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# **NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD**

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**Project Designs and Client Reports No. CP/139/04**

**REPORT ON  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FIELD EVALUATION ON  
LAND TO THE REAR OF  
EASTFIELD HOUSE  
CORBRIDGE  
NORTHUMBERLAND**

**NGR: NY 9908 6435**

**Planning Reference  
20040803  
NCCCT Ref: T13/5; 3627**

**FOR  
SMITHS GORE**

F O Giecco BA, Dip Arch, AIFA  
C J Jones BA, MA, AIFA  
North Pennines Archaeology Ltd  
Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre  
Nenthead  
Alston  
Cumbria CA9 3PD  
Tel: (01434) 382045  
Fax: (01434) 382294  
Mobile: 07979 671882  
Email: C.Jones@nparchaeology.co.uk

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In August 2004 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Smiths Gore to undertake an archaeological field evaluation in advance of a planning application to develop land behind Eastfield House, Corbridge, Northumberland. The work was required in response to a brief prepared by Northumberland County Council Conservation Team.

The work involved the consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record in order to assess the existing information regarding the site's historic, archaeological, topographical and geographical context prior to the preparation of a project design. This involved the collection of all readily available information regarding the archaeological landscape of the study area, including the locations and settings of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Parks and Gardens and other, non-designated archaeological remains.

The development area falls within an area of high archaeological potential, within the historic medieval core settlement of Corbridge. The site is situated within the eastern half of the medieval settlement within an area of former burgage plots. Recent excavations within burgage plots across the county have revealed a number of medieval and later features which have produced insights into the form and use of these land parcels in the medieval period.

The archaeological field evaluation revealed a number of archaeological features. These included linear features, pits and post holes of probable medieval origin. The evaluation also revealed the presence of pottery of probable 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century date. The results of the evaluation indicate the likelihood of significant archaeological remains present on site, including the presence of a timber post-built structure.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thanks are due to the following people and institutions who gave help and assistance during the compilation of this report: Liz Williams of Northumbria County Council Sites and Monuments Record, Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist, Steena Steward of Smiths Gore.

The field evaluation was directed by Frank Giecco BA, Dip Arch, AIFA. The report was written by Frank Giecco and Chris Jones BA, MA, AIFA. The report was edited by Juliet Reeves BA.

## **1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION**

- 1.1 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was invited by Smiths Gore of Eastfield House, Main Street, Corbridge NE45 5LD, to undertake an archaeological field evaluation on land to the rear of Eastfield House, Main Street, Northumberland.
- 1.2 The work followed a planning application for the construction of a single dwelling, a scheme that affects an area of high archaeological potential within the medieval town of Corbridge. As a result, Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) recommended that a programme of archaeological work should be undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation submitted to and approved by NCCCT.
- 1.3 The work comprised a field evaluation consisting of the excavation of a single east-west orientated trench measuring 10m by 2m in order to investigate the footprint of the proposed building and the area to the immediate west, an area which does not appear to have been occupied since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 1.4 The site is situated to the rear of Smiths Gore's offices at Eastfield House, Main Street, Corbridge (NY 9908 6435) and lies within medieval Corbridge, on the site of a burgrave plot. Map evidence since 1841 reveals the site has not been significantly built on and as a result the potential that groundworks will have an impact upon previously undisturbed archaeological remains is high.

## **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 There has been no previous work undertaken on the site. However, there have been a number of interventions within medieval Corbridge.
- 2.2 In May 2001 Archaeological Services at the University of Durham undertook a field evaluation at Duke's Cottages in advance of a residential development. The work revealed archaeological features including a shallow gully and also recovered fragments of medieval pottery (ASUD 2001).
- 2.3 In September 2003 Tyne & Wear Museums Archaeology Department maintained a watching brief during the upgrading and extending of existing water services within Corbridge at Well Bank, Town Farm Fields and West Terrace. The work revealed a number of undated surfaces surviving beneath the road surface and modern disturbance and concluded that there is a strong possibility of surviving archaeological remains throughout medieval Corbridge (TWM 2003).
- 2.4 In October 2003, the Archaeological Practice (TAP) undertook a field evaluation on land at 2 Princes Street, Corbridge. The work revealed the presence of a shallow linear ditch filled medieval pottery of 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century date and extensive potential for environmental sampling (TAP 2003).
- 2.5 In December 2003 Tyne & Wear Museums Archaeology Department maintained a watching brief on behalf of Integrated Utility Services of groundworks to the north and south of the bridge. The work revealed an undated cobble surface beneath the road surface and modern disturbance (TWM 2003).



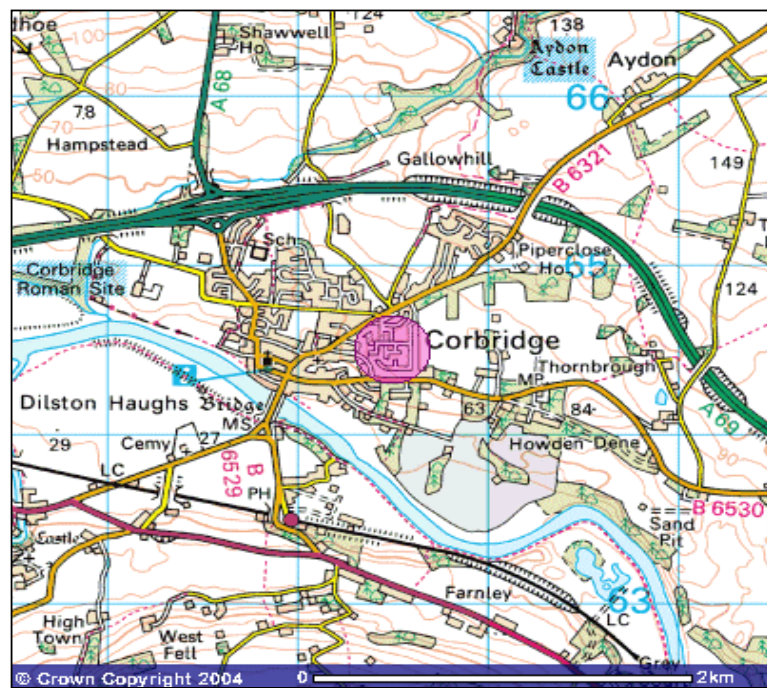


Figure 1: Site Location. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Get-A-Map Service 1:50,000 scale by permission of Ordnance Survey® on behalf of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright (1997) All rights reserved. Licence Number WL6488

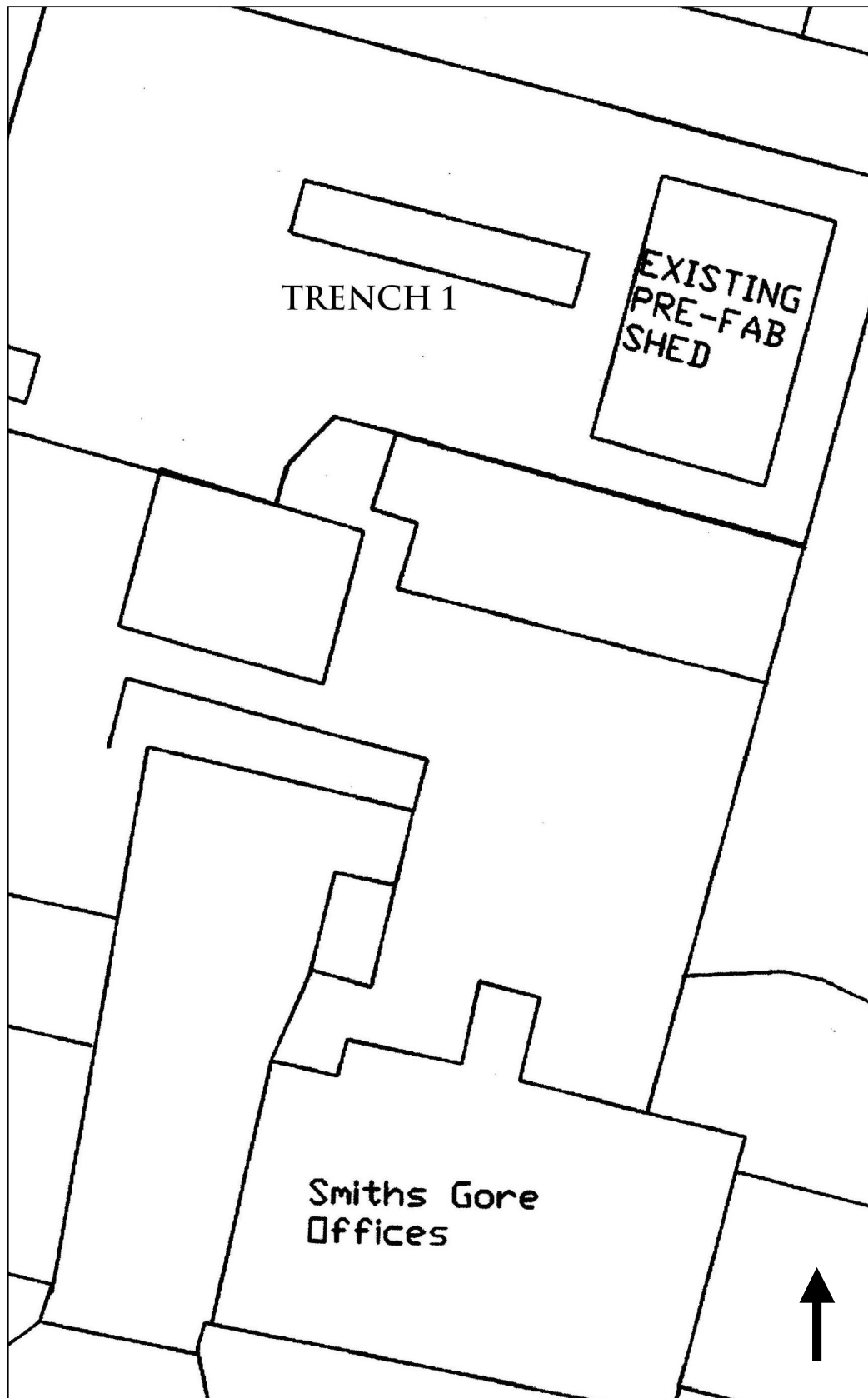


Figure 2: Trench Location. Scale: 1:500

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 PROJECT DESIGN**

2.1.1 A project design was prepared in response to a brief prepared by Northumbria County Council Conservation Team for an archaeological field evaluation. This included a detailed specification of works to be carried out, which consisted of a desk-based assessment prior to fieldwork, the excavation of a linear trial trench and a programme of post excavation and reporting.

### **2.2 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT**

2.2.1 The assessment involved the consultation of the Northumberland County Council Sites and Monuments Record. This was in order to obtain information on the location of all designated sites and areas of historic interest and any other, non-designated sites within the study area, which included monuments, findspots, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

2.2.2 An electronic enquiry was also made of English Heritage's National Monuments Record and the website of the Archaeology Data Service. This was in order to enhance and augment the data obtained from a search of the appropriate repositories.

2.2.3 Further documentary study was undertaken at the County Record Office, North Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which involved the collection of all relevant historical maps and documents including surveys, Tithe and Enclosure Maps, Acts of Parliament and early Ordnance Survey maps.

2.2.4 The desk study was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (IFA 1994).

### **2.3 FIELD EVALUATION**

2.3.1 The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of a single linear trial trench in order to produce a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relevant importance against known development proposals.

2.3.2 In summary, the main objectives of the excavation were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they are observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover paleoenvironmental material where it survived in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

- 2.3.3 The trench was mechanically excavated by a JCB 3CX excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to the top of archaeological deposits, or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. The trench was then manually cleaned and all features investigated and recorded according to the NPA standard procedure as set out in the company Excavation Manual.
- 2.3.4 Photography was undertaken using a Canon EOS 100 Single Lens Reflex (SLR) manual camera. A photographic record was made using 400 ISO colour print film.
- 2.3.5 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (IFA 1994).
- 2.3.6 A programme of environmental sampling was undertaken following an agreed sampling strategy formulated in consultation with English Heritage and Northumbria County Council Conservation Team.

## **2.4 PROJECT ARCHIVE**

- 2.4.1 The full archive has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with the current English Heritage guidelines set out in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 1991). The archive will be deposited within an appropriate repository and a copy of the report given to the County Sites and Monuments Record, where viewing will be available on request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier NPA 04 EHC-A.

### **3 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

#### **3.1 TOPOGRAPHY, GEOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY OF THE STUDY AREA**

- 3.1.1 The medieval and modern town of Corbridge is situated on the north bank of the River Tyne on stepped alluvial terraces, created by the changing course of the Tyne and the underlying geology (NCCCT 2001).
- 3.1.2 The solid geology of the region comprises Carboniferous limestones and sandstones of the Stainmore Group, overlain by drift deposits of glacial sands, gravel, boulder clay and Head deposits (SSEW 1984, NCCCT 2001). Head deposits are often indistinguishable from till, although these occur in association with concave footslopes as opposed to smooth, convex slopes (SSEW 1984).
- 3.1.3 The settlement lies close to an important bridging point across the River Tyne, a factor important in the development of Corbridge as an important medieval market town (NCCCT 2001).

#### **3.2 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE**

- 3.2.1 The study area exists within a modern urban landscape within modern Corbridge. The area has been a focus for settlement since at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century and developed into an important market town in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (NCCCT 2001). The site is situated within an area of burgage plots set perpendicular to the main street. Fryer's map of 1777 shows a series of buildings along the street frontages with linear plots extending to the rear. Map evidence from 1841 shows that the site has not been significantly built on (Ibid.).

## 4 RESULTS

- 4.1 The evaluation was undertaken by a team of professional field archaeologists directed by Frank Giecco BA, Dip Arch, AIFA, Principal Archaeologist.
- 4.2 A single east-west oriented linear trial trench was excavated, measuring 10m x 2m and situated at the centre of the development area. The work was undertaken within 3 working days between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> August 2004.
- 4.3 All references to cardinal directions refer to site grid north.

### 4.4 TRENCH 1

- 4.4.1 Trench 1 was located across the site of the proposed dwelling, oriented east-west and measured 10m x 2m. The natural substrate was observed at a depth of 1.10m and consisted of mixed postglacial till (101). (The medieval features were sealed by a mid brown sandy loam garden soil (102), which was in turn sealed by a layer of modern hard standing and tarmac (100).
- 4.4.2 A series of linear and circular features were observed cutting the natural substrate (101). These included a narrow gully (103), approximately 2m in length by 0.20m wide and 0.20m deep, oriented north - south. This was filled by a mid brown sandy loam (104).
- 4.4.3 A gully (113) was observed cutting the natural substrate (101) at the western end of the trench. This measured approximately 2.0m in length by 0.20m wide and 0.10m deep and was oriented northwest - southeast. This was filled by a mid brown sandy loam (114).
- 4.4.4 A large circular posthole (115) was observed cutting the natural substrate. This measured 0.50m in diameter and was 0.40m deep. This was filled by a dark brown sandy loam (116). Finds recovered from this deposit included one sherd of probable 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century pottery and an iron arrowhead (SF1).
- 4.4.5 A large circular posthole (110) was observed cutting the natural substrate (101) at the eastern end of the trench, approximately 3.80m east of 115. This measured approximately 0.50m wide by 0.40m deep. This was filled by a dark brown sandy loam (111).
- 4.4.6 A series of small, undated pits were also observed cutting the natural substrate, of variable dimensions (105), (107) and (112).

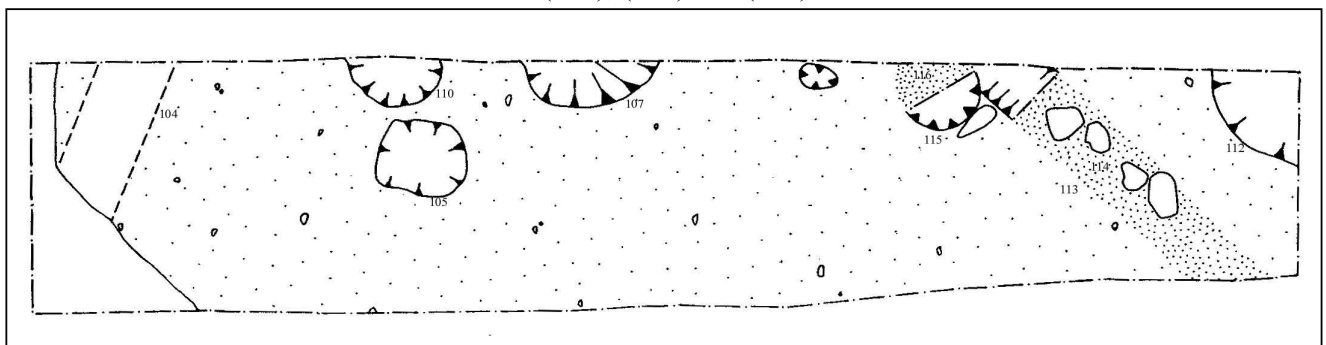


Figure 3: Trench 1 Plan of Archaeological Features. Scale: 1:40



Plate 1: General view of trench from the west, after initial cleaning (Photo: F Giecco)



Plate 2: Detailed view of slot [115] leading up to posthole [113] (Photo: F Giecco)

## 5 THE FINDS

5.1 The pottery and other artefactual material has been cleaned, marked and packaged according to standard guidelines, and recorded under the supervision of Frank Giecco. The pottery and finds are quantified in Table 1. No further work is required on the finds assemblage.

### 5.2 THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY

5.2.1 Nine sherds of partially reduced pottery with a white buff surface and traces of a pale yellow glaze of 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century date were recovered (see table 1)

### 5.3 POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY

5.3.1 Context 100, (the cleaning level) produced 9 fragments of 19<sup>th</sup> century pottery ranging from vitrified stone wares to white porcelain.

### 5.4 IRON

5.4.1 Context 100 produced one machine cut nail measuring 0.35mm in length with a rectangular cross section. Context 116 produced a complete broad headed arrowhead with a maximum width of 24mm and length of 52mm. The dating of this arrowhead to the 13<sup>th</sup> /14<sup>th</sup> century is consistent with the associated pottery recovered during the excavation.



Plate 3: Digitised image of arrowhead Scale 1:1

### 5.5 GLASS

5.5.1 2 fragments of late 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> window glass were recovered from contexts 100.

### 5.6 LEAD OBJECTS

5.6.1 Context 108 produced a five small fragment of undiagnostic molten lead.



## 5.7 FLINT

- 5.7.1 1 piece of imported cortical flint was recovered from context 100. The flint consisted of a debitage flake and as such can yield no further useful information.

CONTEXT	TRENCH	MED POT	POST MED POT	GLASS	FLINT	BONE	Fe	Pb	SLAG
100	1		9	2	1	1	1		
104		1							
108		5				1	1	5	
109		1							1
111		1							
116		1					1		
<b>TOTAL</b>		9	9	2	1	2	3	5	

**Table 1:** Finds by Context

## 6 ENVIRONMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

### 6.1 METHODOLOGY

- 6.1.1 From the excavated trench 3 contexts produced matrices considered suitable for analysis. In each case between 5 and 10 litres of material was removed from each context. All these samples were then subjected to manual water flotation.
- 6.1.2 Flotation separates the organic, floating fraction of the sample from the heavier mineral and finds content of sands, silts, clays, stones, artefacts and waterlogged material. Heavy soil and sediment content measuring less than 1mm falls through the retentive mesh to settle on the bottom of the tank. Flotation produces a 'flot' and a 'residue' for examination, whilst the heavier sediment retained in the tank is discarded.
- 6.1.3 The residue, as well as retaining the soil matrix matter measuring more than 1mm, contains the larger artefacts of bone, pottery etc, which can then be extracted and recorded. The floating fraction or 'flot' generally comprises the organic material of mainly plant matter, seeds, small or parts of bone, both charred and uncharred, and insect remains. A rapid assessment by scanning the material with a hand lens or microscope then allows for recommendations to be made as to the samples' potential. Further work by palaeobotanists or entomologists can then be carried out if necessary.
- 6.1.4 Where the preservation has been favourable, the organic remains may produce a valuable suite of information regarding the depositional environment of the material. This can include seasonality and climate, anthropogenic activities, and elements of the economy.

SAMPLE NUMBER	CONTEXT NUMBER	SAMPLE SIZE (litres)	FLOT SIZE (cm <sup>3</sup> )	RETENT SIZE (cm <sup>3</sup> )
1	104	10	10	1000
2	106	10	10	1500
3	116	5	20	500

**Table 2** Details of samples and contexts.

DETAILS		RETENT FRACTION										LIGHT FRACTION												
Context	Context type	Sample number	Stones	Gravel	Charred wood	Coal	Waterlogged wood	Bone	Burnt bone	Insects	Charred wood	Waterlogged wood	Nematode cases	Charred grain	Common nettle	Small nettle	Chenopodium	Corn spurrey	Brassica	Woody plant parts	Other seeds/spores	Roots	Bone	
104	Fill	1	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	0
106	Fill	2	1	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
116	Fill	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	

**Table 3:** Contents of flot and retent residues from samples.

## 6.2 SAMPLE 1 (CONTEXT 104)

- 6.2.1 This sample was taken from a large post hole (cut 103). There were inclusions of stones and gravel. The flot consisted of woody plant parts and roots with a small amount of charred wood and coal. The flot produced several seeds and an amount of charred grain.
- 6.2.2 The charred grain was of well-preserved oats and ‘blown’ barley or wheat, caused by the grain being intensely and usually unevenly heated, giving it the effect of popcorn. The seeds consisted of elder (woods, scrub and hedgerows), *Chenopodium* species (arable fields, waste places), *Brassica* species (turnip, cabbage and mustards). As the suite of seeds recovered with the grain was not charred it implies that the assemblages, although from the same context, were deposited in different manners into the soil, the grain either brought in or possibly spread on the soil with ashes or refuse, the other seeds occurring there naturally from the surrounding environs.
- 6.2.3 The retent consisted of small stones and pebbles with some fragments of coal and charred wood. There were also a few small fragments of burnt bone. A sherd of 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery was recovered from the retent.

### 6.3 SAMPLE 2 (CONTEXT 106)

6.3.1 This sample was removed from the animal bone rich fill of a posthole or pit. The context was an orange brown sandy silt. The flot produced tiny fragments of burnt bone, some roots, woody plant parts and charred wood fragments. The suite of seeds comprised charred grain as wheat and oats as well as corn spurrey, dock species, *Chenopodium* species (arable land) and *Brassica* species (turnip, cabbage or mustard varieties) and elder (woods, scrub and hedgerows). Again, as above, only the grain was charred, implying different deposition processes for the material.

6.3.2 The residue produced small stones and pebbles and an amount of small gravel. There was also a considerable amount of bone in the material and a few fragments of burnt bone were recovered. The bone was too fragmentary to determine species but several of the larger fragments bore cut or gnaw marks. If this were an animal burial pit the carcass may have lain on the surface prior to burial, scavengers then gnawing on the bone, or it may have been a small refuse pit.

### 6.4 SAMPLE 3 (CONTEXT 116)

6.4.1 This sample was taken from the fill of a posthole. The soil matrix was made up of a grey brown sandy silty clay with occasional inclusions of pebbles. In this case the flot produced mainly root material. There was very little else present apart from a few fragments of charred wood and a few seeds. The suite of seeds again contained charred oats and wheat, similar to the above. Considering that the sample size was only half that of 1 and 2 though, there was an appreciable amount more grain recovered.

6.4.2 The suite of seeds comprised corn spurrey, dock species, *Chenopodium* species (arable land) elder (woods, scrub and hedgerows) and common nettle (woods, hedges, nitrogen-rich grassland, waste places). As above, only the grain was charred, implying different deposition processes for the material. The grain in this case was very evenly preserved, the charring process then occurring over a long period with an even heat.

### 6.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5.1 The evidence for anthropogenic activity within this immediate area is proved by the charred grain, charcoal and charred wood. There seem to have been different deposition processes associated with the charred plant remains and the uncharred seed species, the latter entering the soil matrix by natural means. The charred grain may have been deposited through soil enhancement practices, the remains of fires being spread on the soil to improve fertility.

6.5.2 If further work is required on the site a full sampling strategy must be implemented to maximise the recovery of charred and waterlogged plant remains, as well as any bone that may be present in other areas.

## 7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The evaluation has revealed a series of archaeological features cutting the natural substrate, sealed by a garden soil deposit, of probable medieval date. These archaeological features comprised pits, postholes and gullies. It is possible these features comprise the foundation remains of one or more timber structures. No organic remains, including the remains of timber posts, however, could be identified within any of the deposits. Selected features were environmentally sampled producing a minimum 10 litre sample, or 100% of the context where this was less than 10 litres.
- 7.2 There is a high probability that archaeological remains relating to those revealed by the field evaluation are present outside the area of the evaluation trench, within the footprint of the proposed dwelling. It is anticipated that further work will be required, where the features and deposits will be excavated and recorded in plan and section, ensuring their preservation by record. Any such requirement will be set out by Northumbria County Council Conservation Team in consultation with appropriate specialists.

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