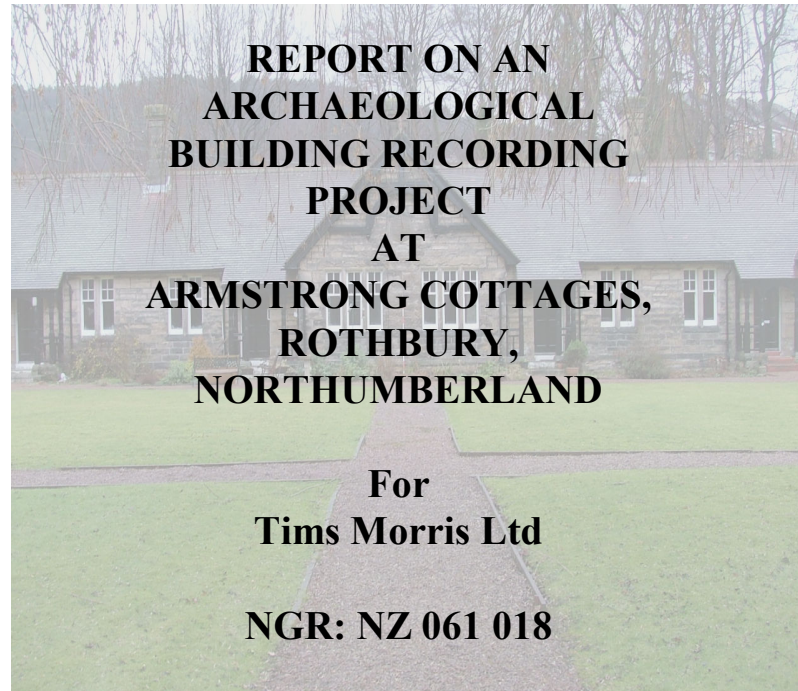

NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Report No. CP/850/08



Oasis Ref: northpen3-54119

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23 January 2009



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SUMMARY

In December 2008, North Pennines Archaeology Limited were commissioned by Tims Morris Ltd to undertake an archaeological building recording project of Armstrong Cottages, Rothbury, Northumberland (NZ 061 018) prior to the renovation of the buildings following flood damage incurred in 2008. Armstrong Cottages are Grade II listed buildings, sited to the north of a low stone wall with central entrance gate, which are also Grade II listed. The properties are located at the eastern end of Rothbury Conservation Area.

A rapid desk-based assessment was undertaken to place the buildings and site of Armstrong Cottages into their historical context. The assessment involved the consultation of historical mapping at Northumberland Archives, Woodhorn, Ashington, as well as the consultation of published and unpublished material to provide an insight into the history and occupiers of Armstrong Cottages.

The rapid desk-based assessment revealed that Armstrong Cottages were constructed in 1896 by William Armstrong of Cragside in memory of his mother Lady Armstrong as almshouses for aged estate workmen and other deserving persons. Armstrong Cottages form only part of a number of buildings erected by the Armstrong's of Cragside in Rothbury for their staff on the estate; these include Addycombe Cottages (1873) and Walby Hill. Cartographic sources indicate that the land on which the cottages were constructed was previously undeveloped apart from a small row of buildings fronting the roadside.

The building recording project revealed that Armstrong Cottages were constructed in a single-phase as 12 single-storey cottages, U-shaped in plan and set back from the main road into Rothbury. To the front of the cottages is a large lawned area with symmetrical gravel paths and foliage, a central entrance gate focuses on a large gable in the south elevation which has an inscribed tablet containing the date 1896.

The cottages were constructed with architectural elements which appear to echo those used in the main house at Cragside, such as dominating gables, prominent chimneys, mullioned windows and decorative bargeboards. They are, however, not as architectural in detail as the earlier Addycombe Cottages (1870s) located just to the north of Armstrong Cottages, which were designed by Norman Shaw, the same architect as the picturesque house at Cragside.

Of the twelve cottages, six are relatively small having only three rooms, and therefore possibly designed for single occupancy. The six cottages which make up the long range are larger, having an extra room suggesting there were meant for two or more occupants. The original function of each of the rooms is not known, however it is likely that each room served several functions, for example the main living area which faces the lawn to the front may also have been used for cooking and sleeping.

Armstrong Cottages are a nice example of housing provided by a philanthropic landowner, for retired workers from the estate. They are a continuation of a charitable tradition in Britain which dates back to the medieval period. These almshouses should not be seen in isolation; they form only part of the influence and affect the Armstrong family had on Rothbury and the surrounding area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would like to thank David Morris of Tims Morris Ltd for commissioning the project.

The building survey was undertaken by Fiona Wooller. The report was written by Fiona Wooller. The project was managed by Martin Railton, Project Manager for NPA Ltd. The report was edited by Martin Railton.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In December 2008, North Pennines Archaeology were commissioned by Tims Morris Ltd to undertake an archaeological building recording project (corresponding to a Level 2 survey as described by English Heritage¹) of Armstrong Cottages, Rothbury, Northumberland, prior to their renovation following flood damage incurred in September 2008.
- 1.1.2 Armstrong Cottages were constructed in 1896 by William Armstrong as almshouses for aged estate workers. The twelve cottages, along with the front wall and gate, are grade II listed buildings and are located at the eastern end of Rothbury Conservation Area². The properties are recorded on the Northumberland County Council Historic Environment Record database (HER) as No. 3008 (Armstrong Cottages) and No.3009 (front walls and gateway).
- 1.1.3 The building recording project was undertaken by Fiona Wooler on the 19th January 2009.

1.2 SITE LOCATION

- 1.2.1 The town of Rothbury is located approximately 14km to the south-west of Alnwick and c.18km to the north-west of Morpeth. The town is situated in Coquetdale, with the River Coquet flowing to the south side of the main settlement. The ground to the north of the town rises steeply to a height of c. 230 metres above mean sea level, whilst the ground to the south is gentler in ascent rising to c.150 metres above mean sea level at Whitton. The land to the east of the town is dominated by the Cragside Estate, a National Trust property, which includes the picturesque mansion of Cragside the former home of William Armstrong, the well-known Victorian inventor, engineer and gunmaker (Figure 1).
- 1.2.2 Armstrong Cottages are situated to the east end of Rothbury known as Town Foot, on the north side of the B6341 and the River Coquet. The buildings are set back from the road, separated from it by an area of lawn with gravel paths. A low wall with central gate defines the southern boundary of the properties. Immediately to the west of Armstrong Cottages is the property known as Well Close, to the north are Stable Walls and Walby Hill Cottages, and to the east is Riverdale (Figure 2).

¹ English Heritage, 2006

² Alnwick District Council, 2001

2. AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 RAPID DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

- 2.1.1 Prior to the commencement of archaeological works at Armstrong Cottages, a rapid desk-based assessment was undertaken in order to establish the building's historic context and to provide details, where known, on the building's architects, builders, patron and owners.
- 2.1.2 The rapid desk-based assessment involved the consultation of historical maps, unpublished material and published sources housed at Northumberland Archives at Woodhorn, Ashington.
- 2.1.3 The rapid desk-based assessment was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment* (IfA 2001a).

2.2 BUILDING RECORDING

- 2.2.1 A Level 2 building survey of Armstrong Cottages was undertaken, according to the standards and guidance set out by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2001b) and English Heritage (2006).
- 2.2.2 The survey includes:
 - a written description of the building, including their plan, form, function, age, development sequence and construction material. A description of the building's landscape and historic context is also considered.
 - a photographic record of the building, and its relationship with other structures and the surrounding landscape, using 35mm monochrome film. A digital photographic record was also made for illustrative purposes within this report.
 - a ground plan of the building noting the location of structural features of historic significance.

2.3 PROJECT ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 An archive will be prepared in accordance with the recommendations in *Archaeological Archives: A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Brown 2007). Arrangements will be made for its long-term storage and deposition with an appropriate repository.
- 2.3.2 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd supports the Online Access to Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) Project. The overall aim of this project is to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological work. Details of the building recording project will be made available by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd as a part of this national project under the unique identifier **northpen-54119**.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

- 3.1.1 The earliest map consulted during the rapid desk-based assessment was a plan of Rothbury dating to c.1800 which shows the land on which Armstrong Cottages would eventually be constructed as undeveloped with the south-west corner as a small enclosure. The land is annotated as in the ownership of William and Henry Story with the name 'Knock Law' (Figure 3).
- 3.1.2 By the date of the publication of the Rothbury Tithe Map in 1848, a small row of buildings has been constructed against the southern boundary, fronting the road, and to the east of the small enclosure noted on Figure 3. The Workhouse is annotated immediately to the east of the field (Figure 4).
- 3.1.3 The First Edition Ordnance Survey maps for Rothbury are split over four different sheets, as shown on Figure 5. The row of buildings fronting the road are clearly visible, as is the 'Union Workhouse' located to the east. On the western side of the field in which Armstrong Cottages would eventually be constructed is 'Wellfield Cottage'. To the south of the site is 'Walby's Hill' and a ford which crosses the River Coquet (Figure 5).
- 3.1.4 By the date of publication of the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map in c.1897, the almshouses now known as Armstrong Cottages, are shown to have been constructed and the row of buildings fronting the road have been demolished. To the north, Addycombe Cottages have also been erected by this date, and the 'Rothbury Union Workhouse' remains to the east. Land on the south side of the river has been developed with the Auction Mart, railway lines, goods sheds, engine shed and station having been constructed by this date (Figure 6).
- 3.1.5 The Third Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1920 shows that properties have been constructed on Walby's Hill by this date, as well as buildings to the north of the almshouses.

3.2 DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

- 3.2.1 Writing prior to the creation of the Cragside Estate, and the construction of William Armstrong's house of Cragside, Oliver noted that: *'the village of Rothbury, or rather market-town, stands on the north side of the Coquet about five miles above Brinkburn. The situation of Rothbury, being screened by lofty hills from the north and east winds, is considered favourable to invalids and many persons in a delicate state of health resort there for the benefit of the air to the drink goats mild, many of those animals being pastured on the hills in the neighbourhood'*³.
- 3.2.2 In 1888, Tomlinson noted that the mansion of Cragside had started to be erected for William Armstrong in 1863, located on a rocky platform above Debdon Burn, and reached by a winding pathway which introduced the visitor to charming areas of

³ Oliver, S, 1835, Pages 77-78

romantic scenery. Cragside was designed by Norman Shaw, and was described by Tomlinson as having being built *'in a composite style of architecture, partly Gothic and partly Elizabethan. The general effect of the building, with its numerous gables and corners, its red-tiled and high pitched roofs, its overhanging eaves, its lofty chimneys and quaint-looking lattices, is highly picturesque'*⁴.

- 3.2.3 Writing with reference to the Congregational Church at Rothbury, Dixon noted that a new church was erected in 1893 on the site of an old house which originally belonged to the Donkins of Tosson, and which incorporated a date stone 'D1690D', which in 1903 was located in the rockery of Haw Hill House. Prior to the demolition of this house, the building had been used as an almshouse which was supported by Lady Armstrong⁵. The old house which acted as the primitive almshouse in the second half of the 19th century was visited by William Armstrong in the 1820s, when it was owned by family friends the Donkins. Seventy years later the site on which the old house stood along with other derelict properties was owned by the Armstrong's (possibly through a bequest from Armorer Donkin). In the 1890s it was agreed that the land on which these properties stood should be used for the new Congregational Church⁶. Following the demolition of the old almshouse, twelve cottages were erected in 1896 at the east end of the village by Lord Armstrong in memory of his mother, which as Dixon describes were built *'with that kind consideration for the comfort and happiness of those around him so characteristic of his lordship, [the cottages] were set apart as homes for the aged estate workmen and other deserving persons'*⁷.
- 3.2.4 Within the grounds of Cragside several lodges were erected for workers on the estate, for example the head gamekeeper. Workers were also housed in several cottages which presumably existed on the site prior to the creation of the estate, such as Debdon Burnfoot Cottage, which Dixon was described as being the original building within the grounds in 1903⁸. The Armstrong estate was not confined to the landscape around Cragside; as chances arose, Armstrong gradually purchased almost 30 farms stretching from the rich arable land of the Coquet to the sheep walks of Simonside and the Cheviots. The acquisition of Bamburgh Castle also included four coastal farms from the old Crewe estate⁹.
- 3.2.5 Following the death of Lady Armstrong in 1893, an article in the Newcastle Daily Journal in September of that year reported that *'Lady Armstrong was as distinguished for her modesty and generosity as her husband, and was a cheerful helper in all efforts of a charitable and philanthropic character'*¹⁰. In the October issue of The Rothbury Church Monthly in 1893, the caring and philanthropic nature of Lady Armstrong was also described: *'To the parish church she was a generous donor and her name was identified with nearly every movement in the parish particularly those of an educational nature. As instances of her kindly disposition it may be mentioned that every New Years Eve she gave £50 worth of clothing, divided into 50 parcels, to the deserving aged poor in Rothbury. Every year the old people were invited to*

⁴ Tomlinson, W.W, 1888, Page 331

⁵ Dodds, M (Ed), 1940, Page 339

⁶ The National Trust, 1992, Page 77

⁷ Dixon, D.D, 1903, Pages 419-420

⁸ *Ibid*, Page 435

⁹ The National Trust, 1992, Page 77

¹⁰ Rothbury Parish Magazine, 1893

*Cragside to receive their welcome parcels. There, they were entertained to dinner and tea and for many years Lady Armstrong personally attended to them, and they received the gifts of clothing from her own hands. In the parish, again, there were a number of old people who are known as Lady Armstrong's pensioners*¹¹.

3.2.6 The only available Census Returns which could be consulted for entries relating to Armstrong Cottages date to 1901 [the 1911 Census has just been released for public access however it does not as yet include Northumberland¹²]. The following entries are recorded for 1901 which provide an interesting insight into those living in the cottages at that date [only 11 of the 12 occupied]. The titles of each column are taken from the original census forms:

No of Persons [in property]	Name	Relation to head of family	Marital status	Age last birthday	Profession or occupation	Employer, worker or own account	Where born
1	Annie Ramsey	Head	Widow	75			Rothbury
1	Elizabeth Turner	Head	Single	75		Own account	Berwick
1	Annie Baston	Head	Single	59		Own account	?Durham
1	Isobella Dixon	Head	Widow	48	Dress maker	Own account	Newbiggin on Sea
1	Elizabeth Douglas	Head	Single	53	Pauper	Own account	Kelso
3	Alexander Hindmarsh	Head	Widower	64	Former coachman		North Shields
	Elizabeth Hindmarsh	Daughter	Single	22			Rothbury
	Ella Hindmarsh	Niece	Single	15			North Shields
2	Barbara Woodcock	Head	Widow	69			?
	Mary ?	Grand daughter	Single	16	Dress maker		Rothbury
2	Elizabeth Fleming	Head	Widow	59			Rothbury
	Isabella Fleming	Daughter	Single	32	Dress maker		Rothbury
3	John Young	Head	Married	74	Caretaker (?late estate)		Bolton
	Mary Young	Wife	Married	74	Housekeeper		Rothbury
	Hannah Thompson	Boarder	Single	72	Pauper		Rothbury
1	Margaret ?Whinham	Head	Widow	75	?Retired wash laundress	Own account	Elsdon
1	Mary Gardiner	Head	Single	58	Wash laundress	Own account	Ireland

¹¹ Rothbury Parish Magazine, 1893

¹² <http://fmpbsol.1911census.co.uk/> - Accessed 20/1/2009

4. SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 Armstrong Cottages (No's 1-12 consecutive) are single-storey and U-shaped in plan with the long axis orientated east-west. The long range contains six cottages, and each short range to either side contains three.
- 4.1.2 The land to the front of the properties consists of a large area of lawn intersected by gravel paths laid symmetrically into the grass (Plate 1). From the main road the cottages are accessed via a small gate set in a low wall placed centrally with the long range of the buildings. The low wall is constructed of roughly-squared masonry topped with chamfered coping stones which have regularly-spaced holes along the top indicating that formerly there were railings. The gateway is defined by two short panelled piers with moulded flat tops. A decorative cast iron archway over the gateway is intertwined with foliage. Trees have been planted symmetrically either side of the gateway within the lawned area (Plate 2).
- 4.1.3 Figure 8 shows the type of construction material, where observed, of the exterior and interior walls of the cottages.

4.2 ARMSTRONG COTTAGES - EXTERIOR

- 4.2.1 Externally, the cottages are constructed of coursed 'rock-faced' stone, sometimes referred to as '*rustication*' or '*cyclopean*', this type of masonry is used to give a rich and bold texture to an exterior wall¹³. At the base of the walls is a projecting plinth which contains iron air vents along its length. Air vents, or airbricks, were used to reduce moisture as they allowed air to circulate in the void beneath the internal floorboards¹⁴. The roofs are laid in red clay tiles with decorative tile ridge cresting, and located astride the ridge are regularly-spaced substantial masonry chimney stacks (Plate 3). The chimney stacks are constructed of ashlar masonry, with two thin half-round decorative string courses encompassing half-round vertical pilasters on each side, and topped with a cornice (Plate 4).
- 4.2.2 Each cottage has a projecting gable which contains a three-light mullioned window with square head, reminiscent of medieval architecture. The windows are 4-pane upper sashes with fixed-pane lower halves. In front of each of the gabled projections is a small garden plot, allowing residents to grow produce or flowers. Above these windows are relatively plain bargeboards which define the gable end; although these provide architectural detail to a building they also serve a practical function as they hide the ends of horizontal roof timbers. Set between the bargeboards is a horizontal timber and three vertical braces, all with chamfered edges. At the apex of the gable is a ceramic finial (Plate 3). Rainwater from the gabled roof of these projections is collected by cast-iron guttering into a downpipe located against the face of the gable,

¹³ Fleming, J *et al*, 1999, 498

¹⁴ Yorke, T, 2006, Page 37

and another against the main wall of each cottage; all symmetrically placed along the main elevations of the cottages (Plate 5).

- 4.2.3 The main doorways to each of the cottages in the elevations facing the lawned area are all accessed up two steps. Each doorway is protected from the elements by a porch constructed from decorative timber with a central segmental arch. The porches are covered by a continuation of the main roof. The main doors are of 4-panels with a centrally-placed letterbox. No.12 Armstrong Cottages has an interesting door knocker in the form of a stags head with what appears to be a fox below. Similar door knockers were not noted on any other of the doors so it is not known if this is an original feature relating to the Cragside Estate, or a personal feature of one of the former occupants (Plate 7). Each cottage has an iron boot scraper located at the base of the steps to the porch (Plates 6 and 8).
- 4.2.4 The long range which faces south and contains six of the cottages has a central gabled projection which is much larger than those already noted (Plate 9). This section of the cottages is in line with the gateway from the road and is consequently the main focus. Located within this gable (and noticeably in direct sight of the main gateway) is an inscribed shield-shaped tablet which reads (Plate 10):

Erected by
WILLIAM GEORGE
BARON ARMSTRONG
of Cragside
In Memory of
Anne Armstrong
HIS MUCH LOVED
MOTHER
MDCCCXCVI [1896]

- 4.2.5 The long range which faces south contains six cottages which are larger than the three in each of the side wings (see Figure 8). The four central cottages each have an extra window, in the form of a two-light mullion (Plate 11). The two cottages located on each side where the long and short ranges join have porches which fit in with the meeting point (Plate 12).
- 4.2.6 The south gable ends of the two short ranges each have a blank projecting square tablet set between two windows (Plate 13). The south elevation of the eastern short range has a name sign 'Armstrong Cottages' (Plate 14).
- 4.2.7 The rear of the shorter side wings which make up Armstrong Cottages are visible from access lanes to the west and east of the properties (Plates 15 and 16). The rear of the properties has a flat-roofed extension and a gabled extension providing extra rooms for the cottages. Although each of the gabled projections to the rear of the properties have bargeboards, it is noticeable that they are plain and do not contain the architectural embellishment of those which face the main road. Rainwater from the pitched roofs of the gabled extensions in the short ranges does not drain into guttering, instead the water flows onto the flat roofs which must be slightly inclined (although this could not be confirmed due to the height) to allow the water to drain into a downpipe (Plate 17). The masonry used to construct the outer walls of the rear elevations is noticeably different from that of the main elevations facing the road; it is

not the same 'rock-faced' stonework, and is uncoursed, again presumably reflecting the fact that these elevations were not going to be seen by passers-by (see Plate 18).

- 4.2.8 The rear elevation (north) of the long range also has gabled projections and flat-roofed extensions which provide extra rooms to the cottages (Plates 18 and 19). The four central cottages in this range each appear to have had a further fireplace or heater internally as shown by the same decorative chimney stacks located within the pitch of gabled projections (Plate 19).
- 4.2.9 There are small blocked 'windows' in the north elevation of No's 5 and 8 Armstrong Cottages; similar 'windows' were *not* noted in any of the other cottages (Plates 18 and 20). The blocked 'window' to No.8 retains two iron spindles externally, presumably for a wooden door. These features are reminiscent of coal holes for transferring fuel into a property; however this would have meant fuel being moved into one of the main rooms in the cottage. It is curious that these should only be present in two of the properties.
- 4.2.10 The flat-roofed extensions to the rear of the properties appear to generally have been used as protection for the back entrances (Plate 21). With No's 1 and 12, however, the flat roofs also cover a small room which may originally have been a privy or a fuel store, which have more recently been used for housing meters or as utility rooms (Plate 22). All the other cottages have a similar small room, but these are housed within the gabled projections. Writing in relation to water closets (WC's), Yorke notes that by the 1890s improvements in drainage and building regulations meant that some middle class homes were able to have a small room indoors, but usually separate from the bathroom. In new build houses for the working classes, however, the water closet was usually on the ground floor within a rear extension often accessed only from outside¹⁵. Given that the cottages were constructed as almshouses (and therefore for those of a lower class) it is likely that the small rooms to the rear of the properties, all accessed from outside with no internal link with the cottage, may have been used as WC's.

¹⁵ Yorke, T, 2006, Page 105



Plate 1 – View looking north-west showing Armstrong Cottages as seen from the east of Walby's Hill



Plate 2 – View looking north showing the low wall, central gate and symmetrically placed trees with Armstrong Cottages behind



Plate 3 – West elevation of No.12 Armstrong Cottages showing ‘rock-faced’ masonry, red tiled roof, chimney stack and projecting gable (Scale = 2m)



Plate 4 – Detail of one of the chimney stacks



Plate 5 – West elevation of No's 10, 11 and 12 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 6 – Detail of porch way to No.12 Armstrong Cottages (Scale = 2m)

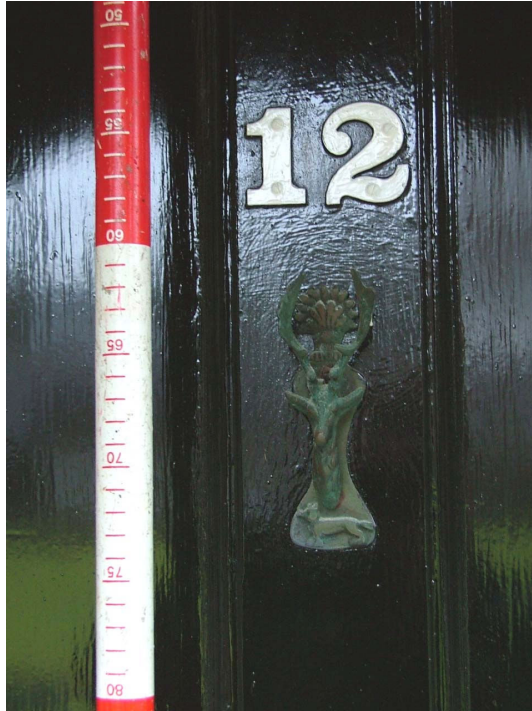


Plate 7 – Detail of door knocker, No.12 Armstrong Cottages (Scale is in 1cm graduations)



Plate 8 – Detail of boot scraper outside No.2 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 9 – View looking north of the central gabled projection which contains the date stone
(Scale = 2m)



Plate 10 – Detail of the inscribed tablet in central gable of long range



Plate 11 – South elevation of No's 5 and 6 Armstrong Cottages (Scale = 2m)



Plate 12 – Porch and doorway to No.4 located at the point where the short and long range meet
(Scale = 2m)



Plate 13 – View looking north showing the south elevation of the western short range (Scale = 2m)



Plate 14 – Sign 'Armstrong Cottages' on south elevation of eastern short range



Plate 15 – View looking north showing west side of Armstrong Cottages (right of photograph) and the lane which separates them from Well Close (Scale = 2m)



Plat 16 – View looking north showing the eastern side of Armstrong Cottages (rear of No's 12, 11 and 10) (Scale = 2m)



Plate 17 – Detail of downpipe from flat roof over the back door to No.12 Armstrong Cottages
(Scale = 2m)



Plate 18 – View looking east showing the north elevation of the long range. Note the blocked
'window' to No.5 (Scale =2m)



Plate 19 – View looking west showing the north elevation of the long range



Plate 20 – Blocked 'window' to No.8 with iron spindles for a former external door (Scale = 2m)



Plate 21 – Back door to No.2 Armstrong Cottages showing flat roof over and door set in a panelled surround (Scale = 2m)



Plate 22 – Flat roofed extension to No.1 Armstrong Cottages also houses a former privy or fuel store. Note the brick internal wall of the small room (Scale = 2m)

4.3 ARMSTRONG COTTAGES - INTERIOR

- 4.3.1 At the time of survey all the internal wall coverings (i.e. wallpaper and plaster), where they had existed, had been removed due to the damage from the floodwater, and each cottage contained fans and dehumidifiers in an attempt to dry out the properties (Plate 23). The lack of wall coverings allowed for the construction material for each of the walls to be noted and these are shown on Figure 8. It is interesting to note the mix of building materials, in particular of those walls which are brick on one side, and masonry on the other. This may reflect the use of cavity walls in new builds which was advocated by architects such as J J Stevenson in his publication *House Architecture* (1880). The 'hollow space' between an outer and inner leaf gave dry walls and kept the house cool in summer and warm in winter, especially if the outer leaf was thicker¹⁶.
- 4.3.2 The lack of wall coverings and the fact that the whole of the interior of the properties has had to be totally stripped bare due to flood damage has meant that any historical fixtures and fittings contemporary (or later) with the buildings has been lost. Some door fittings of note were, however, observed and these will be referred to below.
- 4.3.3 No's 1 to 3 Armstrong Cottages make up the western short range. These three properties are smaller than those which make up the long range (i.e. No's 4 to 9), but are the same size as those in the eastern short range (No's 10 to 12) (Figure 8). The smaller properties consist of three rooms; a large living/sleeping space to the front of the cottage and a kitchen and bathroom to the rear with storage space provided in a cupboard between the two. This is, however, the presumed most recent use of each of the rooms. The original use of internal space needs to be considered. During the period when Armstrong Cottages were constructed (1896) bathrooms had only just started to become a common feature in upper and middle class homes and by the early Edwardian period (c.1900) bathrooms were small compared to modern standards, as most people still washed in the bedroom¹⁷. A kitchen would have housed a cast iron range on which all the cooking would have been done, and there may have been a scullery where traditionally crockery was washed, and food prepared. Other rooms seen in late Victorian/early Edwardian homes included the laundry, a larder and pantry, and of course bedrooms, with a WC housed in an extension to the rear. This is, of course, only a generalisation and it needs to be considered that a small cottage, in particular such as No's 1 to 3 and 10 to 12 Armstrong Cottages presumably had rooms which served several functions.
- 4.3.4 At ground level, the lobbies of No's 1 to 3 are constructed of brick laid in stretcher bond. The corner of the lobby has been chamfered to prevent the presence of a sharp corner (Plate 23). The internal original door fittings appear to have survived in nearly all of the cottages and these consist of a latch with hefty lock below which has decorative metalwork (Plate 24). A large fireplace with sandstone surround, now bricked-up, also survives in all the cottages, set in a masonry wall which provides support for the flue chimney stack above (Plate 25). These fireplaces may originally have housed a small range. The internal front walls which contain the mullioned windows of No's 1 to 3 were noted to be of brick, compared to the external wall which

¹⁶ Brunskill, R.W, 1990, 194

¹⁷ Yorke, T, 2006, 103

is masonry (Plate 23). This was also noted on some of the walls which separated the living area from the utility/bathrooms to the rear, although this was not seen in all the cottages (Plate 26 and Figure 8).

- 4.3.5 The room to the rear of the living areas of No's 1 to 3 and 10 to 12 may have more latterly been used as a kitchen, as it is unlikely that access from the back door to the front room would have passed through a bathroom. The only feature of particular note in this room is the presence of brickwork beneath the window sill, in a wall which is otherwise constructed of masonry (Plate 27). To the south of this room in all the cottages in the short ranges, is an unlit room which may have more recently been used as a bathroom, but which may originally have been used as a pantry or for storage. In four of these cottages (No's 2, 3, 10 and 11) it was noted that a former doorway has been bricked-up and a new doorway inserted in the masonry in the opposite end of the wall (Plate 28). This moving of doorways appears to be a fairly modern occurrence and may have been undertaken to provide space for a cupboard to house a boiler. The installation of a boiler is also suggested by the presence in four of these cottages of an inserted aperture in the wall between the living space and the rear lobby, which is lined with timber, and the fact some water pipes remain *in-situ* at the top of this aperture (Plate 29). The opposite side of this wall shows a bricked-up area in the masonry where a hole has been cut to create the aperture for the boiler (Plate 30).
- 4.3.6 The six cottages in the long range (No's 4 to 9) are all larger than those in the sort ranges, having an extra room and fireplace (Figure 8). The fireplace in the extra room is slightly smaller than that in the main living space (Plate 31), and several retain their fire backs (Plate 32). The floor of No.4 has been removed in the western room to a depth of c.30cm to expose a masonry plinth around the edges of the roof and across the width which would have supported the original floor boards. In the walls it was noted that a layer of slate had been inserted within the brickwork and the masonry, just above the top of the height of the original floorboards (Plate 33). This layer of slate appears to have acted as a damp proof course; from the late 1800s into the early 20th century damp proof courses were common and were generally located around 1ft above ground level. The damp proof course layer was constructed of either a mixture of tar and sand, sheets of lead-cored felt or a line of slates¹⁸. In a room in No.8, where the floor has been removed, two thin horizontal iron girders are set into the wall at the base of the brickwork; it is unlikely that these acted as a damp course due to the material from which they are made, consequently they may have been used to provide support for this wall although this feature was noted in any other room where the floor surface had been removed (Plate 34).
- 4.3.7 In the ceilings of what may have been the former kitchens of No's 4 to 8 (located to the north side of the cottages), hatches were observed which would have provided access to the roof space (Plate 35). The windows in the north elevations of several of the cottages in the long range were noted to have internal reveals which were constructed of a mixture of masonry blocks and brickwork (Plate 36).
- 4.3.8 The only area where any of the roof structure could be noted was through the hatch above the kitchen in No.5, which showed that the roof of the gabled projections was

¹⁸ Yorke, T, 2006, Page 38

constructed of machine-sawn timber and consisted of a king-post roof truss with struts (Plate 37).

- 4.3.9 Where the floor level has been removed in several of the cottages, it was possible to note a small aperture at the base of the internal brickwork of the main elevations (facing the lawned area) which allowed air into the building and circulate under the floorboards (Plate 38). In No.7 the former concrete floor has been removed in one room to expose a depth of c.1.20 metres below present floor level. The foundations of the building are clearly visible as being constructed from coursed masonry and the cross-wall in line with the fireplace would have supported the wooden joists for the floor boarding (Plate 39). The brick partition wall has been removed in this cottage, and in the ceiling the scarring for the former wall shows that the ceiling is constructed of wooden laths which have been plastered (Plate 40).
- 4.3.10 It has already been noted that some walls in the cottages are constructed of two separate 'leaves', one of brick (always internal) and one of masonry, and it was suggested that these acted as cavity walls to allow the walls to remain dry. In No.8 Armstrong Cottages a single missing brick in the north wall of the possible former bedroom shows that there is indeed a cavity between the two different construction materials (Plate 41).
- 4.3.11 The possible 'coal hole' noted in 4.2.9 above and shown on Plate 20 was clearly visible from within the interior of No.8 (Plate 42). Its presence leading into a room such as this is curious as it suggests that fuel was being transferred into the interior of the cottage here, rather than into an external store. The fact that two of the cottages, symmetrically placed in the layout of the buildings, each have these features is also difficult to interpret. It is possible that these cottages were designed to house a particular function which required more heat. Both No's 5 and 8, which have these square blocked holes in the north elevation, also have an additional chimney set in the gabled projection, however No's 6 and 7 also have this extra chimney but have no evidence for a blocked 'coal hole'. Interestingly, there is also no evidence in any of the cottages which have the extra chimney in the gabled projections to the north, of a fireplace or set-pot which these chimneys may have served. It is possible that these chimney stacks to the rear of the cottages were decorative, however they are not visible to those passing the main façade.



Plate 23 – Brick-built lobby in No.1 Armstrong Cottages (Scale = 2m)



Plate 24 – Detail of original latch and lock, No.1 Armstrong Cottages (Scale is in 1cm graduations)



Plate 25 – Large fireplace, now bricked-up, in front room of No.1 Armstrong Cottages (Scale = 2m)



Plate 26 – Internal cross-wall showing bricks laid in stretcher bond, No.1 Armstrong Cottages.
Note the masonry quoins of the door jamb (Scale = 2m)



Plate 27 – View looking west of window with brickwork below, No.1 Armstrong Cottages
(Scale = 2m)



Plate 28 – Bricked-up doorway in masonry wall between former bathroom and rear lobby, No.3 Armstrong Cottages. Note the later studwork of a cupboard (Scale = 2m)



Plate 29 – Inserted hole in wall between main living room and rear of cottage possibly for a boiler, as shown by the water pipes *in-situ* at the top of the aperture (Scale = 2m)



Plate 30 – View looking west from the living are of No.3 Armstrong Cottages showing bricked-up feature in masonry wall (Scale = 2m)



Plate 31 – Fireplace in possible former bedroom, No.4 Armstrong Cottages. Note the removal of the floor in this room



Plate 32 – Detail of small fireplace, No.5 Armstrong Cottages (Scale is in 20cm graduations)



Plate 33 – Detail of slate course below masonry, No.4 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 34 – Base of wall in No.8 showing two iron girders below the brickwork (Scale = 1m)



Plate 35 – Hatch with two bolts in ceiling of No.6 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 36 – Detail of kitchen window, No.4 Armstrong Cottages, showing upper 4-pane sash and reveals constructed of both masonry and brick



Plate 37 – Roof structure of one of the gabled projections as seen from a ceiling within No.5 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 38 – Air vent in south wall located within masonry course of No.6 Armstrong Cottages



Plate 39 – View looking east of the interior of No.7 showing the foundations. The modern supports mark the line of a former brick partition wall



Plate 40 – Scarring in ceiling of No.7 showing line of former brick partition wall



Plate 41 – Missing brick in north wall of bedroom of No.8 shows a cavity between the brickwork and the masonry wall behind (Scale = 1m)

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The origins of almshouses lie in medieval monasteries, where Christian duty dictated the care of people in need. Some of the early foundations began as refuges for pilgrims or lepers, but they eventually concentrated on the care of the elderly. Almshouses have been variously referred to as 'hospitals', 'colleges' and 'asylums', and more recently as 'homes' and 'cottages'¹⁹. Charitable giving has been part of the British way of life for centuries. The Victorian era is considered to have been the most prolific in charitable and philanthropic works²⁰. Of the two thousand groups of almshouses currently occupied, it has been estimated that more than 30 percent were built during Queen Victoria's reign²¹. Generally, the vast majority of Victorian almshouses were provide in modest groupings of between five and twelve dwellings, often single-storey, with unexceptional architectural detail²², although this would presumably depend on the benefactor.
- 5.2 The rapid desk-based assessment revealed that the land on which Armstrong Cottage's would be constructed was undeveloped apart from a row of buildings fronting the roadside to the southern boundary of the field (see Figure 5). The almshouses are shown on the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1897 next to the workhouse (Figure 6). Documentary evidence has indicated that the almshouses were constructed by William Armstrong of Cragside in 1896 to house retired elderly workers from the Cragside estate. The cottages replaced a primitive almshouse that had been supported by Lady Armstrong located in an old house on the site of the Congregational Church which was constructed in 1893. It is clear that the Armstrong family were philanthropists as shown by the construction of cottages and lodges for workers on the Cragside estate, the erection of Addycombe Cottages (designed by Norman Shaw and built in the 1870s) to the north of Armstrong Cottages for retired workers, and the descriptions of Lady Armstrong's character given in the church magazines following her death in 1893. Armstrong Cottages, therefore, should not been seen in isolation but part of the influence of William Armstrong and his family in and around Rothbury.
- 5.3 The Census Records of 1901 show that the occupants of Armstrong Cottages at that date were generally single and elderly, although some younger relatives were also resident. The maximum number living in one cottage at this date was three when Alexander Hindmarsh (retired coachman) shared his home with his daughter and niece.
- 5.4 The building survey revealed that Armstrong Cottages appear to have been constructed as a single-phase with architectural features such as symmetrical gables, prominent chimneys, decorative bargeboards and turned balusters for the porches. The cottages consist of 12 properties, six of which have only three rooms suggesting single occupancy, and the other six with four rooms suggesting they may have been designed for two or more occupants. It is unfortunate that the Building Control Plans for Rothbury, which are housed at Woodhorn (although they are not indexed), are only

¹⁹ Hallett, A, 2004, Pages 5-6

²⁰ Howson, B, 2008, Page 13

²¹ *Ibid*, Page 59

²² *Ibid*, Page 65

available from 1897, as these may have provided information on the original intended use of each room. It is likely that each room served several functions, for example the main living area which faces the lawns to the front may also have been used for cooking and sleeping.

- 5.5 Internally it was possible the note, due to the removal of plaster, that the cottages were constructed of two different materials; brick and masonry. All the brickwork was located in internal walls, in particular for partition walls, and may have been a cheaper material to use. It is interesting to note, however, the presence of a skin of brickwork against a masonry wall (see Figure 8) which may indicate the presence of cavities designed to keep the walls dry, and retain heat in winter and keep cool in summer.
- 5.6 The cottages still largely retain their original and internal layouts, and have not been added to or combined to form larger dwellings. The only internal alterations noted to have been made was the blocking of a doorway and the insertion of another in the room to the rear of the properties; this may have been undertaken when converting this room to a bathroom. It would appear that boilers have also been inserted at some point into most of the cottages as shown by an aperture inserted into the wall between the main living area and the rear rooms. As the presence of blocked doorways and the presumed apertures for boilers occur in nearly all of the cottages it is possible to suggest that alterations were made when the cottages were still under the ownership of an individual or organisation.
- 5.7 Armstrong Cottages were constructed in 1896 on undeveloped land by William Armstrong as almshouses for elderly estate workers and other deserving persons. They are a nice example of housing provided by a philanthropic landowner, for retired staff from the estate. They represent a continuation of the tradition of charity in Britain which dates back to the medieval period. These almshouses should not be seen in isolation; they form only part of the influence and affect the Armstrong family had on Rothbury and the surrounding area.

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Maps

- Plan of Rothbury c.1800*, Ref: ZAN Bell 38-9b
- Rothbury Tithe Map 1848*, Ref: DT 400 M
- First Edition Ordnance Survey Maps c.1860 (25" to 1 mile scale)*
- Second Edition Ordnance Survey Maps c.1897 (25" to 1 mile scale)*
- Third Edition Ordnance Survey Maps c.1920 (25" to 1 mile scale)*

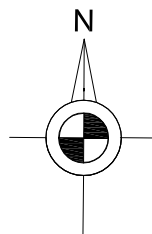
APPENDIX: FIGURES



North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2009

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CLIENT Tims Morris Ltd
DRAWN BY: FW
DATE: January 2009

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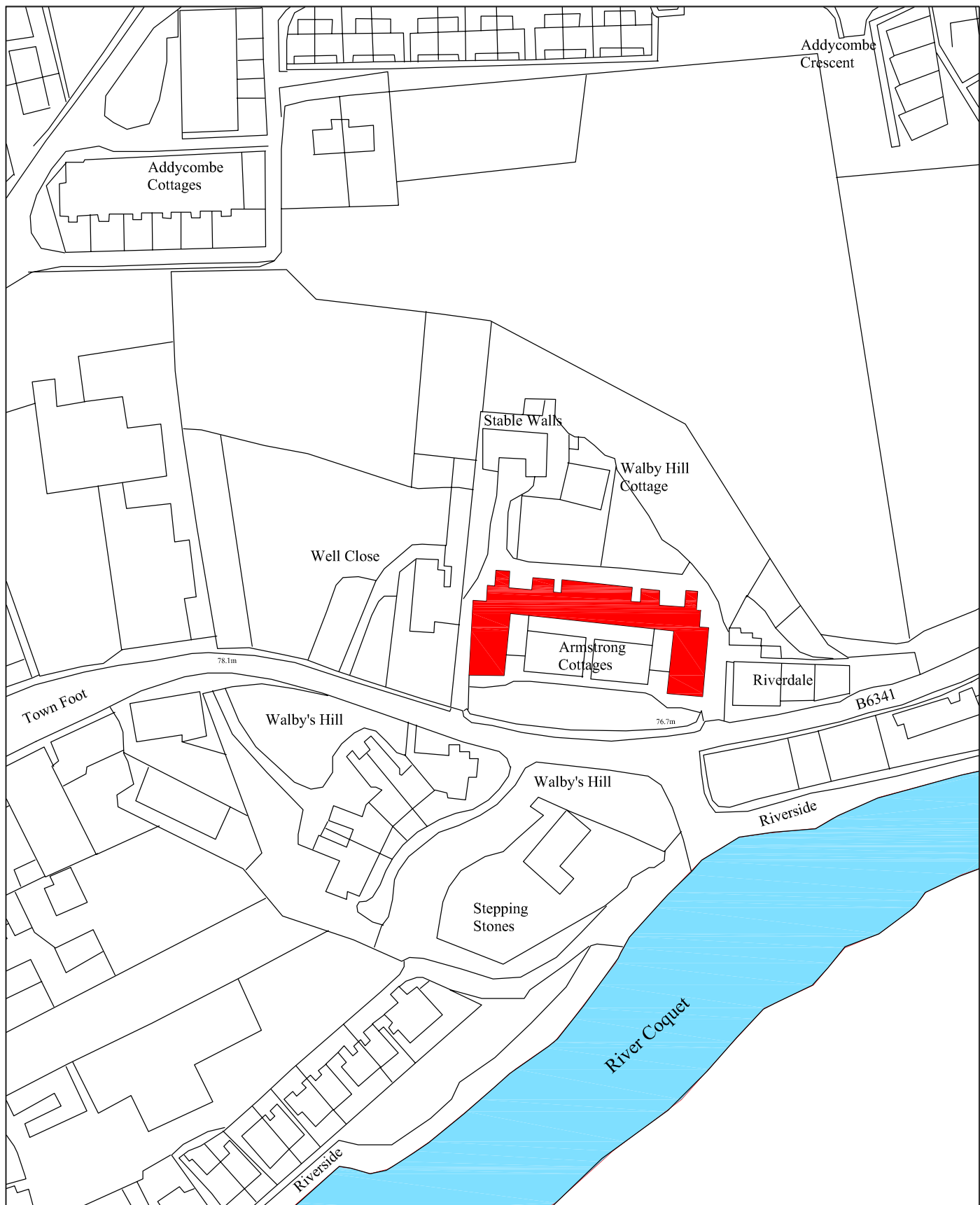


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 Site Location

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Figure 1 : Site Location




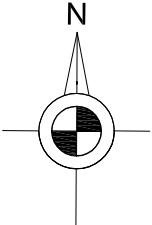
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Figure 2 : Site Location of Armstrong Cottages

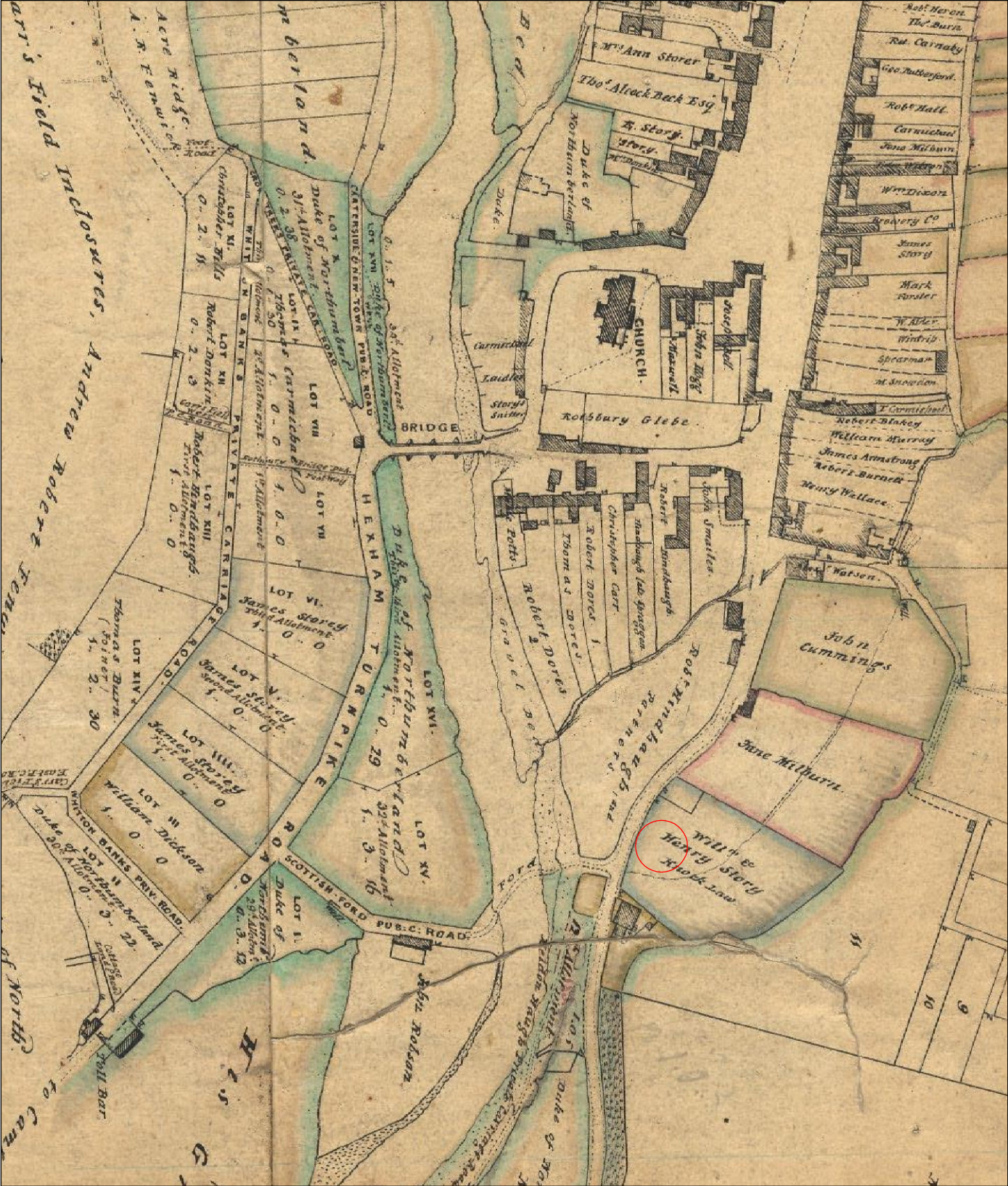


Figure 3 : Plan of Rothbury c.1800



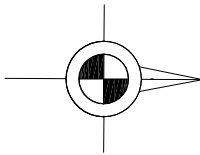
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Armstrong Cottages, Rothbury

Scale Not to Scale

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DATE: January 2009

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Location of
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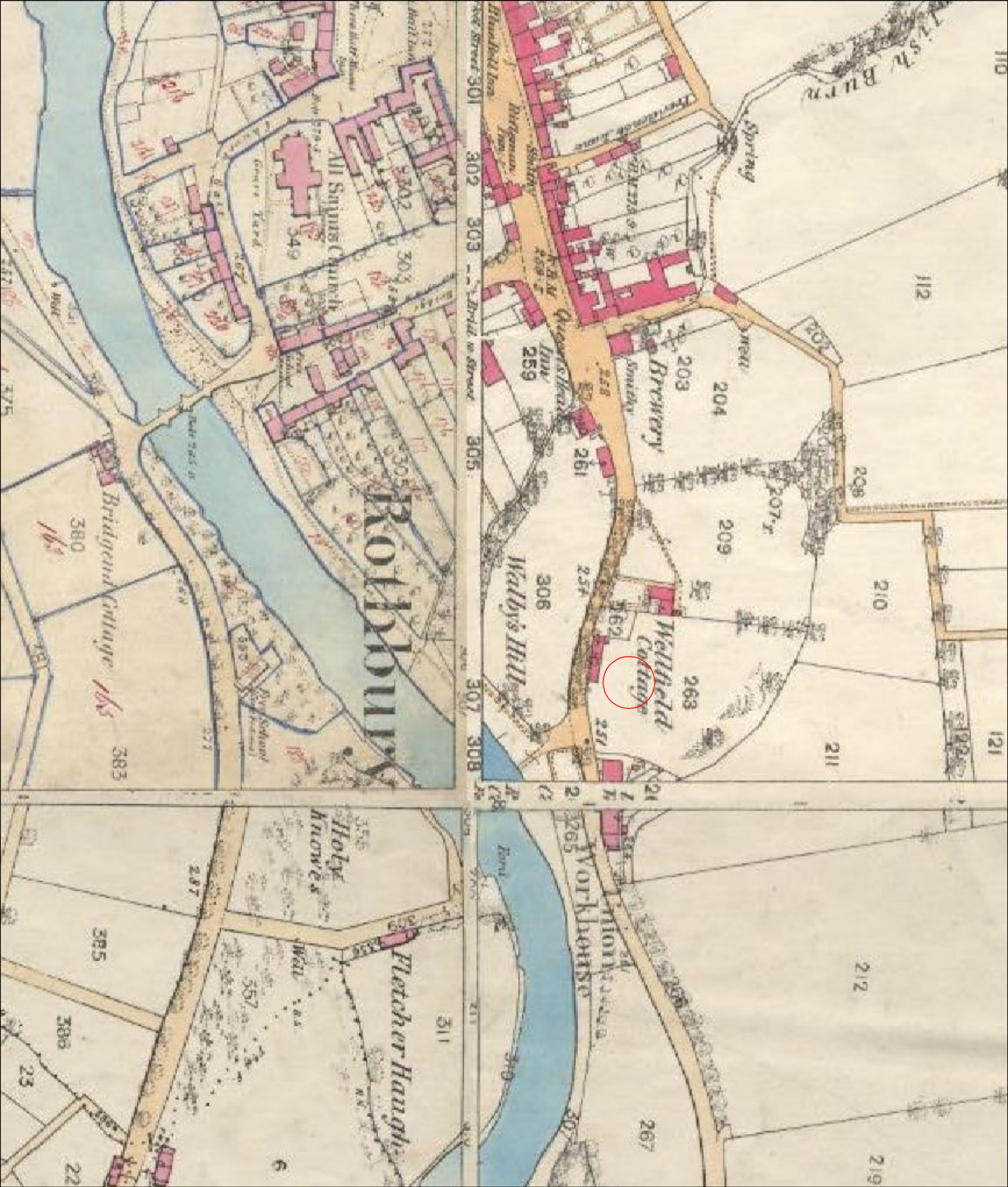
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Figure 4 : Extract from Rothbury Tithe Map 1848



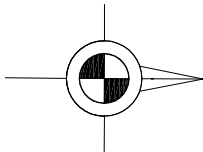
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Armstrong Cottages, Rothbury

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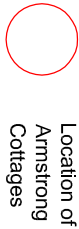
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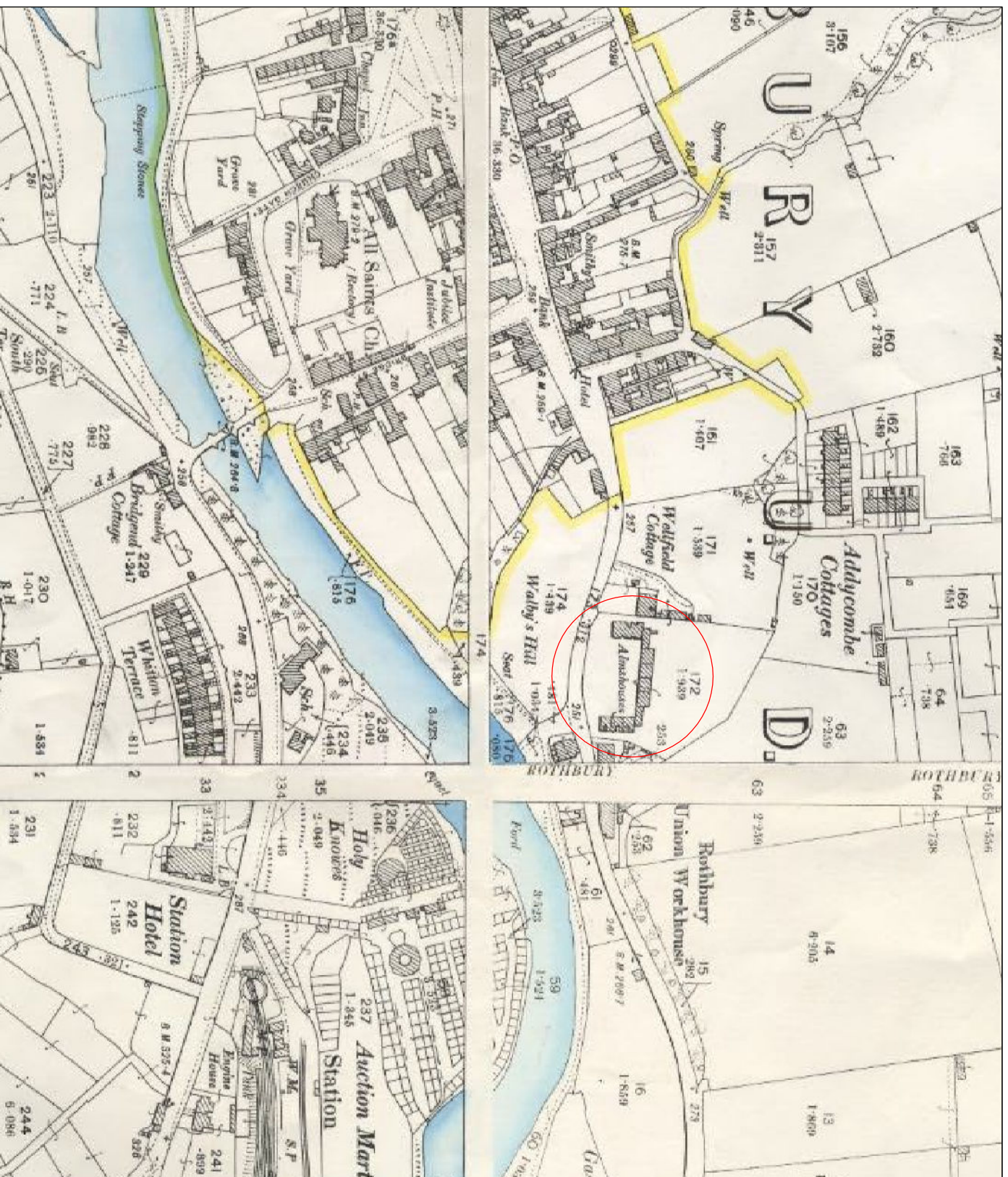
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Figure 5 : First Edition Ordnance Survey Map c.1865



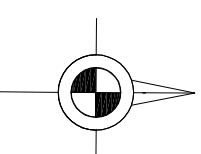
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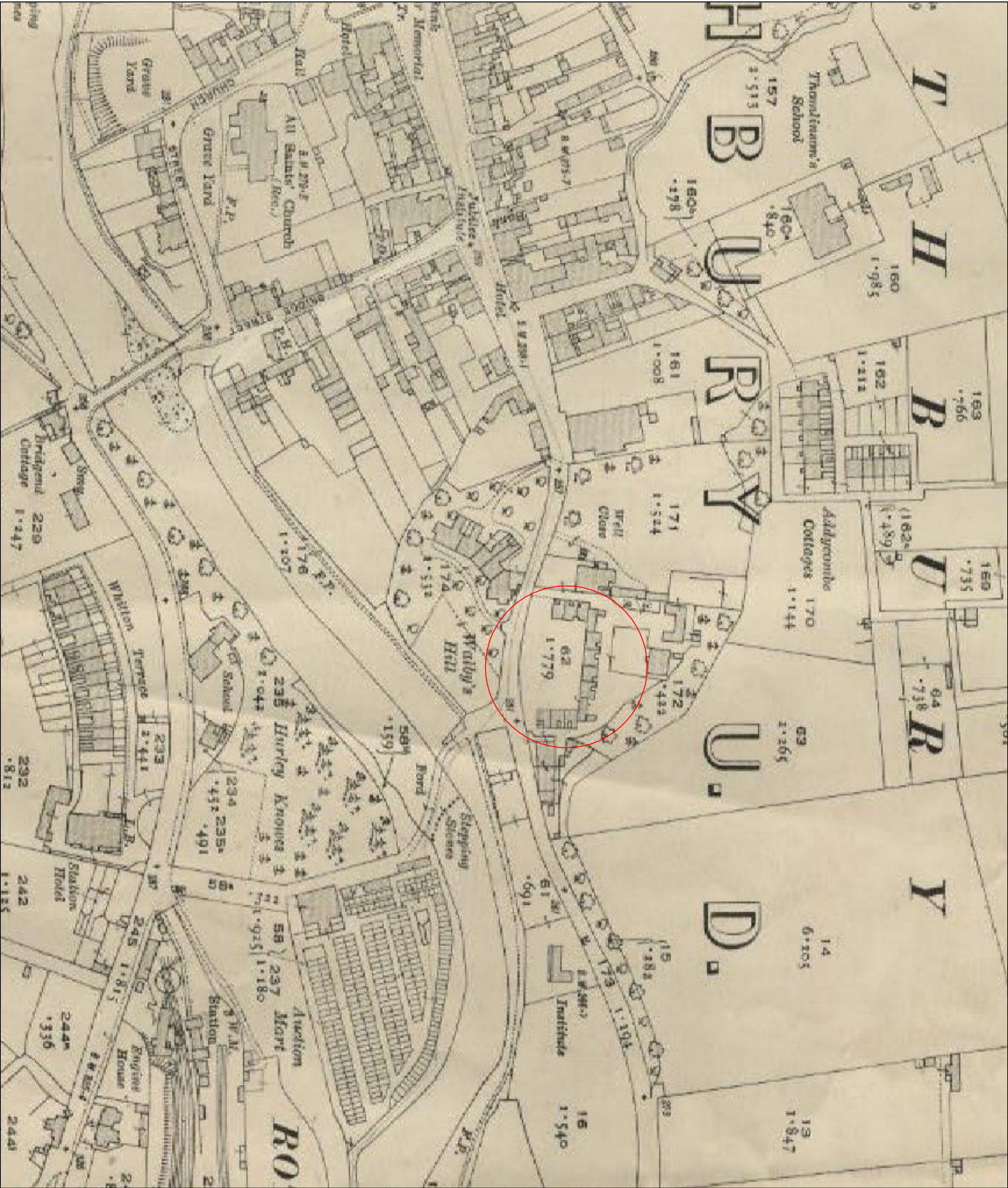
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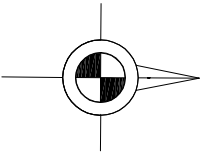


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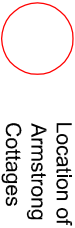
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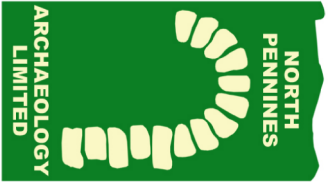


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Figure 7 : Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map c.1920



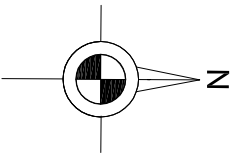
North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2009
Armstrong Cottages, Rothbury

Scale 1:250 at A3

DRAWN BY: FW

DATE: January 2009

LOCATION:



KEY

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- Brickwork
- Stud walls
- Fireplace
- Possible site of original toilet

REPORT No:

CP 850/08

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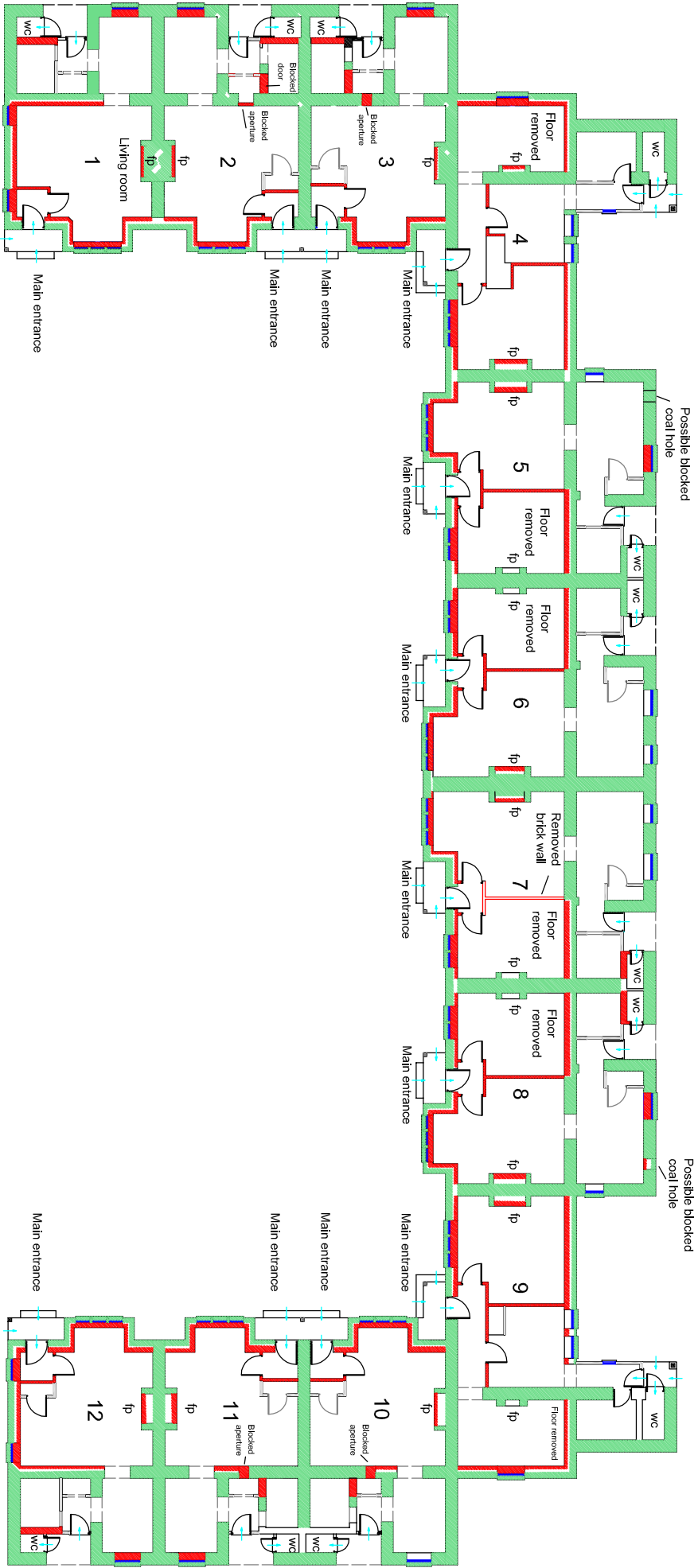


Figure 8 : Ground Plan of Armstrong Cottages