

## **The Chains, Corbridge, Northumberland archaeological watching brief**

*on behalf of*

**Charles Church Ltd**

**ASUD Report 1244**  
May 2005

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**archaeological watching brief**  
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May 2005

*Archaeological Services University of Durham*

on behalf of

***Charles Church Ltd***

*Redworth Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 6HD*

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## **1. Summary**

### ***The project***

- 1.1 A parcel of land to the north of the centre of Corbridge is the subject of a proposal for landscaping and a housing development. The site is presently in cultivation as allotment gardens, and administered by a group of Trustees. An archaeological assessment suggested that the site might contain significant archaeological evidence of past occupation; the land is bounded by St Helen's Lane to the north, believed to follow the route of a Roman road. The sites of a medieval manor and chapel are close by, and the site is thought to be on the line of the medieval town ditch.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Charles Church Ltd, and conducted by Archaeological Services University of Durham in accordance with a project design approved by Northumberland County Council Conservation Section.

### ***Results***

- 1.3 No archaeological evidence was uncovered during the watching brief. The modern burial of domestic rubbish, stones and pets were uncovered in some areas.

### ***Recommendations***

- 1.4 No further archaeological work is required as a result of the watching brief.

## **2. Project background**

### ***Location (Figure 1)***

- 2.1 The site is located between St Helen's Lane and St Helen's Road, Corbridge, Northumberland grid reference NY 9900 6466. The site is bounded by St Helen's Lane to north, residential dwellings to east, St Helen's road to the south and a residential building development to the west.

### ***Development proposal***

- 2.2 The proposal is for a residential housing development, with associated access and services.

### ***Objective***

#### ***Watching brief***

- 2.3 The objective of the watching brief was to identify, excavate and record any significant archaeological features within the proposed development area, in advance of the development.

### ***Methods statement***

- 2.4 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a project design approved by Northumberland County Council Conservation Section (RA01.122 revised).

### ***Dates***

- 2.5 Fieldwork was undertaken between 29<sup>th</sup> March and 20<sup>th</sup> September 2004. This report was prepared between 7<sup>th</sup> April and 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

### ***Personnel***

- 2.6 Fieldwork was conducted by Andy Willis, Mark Douglas, Jason Mole, Matt Claydon and Martin Railton the project manager was Duncan Hale. This report was prepared by Andy Willis, with illustrations by Janine Fisher.

### ***Archive/OASIS***

- 2.7 The site code is **CTC03**, for Corbridge, **The Chains 2003**. The archive is currently held by Archaeological Services University of Durham and will be transferred to the Museum of Antiquities, Newcastle upon Tyne in due course. Archaeological Services University of Durham is registered with the **Online Access to the Index of archaeological investigations** project (OASIS). The OASIS ID number for this project is **archaeol3-7699**.

## **3. Landuse, topography and geology**

- 3.1 At the time of the survey the proposed development area comprised an area of allotment gardens.
- 3.2 The site lies some 350m north-east of the River Tyne and slopes gradually to the south, the lower parts are at a mean elevation of c.40m OD. The top soil has been in cultivation for 150 years, and as a result is a deep black garden

loam. The soil has developed on glacial sands and gravels, which are overlain in part by a thick deposit of clayey sands and silts. The solid geology of the site is dominated by Carboniferous deposits of the Millstone Grit series.

## **4. Historical and archaeological background**

### **4.1 *The Roman period (70AD to 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD)***

The Roman fort of Corstopitum lies a short distance to the west of the town. Forts of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries have been excavated and a civilian settlement flourished on the same site in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. St Helen's Lane is thought to have been the Stanegate road. In 1995, two battered stone heads were found in the allotments, one of which may be part of a head of Mars (SMR 9065). It is possible that these objects were part of a Roman funerary monument.

### **4.2 *The medieval period (5<sup>th</sup> century AD to 1540 AD)***

In the Anglo Saxon period a village and monastery was established on a spur just to the east of the Roman town, and the church of St Andrews incorporates some of the masonry of the Saxon Minster church. In the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries the town was enclosed by a ditch (SMR reference NY96 SE38, which is thought to have been administrative rather than a defensive feature.

### **4.3 *The post-medieval period (1541 AD to 1899 AD)***

Corbridge became an important market town, and profited from the twice-yearly fairs at Stagshaw Bank. It is believed that the manor house of Corbridge lies near or in the southern part of The Chains, as a patch of ground here is referred to in a number of documents as the '*auld halles*'. An early building was apparently replaced in the late 13th century but it is believed that this in turn was abandoned by the mid-14th century. Associated with the manor house was a chapel, dedicated to St Helen, and first mentioned in about 1300. Until the 19th century parts of the chapel's east end were said to survive in the boundary wall on the south side of The Chains. Archaeological work near here, at the rear of St Andrew's Parish Hall, uncovered some sandstone walls, which were interpreted as parts of medieval buildings.

### **4.4 *Previous archaeological works***

An archaeological evaluation (ASUD 2001) and desk-based assessment (PCA 2000) have previously been undertaken on the site.

## **5. The watching brief**

### ***Introduction***

5.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during all elements of ground disturbance on the site, which consisted of topsoil stripping to a depth of 0.50m (Figure 2).

5.2 A number of pits containing animal bones and domestic rubbish were identified. These all proved to be of a modern 20<sup>th</sup> century date. The buried animal remains were probably a result of allotments users burying their

favoured pets on the site. A scattering of modern 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery was also uncovered, but were not of archaeological significance.

## **6. The finds**

- 6.1 The animal bones and pottery were all 20<sup>th</sup> century in date and did merit archaeological significance, they have subsequently been discarded.

## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1 No significant archaeological features or finds of interest were identified. No further archaeological work is necessary.

## **8. Sources**

Archaeological Services University of Durham 2001. *The Chains, Corbridge, Archaeological Evaluation*. ASUD report 730.

Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd. 2000. *An Archaeological Assessment: The Chains, Corbridge, Northumberland* Unpublished Report for The Northumberland Estates.





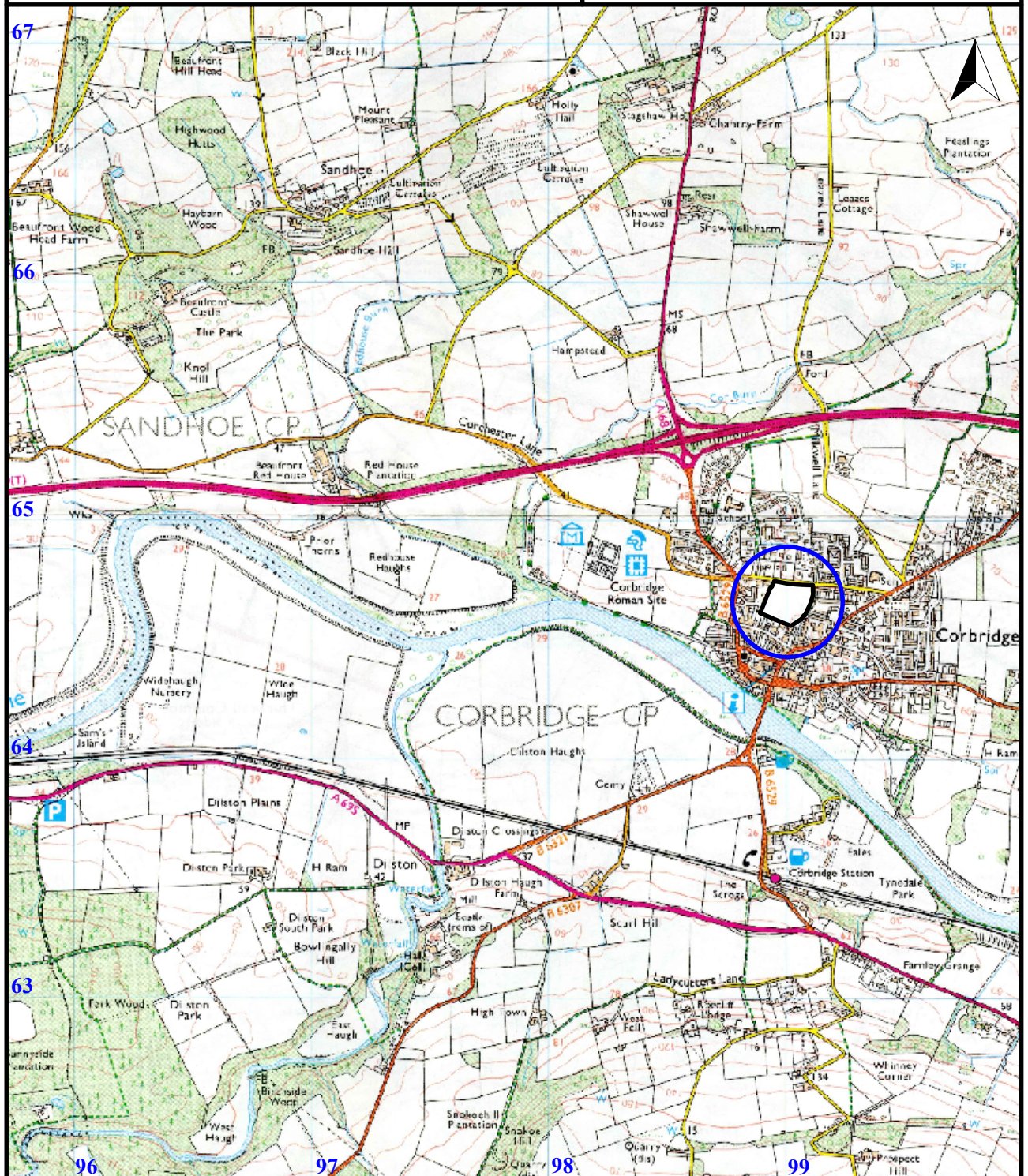
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Figure 1  
*Location map*





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Figure 2  
*Location of topsoil stripping*



area of top soil stripping



previously excavated areas (CTC00)