NORTH PENNINES HERITAGE TRUST

Project Designs and Client Reports No. CP/60/03

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON LAND ADJACENT TO ASH LEA SOUTHWAITE GREEN EAMONT BRIDGE CUMBRIA

For Mr & Mrs Studholme

NGR NY 51852 28377
Planning Application Ref. 3/03/0189

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

No archaeological features were recorded during the watching brief. The recovery of four worked chert artefacts from the topsoil, was the only notable aspect of this watching brief.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Heritage Trust would like to acknowledge the following people and institutions for their assistance during the undertaking of the project: Miss Gillian Draper, Mrs Bette Hopkins of Cumbria County Council Sites and Monuments Record, Mrs Susan Dench and all the staff at Carlisle Record Office.

1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

1.1 In June 2003 North Pennines Heritage Trust was invited by Mrs L Studholme to undertake a desk-based assessment and maintain a watching brief of works on land adjacent to Ash Lea, Southwaite Green, Eamont Bridge, Cumbria. This was in response to a brief prepared by Cumbria County Council Archaeology Service following an application to Eden District Council for a building extension to Ash Lea.

1.2 The site is located to the south of the village of Eamont Bridge, adjacent to the Neolithic monument of Mayburgh Henge (SAM 23647) (NGR NY 51852 28377). The area is shown in figure 1. Historically, the bridge at Eamont Bridge marked the boundary between Cumberland and Westmorland, with the main part of the village, including the site, situated within the extreme western part of Westmorland.

1.3 The site is located approximately 400m west of the village of Eamont Bridge (see figures 1 and 2). It occupies an area of raised ground, a low knoll of glacial drift, and enjoys a wide and panoramic view of the surrounding countryside. Another important henge monument, King Arthur's Round Table (SAM 23648; Cumbria SMR entry 2868) lies at the southern part of the modern village. Together with Little Round Table henge (SAM 23676; Cumbria SMR entry 3996), which lies approximately 200m further south, these are thought to form a group of three henges (see figures 3 and 4) located close to the confluence of the Rivers Eamont and Lowther. Eamont Bridge lies in the civil parish of Yanwath and Eamont Bridge, and in the ecclesiastical parish of Barton.

1.4 The village is located in what Cumbria County Council has recently described as 'intermediate land' (landscape type six: Cumbria County Council 1995). This is predominantly grazing land between 100-200m AOD. Intermediate refers to its status between lowland areas of Cumbria and the more rolling, upland parts. It is undulating land with regular patterns of hedges and some stone walls.

2 PREVIOUS WORK

2.1 No previous archaeological work has been undertaken on the site.

2.2 Although there have been no archaeological excavations within Mayburgh Henge itself, several objects have been recovered from the site; these include a 'brass celt' (bronze axe-head), a polished stone axe head fragment (Langdale type) (Stukeley 1776) and a flint thumbnail scraper.

2.3 Excavations at Yanwath Wood (NY 519 260) revealed evidence of a settlement site and associated field system consisting of a group of small rectilinear enclosures possibly for agricultural (as opposed to pastoral) use. This site was occupied in the early Roman period and provides an example of a Cumbrian Romano-British farm (Higham 1983).

3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 The work undertaken consisted of a desk-based assessment and watching brief.

3.2 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

3.2.1 The desk based survey involved the consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record in Kendal and County Record Office, Carlisle in the first instance. This involved the assessment of all readily available primary and secondary documentary and cartographic material and all available aerial photographs. Consultation of this material allowed a comprehensive understanding of the geographical, topographical, archaeological and historical context of the site.

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

3.3 Watching Brief

3.3.1 The aims of the watching brief were as follows:

- to supervise all topsoil stripping and excavation for footings and/or service trenches and clean and record any putative archaeological features and produce a stratigraphic record;
- to record archaeological deposits;
- to establish, wherever possible, the depth of archaeological remains;
- to establish, wherever possible, the condition of the remains;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover paleoenvironmental material where it survives.

4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Place-name Evidence

4.1.1 The name Eamont Bridge is of ancient origins. 'Eamont' is a compound of two French words, *eau*, water, and *mont* a hill or mountain (Mannex et al 1851). It is referred to in the Anglo Saxon chronicle of 926 AD as *Eamotum.* Alternatively, the place name could derive from the Old English *ea* and *mot*, which means 'junction of streams', as Eamont Bridge is located at the confluence of the Lowther and the Eamont rivers (Armstrong 1976).

4.2 Prehistoric

4.2.1 Mayburgh henge is composed of a substantial bank made from water-worn cobbles piled together without mortar or other bonding. These are now grassed or partly grassed and were presumably carried up from the nearby river beds. It is most unusual in this respect because normally henge banks are composed of material derived from digging an inner ditch. There is no associated ditch with Mayburgh henge. The bank is *c*. 6m high though it is at its highest near the entrance and varies in width from just over 33m wide on the north side to 45m wide on the south side. This means the bank of the henge is also unusually large. The bank encloses a flat, circular area *c*. 90m across. The single entrance is located on the east side, facing King Arthur's Round Table. Today, there is just one megalith surviving near the centre of the circle (*c*. 10m NW of the actual centre), though others once stood there (see below). There has never been an excavation by archaeologists at Mayburgh, though it can be expected through parallels with sites elsewhere and casually collected finds at the site (see below) that social and religious practices at the monument date from the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. Excavations in the 1930s at King Arthur's Round Table (Collingwood 1937; Bersu 1940) revealed at least two different major phases of monument construction and use in prehistory. It is not unreasonable to expect that, similarly, Mayburgh is a site that saw different phases and uses.

4.2.2 The henges at Eamont Bridge have aroused the interest of antiquarians, archaeologists and travel book writers since at least the eighteenth century onwards (Pennant 1769; Stukeley 1776; Hutchinson 1776; Green 1819; Atkinson 1882; Dymond 1891; Heelis 1911; Collingwood 1937; Bersu 1940). Indeed, Dymond (1891) reminds his readers that Leland (ca. 1538) wrote about King Arthur's Round Table as early as the sixteenth century, although there seems to have been a gap after until Stukeley's visit in 1725. Stukeley remarked that the area containing the henges was used 'to this day for a country rendezvous, either for sports or military exercises, shooting with bows.' (see, Atkinson 1882, 453-5). He elaborated on this idea, suggesting that while the inner recesses of the henges were too small for any games or exercises involving horses, ancient Britons probably used King Arthur's Round Table and Little Round Table in combination, with between them a '*circus* or foot race' where chariots could have raced. When Stukeley went to see Mayburgh he became even more convinced of his idea. He interpreted Mayburgh as a more solemn place of worship, 'a great British temple' and that after worshipping there, people would

pass through to the '*circus* to celebrate their games'. Thus, he understood the monuments as linked together as group. This is still debated today, and while remaining unproven, links and connections among the henge monuments seems likely.

4.2.3 Stukeley remarked that there was, prior to his visit, 'two circles of huge stones' at Mayburgh, with four remaining of the inner circle until a year or two beforehand, when they were blown to pieces with gunpowder. He describes them as a 'hard, black kind of stone' and states the inner circle to have been fifty foot in diameter. He observed one stone remaining of the outer circle, with others near the entrance and fragments lying all around. Stukeley also recorded that a 'brass celt' (bronze axe-head) was found when the interior was ploughed. This find was added to in the nineteenth century when a polished stone axe fragment (Langdale type) was discovered beneath turf at the entrance. Together with a flint thumb-nail scraper, discovered in 1996, these make up the only prehistoric finds known to archaeologists from Mayburgh, prior to the watching brief here reported.

4.2.4 Other writers, such as Hutchinson (1767) and Pennant (1790) introduce the idea that the henge was a site of 'druidic' worship in the manner of a grove and were not persuaded by the place-name evidence that the site was ever meant to be defended as a fortification. Hutchinson drew parallels with the site of Bryn Gwyn in Anglesey. Green directed attention to the ascent up the slope towards the henge being 'covered with wood, and the remains of timber trees of great size' (1819, 383) and the bank itself being strewn with a few trees and shrubs. However, he describes the interior as contrastingly a 'fine plain of meadow ground' (ibid.), except that an ash tree grew out from the base of the standing stone.

4.3 Medieval

4.3.1 Eamont Bridge and its surrounds seem to have been popular in the medieval period. Nicolson and Burn remarked that King Arthur's round Table "seems to have been a jousting place…" thus suggesting that the area may have been utilised in the medieval period (Nicholson and Burn, 1777).

4.3.2 Evidence suggests that during the reign of Henry V1, Penrith Castle was repaired out of the ruins of Mayburgh Henge.

4.3.3 Nicolson and Burn (1777) state, "in the reign of Henry VI there seems to have been a general contribution towards the building, or perhaps rather rebuilding of Eamont bridge." Mannex (1851, 208) remarks, "The bridge appears to have been rebuilt in 1425, when a quarantine, or an indulgence of forty days, was granted to such of the faithful as contributed towards its erection." (Mannex et al 1851, 209).

4.4 Post Medieval

4.4.1 Further stones from Mayburgh Henge were also re-used in the 16th Century, for the repairing of Penrith castle. King Arthur's Round Table continued to be utilised in the 18th Century for "country rendezvous, either for sports or military exercises, shooting with bows…" (Atkinson 1882).

4.4.2 Nicolson and Burn (1777) state that a turnpike passed "through Brough, Appleby, to Eamont Bridge, where it enters Cumberland." Williams writes that the Eamont Bridge Trust were unable to lease their gates between 1846 and 1851 on account of the lessees' concern as to the effect which the newly-opened Lancaster to Carlisle Railway might have upon the receipts of their respective gates (Williams 1975, 55). The fact that Eamont Bridge was located on the main east-west turnpike and north-south route suggests that it may have been a staging post.

4.4.3 The cartographic evidence indicates that Eamont Bridge was quite an industrious village. The 1868 map of the area shows two mills either side of the bridge, both on the north side of the river. The mill to the west of the bridge was a flour mill, and the mill to the east, Low Mill was a corn and snuff mill. By the 20th century the mill on the west, High Mill, had also began to manufacture snuff. In the mid 19th century the proposed development site was located behind a terrace of houses. The enclosed area bounding the site to the north contained St. John's Mission Room. The 1901 map (Figure 3) refers to the 'Robin Hood Inn' and also to a smithy on the east of the site just outside the boundary.

5 RESULTS

5.1 No archaeological features or deposits were observed within the foundation trenches. The natural subsoil, which consisted of a mixed alluvial till comprising a sandy silt (101), was observed at a depth of 0.30m, sealed by a layer of slightly humic topsoil (100), 0.35m thick.

6 THE FINDS

6.1 The finds identified during the fieldwork all came from the topsoil. These included 4 chert bladelets, which appeared to exhibit the characteristics of a Mesolithic narrow-blade technology (see figures 6 and 7), which were recovered from context 100. Owing to the insufficient size of the sample area in relation to the quantity of artefacts recovered, no definite conclusions can be drawn from the recovery of such artefacts. However, it must be recorded as significant owing to the scarcity of finds from the area.

6.2 Other finds included fragments of blue and white transfer printed porcelain and fragments of clay pipe stem recovered from the topsoil layer (100). These are almost exclusively of late 19th – 20th century date.

6.3 A NOTE ON THE FLINT

6.3.1 Material

6.3.1.1 The lithic materials were studied with the use of an X40 microscope and all appeared to be reddish-brown with crypto-crystalline inclusions. Macroscopic analysis also showed that the ventral faces of most of the worked materials had

fractured with a sub-conchoidal, rather than a conchoidal profile. The only exception to this was apparent in the piece illustrated as Figure 4. This is probably because, as a core rejuvenation flake, a higher than normal amount of percussive force was required in order to remove a step fracture and make the core suitable for blade production again. These observations led to the conclusion that the material utilised was a fine-grained chert with high silica content.

6.3.2 Bladelet, 29mm long x 8mm wide (figure 1).

6.3.2.1 Dorsal face. Displays evidence of prior narrow blade removal. Left hand margin modified by retouch and curves around at 29mm to right hand margin of distal end. Right hand margin utilises narrow facet created by earlier blade production.

6.3.2.2 Ventral face. Sub-conchoidal fracture, the bulb of percussion carries an eraillure flake below the remains of the striking platform.

6.3.3 Modified bladelet, 18mm long x 9mm wide (figure 2).

6.3.3.1 Dorsal face. Displays evidence of prior blade removal. Left hand margin retouched, right hand margin appears abraded, possibly from natural causes. Distal end invasively retouched producing a planed edge.

6.3.3.2 Ventral face. Sub-conchoidal fracture, the bulb of percussion carries an eraillure flake below the remains of a striking platform.

6.3.4 Bladelet, 21mm long x 8mm wide (figure 3).

6.3.4.1 Dorsal face. Displays evidence of prior narrow blade removal. Distal end flaked back invasively to create planed edge, facet of flake scar thermally damaged.

6.3.4.2 Ventral face. Sub-conchoidal fracture, proximal end thermally damaged.

6.3.5 Core rejuvenation flake, 26mm long x 10.5mm wide (figure 4).

6.3.5.1 Dorsal face. Displays evidence of prior narrow blade removal. The removal of this flake was probably necessary because of an error made in the tool production process that created a step fracture approximately half way down the dorsal face. Distal end displays remains of flaking at right angle to blade scars on dorsal face. This suggests that the tool producer was employing a multidirectional core reduction strategy.

6.3.5.2 Ventral face. Pronounced conchoidal fracture possibly indicating the use of a hard hammer tool. This strategy would have been followed to facilitate the removal of a step fracture on the working face of the core.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 No archaeological structures or deposits could be observed within any of the foundation trenches. The finding of four chert bladelets from context 101 do not shed sufficient light on the nature and scale of activities adjacent to the henge. These blades exhibit characteristics indicative to the Later Mesolithic period. However, the results of the fieldwork suggest their was little activity on the site prior to the construction of the semi-detached houses in the 20th century.

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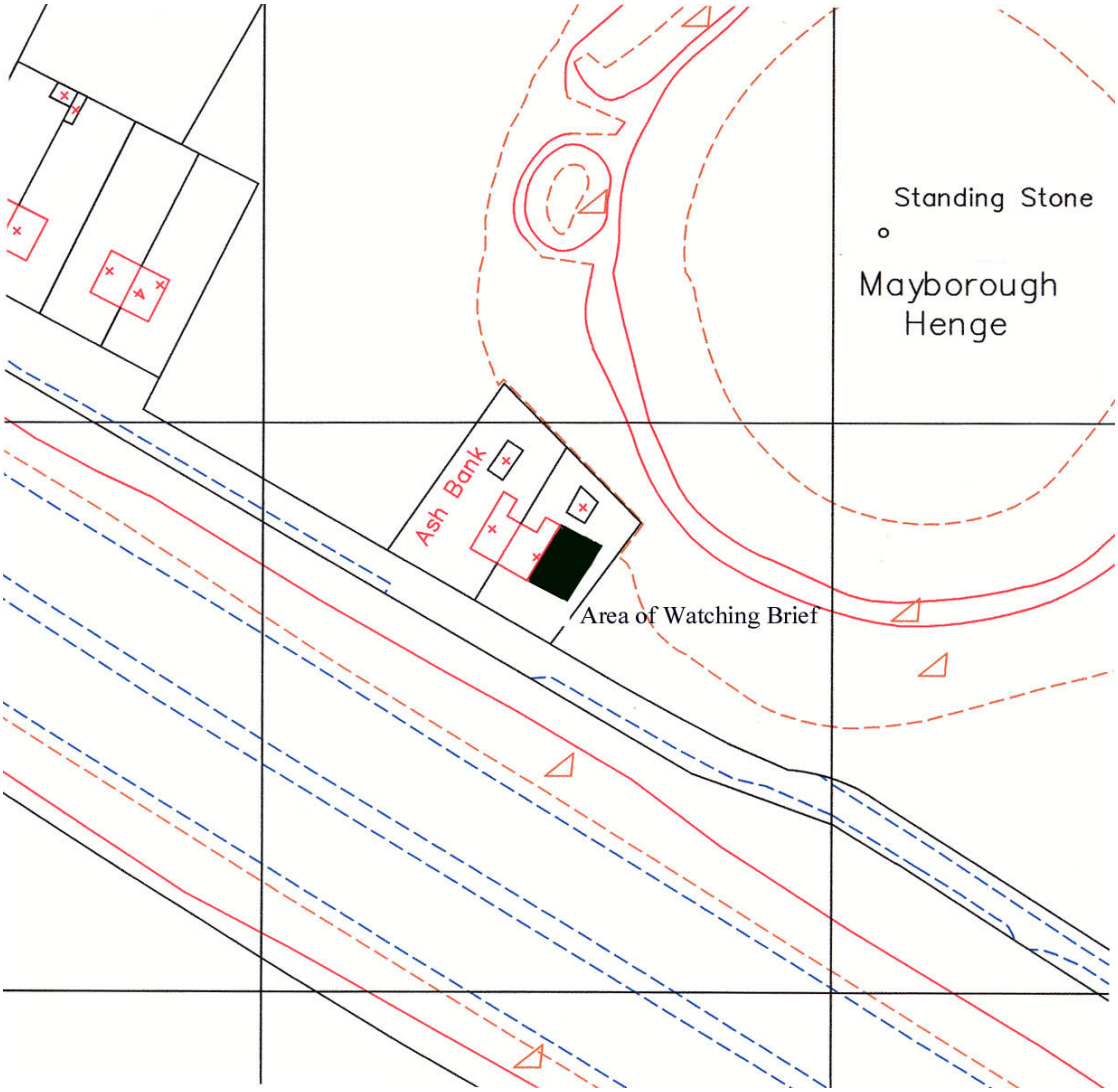

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PROJECT: ASH LEA, EAMONT BRIDGE

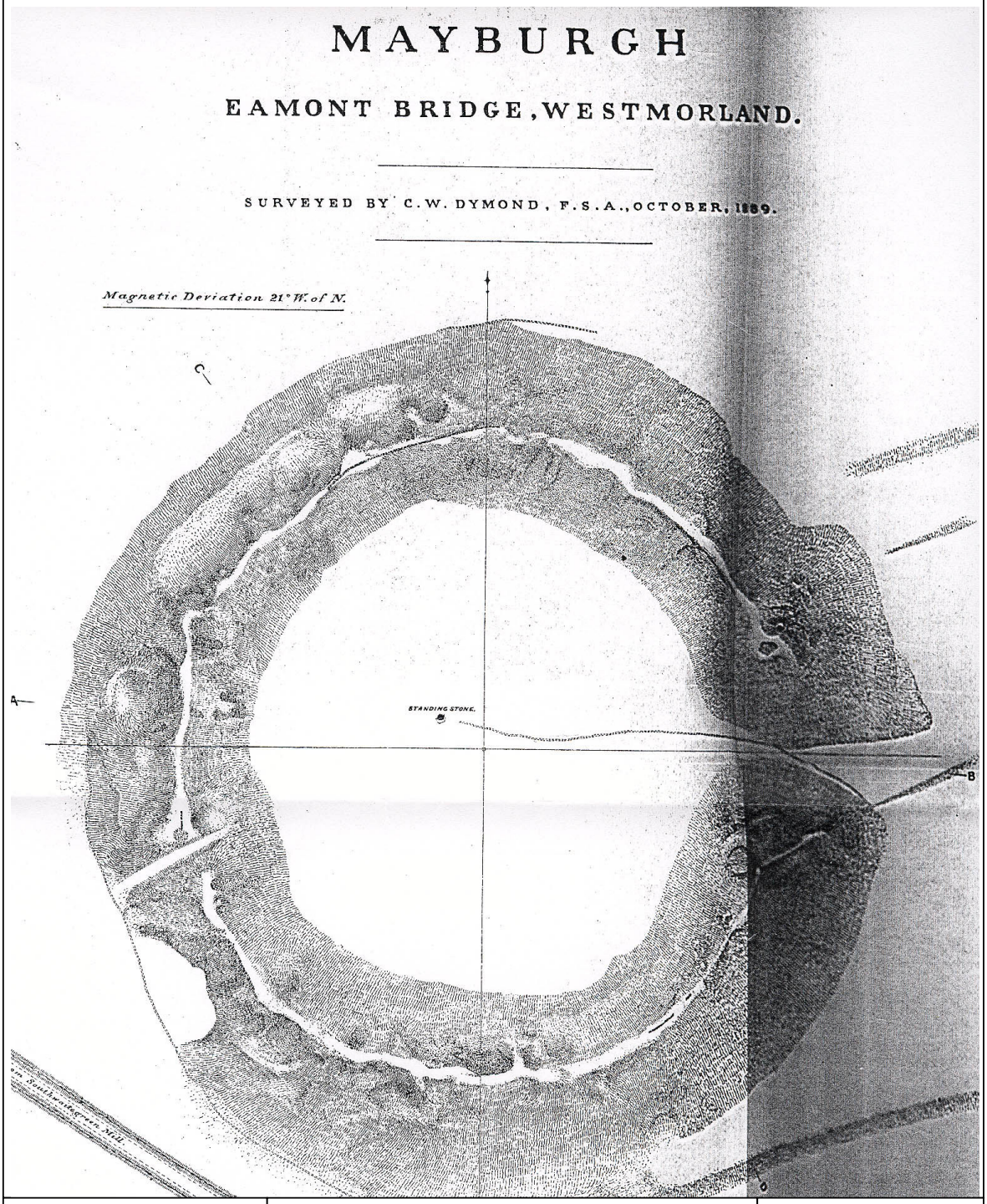
FIGURE: 2

NGR NY 2250 6270

SCALE 1:1000

TITLE: Site Location

N



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PROJECT: ASH LEA, EAMONT BRIDGE

FIGURE: 3

NGR NY 2250 6270

SCALE N/A

TITLE: 1889 Plan by C.W.Dymond

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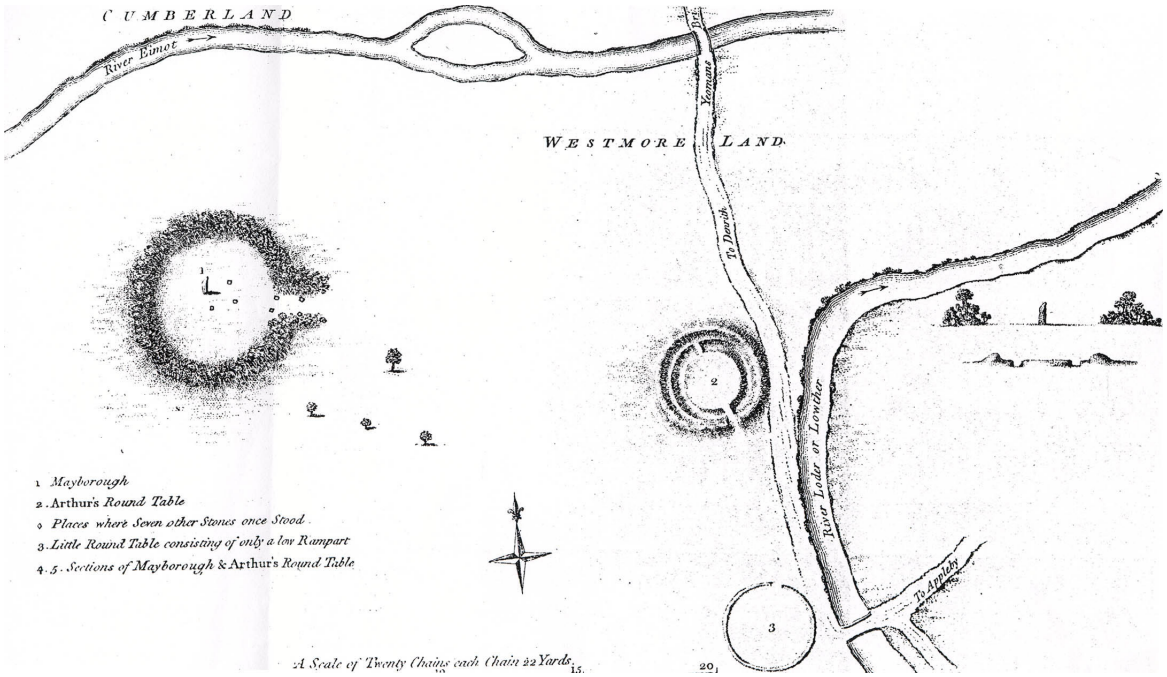

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PROJECT: ASH LEA, EAMONT BRIDGE

FIGURE: 4

NGR NY 2250 6270

SCALE N/A

TITLE: 1769 Plan of Mayburgh Henge and King Arthur's Round Table from Pennant's first tour in Scotland

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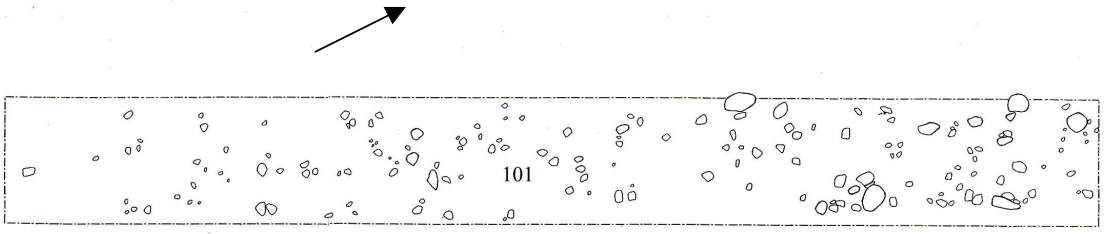

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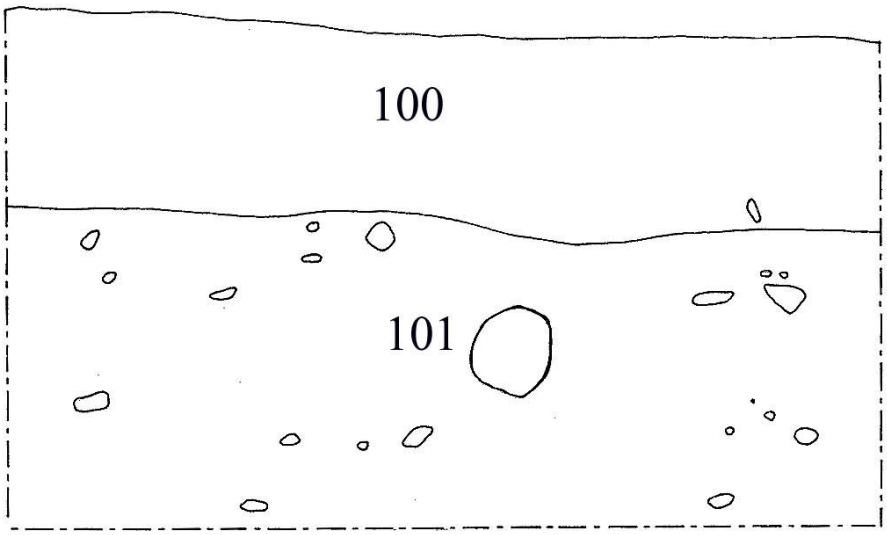

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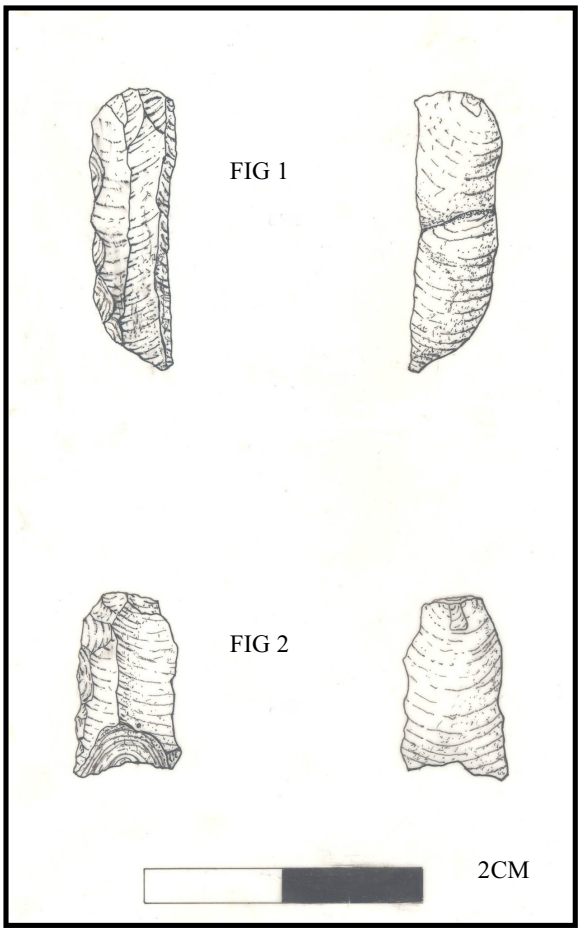
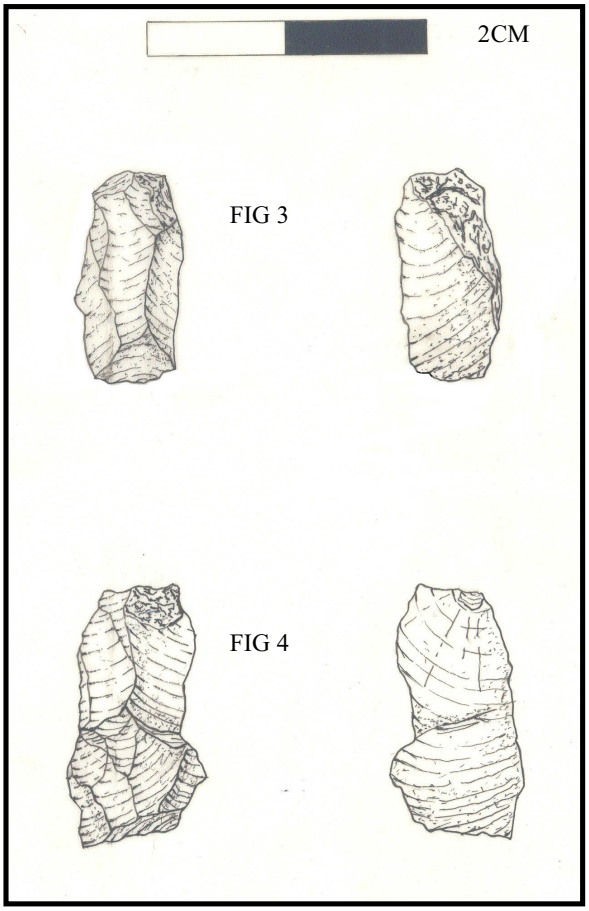


ASH LEA, EAMONT BRIDGE FIGURE 6:	Chert blades (small find numbers 1 and 2) Drawn by: K Denham



ASH LEA, EAMONT BRIDGE FIGURE 7:	Chert blades (small find numbers 3 and 4) Drawn by: K Denham