

**LAND NEAR ST.
BARTHOLOMEW'S
CHURCH, CHURCH
POINT, NEWBIGGIN-
BY-THE-SEA,
NORTHUMBERLAND**



WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

CP. No: 1124/10

12/10/2010

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Quality Assurance

This report covers works as outlined in the brief for the above-named project as issued by the relevant authority, and as outlined in the agreed programme of works. Any deviation to the programme of works has been agreed by all parties. The works have been carried out according to the guidelines set out in the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Standards, Policy Statements and Codes of Conduct. The report has been prepared in keeping with the guidance set out by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd on the preparation of reports.

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SUMMARY

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd (NPAL) were commissioned by David Gardner, on behalf of their clients Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Heritage Partnership Ltd, to undertake an archaeological watching brief on groundworks relating to the construction of a new heritage centre on land near St Bartholomew's Church, Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Northumberland (NGR NZ 31698 88001). North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook a desk-based assessment in 2008 in order to establish the scope of the archaeological work required to fulfil the archaeological conditions of the planning decision. The report identified a number of historic structures and features within the development site which were likely to be impacted upon by the development, most notably the nearby medieval church of St Bartholomew with its associated graveyard and a medieval pier that is thought to have existed within the vicinity. Of particular importance was known usage of Church Point during the Mesolithic period, into later prehistory. As a result, the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team granted planning consent for the development (Planning Application No. 08/00171/FUL) on the condition that an Archaeological Watching Brief be undertaken during all groundworks. The watching brief was required as the site lies within an area of prehistoric activity and to the east of the 13th century parish church of St. Bartholomew, which identified the site to be of archaeological interest.

The Archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken over seven days between September 22nd and October 1st, 2010. The watching brief monitored the excavation of all groundworks on the site of the former heritage centre building and on land immediately to the east and north. No archaeological remains were noted within the excavated area. The entire area consisted of made ground that appeared to relate to modern activity, possibly as a colliery dump.

As this archaeological watching brief was conducted as part of a recommendation to observe groundworks in association with the development of a new heritage centre, no further work is deemed necessary. However, given the significant archaeological potential of the area, it is recommended that any future work be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Dave Gardner and the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Heritage Partnership Ltd, for commissioning the project, and for all assistance throughout the work.

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would also like to extend their thanks to Dave Carr of NCS Build, and all staff at the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Heritage Centre, for their help during this project.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Jocelyn Strickland. The report was written by and the drawings produced by Jocelyn Strickland. The project was managed by Frank Giocco, Technical Director for NPA Ltd. The report was edited by Matt Town, Project Manager for NPA Ltd.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In March 2010, North Pennines Archaeology were invited by Dave Gardner, on behalf of their clients, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Heritage Partnership Ltd, to maintain an archaeological watching brief on land near St. Bartholomew's Church, Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Northumberland (NGR NZ 32698 88001; Figure 1), during groundworks associated with the development of a new heritage centre. The proposed works lie within the immediate vicinity of the 13th century parish church of St. Bartholomew as well as being within the area of known prehistoric activity. Further sources indicate that a medieval pier may have been located within the area of the Heritage Centre, referred to in documents from 1353. As a result, Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist for Northumberland County Council, requested that all ground reduction be subject to a programme of archaeological observation and investigation. This archaeological programme forms part of a condition on planning consent and is in accordance with guidance given in Planning Policy Statement 5 (Planning for the Historic Environment).
- 1.1.2 All groundworks associated with the construction of a new heritage centre had to be excavated under full archaeological supervision and all stages of the archaeological work were undertaken following approved statutory guidelines (IfA 2002), and were consistent with the specification provided by Karen Derham (2008) and generally accepted best practice.
- 1.1.3 This report outlines the monitoring works undertaken on-site, the subsequent programme of post-fieldwork analysis, and the results of this scheme of archaeological works.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

2.1.1 A project design was submitted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in response to a request by Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Heritage Partnership Ltd, for an archaeological watching brief of the study area. Following acceptance of the project design by Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist at Northumberland County Council, 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 THE WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 The works involved a structured watching brief to observe, record and excavate any archaeological deposits from the development site. A watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, on a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed (IfA 2002).

2.2.2 The aims and principal methodology of the watching brief can be summarised as follows:

- to determine the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record them;
- to carry out further excavation and recording work in adequate time, if intact archaeological remains are uncovered during the project;
- to accurately tie the area watched by the archaeologist into the National Grid at an appropriate scale, with any archaeological deposits and features adequately levelled;
- to sample environmental deposits encountered as required, in line with English Heritage (2002) guidelines;
- to produce a photographic record of all contexts using colour digital, and monochrome formats as applicable, each photograph including a graduated metric scale;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful of dating purposes;

- to produce a site archive in accordance with MAP2 (English Heritage 1991) and MoRPHE standards (English Heritage 2006).
- 2.2.3 An area of approximately 1,464.5 square metres was stripped of soil (topsoil and subsoil). The trenches formed a trapezoid approximated to 68 metres x 29 metres x 85 metres, with the foundation cuts measuring approximately three metres in width. The foundation trenches were stripped of topsoil and overburden to the required formation levels. Archaeological monitoring and supervision of groundworks associated with the stripping commenced on September 22nd, 2010. A summary of the findings of the watching brief is included within this report.

2.3 THE ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the specification, and in line with current UKIC (1990) and English Heritage Guidelines (1991) and according to the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2007). The archive will be deposited within the Great North Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with copies of the report sent to the County Historic Environment Record at Morpeth, Northumberland, available upon request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifier NPA10, NHC-A, CP 1124/10.
- 2.3.2 North Pennines Archaeology, and Northumberland County Council, support the **Online AccesS to the Index of Archaeological InvestigationS (OASIS)** project. This project aims to provide an on-line index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature, created as a result of developer-funded archaeological work. As a result, details of the results of this project will be made available by North Pennines Archaeology, as a part of this national project.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 LOCATION AND GEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

- 3.1.1 Newbiggin-by-the-Sea lies within the sweeping sandy beaches and rocky headlands of the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain approximately 11.2 kilometres north of Blyth, and 5.3 kilometres east of Ashington, in southeast Northumberland. The South East Northumberland Coastal Plain extends southwards from the Coquet River to the northern edge of Newcastle City to encompass the low-lying plain of the Northumberland coalfield (Countryside Commission 1998). The site is situated to the north and west of the North Sea. The 13th century parish church of St. Bartholomew is to the northeast and a carpark to the north of the former Heritage Centre. The area is shown in Figure 2.
- 3.1.2 The underlying geology is of Coal Measures of Upper Carboniferous age. These consist mainly of mudstones and sandstones with numerous coal seams. The bedrock is heavily mantled by boulder clay or till that was deposited from ice sheets during the last glaciation (*ibid*).

3.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- 3.2.1 *Introduction:* this historical background is compiled mostly from secondary sources, and is intended only as a brief summary of historical developments specific to the study area.
- 3.2.2 *Prehistoric (up to 43AD):* the earliest evidence of activity dates to the Mesolithic. Large numbers of Mesolithic flint and waste flakes have been found at Newbiggin Point, to the north of the development site. These were most probably used for hunting or fishing. The amount of microlith and knapping waste found within this area is larger than other Mesolithic sites in the county and possibly reflects the amount of collecting being carried out here. The flints were located on top of the natural boulder clay, covered by blown sand.
- 3.2.3 In 1878 three Bronze Age spearheads and an Iron Age stirrup were found on Newbiggin Moor, indicative of settlement. No associated earthworks or barrows have been found in the area, and the exact location of the finds is now not known. At Spital Quarry, to the south of Newbiggin, a stone cist and cover containing an urn was found in the early 19th century. The present location of the urn is not known, though the location is typical of Bronze Age cist burial sites (Peters 2008).
- 3.2.4 *Medieval (410AD-1485):* during the medieval period Newbiggin-by-the-Sea was a thriving village with its own market charter and was a major port

- between Newcastle and Berwick. Traces of the layout of the medieval town can be seen in outlines of burgage plots that run off of Front Street (*ibid*).
- 3.2.5 To the northeast of the present site is parish church of St. Bartholomew, a Grade I Listed Building. This church dates to the 13th century, although pre-Conquest fabric incorporated into the nave may indicate an even earlier origin (*ibid*).
- 3.2.6 In 1352 Thomas Hatfield granted an indulgence of 40 days to any person that would contribute in the assistance of repairing and maintaining the pier at Newbiggin. It was recorded that this medieval pier was built from north to south along the rocks on the north side of the harbor, formed from large pieces of basalt and other hard rocks. Part of the pier was still standing in 1832, where it was stated that '*some of the piles of wood were conspicuous at low water*' (Hodgson 1828). It is thought that coastal erosion has removed all traces of this pier.
- 3.2.7 *Post-medieval and Modern (1485-Present)*: the majority of the Post-medieval period has been dominated by coal mining in the area. The attraction of the seaside and the absence of a large port made Newbiggin a desirable residential centre. The railway arrived at Newbiggin in the 19th century and the building of the Newbiggin Railway Station helped with its growth (*ibid*).
- 3.2.8 In 1908 a colliery was sunk at Newbiggin. At its peak, in the 1940s the colliery employed 1400 men and produced 470,000 tons of coal. The colliery closed in 1967. Some of the mining activity took place on Newbiggin Moor with the waste being dumped into the sea, having an impact on the cleanliness of the beaches and causing resentment from the community. The need for workers expanded the village to the north and west. The population of the area increased from 1,388 to 3,445 between 1891 and 1911. The demand for housing was so high that some people lived in overturned boats on the beach and others in temporary huts at Church Point while waiting for council housing (*ibid*).
- 3.2.9 A pant, an area where a spring flow of fresh water is directed through a spout, is noted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey mapping (1866) of the area. No information regarding the age of the pant was noted on the mapping.
- 3.2.10 Pillboxes were erected in order to defend the industrialized coastline from attack during WWII. Two of these were located at Newbiggin Point (*ibid*).

3.3 PREVIOUS WORK

- 3.3.1 In 1999 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken within the graveyard of St Bartholomew's Church during the installation of

flodlighting. This located a probable medieval wall to the north of the church, in a north/south alignment, that survived as a single course of squared and finely dressed sandstone ashlar. A cross-shaped mason's mark was recorded on one of the chamfered blocks. On the south side of the church a small quantity of human remains were recovered that were attributed to accumulated depths of wind-blown sand (Nolan 1999).

- 3.3.2 In 2006 a new toilet was installed in the base of the tower of St Bartholomew's Church. This entailed the internal floor level being raised, the west door enlarged and the installation of a new drain along with a short length of path. Cleaning the base of the stair, inside the tower, revealed that the lowest step was actually a re-used cross slab grave cover. Three further medieval grave slabs were found outside the west wall of the tower. It is thought that these grave slabs were used to pave an earlier path. A drainage trench that cut across the main churchyard path revealed no archaeological features or artefacts (Ryder 2007).
- 3.3.3 Another watching brief was undertaken at Newbiggin in 2007 that monitored the ground disturbances caused by the renewal of water mains through the historic centre of Newbiggin. A total of 32 test pits were recorded, three contained medieval walls and one with a hearth (Muncaster 2007).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The watching brief monitoring was undertaken over seven nonconsecutive days. The first day was on September 22nd, 2010 with monitoring works ending on October 1st, 2010.

4.2 THE WATCHING BRIEF

4.2.1 The watching brief covered the controlled stripping of deposits around the site prior to the main excavation of the foundation trenches.

4.2.2 The topsoil was stripped by a 360° excavator with a toothless bucket. Overall the stratigraphy of the site consisted of topsoil (**101**) that was comprised of sand and a small amount of root growth. This was present to a depth of 0.38 metres. Beneath the topsoil, was a layer of clay (**102**), dark greyish in color, with a thickness of 0.22 metres. This was followed by a second layer of sand (**103**), with a thickness of 0.185 metres. This layer was intermixed with coal, broken red brick and modern day rubbish such as plastic soda bottles and crisp packets. This was followed by a second layer of clay (**104**) with a depth of 0.32 metres. A third deposit of sand (**105**) was located beneath (**104**). The uppermost aspect of this layer contained three steel cabled ropes. The cable ropes appeared to be separate entities, with two coming out of the south facing section and one out of the west facing section. The terminus of the ropes was not encountered, and the purpose of the steel cabled ropes is unknown (Plate 1). Beneath this layer the natural drift geology of a grey clay was encountered (**106**) (Plate 2). No archaeological features were noted.



Plate 1: Metal pipe and steel cabled rope



Plate 2: South facing section

4.2.3 Directly north of the former Heritage Centre the stratigraphy was different, most probably due to the construction of the former building. Here the

stratigraphy consisted of the sandy topsoil (101) to a depth of 1.5 metres. This was overlying a deposit of black sand sealed by a thin lense of iron pan (109) (Plate 3). The black sand had an average thickness of 0.20 metres. The terminus of this deposit was not reached, as further excavating to the east did not extend to this depth. The deposit (109) extended for at least 10.3 metres.



Plate 3: South facing section showing (109)

4.2.4 The stratigraphy in the easternmost extent of the site again differed slightly from the stratigraphy noted in the northern area of the site. Here the stratigraphy consisted of the sandy topsoil (101) of varying depths that ranged from 0.75 metres to 1.95 metres, followed by a layer of shale and crushed red brick (108) with an average thickness of 0.36 metres. The shale and red brick deposit was overlying a layer of coal (107) also of varying depths that ranged from 0.17 to 1.74 metres. This was followed by (105) that had an average width of 0.50 metres, in turn overlaying the natural drift geology. Deposit (108) extended for a total length of 10 metres (Plate 4). Toward the northern end of the west facing section deposit (107) tapered out to an average thickness of 0.47 metres (Plate 5). It was first thought that (108) was a former brick wall or footpath that followed the natural geology of a sand dune that was intermixed with a deposit of sea coal. However, the coal deposit (107) contained timber planks, fragments of metal machinery and a crisp packet with a *Best Before* date of 2005, indicating that this was an area of made ground, most probably used as a colliery dump within the last five years.



Plate 4: West facing section showing deposits (107) and (108)



Plate 5: Northern end of West Facing Section

4.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLING

- 4.3.1 The entirety of the excavated area consisted of made ground, with no archaeological finds or deposits present. Presumably the ground was disturbed when the iron pipe and steel-cable ropes were laid.
- 4.3.2 No environmental samples were taken during the duration of the watching brief.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The stripping of topsoil and all subsequent stratigraphic layers was undertaken under archaeological supervision.
- 5.1.2 The watching brief revealed no archaeological features or deposits, despite its close proximity to the 13th century St Bartholomew's Church and its location to the historic core of the town. No evidence of prehistoric activity or a medieval pier was encountered. If prehistoric flints or a pier were ever present, they would have been destroyed with the earlier groundworks, as the entirety of the excavated area consisted of made ground.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.2.1 As this watching brief was conducted as a condition of groundworks associated with the construction of a new Heritage Centre, no further archaeological work is deemed necessary. However, given the site's location in relation to the medieval church as well as being located within an area of known prehistoric activity it is recommended that any work conducted in the future be subject to a similar programme of archaeological investigation.

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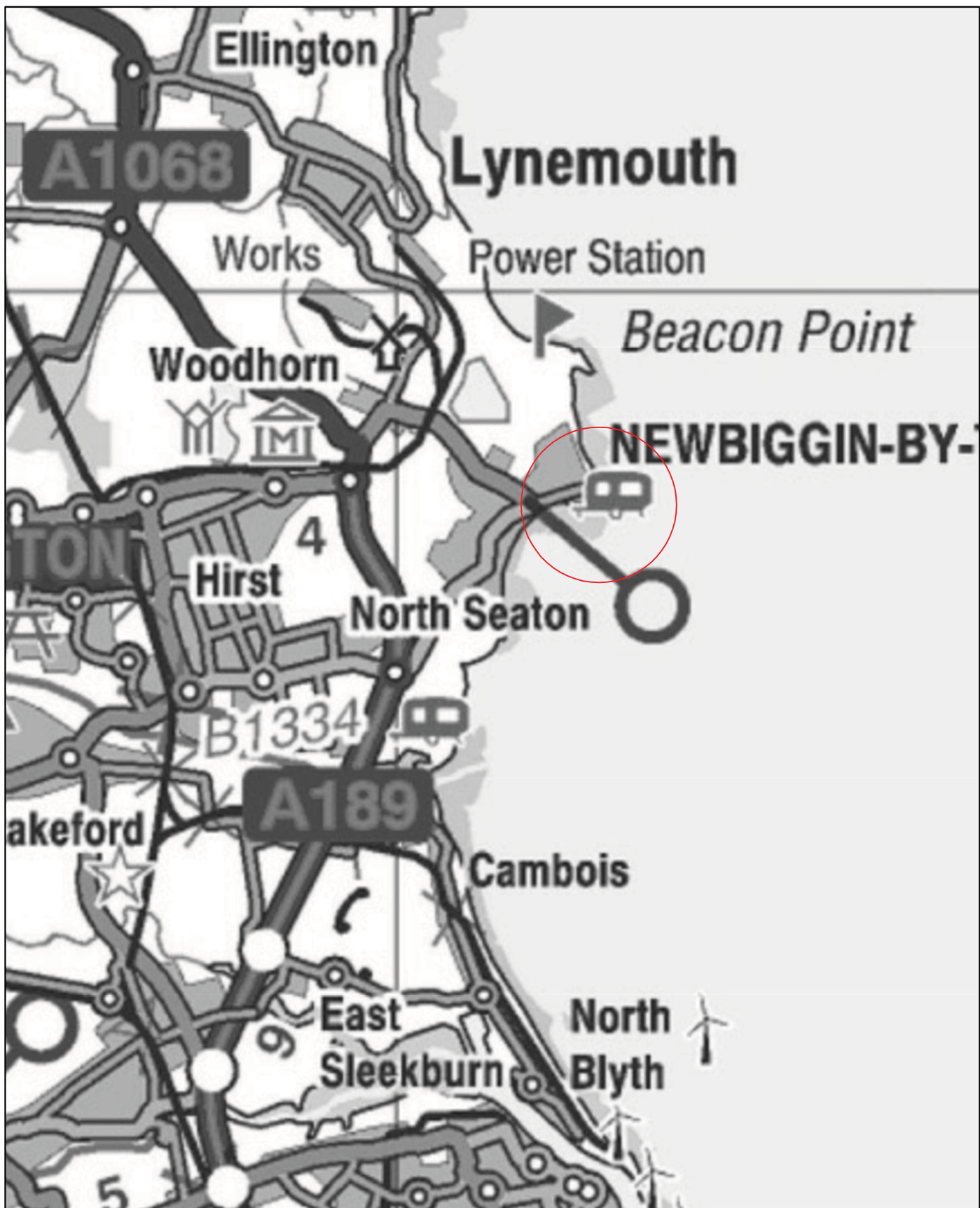
UKIC (1990) *Guidelines for the preparation of excavation archives for long-term storage*

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT TABLE

Context Number	Context Type	Description
101	Deposit	Sandy Topsoil
102	Deposit	Clay
103	Deposit	Sand with flecks of coal and modern rubbish
104	Deposit	Clay
105	Deposit	Sand (steel cabled rope noted in this deposit)
106	Deposit	Natural Drift Geology
107	Deposit	Coal
108	Deposit	Shale and crushed red brick
109	Deposit	Black sand sealed by a lense of iron pan

Table 1: List of Contexts issued during Watching Brief

APPENDIX 2: FIGURES



North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2010

PROJECT: Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea
 SCALE: 1:50,000 at A4
 REPORT No: CP 1124/10
 CLIENT Newbiggin Heritage Partnership Ltd.
 DRAWN BY: JS
 DATE: October 2010
 FIGURE: 1

KEY:

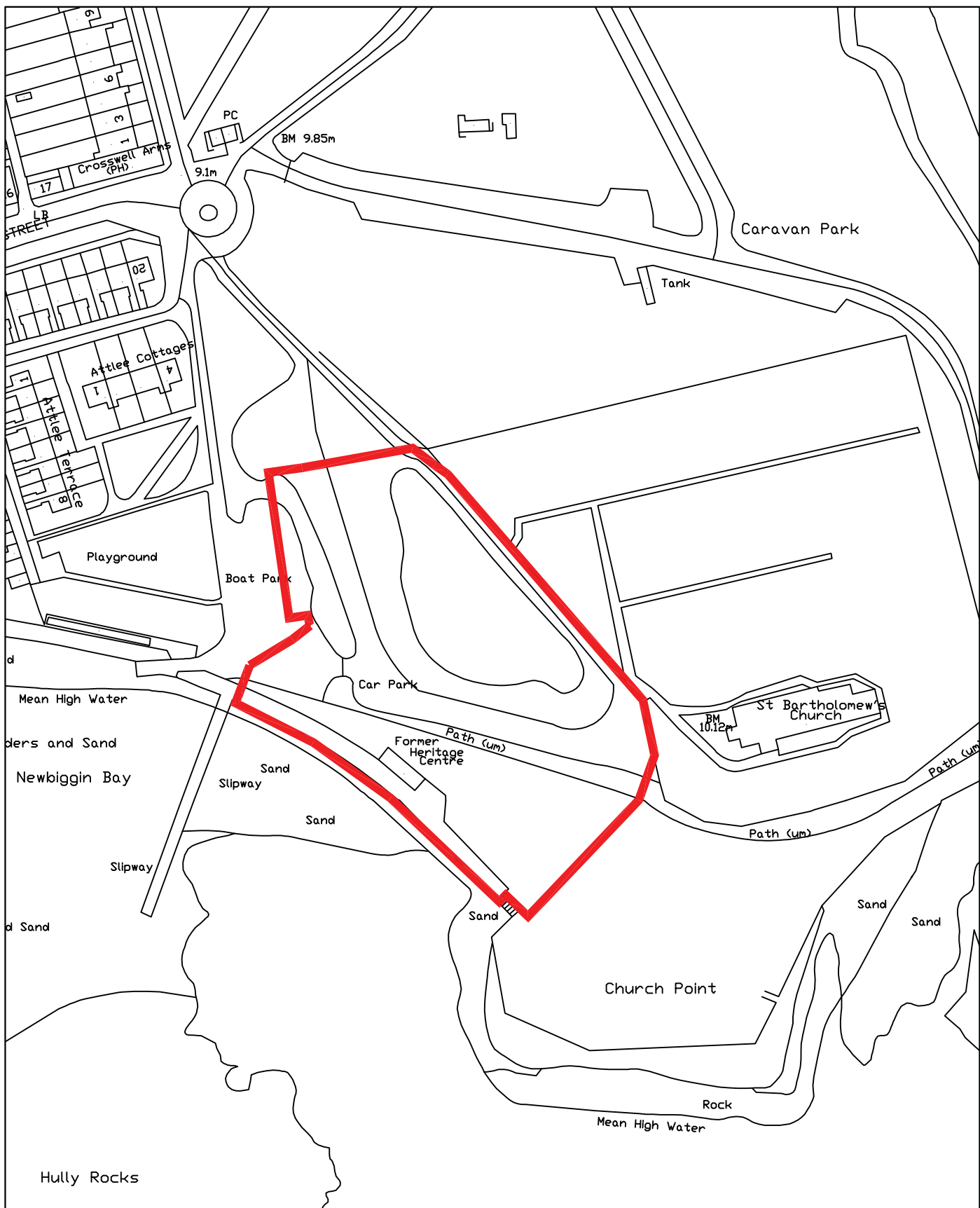


Approximate Site Location



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Figure 1: Site Location






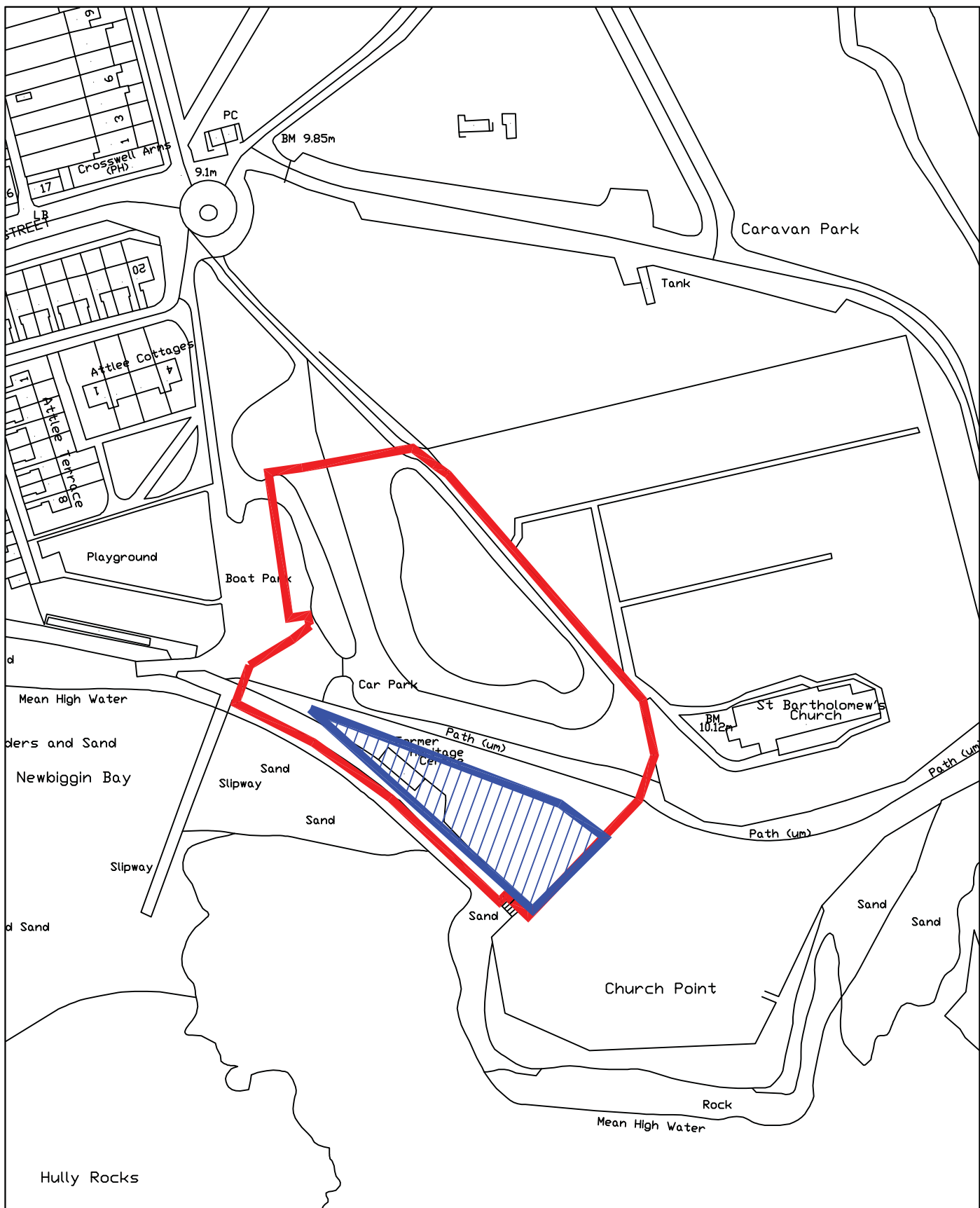
 <p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010</p>	<p>PROJECT: Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea</p> <p>SCALE: 1:1,500 at A4</p> <p>REPORT No: CP 1124/10</p> <p>CLIENT Newbiggin Heritage Partnership Ltd</p> <p>DRAWN BY: JS</p> <p>DATE: October 2010</p> <p>FIGURE: 2</p>	<p>KEY:</p>  <p>Site Boundary</p>	 <p>Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100014732</p>
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Figure 2: Detailed location of development site prior to the demolition of the former Heritage Centre building







 <p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd 2010</p>	<p>PROJECT: Church Point, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea SCALE: 1:1,500 at A4 REPORT No: CP 1124/10 CLIENT: Newbiggin Heritage Partnership Ltd DRAWN BY: JS DATE: October 2010 FIGURE: 3</p>	<p>KEY:</p> <p> Site Boundary</p> <p> Area of Watching Brief</p>	 <p>Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number 100014732</p>
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Figure 3: Location of watching brief area



North Pennines Archaeology Ltd
2010
Church Point
Newbiggin-by-the-Sea

CLIENT:
Newbiggin Heritage
Partnership Ltd

SCALE: 1:150 at A4

DRAWN BY: JS

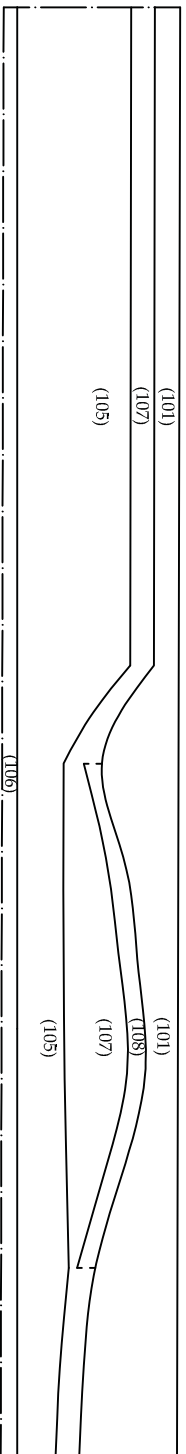
DATE: October 2010

KEY:

(101) Context Number

— — — Edge of Excavation

----- Edge of Feature



REPORT No:
CP 1124/10

FIGURE:
4

Figure 4: West Facing Section Within Watching Brief Area