
NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Report No. 278/05



**REPORT ON
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
FIELD EVALUATION
AT CHICHESTER HOUSE,
DICKTRODE LANE,
SKINBURNESS,
SILLOTH, CUMBRIA**

**For
QUADRANGLE
ARCHITECTURAL
SERVICES**

NGR: NY 12714 56079

**Planning Application Nos:
2/05/0860**

Mark Dodd BA
North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre
Nenthead
Alston
Cumbria CA9 3PD
Tel: (01434) 382045
Fax: (01434) 382294
Mobile: 07966 172031
E-mail: g.davies@nparchaeology.co.uk

05 March 2007



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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

On November 24th 2005, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Chichester Hall, Dicktrode Lane, Skinburness, Silloth, Cumbria on behalf of Mr D Shankland of Quadrangle Architectural Services. The work conformed to the standards set out in a brief provided by Mike Collins, the Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist for English Heritage.

The work involved the consultation of the County Historic Environment Record in Kendal and the County Record Office, Carlisle, in order to assess the existing information regarding the site's historic, archaeological, topographical and geographical context prior to the commencement of fieldwork. 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. This was followed by a visual site inspection and the excavation of two trial trenches in order to assess the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains.

No significant archaeological deposits were observed within the trench. It is unlikely that the development will impact upon any significant archaeological remains in the knowledge that much of the ground has been consolidated. Any features within the footprint of the development are likely to either be truncated away by previous developments or preserved beneath a substantial depth of deposits that are most likely to be contemporary with Chichester Hall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology would like to thank Mr D Shankland of Quadrangle Architectural Services for commissioning and supporting the work as well as Mike Collins, the Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist for English Heritage and Jeremy Parsons of Cumbria County Council for their assistance throughout the project.

The evaluation was undertaken by Mark Dodd and Jon Cousins. The report was produced by Mark Dodd, with drawings by Matt Town, and was edited by Juliet Reeves. The project was managed by Frank Giecco, Technical Director for NPAL.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Circumstances of the Project

- 1.1.1 On November 24th 2005, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Chichester Hall, Dicktrode Lane, Skinburness, Silloth, Cumbria on behalf of Mr D Shankland of Quadrangle Architectural Services.
- 1.1.2 The work was required in a brief provided by Mike Collins, the Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist for English Heritage (Collins, 2005) in response to a planning application for an extension and new sewerage system to Chichester Hall. The development lies within an area of significant archaeological importance, specifically known to be an area of Roman defence structures contemporary with the construction of Hadrian's Wall. Milefortlet 9 lies 150m to the north of the development with strong potential for associated features.
- 1.1.3 This document sets out the results of the archaeological evaluation in the form of a short report.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 *Location and Topography*

2.1.1 Skinburness is situated 23 miles west of Carlisle and approximately 12 miles north of Maryport, on the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Figure 1). At c.7m AOD, the development site is located on raised beach deposits laid down during the final stages of glaciation. This forms a spit of land known as Grune point, which has been extended by a continual process of longshore drift (Bellhouse 1989).

2.2 *Historical Background*

2.2.1 **Prehistoric:** Palaeolithic evidence within the region is absent resulting from widespread glaciation during this period. It is not until the Mesolithic period that evidence of human activity begins within Cumbria, yet this is still subject to local variations in the evidence recovered. Generally, knowledge of specific sites is dependant on the identification of surface scatters of lithic material with little other material culture surviving (Brennand and Hodgson 2004). The problem spreads further still, in that changes in sea levels mean that many sites may have been lost through coastal inundation. Bewley has suggested that while the southwest facing coastlines have provided the highest level of Mesolithic evidence, the north and northwest coastlines may suffer different processes of coastal erosion. Thus perhaps accounting for a seeming lack of evidence from these parts, whilst stressing that there is however, still strong potential for future recovery (1994, 54).

2.2.2 Evidence of Neolithic activity is also identified with surface scatters of material culture as in the Mesolithic, but is also evidenced by the presence of monuments (Brennand and Hodgson 2004). While structural evidence is more typically associated with the upland regions, the lowlands have suffered from intensive agricultural activity that may have obliterated further sites.

2.2.3 Much of the lowland evidence indicates that the majority of Neolithic settlement was focused on sandy ridges around the coasts, tarns and marshes with an economy mainly based on the natural resources (Bewley 1994, 58). To the southwest of the development site, several flaked flint axes have been found on the raised beach at Silloth (SMR No 379).

2.2.4 The Bronze Age is marked nationally by the introduction of bronze metalwork, changes in pottery styles, monumental building and an increase in the occurrence of single burials. Some evidence of continuity is present though, as sources of stone continue to be exploited with the production of axe hammers (Brennand and Hodgson 2004). One such axe hammer was found close to Silloth in 1917 (Hodgkinson *et al.* 2000, 113), demonstrating activity within the vicinity of the development during this period.

2.2.5 There is a general lack of evidence for Iron Age archaeology throughout the northwest with a general picture of small, dispersed settlements and little evidence for non-organic material culture (Brennand and Hodgson, 2004). Through aerial photography, multiple

enclosures have been located throughout lowland Cumbria, although dating of these sites has been hampered by the lack of identifiable material culture (*ibid.*).

- 2.2.6 **Romano-British:** This period has been well documented within the northwest, specifically due to the wealth of military evidence, whilst the rural evidence has received relatively little attention (Philpott 2004). The development lies within the same defensive network as Hadrian's Wall, consisting of a series of forts, milefortlets and turrets constructed in the early 2nd Century, running down the northwest Cumbrian coast (*ibid.*)
- 2.2.7 Although the Roman archaeology of this part of the coast is still imperfectly understood, aerial photography in the 1940's identified Milefortlet 9 and the remains of an earlier fortlet, which partly underlies the milefortlet, 150m to the northeast of the development (Collins 2005). In 1954, several sherds of Roman pottery were recovered from the surface of the field in which the site is located (*ibid.*).
- 2.2.8 It has been suggested that Milefortlet 9, aligned on a north-south axis would have represented a turning point in the defences with Tower 9a close to the shore to the west and a short barrier closing the defences to the creek on the east side (Bellhouse 1989). This theory presupposes that linear barriers connected the defence system on this part of the coast. Although such features have been located on the other side of Moricambe bay, 5km to the north, it is not certain if they are present at this point in the frontier (Collins 2005).
- 2.2.9 **Medieval:** In 1150 Henry, Prince of Cumberland, granted land for the foundation of Holm Cultram Abbey, following this one of six granges for husbandry was established at "Skinburne" (Lysons and Lysons in Fletcher and Miller 1997). Over time, Skinburness developed into a small fishing town, and one of the main places for the King's magazines supplying the army against the Scots. But this growth was curtailed when Skinburness was destroyed by the sea, sometime between 1301 and 1304 (Grainger and Collingwood in Fletcher and Miller 1997).
- 2.2.10 Shortly after the destruction of the village, although the exact time is not known, the Holm Cultram sea dyke was first constructed. Although repaired on numerous occasions, it now runs for c.1640m from Skinburness on a southeast orientation towards Sea Dyke End Farm (Fletcher and Miller 1997).

2.3 *Archaeological Background*

- 2.3.1 No previous work has been undertaken on the development site itself.
- 2.3.2 In 1976-77 Barri Jones (Manchester University) carried out excavations over cropmarks located by aerial photography behind the Silloth-Skinburness road, uncovering a possible palisade trench (Higham and Jones 1991). In 1994 however, David Wooliscroft re-excavated the trenches and disregarded the palisade, observing only modern water pipes (Walker 2003).
- 2.3.3 In the mid 1990's Lancaster University Archaeological Unit investigated the Holm Cultram sea dyke. Undertaking a desk-top study, field survey, and targeted excavation they also carried out a watching brief during reconstruction work. This project was

unable to reach any firm conclusions about the original date of construction, stating that it had been largely reconstructed as late as the 19th or early 20th Century with a possible medieval phase near to Skinburness (Fletcher and Miller 1997).

2.3.4 In 2004 Oxford Archaeology North undertook a DBA on land centred on Solway Lido to the south of the study area. This study identified a high potential for below ground remains dating to the Roman period (OAN 2004).

2.3.5 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd has undertaken four separate evaluations to the south on land in and around Silloth. Three evaluations (Dodd 2005; Jones 2003; 2005) evidenced no archaeological features of great antiquity, while a fourth evaluation at Solway Lido recovered evidence of substantial linear ditches and a palisade. Carbon 14 dating indicated that these ditches were 10th century features (Jones 2004).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Project Design

3.1.1 A project design was prepared in response to a brief prepared by English Heritage for an archaeological field evaluation. This included a detailed specification of works to be carried out, which consisted of a visual site inspection, the excavation of two trial trenches and a programme of post excavation and reporting.

3.2 Visual Site Inspection

3.2.1 A visual site inspection was undertaken by Matt Town prior to the commencement of fieldwork which found neither hazards to health or safety nor any constraints to undertaking fieldwork, such as Tree Preservation Orders or public rights of way.

3.2.2 The walkover survey viewed the area of development for any visible archaeological remains and found none. The only area of concern was the presence of an existing sewer that was mentioned in the brief for the evaluation (Collins 2005). Upon arrival to the site the identification of two manhole covers on either side of the evaluation area indicated the location of the sewer allowing the trenches to be located in suitable positions.

3.3 Field Evaluation

3.3.1 The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of two linear trial trenches (Figure 2) measuring 5m x 1.5m and 7.5m x 1.5m, which provided a 10% sample within the footprint of the proposed development. This was in order to produce a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relevant importance against known development proposals.

3.3.2 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 were 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 survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.
- 3.3.3 The trenches were mechanically excavated by a JCB 3CX excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to the natural substrate. The trench was then manually cleaned.
- 3.3.4 Photography was undertaken using Canon EOS 100 and EOS 300V Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras. A photographic record was made using digital photography, 200 ISO Colour Print and Colour Slide film.
- 3.3.5 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (IFA 1994).

3.4 *Project Archive*

- 3.4.1 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, 2nd Ed. 1991). The archive will eventually 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.

4 EVALUATION RESULTS

4.1 *Trench 1*

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 was 5m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated approximately northwest-southeast. It was located close to the southeast end of the building in a small area of lawn between Chichester Hall and a concrete path leading to a builder's yard to the east of the property. The trench was initially machined to depth of 0.4m, with a slot at the southeast end measuring a depth of 1.2m below ground level, due to repeated collapsing within the slot this was recorded from the side.
- 4.1.2 The machining removed 0.28m of topsoil (100), this was a dark grey brown sandy silt with a moderate density of sub-rounded stones throughout. At a depth of 0.4m several features became visible and the machining continued at this horizon. Running on a north-south orientation the cut for a modern water pipe became visible and was cutting through an earlier ceramic sewage pipe on northeast-southwest orientation.
- 4.1.3 Both modern services proved to be cutting a third earlier feature [102], running between the northern and southern corners of the trench, the full width of this feature was not visible within the limits of the excavation. A slot was machined in the final 2.4m of the trench at the southeast end to a depth of 1.2m in order to test the natural substrate and showed [102] to be a near vertical cut.

- 4.1.4 The slot showed that the fill of [102] consisted of mixed grey brown silty sand with numerous lenses of sandy gravel (103), this feature continued in plan at the base of the slot. Towards the lower part of the feature there was evidence that the sides had collapsed slightly when originally excavated. The mixed fill and near vertical nature of the cut indicated that it was probably backfilled soon after excavation. There were no finds recovered in association with this feature but is potentially related to the construction of Chichester Hall given its proximity.
- 4.1.5 The northeast facing section within the slot showed a layer of subsoil (101), c. 0.26m deep consisting of mid red-brown silty sand with a moderate frequency of sub-rounded stones. This was overlying (104), mid to light yellow sands with occasional sub-rounded stones <0.04m in diameter, which extended to a depth beyond the 1.2m excavated. Deposit (104) represents an accumulation of windblown sands presumably dumped by storm events. Both these deposits were cut by [102], and the presence of gravels mixed within its fill suggest that this feature continued to a much greater depth where it must cut through a gravel rich deposit more representative of natural.
- 4.1.6 No archaeological artefacts were recovered during the excavation of this trench.

4.2 *Trench 2*

- 4.2.1 Trench 2 was 7.5m long and 1.5m wide, and orientated approximately east-west. It was located c. 7.5m to the southeast of Chichester Hall, avoiding the known location of a sewage pipe. The trench was machined to a maximum depth of 1.2m, though a small step was left in-situ at the eastern end in order to avoid a lead water pipe and a similar step was left at the western end after rupturing the continuation of the modern water pipe noted in Trench 1.
- 4.2.2 The machining of the trench removed several successive layers of made-up ground that appear to have been deliberately deposited. In total, eight separate deposits were identified of varying depths. The first of these, the topsoil (200), was a dark grey brown sandy silt between 0.2m and 0.3m deep, with a lens of sub-rounded stones just below the turf line. This was overlying (201) comprising mid to light, brown grey silty sands up to 0.2m deep. The most unusual deposit (202) was underlying this and was identified as light grey coarse sand and shingles measuring up to 0.04m in diameter. This deposit was unlike any of the others observed within the trench and probably represents a specific episode of consolidation.
- 4.2.3 Beneath (202), five further deposits were recorded, the latest of these (203) a mid brown grey, coarse sand with sub rounded stones <0.02m in diameter up to a depth of 0.25m. This was overlying a mid to dark red brown silty sand with frequent sub-rounded stones <0.01m in diameter (204), varying in depth between 0.05m-0.2m, and (205), a mid grey, coarse sand with occasional inclusions of sub-rounded stones up to 0.02m in diameter to a maximum depth of 0.25m. Underlying this deposit a separate layer, (206) was identified, consisting of mid to dark red brown silty sand with frequent sub-rounded stone inclusions approximately 0.02m in diameter, measuring a total depth not more than 0.05m. This was overlying mid grey orange coarse sand with frequent sub-rounded pebbles <0.04m in diameter (207). The depth of this deposit was not observed within the trench as it was not machined beyond 1.2m. It is thought that this deposit represents the natural substrate forming a raised shingle bank.

- 4.2.4 Each of these deposits appear to represent deliberate phases of deposition in an attempt to raise the ground level. The relative homogeneity and horizontal nature of these deposits suggests that these are more likely to be the result of human activity than episodes of coastal inundation.
- 4.2.5 There were no cut archaeological features observed within this trench and there were no archaeological artefacts recovered during its excavation.

5 THE FINDS

- 5.1 No Finds were recovered from the evaluation.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The results of the evaluation show that the development site has been intensively altered during the modern period. Interestingly, there is no continuity of deposits between the two trenches, highlighting the extent to which the deposits have been impacted upon already.
- 6.2 Both trenches demonstrate significant episodes of landscaping, it was not possible to ascertain the extent of feature [102] within Trench 1 due to its scale, but it showed no signs of continuing into Trench 2. This may either be because it does not continue this far, possibly changing direction or that the deposition of material observed within Trench 2 represents a later episode of activity.
- 6.3 No features were observed during the evaluation that may be related to Milefortlet 9 or the medieval roots of Skinburness. It is unlikely that the development will impact upon any significant archaeological remains in the knowledge that much of the ground has been consolidated. Any features within the footprint of the development are likely to either be truncated away by previous developments or preserved beneath a substantial depth of deposits most likely associated with Chichester Hall.

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8 APPENDIX I – LIST OF CONTEXTS

CONTEXT	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Trench 1		
(100)	Deposit	Topsoil – Dark grey brown sandy silt with sub-rounded stones throughout
(101)	Deposit	Subsoil – Mid red brown silty sand with a moderate frequency of sub-rounded stones
[102]	Cut	Linear – Near vertical feature, dimensions greater than area observed
(103)	Deposit	Fill of [102] – Mixed grey brown silty sand with lenses of sandy gravel, <0.05m diameter
(104)	Deposit	Windblown sands – Mid to light yellow sands with occasional sub-rounded stones <0.04m in diameter
Trench 2		
(200)	Deposit	Topsoil – Dark grey brown sandy silt with sub-rounded stones throughout
(201)	Deposit	Mid to light brown grey silty sand, frequent sub-rounded stones <0.04m diameter
(202)	Deposit	Light grey coarse sand and gravel, frequent sub-rounded stones <0.04m diameter
(203)	Deposit	Mid brown grey coarse sand, sub-rounded stones <0.02m diameter
(204)	Deposit	Mid to dark red brown silty sand, frequent sub-rounded stones <0.01m diameter
(205)	Deposit	Mid to light grey coarse sand, occasional sub-rounded stones <0.02m diameter
(206)	Deposit	Mid red brown silty sand, frequent sub-rounded stones <0.02m diameter
(207)	Deposit	Natural – Mid grey orange coarse sand and shingle, sub-rounded pebbles <0.04m diameter

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Plate 2	Trench 2 (facing east)
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Figure 1	Site Location Map
Figure 2	Trench Location Map



Plate 1: Trench 1 – Northeast facing section (facing west)



Plate 2: Trench 2 (facing east)



Plate 3: Trench 2 – North facing section (facing southeast)