 'gully' proved it to be ephemeral, while excavation of the 'ditch' or 'furrow' demonstrated that it was an irregular feature the continuation of which could not be demonstrated further along its alignment. Other potential features examined proved to be residual subsoil lying within cracks in the outcropping sandstone. All were interpreted as natural features. Overlying the glacial subsoil was a reddish-brown sandy-gravel subsoil [7: 0.1-0.2m thick]. Above this was a grey-brown clayey-silt topsoil [6: 15-0.2m thick]. No archaeological features were identified and no finds recovered: the anomalies are therefore presumed to derive from a mixture of interfaces between different material within the glacial subsoil and geological features below the glacial subsoil.

6. The archaeological resource

- 6.1 No archaeological deposits were recorded in any of the trenches. The geophysical anomalies are interpreted as having been caused by variations in the geology.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 As no significant archaeological resource was identified, no further scheme of archaeological works is recommended.

8. Sources

Cartographic sources

Speed, 1610 Map of Northumberland
Armstrong, 1769 A map of the County of Northumberland
Anon., 1840 Tithe award, Acomb West township [St. John Lee parish]
Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, 25" to 1 mile
Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition, 25" to 1 mile
Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition, 6" to 1 mile

Other sources

Hodgson, J C, 1897 *A History of Northumberland IV*, Newcastle
Taylor, M V, and Collingwood, R G, 1927 Roman Britain, *Journal of Roman Studies* **17**

Websites

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

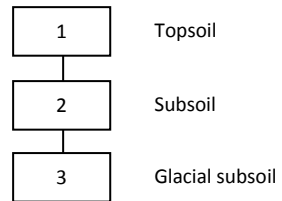
Appendix 1: Data table

Table 1.1: Context data

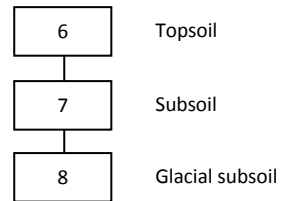
No	Area	Description
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2	1-2	Subsoil
3	1-2	Glacial subsoil
4	-	VOID
5	-	VOID
6	3-4	Topsoil
7	3-4	Subsoil
8	3-4	Glacial subsoil

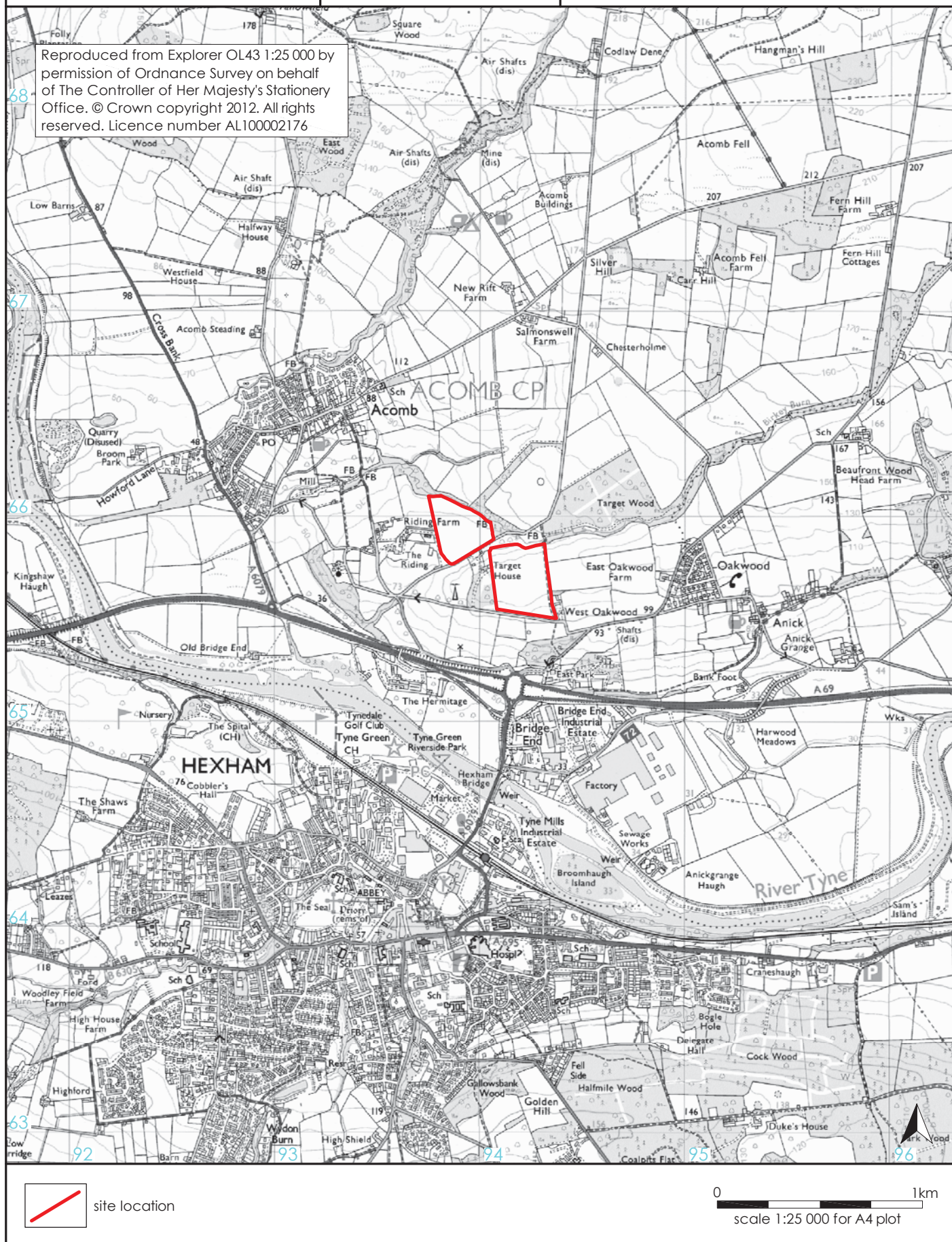
Appendix 2: Stratigraphic matrices

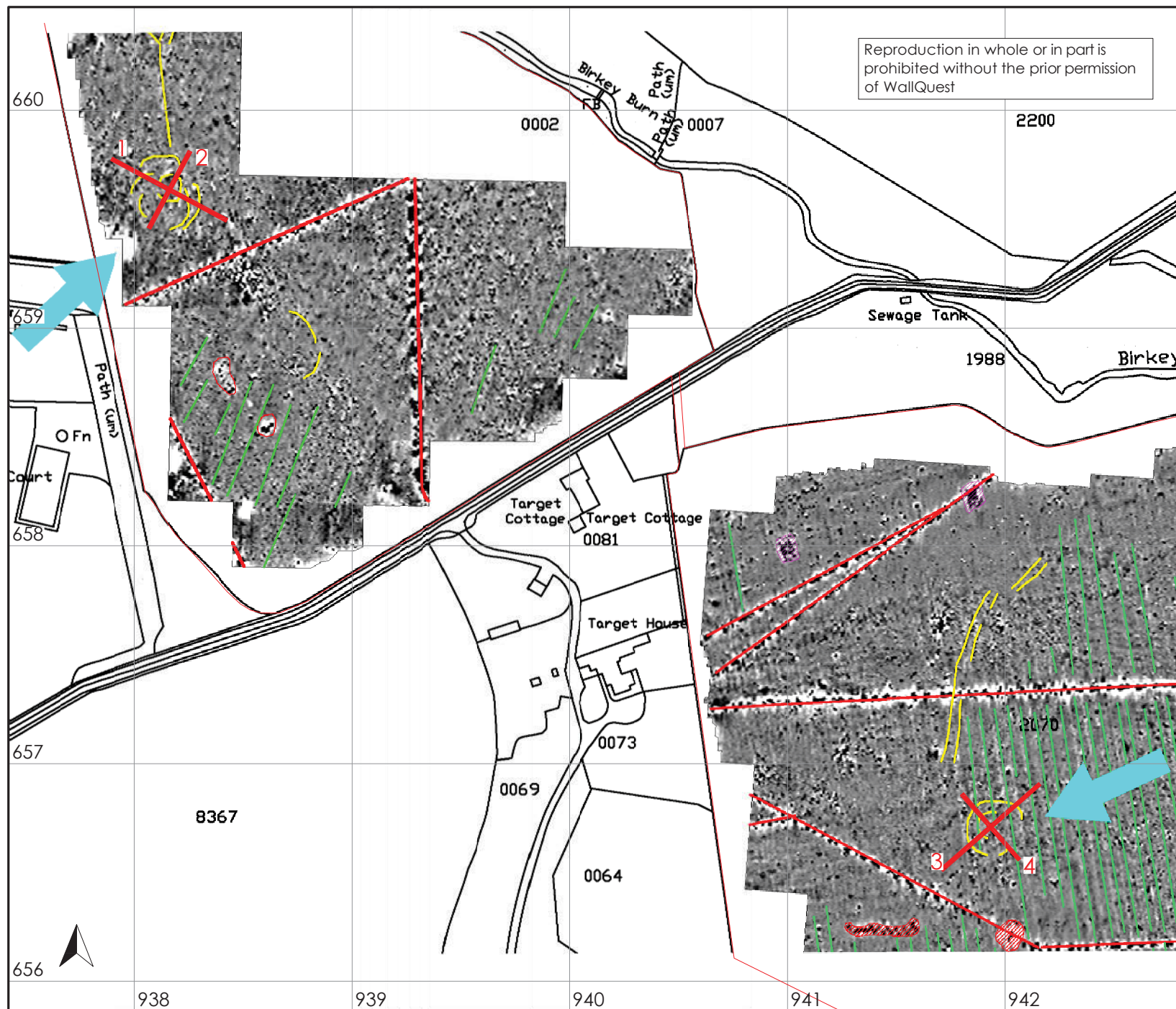
Trenches 1 and 2



Trenches 3 and 4







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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES DURHAM UNIVERSITY

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Figure 2: Trench location

0 100m
scale 1:2500 for A4 plot

 trench



Figure 3: Trenches 1 and 2,
looking south-east



Figure 4: Trenches 3 and 4,
looking north