

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
FIELD EVALUATION AT
THE OLD CASTLE
CINEMA
EGREMONT
CUMBRIA**

**FOR
MR J R MEAN**

NGR NY 41081 59900

**Planning Application No.
4/03/1003**

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NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned in October 2003 to undertake a desk-based assessment and field evaluation at the Old Castle Cinema, Egremont, Cumbria. This was followed by a field evaluation of part of the site within the area of the car park and shops. The work was carried out on behalf of the developer, Mr Bob Mean according to a brief written by Cumbria County Council Archaeology Service in response to a proposal for a residential development.

The desk-based assessment included the consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record, Kendal and the County Record Office, Whitehaven. This involved the assessment of all readily available primary and secondary maps, documents and aerial photographs relevant to the study area, in order to place the site within its known historical, archaeological, geographical and topographical context. The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of a series of linear trial trenches and a test pit in order to establish the presence/absence, extent, nature and state of preservation of archaeological remains, and to provide a predictive model of their survival across the site.

The results of the desk-based assessment found the site to have been occupied by a tannery, built in 1720, on land immediately north of the main medieval north-south road adjacent to Egremont Castle. During the demolition of the tannery in 1911, substantial masonry remains were found. In 1925 the Old Castle Cinema was built on the site of the tannery.

The field evaluation found extensive disturbance within the car park area to the south of the cinema building, with no surviving archaeological deposits. A trench to the rear (west) of the cinema building found a feature of unknown date, which has been interpreted as a path, and a pit also of unknown date. Within the shops area a test pit found no structural archaeological remains, a deposit of large cobbles containing two large amorphous clay lumps was tentatively identified as a demolition deposit of an earlier structure.

No significant archaeological remains were identified by the assessment, and there is a low probability of significant archaeological remains surviving within the development area, particularly within the foundations of the cinema, which is located on the site of former tannery. The level of disturbance within the area adjacent to the main road, cannot be fully ascertained, however, due to the limited area of the evaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would like to thank the staff at the Cumbria Sites and Monuments Record in Kendal and County Records Office, Whitehaven. Thanks also to Bob Mean and Les Feenan.

The project was undertaken by Chris Jones, BA, MA, PIFA, Assistant Archaeologist, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd. The project came under the overall management of Frank Giocco, BA, Dip. Arch, Principal Archaeologist, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd. The report was edited by Juliet Reeves, BA.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In October 2003 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Mr Bob Mean to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment and field evaluation at the Old Castle Cinema, Egremont, Cumbria, NY 41081 59900 (Figure 1). The project aimed at providing valuable archaeological information regarding the history and archaeology of the site. The project arose in response to a proposal for a residential development, and was undertaken in accordance to the requirements of a brief prepared by Cumbria County Council Archaeology Service.
- 1.2 The desk-based assessment consisted of a search of both published and unpublished records held by the Cumbria Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in Kendal, and the Cumbria County Record Office in Whitehaven (CRO/W). The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of a series of linear trial trenches in order to assess the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and provide a predictive model of their survival across the site.
- 1.3 This report follows a standard format and sets out the methodology employed during the course of the work, the results of the work and the potential of the area with any recommendations for further work.
- 1.4 The site is located within the centre of Egremont, an area indicated by the Cumbria Extensive Urban Survey (CCCAS) as of high archaeological importance. The site lies adjacent to the scheduled area of Egremont Castle (SAM 34977) and within the centre of the medieval town, close to the market place.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Project Design

- 2.1.1 A project design was prepared in response to a brief prepared by Cumbria County Council Archaeology Service. This included a detailed specification of works to be carried out, which consisted of a desk-based assessment prior to field evaluation.

2.2 Desk-Based Assessment

- 2.2.1 This involved the consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record in Kendal in the first instance. This included the collection of all available and pertinent information regarding the locations and type of current sites held within the SMR database, including grid references and descriptions. Following this the County Records Office in Whitehaven was consulted in order to consult maps and documents relevant to the study area. This included the collection of historic maps, including Tithe or Enclosure maps and early Ordnance Survey maps. All relevant historical documentation was also studied in order to provide information concerning tenure and ownership and the general history of the site. Several secondary sources and journals, such as the Transactions of the

Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, were also consulted. Collections briefly consulted for pertinent references included Directories, Business Records, Miscellaneous Records and Diocesan Records.

2.2.2 Some use of the internet was made including a search of Genuki (<http://www.genuki.co.uk>) and the National Monuments Record (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk>).

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

2.3 Visual Site Inspection

2.3.1 A visual site inspection was undertaken on the 29th October. This was in order to note any surface features of potential archaeological interest and to identify any potential hazards to health and safety, such as the presence of live services or constraints to undertaking archaeological fieldwork, such as Tree Preservation Orders and public footpaths. Particular regard was given to the impact of basement construction within the former cinema on the survival of archaeological deposits.

2.3.2 The results of the site inspection were difficult to assess, as the basement of the cinema consisted of redeposited layers of concrete and gravel. No exact height information was available although it was suggested by the client that the basement extended approximately 2.5m (c. 8ft) beneath the floor level.

2.4 Field Evaluation

2.4.1 The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of a series of linear trial trenches in order to produce a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relevant importance against known development proposals. All work will be undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (IFA 1994).

2.4.2 In summary, the main objectives of the excavation were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains, and to record these where they are observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover paleoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

2.4.3 Each trench was mechanically excavated by a JCB 3CX excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket to the top of archaeological deposits, or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first. Each trench was then manually cleaned and all features investigated and recorded according to the North

Pennines Archaeology Ltd standard procedure as set out in the North Pennines Archaeology Ltd Excavation Manual (Giecco, F. 2001). Photography was undertaken using a Canon EOS 100 Single Lens Reflex (SLR) manual camera. A photographic record was made using 400 ISO colour print film.

2.5 Project Archive

- 2.5.1 A full archive has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with English Heritage guidelines (1991). The archive will be deposited as the client wishes with two copies of the report deposited in the County SMR in Kendal.

3 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 3.1 The site is situated on gently sloping ground from south-north, at a height of approximately 54m AOD, falling to a height of approximately 52m AOD. It lies within the medieval and modern town centres, located close to the line of a stream called the 'Skitter beck', a tributary of the River Ehen which flows along the eastern edge of the town and meanders south. The solid geology consists of 300m thick Triassic St Bees Sandstone overlying shales and evaporates.

4 PREVIOUS WORK

- 4.1 In 1988 Cumbria and Lancashire Archaeological Unit (CLAU) carried out excavations at 6-10 Main Street (Newman 1988), the results of which found 19th century houses with extremely shallow foundation trenches cut into a bank of natural gravel. Evidence of pre-19th century activity was sparse and likely destroyed by later activity.
- 4.2 In 1993, Lancaster University Archaeology Unit carried out an evaluation at Gully Flats (LUAU 1993). This included topographic survey, geophysical survey and trial trenches and identified two platforms, interpreted as platforms for outbuildings. Unfortunately reliable dating could not be ascertained.
- 4.3 In 1994 Lancaster University Archaeology Unit undertook an evaluation at Queen's Drive, no archaeological remains were identified and the area was interpreted as featureless pasture which lay outside the area of the medieval town (LUAU 1994).
- 4.4 Turnbull and Walsh undertook investigations at Egremont Castle in 1994, and established that archaeological deposits within the bailey and on the surface of the Motte have been extensively disturbed during the reorganisation of the castle as a municipal park at the end of the 19th century, although masonry features had been left intact. Virtually none of the excavated deposits could be considered as an intact medieval feature (Turnbull and Walsh, 1994).
- 4.5 In July 2000 Carlisle Archaeology Ltd maintained a watching brief at Egremont Castle. No natural deposits were observed, nor were archaeological deposits of pre-modern date (Grahame, 2000).
- 4.6 Between July and November 2001, On Site Archaeology maintained a watching brief during the extension of the Co-op Supermarket, Main Street. The

excavation of foundation trenches revealed probable medieval ditches and postholes/pits, including a layer which contained abundant dressed sandstone blocks, mortar and slate, relating to the demolition of the former Victorian Sunday School (OSA, 2002).

- 4.7 In June 2002, Oxford Archaeology North undertook an archaeological building investigation project at Egremont Castle. This project identified the date of the castle from its origins as a motte and bailey founded c. 1125, with a stone rebuild in the later 12th century. No major 13th century works were identified and the south façade of the great hall was attributed to the early 14th century. The investigation also identified a number of research questions regarding the layout of the castle (OAN, 2002).

5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

5.1 Place Name Evidence

- 5.1.1 The place name Egremont first appears during the Norman period, derived from the Latin *acri mons* or French *aigre mont*, meaning either ‘sharp-pointed hill’ or ‘hill beside the (river) Ehen, as the Latin for Ehen in the Register of St Bees is *Egre* (Armstrong et al, 1950).

5.2 Prehistoric

- 5.2.1 Little is known regarding prehistoric settlement of the Egremont area. A standing circle (now destroyed) existed at Ringingstones (SMR 1198), possibly the same as a tumulus and cairn of ten large stones described by Hutchinson (1974) (Read 1999, CCCAS 2000).

5.3 Roman

- 5.3.1 There is little evidence for Roman period activity within Egremont and environs. A Roman road from Thornhill-Blackbeck-Calder Bridge has been identified south of Egremont (SMR 1255). A coin of Antoninus Pius was found to the north of the town (SMR 4620).

5.4 Medieval

- 5.4.1 Little is known regarding the area around Egremont during the early medieval period, the only evidence of such are similarities to ancient Welsh landowning patterns and the nature of the Barony of Copeland as a pre-Norman single lordship (Winchester 1979; CCCAS 2000). Egremont is itself a feudal seat of power established in the late 12th – early 13th century (CCCAS 2000), although Winchester believes there was a pre-urban settlement centred on the castle, prior to the founding of a planned town in 1200 (Winchester 1979). The first references to the town are from land grants and privileges to a community of burgesses by Richard de Lucy, Lord of the Barony of Copeland c. 1200 (CCCAS 2000). The town was granted a market charter in 1267 and mention of a forfeit of 12d for burgesses not setting out burgage plots in the allotted time suggests the expansion of a rapidly growing town.

- 5.4.2 The economy of Egremont was based on the processing of animal products from nearby farms. The extent of the town was described in the Inquest Post Mortem of John de Multon, whose possessions included a “Castle, with a plot called ‘Applegarth’, the park below the castle, various fisheries, 194 acres of demesne land and 47.5 acres of demesne meadow ... 82 free tenants holding 138 burgages ... 6 waste places called burgages ... (a) weekly market and fair, water mill, fulling mill and 2 smithies.” (CCCAS, 2000). The reference to waste places could indicate urban decay had occurred as a result of the deterioration in climate, cross-border raids and the maintenance of retinues by the nobility and high demands from the Crown, famine and sheep murrains all of which occurred by the mid 14th century.
- 5.4.3 During the Cumbrian Towns Survey, Winchester identified the medieval core of Egremont, in the vicinity of the castle, as Main Street, Market Place and South Street (Winchester 1979). The town also extended along the main road to St Bees, along Herered Lane (Brewery Lane), Herrie Reed Land (**Bookwell Road**) and Haggot End (Ibid.).
- 5.4.4 Egremont Castle (SMR 3051), founded as a motte and bailey by William le Meschin, brother of Ranulf, was in decline following the death of John de Multon, and a ruin by 1578 (CCCAS 2000). In May 1922, during the demolition of the old tannery on **Bookwell Road**, ‘old stonework’ was recovered which had been re-used as part of the tannery, but may have originally been part of the original town gate projecting from the castle.

5.5 Post-Medieval

- 5.5.1 Throughout the 17th century, in the Borough’s Court Leet verdicts, there is evidence of encouragement to take up burgage plots and to build on them (Ibid.). This may represent an upturn in the fortunes of Egremont, particularly as there is evidence of numerous industrial activities, particularly from the 18th century onwards. This includes 7 water mills on the banks of the Ehen, visible on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (see figure 3) including Brisco Mill, High Mill (SMR 12337, 38), Flint Mill (SMR 12335), Great Mill (SMR 12334), Fulling Mill, Little Mill (SMR 12885, 12328), Bleach Green (SMR 12875) and Paper Mill (SMR 12177), Greendykes Mill (SMR 12340) and Ennerdale Mill.
- 5.5.2 During the first half of the 18th century, four tanneries were built in Egremont. The first was built in 1710 by Isaac Pearson who was granted a plot of land by the Borough Council to build a tannery at the foot of a stone bridge across the, then recently diverted, ‘Skitterbeck’. A second tannery (visible on the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey, see figure 4), the largest in the town, was built at **Bookwell** in 1720 (SMR 12341) by Thomas Nicholson of Bigrigg, on land that had been formerly part of the castle grounds. This closed in 1911 and was demolished to make way for the building of the **Old Castle Cinema**, visible on the 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey (see figure 5). A third and fourth tannery were built, at Bridge End in 1750 by William Benson (SMR 12886) and at North Road in 1800, by the Towerson family (Read 1999; CCCAS 2000).

- 5.5.3 In the mid 19th century, Egremont extended “about 3 miles from north to south, and two and a half from east to west, possessing no dependent townships ... The inhabitants (were) principally engaged in the flax and cotton manufacture and in the iron mines of the neighbourhood.” (Whellan, 1860). There has been a history of iron ore mining in the Egremont area since the 11th century. This intensified in the 17th and 18th centuries and led to an expansion of the town in the 19th century. The population had grown to 2,049 in 1851 from 1,515 fifty years earlier (Ibid.). The most notable iron ore mines were Florence (SMR 12339) and Ulcoats, who combined in 1960 and continued in production until the late 20th century.
- 5.5.4 In the 1950s a Nuclear Processing Plant at Winscale (Sellafield) was built, bringing jobs and prosperity to the region. This prosperity was particularly reflected in Egremont between 1950 and 1990. Since then, however, there has been a marked decline in the fortunes of Egremont, leading to the closure of local businesses, including the Snooker Club within the **Old Castle Cinema** building on **Bookwell Road**.



Plate 1: Old Castle Cinema, Egremont EGG-A Main Front (Photo: C Jones)

5.6 Cinemas in Egremont (see plate 1)

- 5.6.1 The Palace was the town's first picture house, on Beckside Lane (along the Skitterbeck, north of the castle), known as Wallace's Flea Pit to the locals. The cinema showed silent films to the piano accompaniment of Jonah Prince, at a price of 2 and 3d (Read 1992, 48). This cinema closed in 1931 after protests were made by the Board of the **Old Castle Cinema**, along the grounds of safety (Ibid.). The Old Castle Cinema was a large building, fronted with shops, built in the late 1920s and opened in 1928 by the Egremont Cinema Company, initially showing silent films, but was adapted in 1929 to show talking pictures. The first film shown was *Rio Rita*, at prices of 1d on wooden seats and 2d and 3d on upholstered seats at the rear of the cinema (Ibid.). The cinema suffered as audiences declined following the introduction of the television, and officially closed in 1976. The building was used temporarily as a bingo hall before it was converted, initially in the 1980s, into a snooker hall which saw the creation of two level floors above the original sloping surface.

6 RESULTS

- 6.1 The field evaluation was undertaken by Chris Jones, BA, MA, PIFA, Assistant Archaeologist, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd and Joanne Beaty, Project Assistant on the 1st and 2nd December 2003.

- 6.2 A total of 2 linear trial trenches each measuring 10m x 1.5m were excavated within Area A. A further trench measuring approximately 2m x 1.5m was excavated within Area B (see figure 2).

- 6.3 All references to cardinal directions refer to site grid north.

6.4 Trench 1 (see plate2)

- 6.4.1 Trench 1 was located within the shops area (Area B), adjacent to the main road (Bookwell Road), at the northwest corner of one of the former shops (see figure 2 for precise location). No natural subsoil was observed within this trench due to the presence of standing water 0.30m deep. The earliest deposit consisted of a mid brown silty clay (113) approximately 0.50m thick directly sealed beneath a formation layer consisting of mid brown sand and modern glazed ceramic floor tiles (context 100). A number of medium sized (0.20m in diameter), rounded cobbles were observed within context 111 (see plate3). These cobbles did not appear to form a coherent deposit or structure and are likely to be a rubble deposit from the remains of a wall or cobbled surface.

- 6.4.2 Two large lumps of clay were also identified within context 113. These consisted of large (c.0.50m diameter) blocks of white silty clay. It is likely that these also formed part of a rubble deposit although this cannot be stated with certainty.



Plate 2: General view of trench 1 from the north east



Plate 3: General view of trench 1 from the north east
(detail of cobbling at limit of excavation).

6.5 Trench 2 (see plate4)

- 6.5.1 Trench 2 was located within the car park area (Area A) south of the cinema building, perpendicular to the road with an east-west orientation. The natural subsoil consisted of a clean, mid-brown gravelly silt (103) observed at a depth of 1.50m. This was sealed by a series of clay-rich, gravelly deposits 1.30m thick,

which were backfilled with tip lines from west-east (context 115), these were in turn sealed by a layer of gravel and tarmac (100). No significant archaeological deposits were observed within this trench.



Plate 4: General view of Trench 2 from the north west

6.6 Trench 3

- 6.6.1 Trench 3 was located to the rear of the cinema building and was aligned northwest to southeast (Area A). The natural subsoil within this trench consisted of mid-brown gravelly silt (103) observed at a depth of 1.40m, sealed by a compact light brown boulder clay (112). This was in turn sealed by a undated layer of pink silty clay (102) at a depth of 1.10m. Context 102 was sealed by a layer of mid brown silt (111) measuring 0.10m in depth.
- 6.6.2 At the northwest end of the trench, context 111 was sealed by an artificial bank. This feature consisted of a mottled white clay deposit (106) and a cobble spread (109). The bank was cut by a pit (104), filled by a deposit (105) of medium sized, rounded cobbles (c. 0.20m diameter). Context 105 was sealed by a deposit of mid brown silty clay (101), a probable late 19th / early 20th century levelling deposit.

Context 101 was in turn sealed by a thick band of black silty clay (110) which was sealed beneath a rubble and gravel makeup of the car park. No artefacts were recovered from any of the deposits which are therefore undated.

7 THE FINDS

7.1 There were no finds recovered from any of the trenches.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 No significant archaeological deposits or features were identified from any of the evaluation trenches. An artificial bank of unknown date was observed within trench 3, which was cut by a pit also of unknown date. The bank appears to be aligned in a northeast – southwest orientation (and as such not perpendicular to the road). The significance of these features cannot be fully understood in the absence of any datable material.

8.2 Due to its limited size, trench 1 has not produced satisfactory results regarding the presence/absence, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains. However, there is a strong probability that any such remains have been extensively disturbed by later building sequences. There is also a strong probability that no significant archaeological deposits will be impacted upon within area A. It is likely that the construction and demolition of the tannery complex and subsequent construction of the cinema will have largely destroyed any surviving archaeological deposits within the area of the cinema building, the depth of which appears to be significantly lower than that of the shops along the front of the development site.

9

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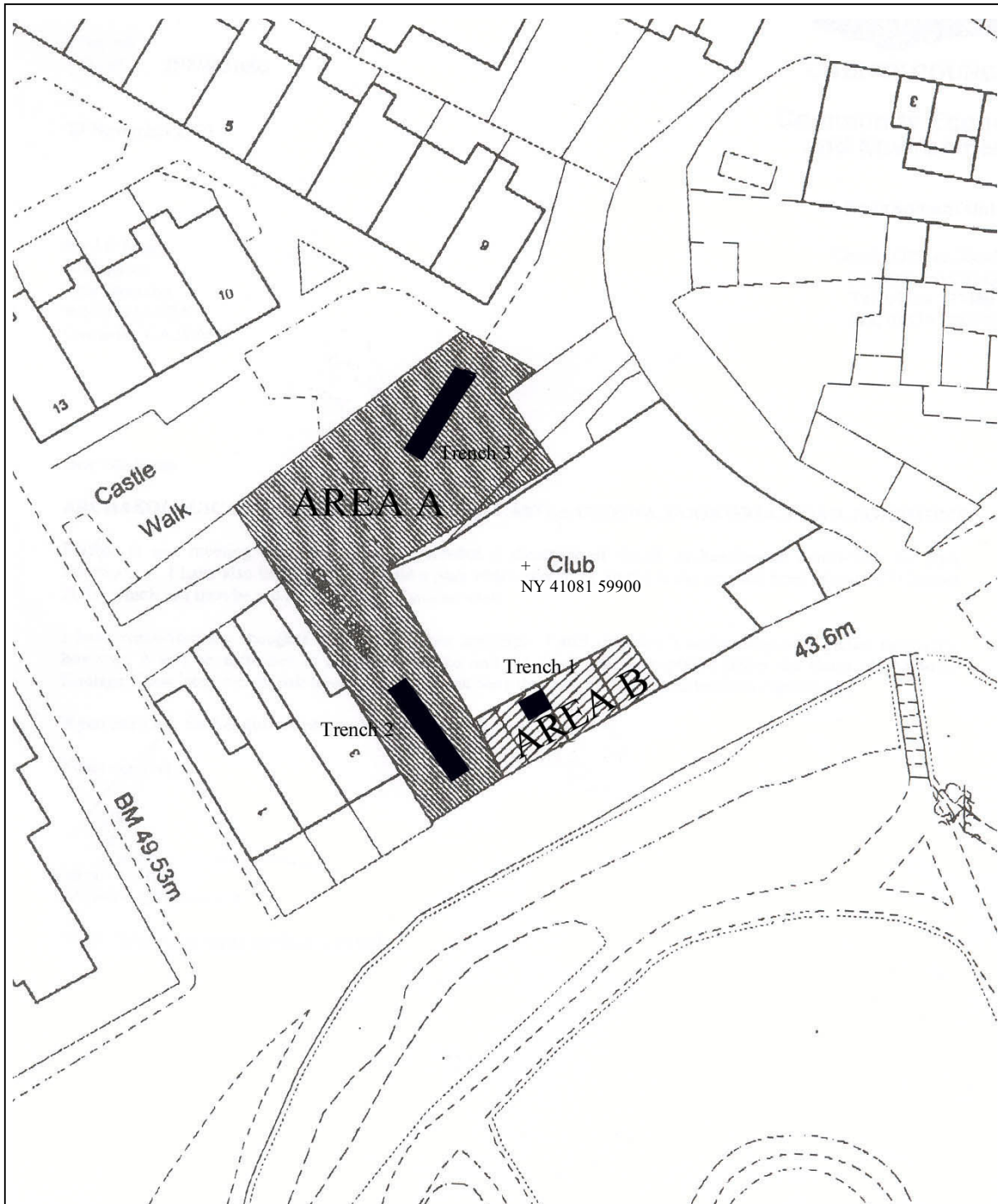
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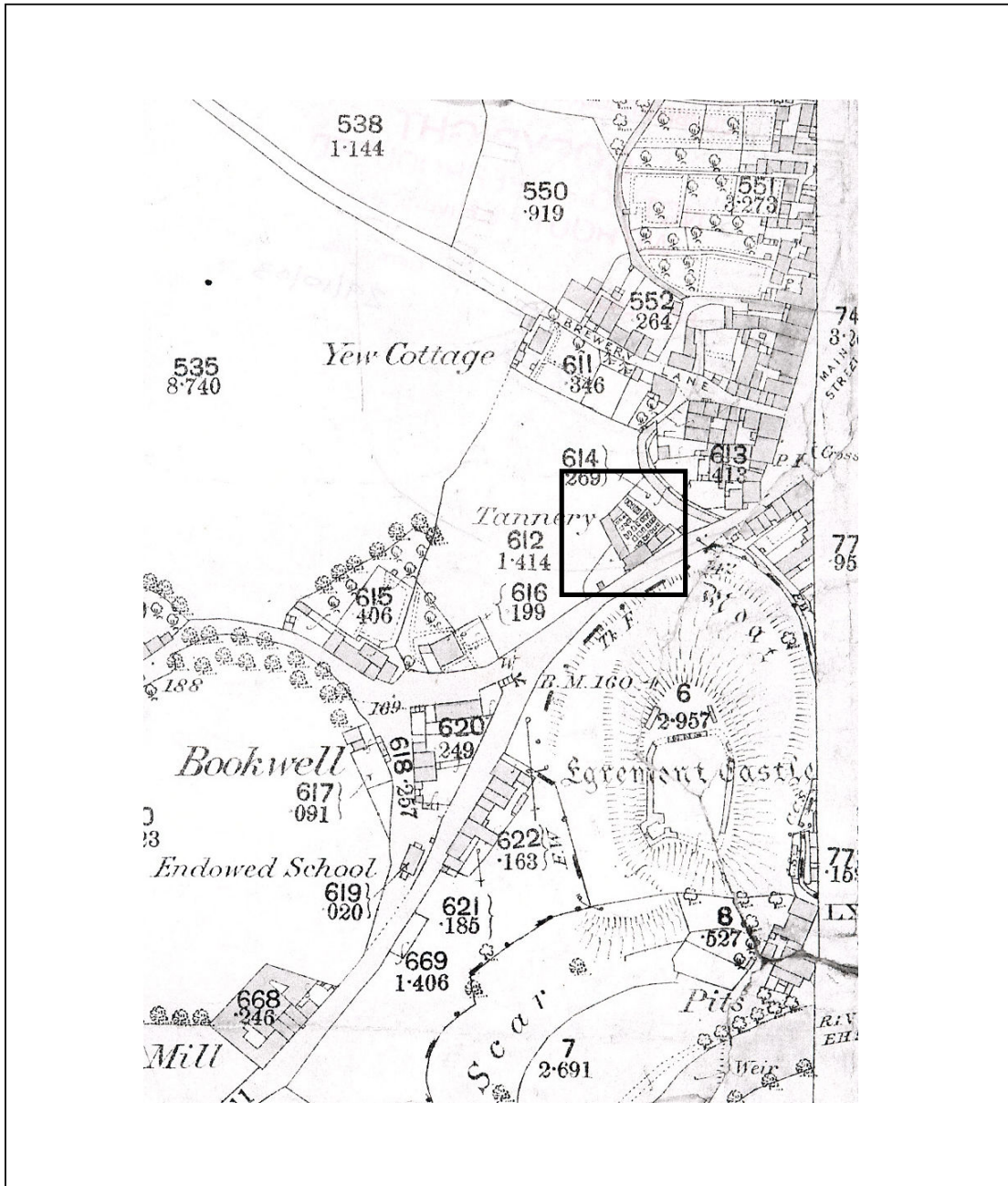
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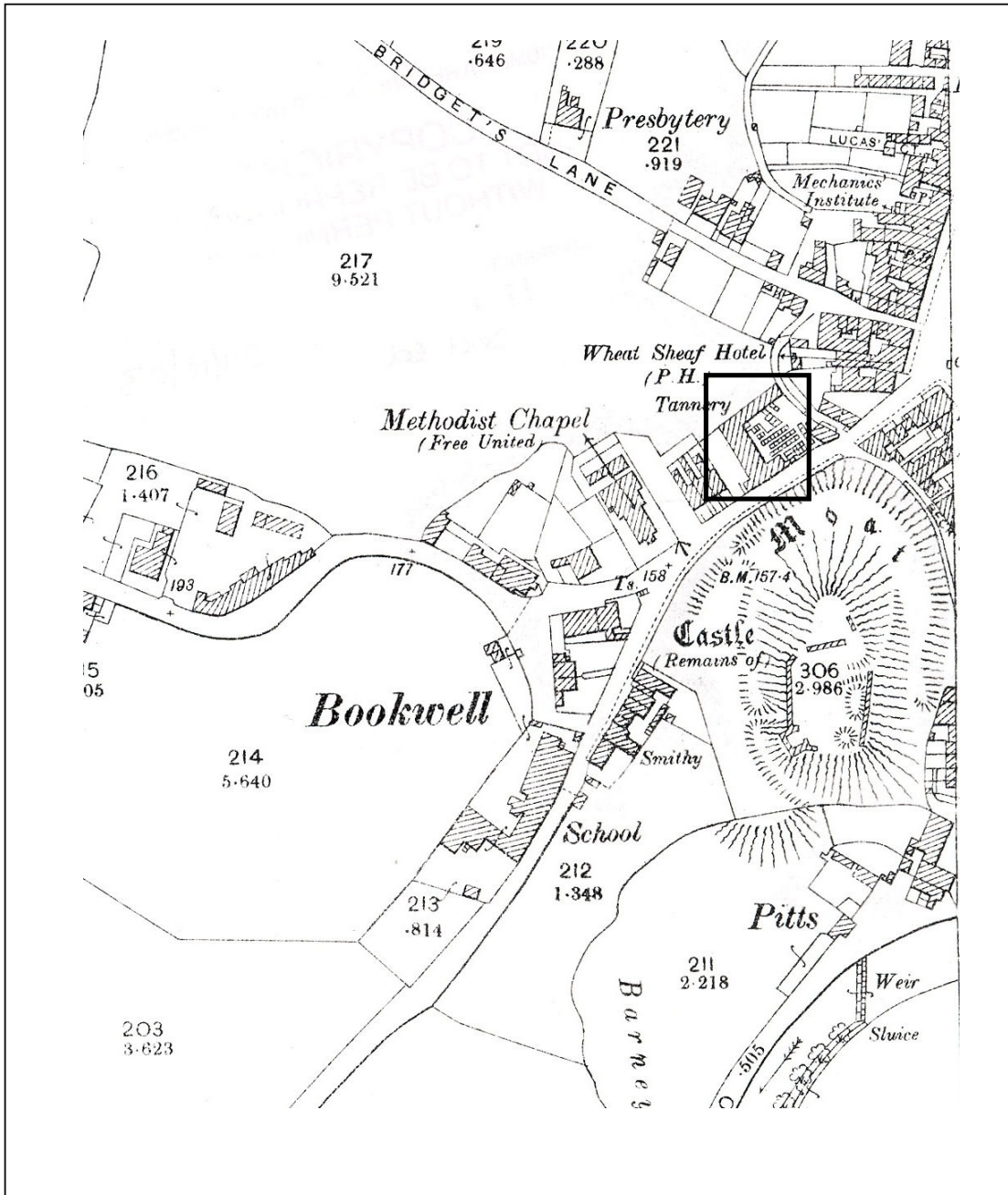
<p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre Nenthead Alston CUMBRIA CA9 3PD</p> <p>Tel: (01434) 382045 Fax: (01434) 382294 Email: np.ht@virgin.net</p>	<p>PROJECT: OLD CASTLE CINEMA, EGREMONT</p> <p>FIGURE: 1</p> <p>SCALE: 1:50,000; NGR NY 41081 59900</p> <p>TITLE: Site Location</p> <p>Reproduced from Landranger® 1:50,000 scale by permission Ordnance Survey® on behalf of the controller of Her Majest Stationery Office © Crown Copyright (1997) All rights reserved. Licence Number: WL6488</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑ N</p>
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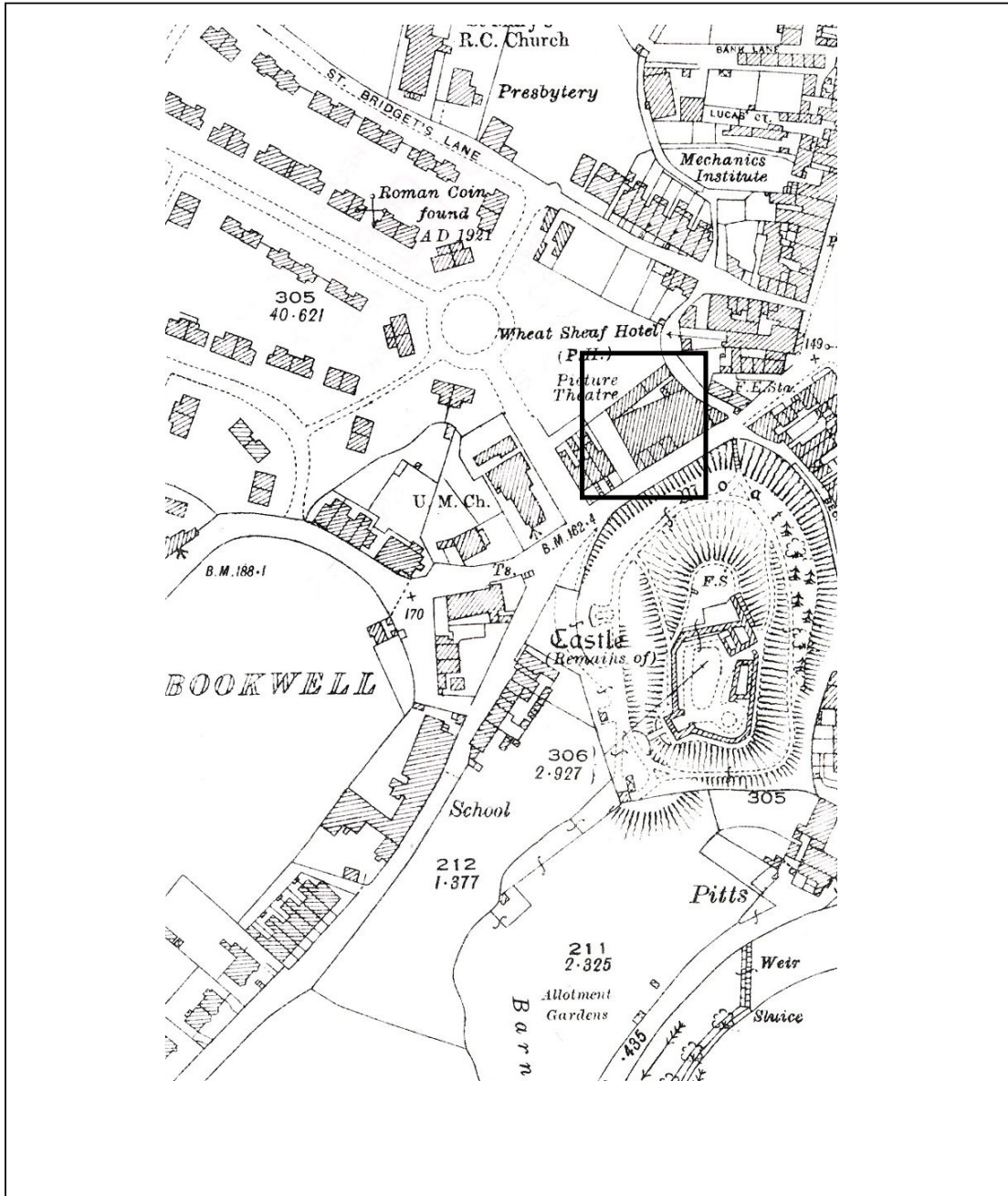
<p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre Nenthead Alston CUMBRIA CA9 3PD</p>	<p>PROJECT: OLD CASTLE CINEMA, EGREMONT</p>	
<p>Tel: (01434) 382045 Fax: (01434) 382294 Email: np.ht@virgin.net</p>	<p>FIGURE: 2</p>	
<p>SCALE: 1:500</p>	<p>NGR: NY 41081 59900</p>	
<p>TITLE: Trench Location Plan</p>		



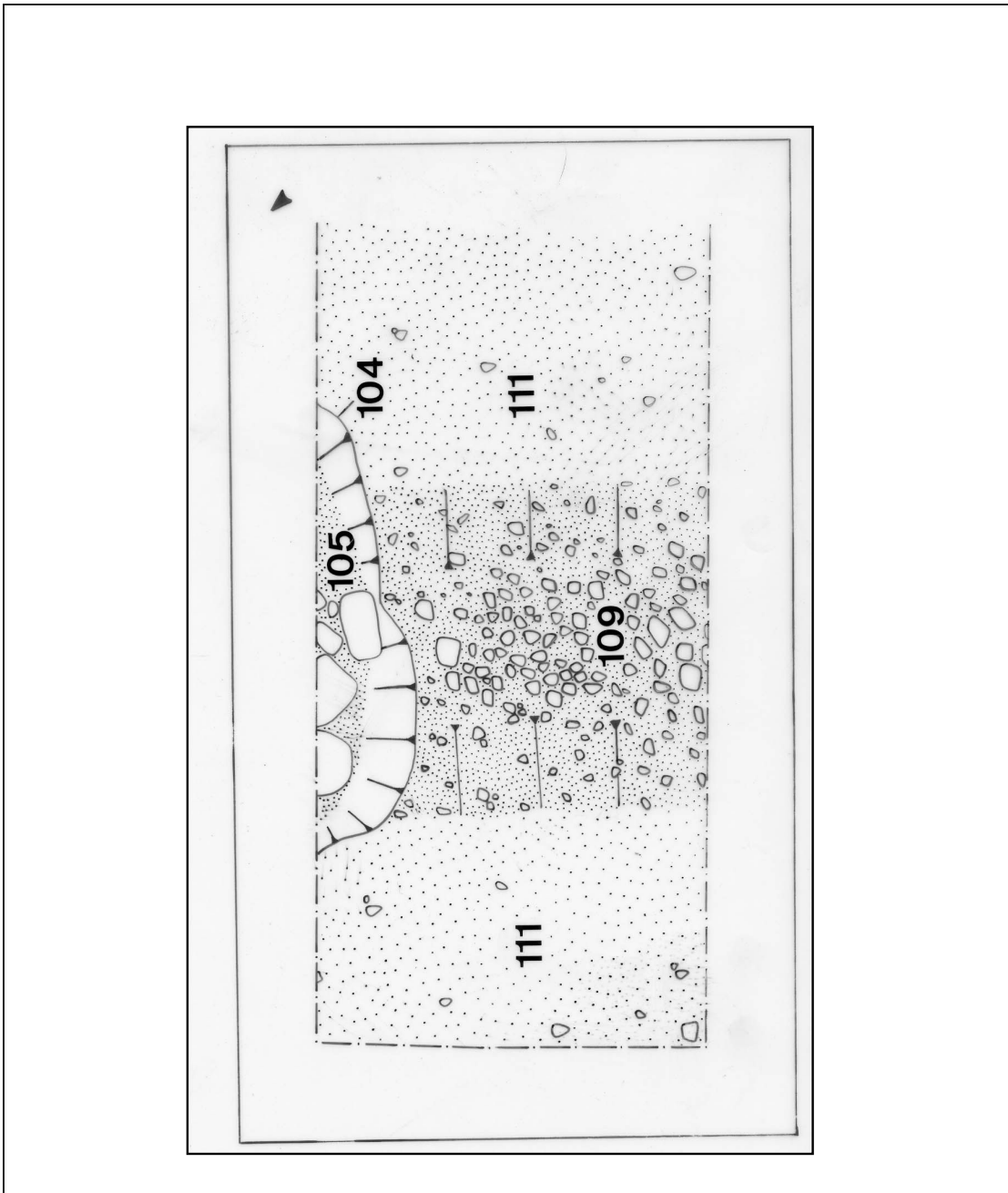
<p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre Nenthead Alston CUMBRIA CA9 3PD</p> <p>Tel: (01434) 382045 Fax: (01434) 382294 Email: np.ht@virgin.net</p>	<p>PROJECT: OLD CASTLE CINEMA, EGREMONT</p> <p>FIGURE: 3</p> <p>SCALE: 1:10,560</p> <p>NGR: NY 41081 59900</p> <p>TITLE: Ordnance Survey 1st Edition (1868)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑ N</p>
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<p>North Pennines Archaeology Ltd Nenthead Mines Heritage Centre Nenthead Alston CUMBRIA CA9 3PD</p> <p>Tel: (01434) 382045 Fax: (01434) 382294 Email: np.ht@virgin.net</p>	<p>PROJECT: OLD CASTLE CINEMA, EGREMONT</p> <p>FIGURE: 5</p> <p>SCALE: 1:10,560</p> <p>NGR: NY 41081 59900</p> <p>TITLE: Ordnance Survey 3rd Edition (1925)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑ N</p>
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