

NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Reports No. CP/477/07



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2009, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were invited by Duncan Stuart, Architect, on behalf of his client Pattinson Photography, to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land to the rear of 1 Battle Hill, Hexham, Northumberland (NGR NY 9361 6395). The site is located on the north side of Battle Hill, between St Mary's Chare and Fore Street, and is currently used as a car parking area which is bound to the north and east by retaining walls and to the south and west by existing buildings.

As the site is located within the medieval core of Hexham, the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) advised that a programme of archaeological works be undertaken as a condition of the planning permission, before development commenced. The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation approved by the NCCCT. The evaluation followed an archaeological desk-based assessment conducted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in April 2007 as part of the archaeological works.

The archaeological evaluation comprised the excavation of two test-pits covering 5% of the development area, as agreed with the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team. Both test-pits measured 2m x 2m and were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m. The test-pits were located as near as possible to the front and rear of the property, in order to assess the possible presence of structural remains fronting the street, and deposits associated with the medieval burgh plot to the rear. Furthermore, the desk-based assessment conducted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in 2007 identified the potential survival of 19th century structural remains at the northern and eastern ends of the development area.

Although no significant remains were observed during the evaluation, evidence of archaeological activity was apparent in both test-pits. Both the northeast corner of Test-pit 1 and the opposing southwest corner of Test-pit 2 revealed similar features cut into the natural substrate. It is probable that the archaeological features observed represented the northeast and southwest limits of a much larger feature located within the centre of the development area. Unfortunately, the exact function of the feature(s) could not be ascertained which was in part, due to undiagnostic deposits and a general lack of archaeological finds. However, a single sherd of 19th/early 20th century pottery retrieved from the primary fill of the aforementioned feature in Test-pit 2 suggests that it was probably associated with the 19th century structures that once occupied the northern and eastern limits of the property, although no evidence of these structures was observed.

No evidence of medieval or post-medieval activity was observed during the archaeological evaluation.

Based upon the evidence retrieved during the archaeological evaluation it would appear that the study area has either not been intensively used in the medieval period or later, or that any such activity has since been destroyed. However, given the location of the development area within the medieval core of Hexham, and the small sample size of the archaeological evaluation, it is recommended that any future invasive work be subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd. would like to thank Duncan Stuart for commissioning the project, and to the client, Pattinson Photography, for their assistance during the work. NPA Ltd would also like to thank John Threlkeld for kindly operating the machine during the evaluation.

Rachel Horn and Frances Wood carried out the field evaluation, under the supervision of David Jackson. The report was prepared by David Jackson and edited by Matthew Town, Project Manager for NPA Ltd. The project was also managed by Matthew Town.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 This scheme of archaeological works was undertaken to establish the archaeological potential of the site, located at Battle Hill, Hexham, Northumberland (NGR NY 9361 6395) (Figure 1). The development site lies within an urban context at the centre of the small market town of Hexham (Figure 2). A planning application has been submitted for development on this land. The strong possibility of surviving archaeological remains relating to the medieval street frontage and associated burgrave plot prompted the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (NCCCT) to advise that an archaeological field evaluation of the site be undertaken prior to the development, covering 5% of the development area.
- 1.1.2 The 5% coverage, equating to two 2x2m test-pits, was excavated in order to assess the potential for further work. The works consisted of the two test-pits, one located towards the street frontage, and one towards the back of the site, as designated by the NCCCT, based on the results of the historical background research undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in 2007. The test-pits are marked in green on Figure 3. The principal objective of the work was to identify and characterise the archaeological potential of the development area in accordance with the specification outlined in the original NCCCT brief.
- 1.1.3 Both test-pits were excavated by mechanical excavator and subsequently cleaned by hand under full archaeological supervision. All stages of the archaeological work were undertaken following approved statutory guidelines (IFA 2002).
- 1.1.4 This report comprises the results of the archaeological evaluation and post-fieldwork analysis following the work at Battle Hill, including a statement of further archaeological potential and recommendations for future work within the area.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 A project design was submitted to NCCCT by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd at the request of Duncan Stuart, Architect, on behalf of his client, Pattinson Photography, for an archaeological evaluation of the study area. This was in accordance with a verbal brief from Nick Best of Northumberland County Council Conservation Team. Following acceptance of the project design, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake the work. The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute for Archaeologists (IFA), and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

- 2.2.1 The evaluation consisted of the excavation of two test-pits in order to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains. The test-pits measured 2m x 2m and were located as near as possible to the front and rear of the property, in order to assess the possible presence of structural remains fronting the street, and deposits associated with the medieval burgrave plot to the rear. All work was conducted according to the recommendations of the Institute for Archaeologists (2002).
- 2.2.2 In summary, the main objectives of the field evaluation were:
- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these where they were 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 palaeoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.
- 2.2.3 The test-pits were excavated by mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. The test-pits were subsequently cleaned by hand and all features were investigated and recording according to the North Pennines Archaeology Ltd standard procedure as set out in the Excavation Manual (Giecco 2003).
- 2.2.4 All finds encountered were retained, and were cleaned and packaged according to standard guidelines, and recorded under the supervision of F. Giecco (NPA Ltd Technical Director).
- 2.2.5 All deposits encountered were deemed unsuitable for environmental sampling, and therefore no samples were retained.
- 2.2.6 Both test-pits were backfilled to the satisfaction of the client, following excavation and recording.

- 2.2.7 The fieldwork programme was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the *Management of Archaeological Projects* (2nd Edition, 1991).

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design, and in accordance with current UKIC (1990) and English Heritage guidelines (1991), and according to the recommendations in *Archaeological Archives: A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Brown 2007). The paper and digital archive will be deposited with the Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne under the unique project identifier: **NPA 09 BHH-A**.
- 2.3.2 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd supports the Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. Details of the results of this project will be made available by North Pennines Archaeology as a part of this national project under the unique project identifier: **northpen3-58362**.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1.1 The development site lies within an urban context at the centre of the small market town of Hexham in Northumberland (Figures 1 & 2). The site consists of a small backyard area, covered in tarmac and currently used as a car parking facility.
- 3.1.2 The site is bounded to the north by a brick wall; to the east by a brick wall; to the south by Nos. 1 and 2 Battle Hill, and to the west by Nos. 30 and 32 St. Mary's Chare.
- 3.1.3 The geology of the immediate area consists of stepped alluvial terraces which have been created by the River Tyne and its changing course. The underlying geology consists of the Stainmore Group of limestone and sandstone which contain thin coal seams overlain by glacial sands, gravel and boulder clay (Lovell 1981, 3-4).

3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 **Prehistoric:** the earliest evidence of human occupation in the Hexham area dates to the Neolithic period. A Neolithic carved rock has been found among a number of carved stones of various dates in the Abbey; however its original prehistoric location is no longer known. Two additional stones of the same type and date have also been found at Shield Croft Farm near Gallows Bank, lending weight to the possibility of Neolithic occupation in the area. Two burials dating to the Bronze Age have been discovered near Hexham over the years; one found in 1830 on the Newcastle road and one in 1921 on the Golf Course. This, combined with a Bronze Age axe from the town, suggests activity in the area at that time. There is less archaeological evidence for Iron Age Hexham. Only a coin from an unknown location in Hexham has been found, and this may have originated from elsewhere (Peters 2007a).
- 3.2.2 **Romano-British:** several Roman stones have been found in Hexham, one found near Hallstile Bank, and others found built into later buildings. It is difficult to ascertain whether these originated from an as yet undiscovered Roman settlement somewhere in Hexham, or whether they were 'robbed' from Corbridge, where it is known that the large Roman military supply base was quarried for use as the building stone for the Anglo-Saxon church, subsequently built in Hexham. When Beaumont Street was built alongside the Abbey in 1864, two Roman altars were found. In addition, a Roman coin was found when two houses adjacent to the Abbey were demolished in 1841 and a number of Roman stones can be seen within the Abbey today (Peters 2007a).
- 3.2.3 **Early Medieval:** The earliest documentary reference to Hexham occurs in AD674. Land known as Hestaldesham was granted by Queen Ethelrid, or Etheldreda, of Northumberland to Wilfrid to endow a new bishopric. It was during this time that Hexham began to flourish with the founding of the Church of St Andrew by St Wilfrid, the bishop of York. The church was built between AD674 and 678 and became a cathedral in 681. In AD821 the bishop moved to Lindisfarne and the church became the centre of a monastery. These buildings were destroyed by the Vikings in AD875 and little remains of this early church. St Wilfrid's crypt can still be seen below the

church and the bishop's chair is still on display in the chancel. Two other churches also existed nearby, including the Church of St. Mary which was built sometime between AD705 and 709. It may have been a circular building but was rebuilt in the 13th century and some of its remains can still be found behind 11-13 Market Street, 14 Market Place and 15 Market Place. The street name, St Mary's Chare, is named after this early church (Peters 2007a).

- 3.2.4 **Later Medieval:** the most prominent medieval remains in the town of Hexham are the Old Gaol and the Moot Hall. The Old Gaol was the first purpose-built prison in Britain and dates to the mid 14th century. Many centuries later, in 1820, Hexham was equipped with a House of Correction that still retains its iron cell doors with their complex locks. The Moot Hall dates to the early 15th century and was probably built as a defence against the Scots. It was still acting as a defence against the Scots until 1640, but was later used as a courthouse. Many of the claustral buildings relating to the Priory Church are also of medieval date. During the medieval period, Hexham grew into a successful market town, serving a commercial function for the surrounding agricultural areas. Hexham also had a school of very early date. Hexham Grammar School was founded in 1599, the building which survives today formed part of the complex of buildings at Hallbank House and dates from 1684 (Peters 2007a).
- 3.2.5 **Post Medieval-Present:** during the post-medieval period Hexham continued to flourish, and the decline of many rural villages at this time led to an increase in population at market centres, such as Hexham. The economic relationship between town and country remained close as the development of the leather industry in Hexham resulted in the production of livestock for skins and hides to be sold and processed in Hexham. A number of tannery sites have been located in Hexham in the Burn Lane area and High Shield. The success of the tannery industry enabled Hexham to expand its population significantly, and to flourish during the 17th and 18th centuries. Several properties close to the development site date to this period of growth. These include No. 20 St. Mary's Chare, No. 16 St. Mary's Chare, Nos. 19 and 19a St Mary's Chare and Nos. 17 and 17a St. Mary's Chare (Peters 2007a).
- 3.2.6 The growth of Hexham continued into the early 19th century but the industrial development of Tyneside was soon to result in the decline of "rural" industries in Hexham. The advent of cheap rail transport allowed goods to be distributed more easily and cheaply and pushed rural factories into decline. The railway station in Hexham and its associated buildings date to this period. The development site during the earlier 19th century appears to have formed the backyard or garden for several properties, and remains vacant. During the second half of the 19th century, several small irregular shaped buildings encroached upon the development area perhaps serving as outbuildings or poorer dwellings for the growing population. The western part of the development site seems to have remained open. By the late 19th century, the irregular buildings seem to have been converted into, or replaced by, an L-shaped building, which formed much of the northern and eastern parts of the development site. The south-western part remained undeveloped. The L-shaped building seen on maps of Hexham dating from between 1860 and 1897 remained in place at least until 1920 (Peters 2007a). At some time between 1920 and the present, it was demolished and returned to backyards for properties fronting Battle Hill, until its recent use as a car parking facility (Figure 3).

3.3 PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

- 3.3.1 A series of previous archaeological works, in advance of apartment blocks being constructed on the site of the old General Post Office, located c.130m to the west of the development site were undertaken in 1999 and 2000 by The Archaeological Practice. The preliminary desk-based assessment of the area outlined the possibility that the Post Office area may retain aspects of medieval occupation and land boundaries based on cartographic and documentary research, and recommended further works in the form of an evaluation prior to groundworks in the area (The Archaeological Practice 1999a). The subsequent evaluation consisted of two trenches, neither of which yielded archaeological evidence for the medieval period or earlier, explained by evidence of truncation in the area. A brick cellar was encountered towards the east of the site, of post medieval or more modern date (The Archaeological Practice 1999b, 11). The report recommended that a third trial trench be abandoned in favour of a watching brief, to be undertaken in the southern part of the site which was less disturbed. No archaeology was encountered during this monitoring, the natural subsoil only being disturbed by tree root activity (The Archaeological Practice 2000, 1).
- 3.3.2 A two-year archaeological watching brief undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd., monitored several test pits in the area of Battle Hill, in the road to the south of the development site (Peters 2007b). The area mainly consisted of previously disturbed mixed backfill, due to the number of services in the area, but a possible sandstone culvert was encountered in a test pit located at the junction with Eastgate. This was thought to be of post-medieval origin. Another find in the area was a small metal fragment located close to the junction with Fore Street, and this was within an unstratified mixed backfill deposit. This is likely to be a fragment from a degraded iron tool, typical of post-medieval activity in the area.
- 3.3.3 During April 2007, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of the development site as part of the current archaeological works (Peters 2007a). The DBA results highlighted the potential survival of 19th/early 20th century structures within the northern and eastern parts of the site. It also highlighted the lack of development over much of the property, significantly increasing the potential survival of medieval or post-medieval remains.

4 EVALUATION RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 The archaeological evaluation took place between the 14th April 2009 and the 15th April 2009, and comprised the excavation of two 2x2m test-pits, covering 5% of the proposed development area. The trenches were located as near as possible to the front and rear of the property, in order to assess the possible presence of structural remains fronting the street, and deposits associated with the medieval burgage plot to the rear (Figure 3).
- 4.1.2 Both test-pits were excavated to the level of the natural substrate by a JCB mini-digger. The test-pits were subsequently cleaned by hand and all archaeological features and deposits were recorded fully. The results of the evaluation are outlined below.

4.2 RESULTS

- 4.2.1 **Test-pit 1:** Test-pit 1 was located toward the southwest corner of the property in an area devoid of any known development (Figure 3). The test-pit measured c.2m x c.2m, and was excavated to maximum depth of c.1.2m revealing a c.0.5m deposit of natural yellow clay/sandy clay (**101**) below a c.0.35m deposit of mid-brown silty clay mixed with demolition material (**103**). The silty clay deposit (**103**) was below a c.0.06m deposit of modern hardcore (**102**) and c.0.14m of tarmac surface (**100**) (Figure 4). The western and southern sections of the test-pit had been heavily disturbed by modern services (Plate 1). The service trench [**104**] was aligned north – south before turning east at the southwest corner of the test-pit. The service trench [**104**] was directly below the modern hardcore (**102**) and continued below the limit of the excavation (Figure 4).
- 4.2.2 The northeast corner of Test-pit 1 also revealed a large feature cut into the natural substrate (**101**). The feature [**106**] was a rounded cut which measured c.0.64m in depth and c.1m in width, and was filled by dark-brown silty clay mixed with large rounded stones and fragments of red brick (**107**). The feature [**106**] was below the silty clay deposit (**103**) (Plate 2, Figure 4). The exact function of the feature [**106**] remains unclear at present, although given its form, it can be suggested that it represents a pit associated with the 19th/20th century structures which once occupied the site (see paragraph 4.2.5 below), which was later backfilled with a mix of clay and demolition material.
- 4.2.3 A single fragment of 19th/20th century glass was recovered from Test-pit 1. The glass fragment had undergone excessive heating, a trait often seen in glass artefacts from rubbish pits. However, the artefact was probably retrieved from a secondary context as it was within the fill (**105**) of the service trench [**104**].
- 4.2.4 **Test-pit 2:** Test-pit 2 was located toward the northeast corner of the property, c.3.3m northeast of Test-pit 1, in the general area of the proposed 19th/early 20th century structures (Figure 3). The test-pit measured c.2m x c.2m, and was excavated to maximum depth of c.1.1m until the natural yellow clay/sandy clay (**101**) was reached. The natural clay (**101**) had been cut by a large sub-circular feature which was observed in all four sections excluding the northeast corner of the test-pit (Plate 3). The feature [**108**] measured c.0.15m – c.0.76m in depth and was filled by two separate deposits

(Plate 4, Figure 5). However, the primary fill (111) was only observed in the southwest corner of the test-pit. The fill (111) measured *c.*0.25m in depth and *c.*0.74m in width, and was comprised of a dark brown/grey clayey silt mixed with demolition debris and roots (Plate 5). A single sherd of 19th century red earthenware with a brown slip was recovered from the fill (111). The secondary deposit (109) above measured between *c.*0.14m – *c.*0.55m, and was comprised of a dark brown silty clay mixed with large rounded stones and fragments of red brick (Plate 4). The feature [108] was below a *c.*0.34m deposit of mid-brown silty clay mixed with demolition material (110). It is probable that the silty clay deposit (110) is the same as deposit (103) noted in Test-pit 1 as both were very similar in both colour and texture. The silty clay deposit (110) was directly below a *c.*0.06m deposit of modern hardcore (102) and *c.*0.14m of tarmac surface (100) (Plate 4, Figure 5).

- 4.2.5 It is probable that the features noted in both Test-pit 1 and Test-pit 2 represent the southwest and northeast extremities of a much larger feature which occupies the central area of the proposed development site. Furthermore, a single sherd of 19th century pottery recovered from the fill (111) suggests that the feature is possibly associated with the 19th/early 20th century structures which once occupied the area. As already noted, the exact function of the archaeological feature(s) remains unclear at present, although it possibly represents a large pit. However, if the observed archaeology does represent a large pit, such a feature would be expected to retain more evidence regarding its function, although it is possible that this type of material evidence is not as evident around the periphery of the feature.



Plate 1: North facing section of Test-pit 1 showing modern disturbance



Plate 2: South facing section of Test-pit 1 showing feature [106]



Plate 3: South facing section of Test-pit 2 showing feature [108]



Plate 4: East facing section of Test-pit 2 showing feature [108]



Plate 5: North facing section of lower fill (111) of feature [108] post-excavation

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The archaeological evaluation comprised the excavation of two test-pits covering 5% of the development area, as agreed with the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team. Both test-pits measured 2m x 2m and were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2m. The test-pits were located as near as possible to the front and rear of the property, in order to assess the possible presence of structural remains fronting the street, and deposits associated with the medieval burgage plot to the rear.
- 5.1.2 During the evaluation, both test-pits revealed similar archaeological features. However, given their location, it is probable that they represent the northeast and southwest limits of a much larger feature located within the centre of the development area. Unfortunately, the exact function of the feature(s) could not be ascertained, although a single sherd of 19th/early 20th century pottery retrieved from the primary fill of the feature in Test-pit 2 suggests that it was probably associated with several structures which once occupied the northern and eastern limits of the property at that time.
- 5.1.3 During the archaeological evaluation, no evidence of medieval or post-medieval activity was observed. The evaluation also failed to obtain any evidence of the 19th/early 20th century structures identified during the NPA 07 desk-based assessment of the property. This suggests that the study area has either not been intensively used in the medieval period or later, or that any such activity has since been destroyed.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.2.1 As the purpose of this archaeological evaluation was to establish the nature and extent of below ground remains within the proposed development area, no further work is deemed necessary associated with the present study. However, given the location of the development area within the medieval core of Hexham, and the small sample size of the archaeological evaluation, it is recommended that any future invasive work in the vicinity of the site be subject to a programme of archaeological monitoring.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX I: CONTEXT INDEX

Context Number	Category	Test-pit	Above	Below	Interpretation
100	Deposit	1/2	102	/	Tarmac Surface
101	Geological	1/2	/	103/104/106/ 108/110	Natural Substrate
102	Deposit	1/2	103/105/110	100	Hardcore
103	Deposit	1	101/107	102	Silty Clay Backfill
104	Cut	1	101	105	Modern Service Trench
105	Fill	1	104	102	Fill of Service Trench
106	Cut	1	101	107	SW Edge of Possible Pit
107	Fill	1	106	103	Fill of Possible Pit
108	Cut	2	101	111	NE Edge of Possible Pit
109	Fill	2	111	110	Secondary Fill of Possible Pit
110	Deposit	2	101/109	102	Silty Clay Backfill
111	Fill	2	108	109	Primary Fill of Possible Pit

Table 2: *Context Index*

APPENDIX II: FIGURES
