

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

on behalf of
Mr Norman Bowlf

Town Farm Cottage
Corbridge
Northumberland

archaeological watching brief

report 5926
March 2023

Contents

1.	Summary	1
2.	Project background	2
3.	Landuse, topography and geology	3
4.	Historical and archaeological background	3
5.	The deposit sequence	5
6.	The artefacts	7
7.	The palaeoenvironmental evidence	8
8.	The archaeological resource	9
9.	Recommendations	9
10.	Sources	9
Appendix 1: Data tables		10
Appendix 2: Stratigraphic matrix		11

Photographs

Photo 1:	Test pit 1, wall F5 looking south
Photo 2:	Test pit 2, wall F5 looking south
Photo 3:	Wall foundation F28, looking north
Photo 4:	Walls F5 and F20, looking north
Photo 5:	Walls F6, F7, cobbles F8 and paving F9, looking west
Photo 6:	Cobble floor F8, looking west

Figures

Figure 1:	Site location
Figure 2:	Location of watching brief
Figure 3:	Photogrammetric plans and section

1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted for a development at Town Farm Cottage, Corbridge, Northumberland. The works comprised the monitoring of groundworks for a building extension foundation trench.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Mr Norman Bowlt and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

Results

- 1.3 Sandstone foundations, cobbles and paved surfaces relating to the 18th/19th century Town Farm Cottages were recorded. The arrangement of wall foundations may reflect pigsties or other animal housing.
- 1.4 A small assemblage of artefacts dating to the post-medieval and modern periods was recovered.

Recommendations

- 1.5 As no significant archaeological resource was identified, no further scheme of archaeological works is recommended in relation to this development.

2. Project background

Location (Figure 1)

- 2.1 The site is located at Town Farm Cottage, Corbridge, Northumberland (NGR centre: NY 9873 6473). It covers an area of approximately 182m². The site is bounded on all sides by Corbridge town, with arable farmland beyond to the west.

Development

- 2.2 The development is an extension to Town Farm Cottage. The planning application reference number is 21/02685/FUL.

Objective

- 2.3 The objective of the watching brief programme was to identify and record any archaeological features uncovered during the works.

Research objectives

- 2.4 The regional research framework (Petts & Gerrard 2006) contains an agenda for archaeological research in the region. The scheme of works was designed to address agenda items:

Roman

- Rii. Roads and communication
- Riii. The Roman military presence
- Riv. Native and civilian life
- Rv. Material culture
- Rvi. Trade and industry
- Rvii. Religion

Medieval

- MDi. Settlement
- MDii. Landscape
- MDiii. Urbanism
- MDv. Churches and religion
- MDvii. Medieval ceramics and other artefacts
- MDvi. Death and burial
- MDviii. Other medieval industries
- MDix. Trade and economy
- MDxi. The medieval to post-medieval transition

Specification

- 2.5 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) provided by Archaeological Services Durham University (reference 22042) and approved by the planning authority.

Dates

- 2.6 Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th and 24th February 2023. This report was prepared for March 2023.

Personnel

- 2.7 Fieldwork was conducted by Valeriia Vdovina and Rachel Wells (supervisor). This report was prepared by Natalie Swann and Valeriia Vdovina, with illustrations by Dr

Helen Drinkall. Specialist reporting was conducted by Dr Carrie Armstrong (animal bone) and Jennifer Jones (other artefacts). The Project Manager was Natalie Swann.

Archive/OASIS

- 2.8 The site code is **TFC23**, for **Town Farm Cottage, Corbridge 2023**. 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 **archaeol3-513915**.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

- 3.1 At the time of these works, the development area comprised outbuildings associated with Town Farm Cottage.
- 3.2 The area was predominantly level with a mean elevation of approximately 39.7m OD. The River Tyne is approximately 350m south of the site.
- 3.3 The underlying bedrock geology of the area comprises sandstone of the Stainmore Formation, overlain by gravel, sand and silt (The British Geological Survey).

4. Historical and archaeological background

The prehistoric period (up to AD 70)

- 4.1 The earliest evidence for occupation around Corbridge dates to the Mesolithic period. Two Mesolithic flints were found during test pitting 800m north-east of the site on land east of Deadrige Lane.
- 4.2 There is more evidence for activity in the later prehistoric periods, with a Bronze Age cist recorded in the town during construction of new housing in 1922, probably at Leazes Terrace. A possible Bronze Age settlement was recorded during excavations at the Roman fort, where a palisaded enclosure was found underneath part of the fort. Although there is no direct evidence for occupation during the Iron Age in the site, to the north-east of Corbridge is a hillfort at Shildon Hill.

The Roman period (AD 70 to 5th century)

- 4.3 The Roman fort and town (*Corstopitum/Coria*) to the west of Corbridge are part of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (N9002). The excavated remains of the fort lie 500m west of the site. It was on the route of the Stanegate Roman road which extended east to the fort at Carlisle (Luguvalium).
- 4.4 The construction of Hadrian's Wall to the north of Corbridge between AD 122 and 128 established the military frontier. Corbridge held a strategic location on the junction between the Stanegate and another major Roman road, Dere Street, which was the supply route between York (*Eboracum*) and Newstead (*Trimontium*) in Scotland. During the construction of the Antonine Wall in AD 142, Corbridge had grown in prominence as a supply base, and following the re-establishment of Hadrian's Wall as the frontier in the AD 160s, Corbridge continued to develop.

- 4.5 While there is no direct evidence of Roman activity in the proposed development area, the full extent of the Roman settlement at Corbridge is undetermined.

The medieval period (5th century to 1540)

- 4.6 An early medieval settlement with a church or monastic site was established on the hill to the east of the Roman town in the area of St. Andrew's Church, with the Roman site used as a stone quarry. A monastery at Corbridge is recorded in AD 786. The early medieval town was also probably enclosed by a ditch and embankment.
- 4.7 Around the 13th century the medieval street plan was laid out: this comprised burgage plots around the marketplace, alongside Marketgate/Westgate (now Watling Street), Fish Shamble Gate (now Hill Street) and Smithy Gate (now Main Street). The Church of St. Andrew, which had been adapted from an earlier church in the 11th century, was subjected to further alterations in the 13th century.
- 4.8 A small settlement was established on the land to the north-west of the town around a manor house (Old Prior Manor and Prior Manor Cottage). The house belonged to the prior of Hexham, who was also sub-deacon of Corbridge, and was built in the early or mid-14th century with a church (Trinity Church). Trinity church is recorded in ruins in the middle of the 16th century and was cleared for housing in the late 19th century. The 1860s Ordnance Survey map shows the site of the church opposite the proposed development area, with the site of the Priory Manor to the north-east of it.

The post-medieval period (1541 to 1899)

- 4.9 Town Farmhouse to the immediate south-west of the proposed development area is a Grade II listed building of 18th century date which was enlarged and remodelled in the early 19th century.
- 4.10 The 1860s Ordnance Survey map shows Hill Bank, which later became Corbridge Town Farm. The layout of the farm buildings remains essentially the same through the late 19th and 20th centuries. The Town Farm Cottage buildings constitute the east range of the farmstead.

Previous archaeological work

- 4.11 No archaeological work has been conducted within the proposed development area. In 1989 a service trench for a water main was excavated from Trinity Court (to the north-west of the site) to the River Tyne; a Roman ditch was identified.
- 4.12 A watching brief carried out at Town Farm Field in November 1993, immediately north of the proposed development area, recovered Roman pottery, including mortaria, amphorae and Samian tableware. The watching brief also revealed stone wall foundations, with a layer to the east of the foundation containing roughly worked sandstone blocks.
- 4.13 Corbridge was included in The Northumberland Extensive Urban Survey Project (Northumberland County Council & English Heritage 2008). The report highlights the potential for Roman and medieval archaeological potential within the proposed development area. In particular, the report notes that the full extent of Trinity Church and its graveyard remains unknown.

5. The deposit sequence

Introduction

- 5.1 Demolition of the existing building had taken place prior to the watching brief. In line with the WSI, stone from the building was examined to check for evidence of reused Roman material; no reused material was identified.
- 5.2 Two test pits were excavated, followed by an area of ground reduction (Figures 2 and 3). The test pits were excavated by hand, and the ground reduction was conducted using a machine equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. All excavations were carried out under constant archaeological supervision. Trench plans and section are shown on Figure 3. Context data is summarised in Table 1.1.

Test pit 1

- 5.3 This test pit was located at the intersection of the wall of the existing building and an internal dividing wall (Photo 1). It was excavated to investigate the need to underpin the wall of the building and measured up to 0.64m long by 0.52m wide, and between 0.36m and 0.64m deep.
- 5.4 Along the south edge of the test pit was a sandstone foundation [F5: over 0.64m deep] constructed from roughly hewn regular coursed sandstone blocks measuring up to 0.24m long by 0.17m wide and 0.13m thick. It was directly below the internal division wall and is therefore probably a foundation for this wall. It was keyed into the east wall of the building indicating that they are contemporary.
- 5.5 Build up against this and across the base of the test pit was a firm dark brown sandy clay [4: over 0.23m deep] containing occasional small, rounded stones throughout. Over this was a dark yellow-brown sand [3: 0.1m deep], then a loose grey-brown deposit comprising sand and rounded stones up to 0.08m long [2: 0.29m deep]. Capping the trench was the concrete floor of the outbuilding [F1: 0.06m thick]. No artefacts were recovered.

Test pit 2

- 5.6 This test pit was located 2.5m west of Test pit 1 and was excavated to assess the suitability of the ground for a raft foundation. It was 0.79m long by 0.66m wide, and up to 0.3m deep (Photo 2).
- 5.7 A sandstone foundation [F5: over 0.23m thick] was identified along the south edge of this test pit constructed from uneven coursed sandstone blocks measuring up to 0.48m long and 0.07m thick.
- 5.8 Build up against this and across the base of the test pit was a firm dark brown sandy clay [4: over 0.07m deep] containing occasional small, rounded stones, under a dark yellow-brown sand [3: 0.14m deep]. Capping the trench was the concrete floor of the outbuilding [F1: 0.06m thick]. No artefacts were recovered.

Ground reduction

- 5.9 Following the excavation of the test pits, an area measuring 34m² was excavated. The natural subsoil, a yellow sand [30] was reached at the depth of 0.8m.
- 5.10 Overlying the natural subsoil was a layer of red-brown sand clay buried soil [29 =17: 0.45m deep]. 19th/20th-century pottery sherds were recovered from layer [17].

- 5.11 The north and east sides of the trench were bounded by existing sandstone walls from an outbuilding that had recently been partly demolished. The south side of the trench was bounded by the north wall of Town Farm Cottage. Within the trench a series of sandstone wall foundations were recorded (Figure 2) that divided the area up into three small cells aligned east/west measuring 3.7m long by 1.8m wide. The cells were further partially subdivided by short walls aligned north/south measuring up to 1.5m long. This cell arrangement is too small for horse stables and is more likely to reflect the remains of pigsties or other animal housing.
- 5.12 The sandstone wall along the north edge of the trench, aligned east/west, had been partially demolished [F27: 3.7m long, 0.48m wide, 2.5m high]. Aligned north/south and butting this wall was the remains of a sandstone foundation [F28: 1.15m long, 0.5m wide, 0.26m high, Photo 3].
- 5.13 To the south another sandstone foundation [F5: 3.7m long, 0.45m wide, 0.6m high] was recorded aligned east/west and keyed into the extant building wall to the east, this was the foundation identified in the test pits (Photo 4). A second wall foundation extended south from and was tied into F5 [F20: 1.05m long, 0.5m wide, 0.25m high]. Both walls were sat within a vertical sided construction cut [F24] that cut the earlier deposits. The area between the cut and the wall had been backfilled with a red-brown gritty sandy clay [23].
- 5.14 Further south the same alignment of walls was repeated forming a third cell. Wall F6 [3.7m long, 0.45m wide, 0.18m high] extended east/west from the extant building, with wall F7 [0.8m long, 0.5m wide, 0.2m high] extending south from F6 (Photo 5). These walls were also sat within a vertical sided construction cut [F22] that had been backfilled with a dark yellow-brown gritty sand [21].
- 5.15 South of wall F6 overlying layer [29] was layer of yellow-brown sand [16] deposited as a ground levelling deposit.
- 5.16 Overlying layer 26 and butting up against walls F6 and F7 was the remains of a cobble surface [F8: 1.4m long, 1.3m wide, 0.07m deep, Photo 6] set into a layer of yellow-brown sandy clay [16: 0.11m deep].
- 5.17 Between walls F5 and F6 and spreading to the west beyond the limits of the walls a layer of dark grey-brown gritty sandy clay was recorded [19: 0.1m deep] overlain by a thin layer of sand [18: 0.04m deep] that formed the bedding for a stone paved surface [F9: 3.4m by 1.4m, 0.05m deep]. Some of the stones had clearly been reused, one had a square hole cut for a door frame and other had a peg hole at one end suggesting it was a stone roof tile.
- 5.18 Sealing the cobbles, paving and walls was a layer of brown sandy clay [4=14=15: 0.25m deep].
- 5.19 Overlying this was a series of modern ground levelling deposits. A layer of grey mortar [13: 0.1m deep] was sealed by a layer of pink mortar [12: 0.05m deep], which was overlain by a yellow sand [11=3: 0.05m-0.1m deep]. To the east of the site this was overlain by a layer of tarmac [10: 0.04m deep]. Elsewhere a deposit of grey-brown sand and gravel [2: 0.25m deep] formed the bedding for a thin layer of concrete [F1: 0.06m deep].

6. The artefacts

Pottery assessment

Results

- 6.1 Five sherds/vessels (328g total weight) were recovered from three contexts. An almost complete, buff, salt-glazed stoneware jar came from context [15] making up most of the assemblage weight at 313g. This was 102mm high x 83mm diameter, with traces of a red paper label – or possibly paint – on the outside. Probably a preserve jar, of late 19th or early 20th century date.
- 6.2 Contexts [4 and 17] produced the other four sherds. Context [4] had a single body sherd of whiteware with external cobalt blue glaze. Context [17] had three sherds, one a rim sherd of mottle-glazed coarseware, the other two body sherds of glazed whiteware and brown-glazed earthenware. All late 19th or early 20th century in date.

Recommendation

- 6.3 No further work is recommended.

Animal bone assessment

Results

- 6.4 A single animal bone fragment was recovered from context [17]. This was a pig left femur distal end fragment. The bone was in moderate condition with some surface flaking, although damage was visible along the length of the element and the articulation was damaged preventing any measurements being taken. The bone had been sawn with an oblique cut across the shaft.

Discussion

- 6.5 The saw was a late 18th or 19th century innovation in butchery and such working indicates a post-medieval date for the fragment.

Recommendation

- 6.6 No further work is recommended.

Glass assessment

Results

- 6.7 Context [15] had a complete, clear, unweathered food jar, mould-made with an applied closure for a foil lid. There were slight traces of an unreadable paper label. 20th century.

Recommendation

- 6.8 No further work is recommended.

Lino assessment

Results

- 6.9 Contexts [15] produced 8 pieces of wet, torn, linoleum flooring, 7 in the same pattern, the largest piece c.242 x 264 x 2.5mm thick. These had a cream coloured, partly patterned background with a cream, green and red geometric design with floral details. The lino backing was red. Most of the fragments had localised burn marks.

The other piece, c.117 x 88mm, was in a different colour scheme, with a grey background with cream/black-lined squares and floral motifs. The backing was again red, but this piece was thicker, at 4mm, and probably older. The lino dates to c.1930s – 1940s.

Discussion

- 6.10 Linoleum was first patented in 1860 and quickly became very popular. It was largely superseded by plastic-based products in the 1960s, but does continue to be produced today.

Recommendation

- 6.11 No further work is recommended. Samples have been photographed for inclusion in the site archive and the fragments will be discarded.

Leather boot assessment

Results

- 6.12 Context [15] had an almost complete but damaged man's right foot safety boot with a metal toe cap. The outer layers of the sole construction were missing, the uppers present but disarranged. The boot was fastened by 6 copper alloy reinforced lace holes. The inside of the boot was filled with compressed straw. It was not clear whether this had been acquired post-deposition or had been used for added comfort during wear. The sole was 305mm long, equivalent to men's size 11.5 to 12.

Discussion

- 6.13 Steel toe cap footwear was first used by German soldiers in the second World War. Its use for workers' general safety was enacted in law in Britain in the 1970s, suggesting this as the earliest date for the boot.

Recommendation

- 6.14 No further work is recommended. The boot has been photographed for inclusion in the site archive and will be discarded.

Iron objects assessment

Results

- 6.15 Two iron objects were found. A corroded but near complete, curved bucket handle came from context [15], c.482mm long and made from 'D' shaped bar, c.15mm wide x 8mm deep, with a 'U' shaped dip in the top surface. The metal was oval in section at the ends, where it had been curled into loops. One end still retained the shield-shaped, riveted plate for attachment to the bucket body. Late 19th/20th century.
- 6.16 The same context had an intact but corroded child's enamelled plate, 160mm diam. The enamel was pale blue on both sides, with red and white enamelled motifs of a rabbit and a kneeling child on the front. Possibly c.1940s.

Recommendation

- 6.17 No further work is recommended.

7. The palaeoenvironmental evidence

- 7.1 No material suitable for palaeoenvironmental assessment was identified.

8. The archaeological resource

- 8.1 Sandstone foundations, cobbles and paved surfaces relating to the 18th/19th century Town Farm Cottages were recorded. The arrangement of wall foundations may reflect pigsties or other animal housing.
- 8.2 A small assemblage of artefacts dating to the post-medieval and modern periods was recovered.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 As no significant archaeological resource was identified, no further scheme of archaeological works is recommended in relation to this development.

10. Sources

Northumberland County Council and English Heritage, 2008 *Corbridge, The Northumberland Extensive Urban Survey Project*.

Petts, D, & Gerrard, C, 2006 *Shared Visions: The North-East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment*. Durham

Appendix 1: Data table

Table 1.1: Context data

No	Description	P	B	M	G	O
F1	Concrete floor					
2	Loose stony deposit					
3	Sand deposit					
4	Sandy clay deposit	•				
F5	Foundation of internal dividing wall (north)					
F6	Foundation of internal dividing wall (south)					
F7	N/S wall keyed into F6					
F8	Cobbles in SW corner					
F9	Paving along west side of area					
10	Black tarmac					
11	Yellow-grey sand deposit					
12	Pink mortar deposit					
13	Grey mortar deposit					
14	Sandstone rubble					
15	Loose brown deposit in SE corner	•	•	•	•	•
16	Sand below cobbles F8					
17	Dark brown clayey sand deposit	•	•			
18	Sand deposit below F9					
19	Black deposit below context 18					
F20	N/S wall keyed into F5					
21	Fill of F22					
F22	Construction cut for wall F6 + F7					
23	Fill of construction cut for wall F5 + F20					
F24	Construction cut for wall F5 + F20					
25	Black deposit west of F20					
26	Yellow sand south of F5					
F27	External wall aligned N/S and E/W					
F28	Foundation of N/S wall keyed into F27					
29	Red sandy deposit					
30	Natural yellow sand subsoil					

Appendix 2: Stratigraphic matrix

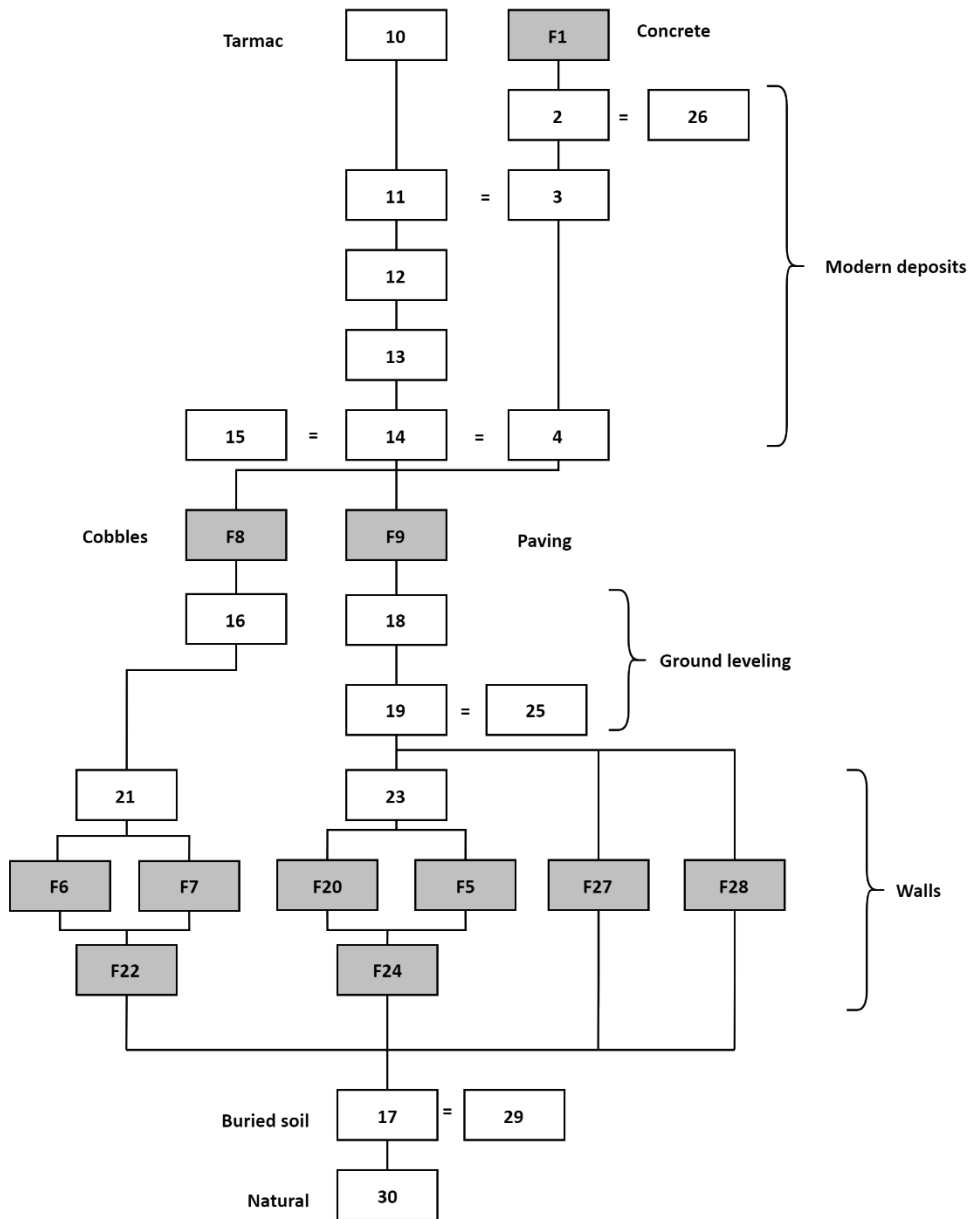




Photo 1: Test pit 1, F5, looking south



Photo 2: Test pit 2, F5, looking south



Photo 3: Wall F28, looking north



Photo 4: Walls F5 and F20, looking north



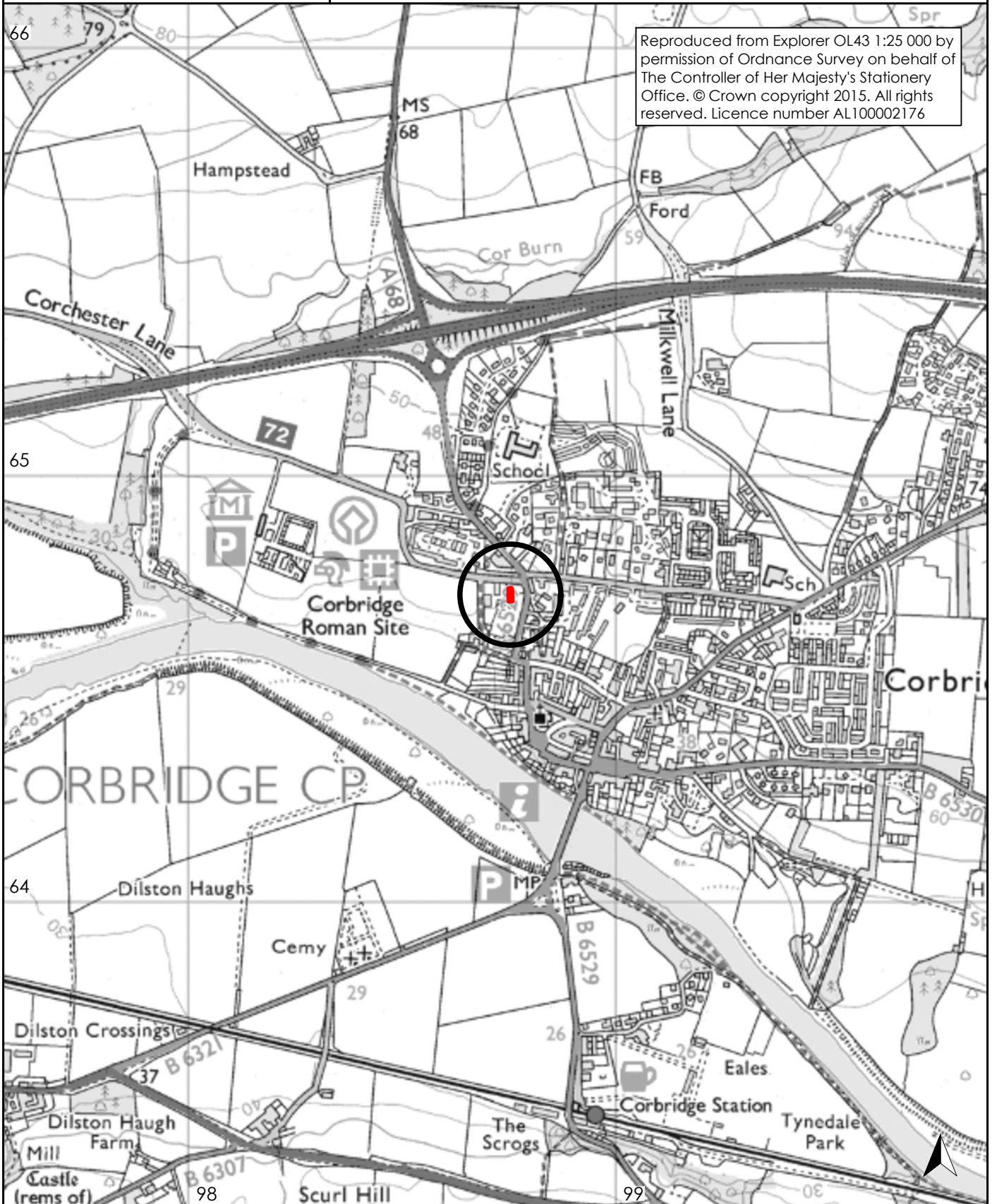
Photo 5: Wall F6 and F7, cobbles F8 and paving F9, looking west



Photo 6: Cobble floor F8, looking west

Figure 1: Site location

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location of watching brief

0 500m
scale 1:12 500 for A4 plot

Figure 2: Location of watching brief

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location of watching brief

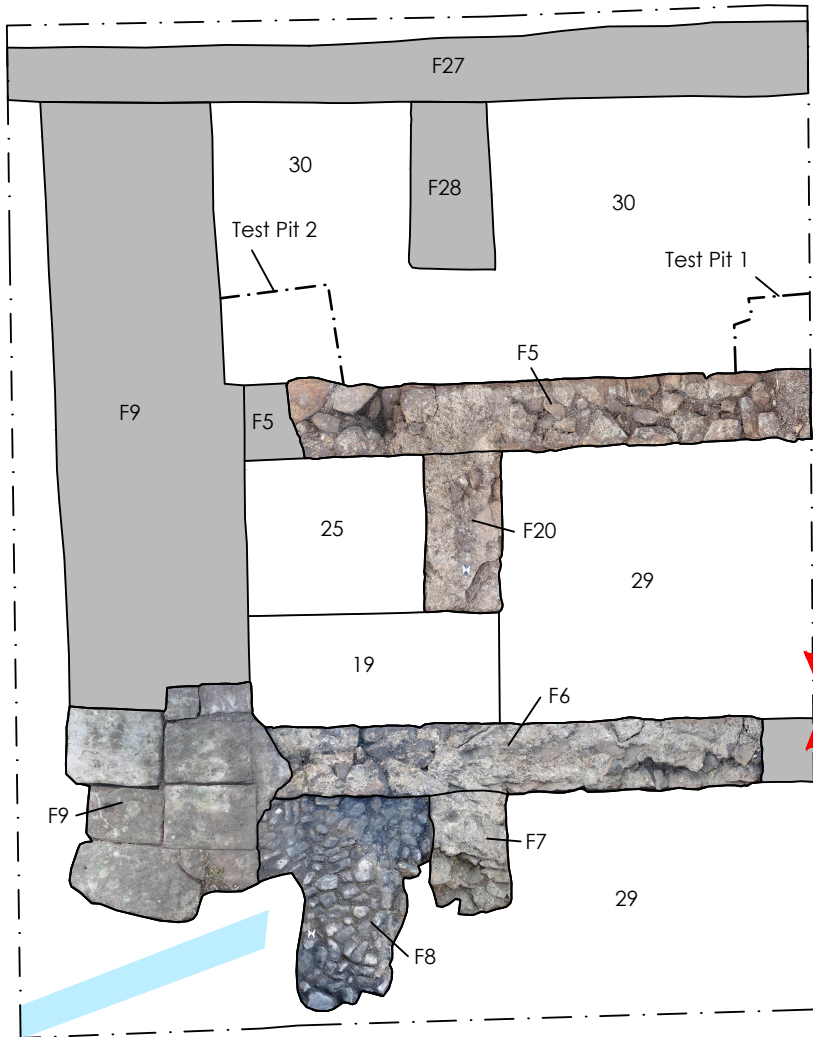


features



Figure 3: Photogrammetric plans and section

Plan



Section

