

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

on behalf of
Northumberland County Council

Morpeth Leisure Centre
Gas House Lane
Morpeth
Northumberland

archaeological evaluation

report 5150
September 2019

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1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation conducted in advance of a proposed development at Gas house Lane, Morpeth. The works comprised the excavation of six evaluation trenches.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Northumberland County Council and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

Results

- 1.3 A pit containing a small assemblage of post-medieval artefacts was identified in the central part of the site.
- 1.4 Modern rubble and evidence for ground disturbance relating to the demolition of the former library was present in the western part of the site. No other archaeological deposits were recorded, or artefacts recovered.

Recommendations

- 1.5 Archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the development in the central part of the site is recommended, in order to record any archaeological resource that is uncovered.

2. Project background

Location (Figure 1)

- 2.1 The site is located on Gas House Lane, Morpeth, Northumberland (NGR centre: NZ 2025 8592). It is irregular in plan and covers an area of approximately 0.86 ha. The River Wansbeck is to the south, Gas House Lane is to the north, to the west is a band of mature trees with car parking beyond, and a residential property is to the east.

Development proposal

- 2.2 It is proposed to build a leisure centre on the site.

Objective

- 2.3 The objectives of the scheme of works were to
- evaluate the archaeological resource within the site where it may be acted upon and identify the nature, extent, quality, depth and preservation of any deposits
 - define the nature, date and extent of any archaeological remains present

Research Objectives

- 2.4 The regional research framework (Petts & Gerrard 2006) contains an agenda for archaeological research in the region, which is incorporated into regional planning policy implementation with respect to archaeology. In this instance, the scheme of works was designed to address agenda items: lii Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Settlement; Riv Roman Native and civilian life; MDi: Later medieval settlement; MDii: Later medieval landscape.

Written scheme of investigation

- 2.5 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation provided by Archaeological Services Durham University (reference DS19.317r2) and approved by the planning authority.

Dates

- 2.6 Fieldwork was undertaken w/c 26th August 2019. This report was prepared for September 2019.

Personnel

- 2.7 Fieldwork was conducted by Ben Matus, Meghan McCarthy and Matthew Claydon (supervisor). This report was prepared by Meghan McCarthy, with illustrations by Dr Helen Drinkall. Specialist reporting was conducted Jennifer Jones (artefacts), and Dr Charlotte O'Brien (palaeoenvironmental). Sample processing was undertaken by Jenny Richards. The Project Manager was Daniel Still.

Archive/OASIS

- 2.8 The site code is **MGH19**, for **Morpeth Gas House Lane 2019**. 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 **archaeol3-365197**.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

- 3.1 At the time of this evaluation, the proposed development area comprised car parking, overgrown former gardens, two derelict Victorian buildings and three vacant residential bungalows with grounds.
- 3.2 The proposed development area was predominantly level with a mean elevation of approximately 25m OD. The site is within Natural England's Mid Northumberland (12) National Character Area. The area is described as a plateau of undulating farmland with a series of ridges and enclosed river valleys in the north and a flatter landscape in the south (Natural England 2013). The River Wansbeck is just to the south of the site and has been prone to flooding in the past.
- 3.3 The underlying solid geology of the area comprises Carboniferous period mudstone, siltstone and sandstone of the Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation, which are overlain by River Terrace Deposits (undifferentiated) of gravel, sand and silt formed in the Quaternary Period (British Geological Survey 2019).

4. Historical and archaeological background

Previous archaeological works

- 4.1 An archaeological desk-based assessment has been conducted for the site (Archaeological Services 2019a), the results of which are summarised below.
- 4.2 While there is no direct evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity within the study area, the presence of activity in the surrounding vicinity and the location of the site in close proximity to the river and river crossings indicate that there is some potential for a resource from these periods to exist.
- 4.3 The proposed development area was located away from the medieval core of Morpeth and appears to have been in agricultural use as part of the common land of the borough in the medieval period. It remained in agricultural use until the middle of the 19th century. Evidence relating to this activity has the potential to survive within the site. Any such remains would be of limited archaeological significance.
- 4.4 Two large houses owned by prominent Morpeth inhabitants were built within the proposed development area in the mid-19th century. They remained private houses until the 1930s when they were purchased by Northumberland County Council. They were used by ARP personnel and the Red Cross during the Second World War, and subsequently by the Council. From the 1950s they were used by the Library Service.
- 4.5 A new purpose-built library was constructed in 1966 on the site. At the end of the 20th century three care home bungalows were built within the eastern side of the site. In 2017 the library was demolished and the land has subsequently been used as a car park.

5. The evaluation trenches

Introduction

- 5.1 Seven archaeological evaluation trenches were proposed; because of the need to protect trees, manholes and the requirement to maintain a 20m margin of

undisturbed ground around a badger sett, six trenches were excavated in adjusted locations.

Trench 1

- 5.2 This trench was 2m long, and was located towards the north-west corner of the site, in the area of the former library. Natural subsoil, a mid-yellowish-brown gravel [3], was identified at a depth of 1.5m. Above this was a dark brown sandy loam subsoil [2: 0.6m deep]. A cut [F9: over 1m by 1m] through these deposits in the south-west part of the trench was filled with a dark greyish brown fill [8] containing brick, stone and concrete debris. The feature extended beyond the edges of the trench. Overlying the subsoil and feature was a layer of loosely compact mixed rubble [7: 0.5-0.7m deep]. The rubble and cut feature are thought to relate to the demolition of the former library building. Above this was the current car park surface [6: 0.1m deep], a well-compacted layer of mixed rubble, sand and gravel.

Trench 2

- 5.3 This trench was 2m long and positioned towards the south-west of the site, in the area of the former library. Natural subsoil, a mid-yellowish-brown gravel [3], was reached at a depth of 1.2m. This was overlain by a dark brown sandy loam subsoil [2: 0.6m deep], above which was a deposit of loosely compacted mixed rubble [7: 0.5-0.7m deep] relating to the demolition of the modern library building. Over this was the current car park surface [6: 0.1m deep], a well-compacted layer of mixed rubble, sand and gravel. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 3 (Photo 1)

- 5.4 Trench 3, near the southern edge of the site, was moved slightly from its intended location due to the presence of a large beech tree and dense overgrowth. This trench was on an east-west alignment and was extended to be 25m long. Natural subsoil, yellowish-brown sandy gravel [3], was reached at a depth of between 0.6 and 0.8m. Above this was a brown sandy silt loam subsoil [2: 0.4m deep], which was overlain by a dark brown sandy loam topsoil [1: 0.4m deep]. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 4

- 5.5 This trench was positioned in the centre of the site, and was repositioned slightly from its intended location to protect trees. It was 7m long and oriented on a north-east / south-west alignment. Natural subsoil [3], a mid-brown sandy gravel, was identified at a depth of between 0.7 and 0.8m. This was overlain by a subsoil [2: 0.4m deep] of brown silty sandy loam. Above this was a topsoil [1: 0.4m deep] of brown sandy loam. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 5

- 5.6 Trench 5 was located in the central area of the site on an east-west alignment and was 13m long. The intended trench location was adjusted slightly to avoid dense overgrowth and trees. Natural subsoil, a mid-yellowish-brown sandy gravel [3], was identified at a depth of between 0.7 and 0.9m. Above this was a dark brown, soft, friable, silty sandy loam [2: 0.4-6m deep]. This was overlain by a soft dark brown sandy loam topsoil [1: 0.3m deep]. No archaeological features were identified and no artefacts were recovered.

Trench 6

- 5.7 Trench 6 could not be excavated due to the location of a badger sett at the east end of the southern wall of 'The Willows' (the eastern of the two 19th century buildings).

Trench 7 (Photo 2)

- 5.8 This trench was 8m long and positioned on a north-south alignment in the central part of the site. Natural subsoil, a soft and gritty mid yellowish-brown sand [3], was reached at a depth of 0.7m. Cut into this at the south end of the trench was a sub-square pit [F5: 0.7m long by 0.6m wide, 0.2m deep] filled with a soft, loosely compact dark greyish-brown sandy loam [4: 0.2m deep]. Fragments of clay pipe stem and other artefacts were recovered from this. Above [F5] was a dark brown sandy loam subsoil [2: 0.4m thick], which was overlain by a dark greyish-brown sandy loam topsoil [1: 0.3m deep]. No further archaeological features were identified and no further artefacts were recovered.

6. The artefacts

Pottery assessment

Results

- 6.1 The sample residue from pit fill context [4] had three very small 19th/early 20th century body sherds, weighing 3g. These are pieces of yellow-glazed and brown-glazed coarseware and glazed earthenware.

Recommendation

- 6.2 No further work is recommended.

Clay pipe assessment

Results

- 6.3 Six post-medieval clay tobacco pipe stems were found in context [4], three hand-recovered and three from the sample residue, which also contained a small fragment of undecorated tobacco pipe bowl. None has stamps or a maker's mark.

Recommendation

- 6.4 No further work is recommended.

Glass assessment

Results

- 6.5 A minute flake (<5mm long) of unweathered, yellow translucent glass came from the sample residue from pit fill context [4]. Post-medieval.

Recommendation

- 6.6 No further work is recommended.

Building materials assessment

Results

- 6.7 The sample from [4] contained a small, abraded and irregularly-shaped piece of fired clay, c.37 x 28 x 20mm, weighing 16g. The highly laminated clay is oxidised on one side, which is possibly original, and reduced on the other. X10 microscopic examination showed impressions of vegetative material in the clay matrix, probably added as temper. This may be a damaged and abraded fragment of daub, of unknown date.

Recommendation

- 6.8 No further work is recommended.

Fuel residues assessment

Results

- 6.9 The sample residue from [4] contained a very small quantity (<1g wt) of burnt fuel waste. Undateable.

Recommendation

- 6.10 No further work is recommended.

7. The palaeoenvironmental evidence

Methods

- 7.1 A palaeoenvironmental assessment was carried out on a bulk sample [context 4], taken from the fill of a small pit. The sample was manually floated and sieved through a 500µm mesh. The residue was examined for shells, fruitstones, nutshells, charcoal, small bones, pottery, flint, glass and industrial residues, and was scanned using a magnet for ferrous fragments. The flots were examined at up to x60 magnification using a Leica MZ7.5 stereomicroscope for waterlogged and charred botanical remains.

- 7.2 The works were undertaken in accordance with the palaeoenvironmental research aims and objectives outlined in the regional archaeological research framework and resource agendas (Petts & Gerrard 2006; Hall & Huntley 2007; Huntley 2010).

Results

- 7.3 Pit fill [4] produced a small flots comprising cinder, modern roots, modern leaf litter and a single fragment of vitrified, oak stemwood charcoal in poor condition. Charred and waterlogged plant macrofossils are absent. Residue finds include pottery, clay pipe, semi-vitrified fuel waste and a tiny fragment of glass. The results are presented in Table 1.2.

Discussion

- 7.4 The sample comprises general waste consistent with a post-medieval date. Diagnostic palaeoenvironmental remains are absent.

Recommendations

- 7.5 No further work is recommended on the sample due to the absence of diagnostic palaeoenvironmental remains.

8. The archaeological resource

- 8.1 A pit containing a small assemblage of post-medieval artefacts was identified in the central part of the site.

- 8.2 Modern rubble and evidence for ground disturbance relating to the demolition of the former library was present in the western part of the site. No other archaeological deposits were recorded, or artefacts recovered.

9. Impact assessment

- 9.1 Development of the central part of the site has the potential to remove or truncate an archaeological resource of post-medieval date.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 Archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the development in the central part of the site is recommended, in order to record any archaeological resource that is uncovered.

11. Sources

- Archaeological Services 2019a *Morpeth Leisure Centre, Gas House Lane, Morpeth: archaeological desk-based assessment*. Archaeological Services Durham University report **5061**
- Archaeological Services 2019b *Morpeth Leisure Centre, Gas House Lane, Morpeth: archaeological building recording*. Archaeological Services Durham University Report **5136**
- Hall, A R, & Huntley, J P, 2007 *A review of the evidence for macrofossil plant remains from archaeological deposits in northern England*. Research Department Report Series no. **87**. London
- Huntley, J P, 2010 *A review of wood and charcoal recovered from archaeological excavations in Northern England*. Research Department Report Series no. **68**. London
- Petts, D, & Gerrard, C, 2006 *Shared Visions: The North-East Regional Research Framework for the Historic environment*. Durham

Appendix 1: Data tables

Table 1.1: Context data

The * symbols in the columns at the right indicate the presence of artefacts of the following types: P pottery, B bone, M metals, F flint, I industrial residues, G glass, C Clay pipe, O other materials.

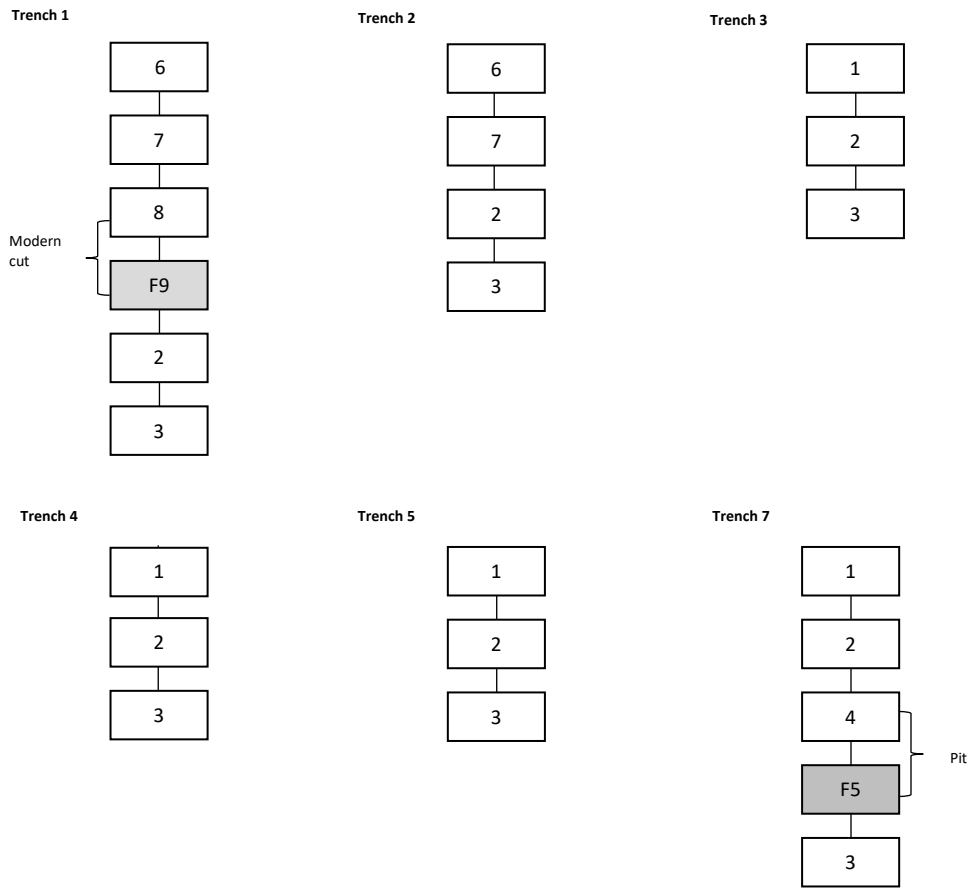
| No | Area | Description | P | B | M | F | I | G | C | O |
|----|--------|-------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tr 3-7 | Topsoil | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Tr 1-7 | Subsoil | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Tr 1-7 | Natural subsoil | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Tr 7 | Pit fill | | | | | * | * | * | * |
| F5 | Tr 7 | Pit cut | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Tr 1-2 | Current car park surface | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | Tr 1-2 | Demolition rubble | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Tr1 | Fill of modern demolition cut | | | | | | | | |
| F9 | Tr1 | Modern demolition cut | | | | | | | | |

Table 1.2: Data from palaeoenvironmental assessment

| Sample | Context | Feature | Volume processed (l) | Flot volume (ml) | C14 available | Rank | Notes |
|--------|---------|---------|----------------------|------------------|---------------|------|---|
| 1 | 4 | F5 | 16 | 20 | No | * | Small flot, modern roots, leaf litter, cinder, single fragment of vitrified oak stemwood charcoal. No charred or waterlogged plant macrofossils. Finds include pot, magnetic fuel waste/hammerscale, clay pipe, burnt coal shale and a tiny fragment of glass |

[Rank: *: low; **: medium; ***: high; ****: very high potential to provide further palaeoenvironmental information]

Appendix 2: Stratigraphic matrices



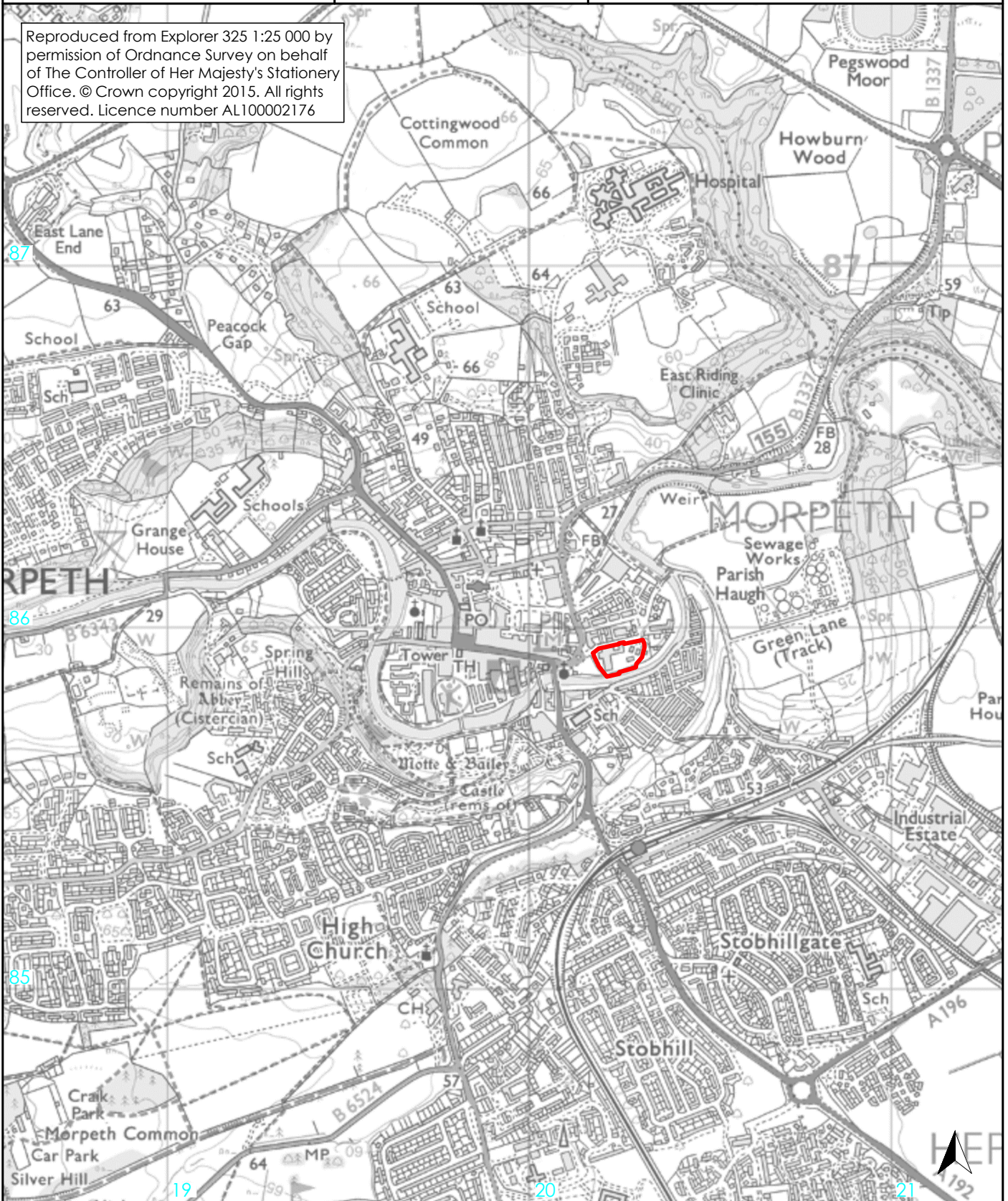


Photograph 1: Trench 3, looking west



Photograph 2: Trench 7, Pit F5, looking south-west

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 proposed development area

0 750m
scale 1:15 000 for A4 plot

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

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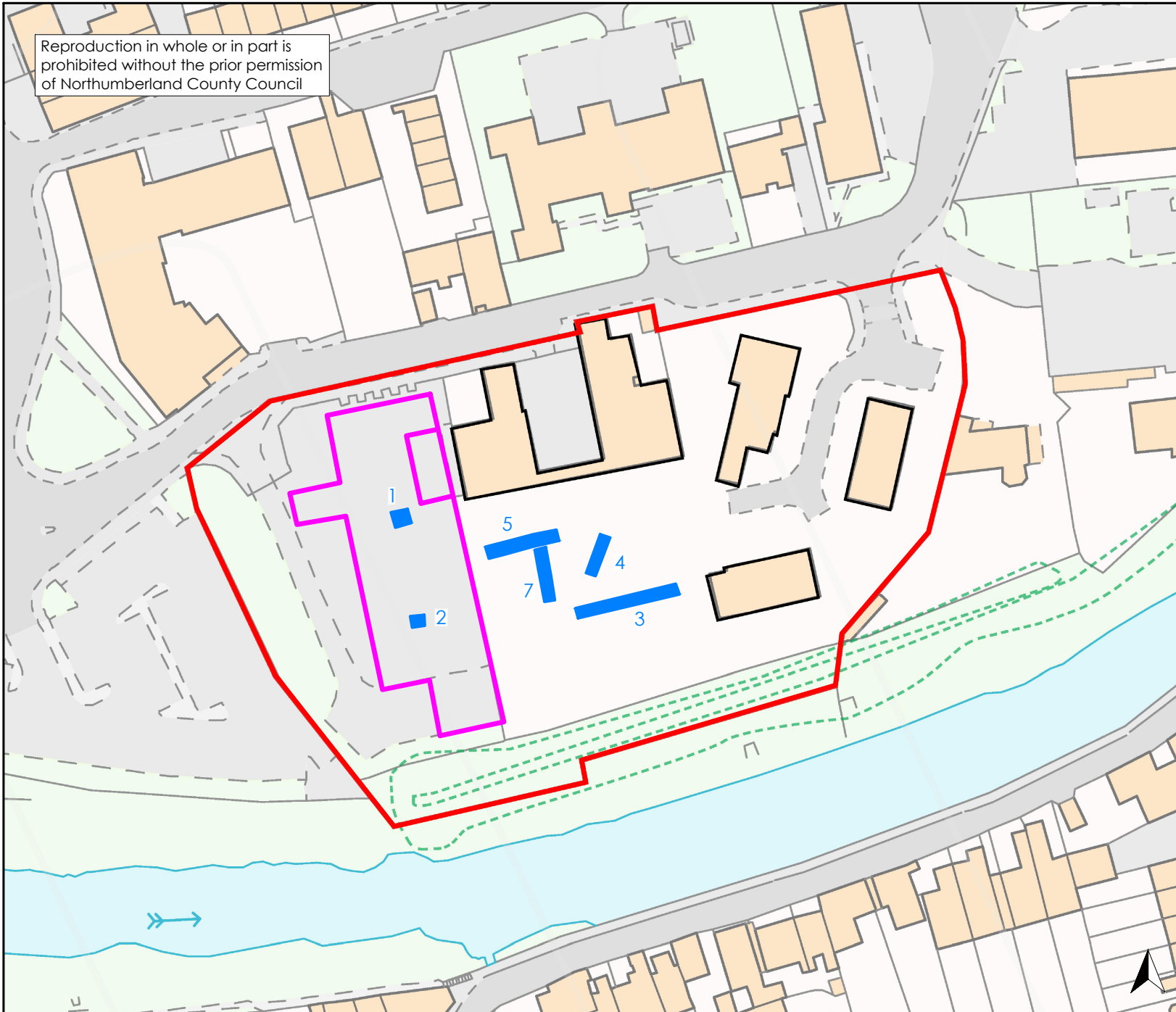
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Figure 2: Trench location

0 50m
scale 1:1000 for A4 plot

-  site boundary
-  trench
-  outline of former library

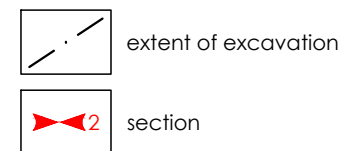
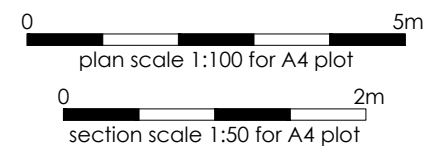


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**Northumberland County
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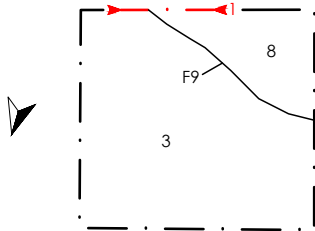
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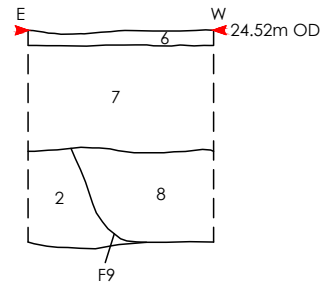
Figure 3: Trenches 1 & 7, plans
and sections



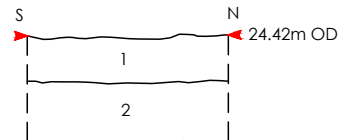
Trench 1, plan



Trench 1, Section 1



Trench 7, Section 2



Trench 7, Section 3



Trench 7, plan

