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# **NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD**

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**Project Designs and Client Reports No. CP/136/04**

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**REPORT ON  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FIELD EVALUATION ON  
LAND AT SILLOTH  
PRIMARY SCHOOL  
SILLOTH  
CUMBRIA**

**For  
ENGLISH HERITAGE**

**NGR NY 112 539**

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## NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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In December 2004 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation of land at Silloth Primary School, Liddell Street, Silloth, Cumbria. This was in response to a brief prepared by Mike Collins, Hadrian's Wall Archaeologist in order to inform a planning application for a childcare facility needed by the local community.

The work involved the excavation of one linear trial trench in order to assess the presence/absence, extent, nature and state of preservation of archaeological deposits.

No archaeological deposits were observed within the trench.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Thanks are due to the following people and institutions for their help, advice and communication provided throughout the project: Mike Collins of English Heritage, Sheena Hetherington of Silloth School, Neil Barnes of Ken Hope Ltd.

## 1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

- 1.1 In December 2004 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation on land at Silloth Primary School, Silloth, for Silloth Childcare Group. The work was required in a brief provided by Mike Collins of English Heritage (English Heritage 2004) in order to inform a planning application for a childcare facility. The site, on Liddell Street, has clear potential for important archaeological remains. As a result, Silloth Childcare Group was advised that an archaeological evaluation would be required in advance of the determination of a planning application. The work was funded by English Heritage.
- 1.2 The town of Silloth is situated approximately 23 miles west of Carlisle and approximately 10 miles north of Maryport and is located on the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is located within a landscape of some antiquity, particularly from the Roman and medieval periods. The area is shown in Figure 1.
- 1.3 The site consists of a vacant plot of land with sparse grass cover overlying sand. The land undulates gently, from a height of approximately 14m AOD at the west to a height of approximately 10m AOD at the east. The geology consists of wind blown dune sand and shingle of raised storm beaches.
- 1.4 The purpose of the fieldwork was to evaluate the site in order to define the presence or absence of archaeological remains. The fieldwork was undertaken in a single phase lasting one day. Deposits were excavated in plan and, where appropriate, in section, and were recorded in order to achieve an understanding of their nature, extent, depth and state of preservation. Any artefactual material was collected to facilitate the interpretation and date of the archaeological features. No paleo-environmental material was encountered during the evaluation.
- 1.5 The site archive has been prepared to full MAP2 standard and is located in the archive of North Pennines Archaeology Ltd under the unique project identifier NPA 04 LID-A.

## 2 PREVIOUS WORK

- 2.1 There has been no previous archaeological assessment undertaken within the study area.
- 2.2 In 1976-77 Barri Jones of Manchester University carried out excavations on a putative palisade visible on aerial photographs, in a north-south orientation behind the Silloth-Skinburness road. The palisade was thought to have consisted of a redeposited clay matrix within a trench, with stakes inserted at c. 60m intervals (Higham and Jones 1991). In 1994 David Wooliscroft re-excavated the trenches and disregarded the palisade, observing only modern water-pipes (Walker 2003). Wooliscroft also excavated a possible Roman road, the course of which is uncertain but could have followed a line under the present Solway School (Ibid.).
- 2.3 Higham undertook investigations into a Romano-British farmstead east of Silloth School in 1983. This revealed evidence of settlement and linear features which traversed the area of the Roman camp north of Silloth, which have been identified from aerial photographs (Higham and Jones 1983; 45-72).
- 2.4 In November 2003 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook a field evaluation on land adjacent to Solway School, Silloth (SOL-A), on land reputed to be the site of Milefortlet 11. No traces of Milefortlet 11 were identified, and the only remains recovered related to an early 20<sup>th</sup> century chicken farm (Jones 2003; figure 2)
- 2.5 In January 2004 Oxford Archaeology North undertook a desk-based assessment and rapid identification survey on land at Solway Lido (OAN 2004). This assessment identified significant remains of 20<sup>th</sup> century pillboxes and two modern linear features. The assessment also identified a very high potential for the identification of below ground remains dating to the Roman period. This work was followed by a field evaluation undertaken in March 2004 by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd which revealed a series of substantial linear ditches and a number of smaller ditches which could be interpreted as palisade slots (Jones 2004). Three ditches were found to contain a significant amount of slag within their upper fills and quantities of charred grain in their lower fills. This activity was concentrated in the north-western third of the site which appears to contain compelling evidence for probable prehistoric settlement. C14 dates recovered from charcoal samples from the fills of the ditches indicate they remained in use as late as 1000 AD (Ibid.).





Figure 1: Site Location.

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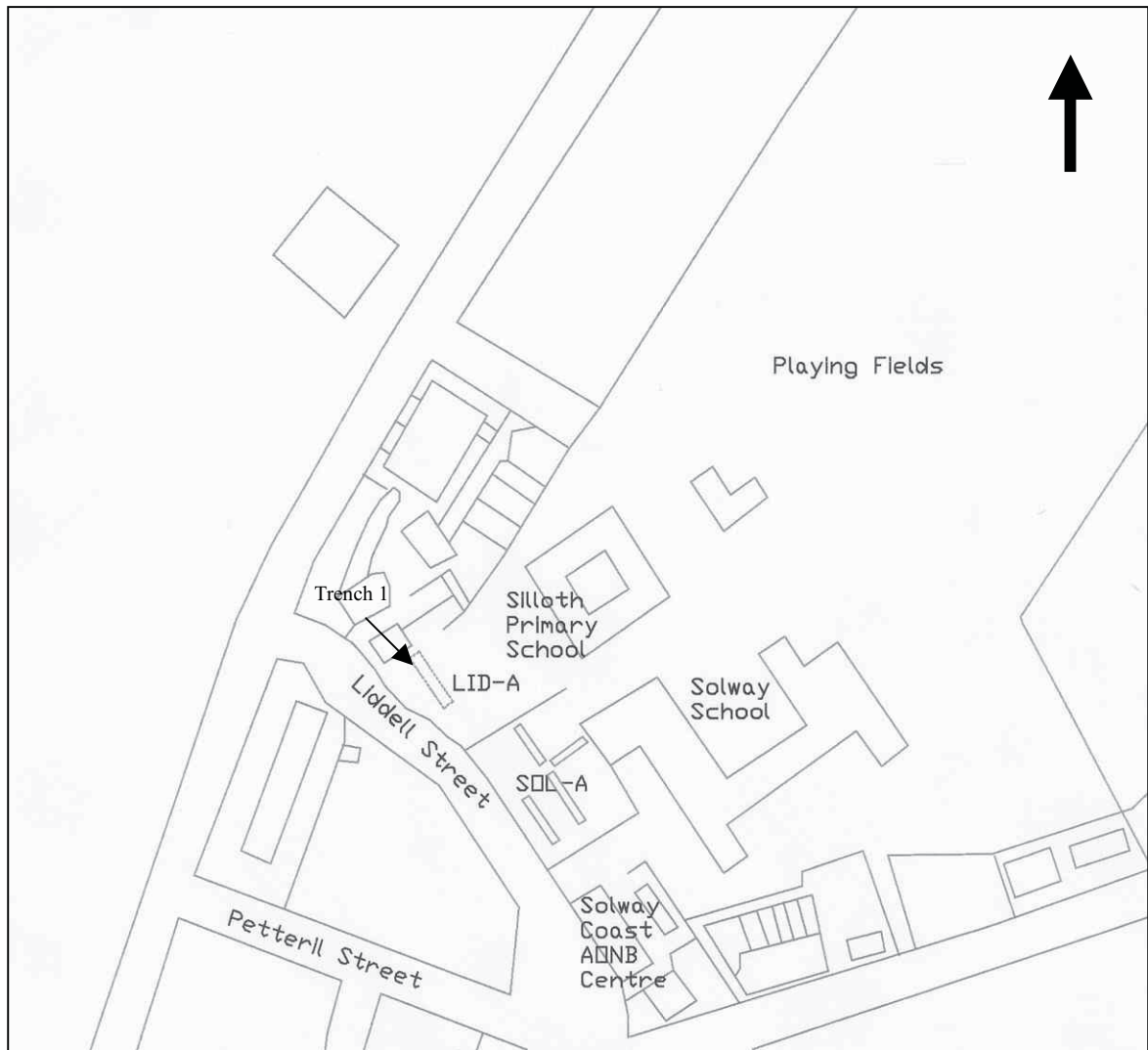


Figure 2: Site Location, showing location of current evaluation (LID-A) and former evaluation, Solway School (SOL-A) Scale: 1:1250

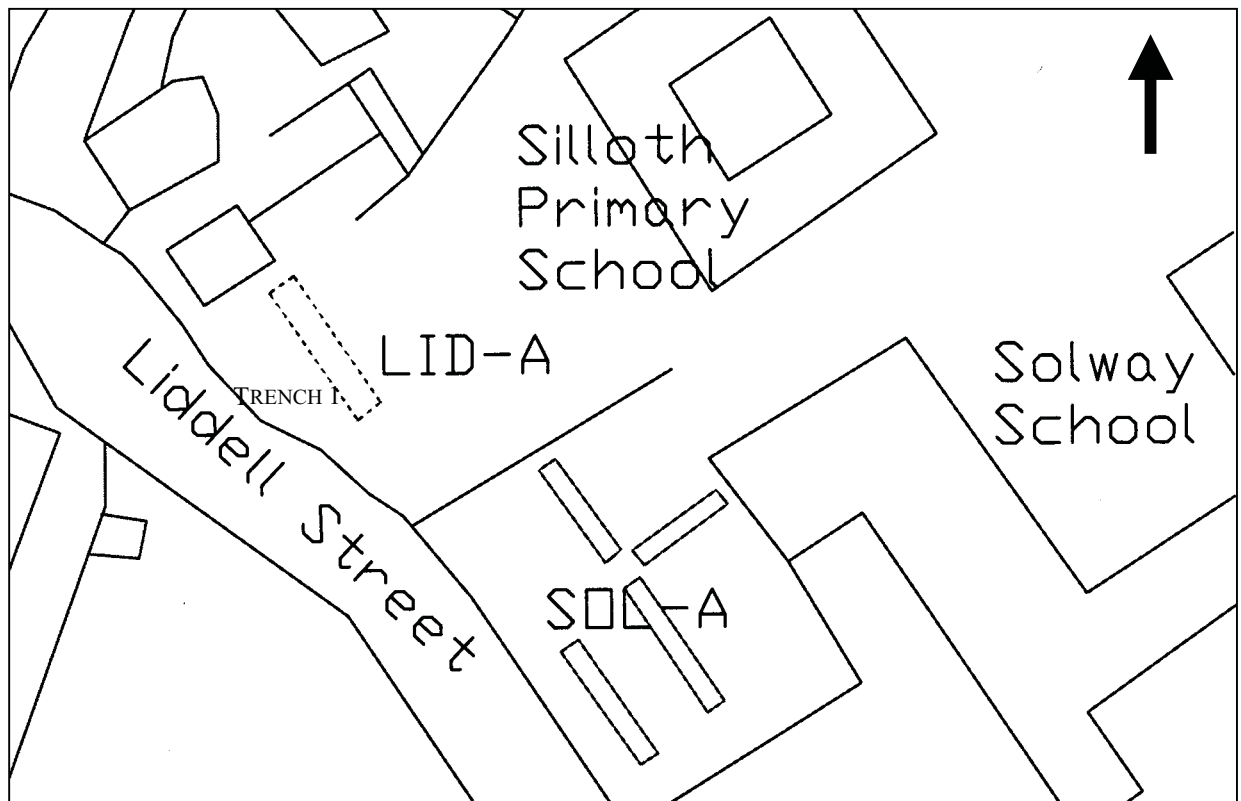


Figure 3: Trench Location Plan: Scale: 1:500

### 3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The work undertaken consisted of a field evaluation. This consisted of the excavation of a single linear trial trench which measured 2m x 10m, in order to produce a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains.
- 3.2 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 were 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.
- 3.3 The 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. The 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. Photography was undertaken using a Canon EOS 100 Single Lens Reflex (SLR) manual camera. A photographic record was made using 200 ISO colour print film.
- 3.4 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations* (IFA 1994).

### 4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 4.1 Place Name Evidence

- 4.1 The name Silloth derives from the sea-lathes or medieval field barns which were situated throughout the area.

#### 4.2 Prehistoric

- 4.2.1 There is evidence of Mesolithic and Neolithic activity along the Cumbrian coast, particularly from finds along the Cumbria coast between St Bees and Ravenglass, although no definitive evidence within the vicinity of the development site (Cherry and Cherry 2002; Young 2002). Neolithic activity can also be assumed through the distribution of stone axes, one of which was found north of Silloth (SMR 379).
- 4.2.2 Evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age activity is scarce within the North Cumbrian Plain, however, evidence has been interpreted largely from aerial photographs, and settlement remains have been found at New Cowper Quarry, north-west of Aspatria (Jones 2003). Similarly, a number of undated enclosures of probable Iron Age date have been identified from aerial photographs (Bewley 1994).

### **4.3 Roman**

- 4.3.1 Evidence of Roman period activity in North Cumbria consists of the military installations of the Stanegate and Hadrian's Wall systems and their associated 'native' settlements. The military installations consisted of milefortlets, turrets and a palisade linked by a metalled trackway. There is evidence of two phases of coastal defence at Silloth identified from aerial photographs, an earlier palisade and associated features are known to have been built prior to the construction of the known system of towers between milefortlets (OAN 2004). Across the area to the east are a pair of side ditches, probably the remains of a coastal road (Ibid.).
- 4.3.2 The coastal defences between the forts at Silloth, situated north of Solway School, and Beckfoot on the coast to the south, consist of installations along a narrow coastal strip west of Blitterlees, on Blitterlees Bank (now occupied by a golf course), some distance to the west of the present development site.
- 4.3.3 A hoard of 20-30 coins of Vespasian, Trajan and Hadrian had been found at Greenrow School, in a reference made in the Carlisle Patriot of 1841, together with the remains of a pottery jar which presumably housed the coins (Shotter 1991; SMR 17701).

### **4.4 Medieval**

- 4.4.1 There is little evidence of medieval activity within or adjacent to the development site. The place name for the settlement at Silloth, however, is said to be derived from the sea-lathes or grain storage barns used by the monks of Holm Cultram Abbey, and the settlement consisted of dispersed farms and field barns until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **4.4 Post Medieval**

- 4.4.1 The town of Silloth developed in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a need for a safe port on the north-west coast. The railway was extended from Drumburgh on the Port Carlisle line to Silloth, a distance of 13 miles, which opened in 1856, the docks opening a year later (Whellan 1923, OAN 2004). The new town of Silloth was planned around the dock, on an orthogonal rectangular grid pattern and Silloth rapidly grew as an important shipping port (Ibid.). Silloth was also a popular holiday destination in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its sandy beaches and spectacular views of Criffel and other Scottish mountains across the Solway (OAN 2004).

## **5 RESULTS**

- 5.1 The evaluation was undertaken by Chris Jones BA, MA, AIFA, Project Archaeologist, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd.
- 5.2 One linear trial trench, which measured 2m x 10m, was excavated within the proposed development site.
- 5.3 All references to cardinal directions refer to site grid north.

### **5.4 Trench 1**

- 5.4.1 The trench was located centrally within the development site, and was oriented approximately northwest-southeast. The natural substrate was observed at a depth of 1.20m and consisted of mid brown gravelly sand of a raised beach (102). This deposit was sealed by a layer of wind blown sand (101), which was in turn sealed by a layer of mixed topsoil and rubble (100) which included fragments of 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery, glass, brick, slate and iron, none of which were retained. No archaeological deposits were observed within the trench.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 No significant archaeological deposits were observed within the trench. No evidence was observed to suggest that there had been any activity on the site. Study of the historic maps of the site also indicated no activity on the site. No evidence of any Roman activity was observed, such as the possible line of a road and/or palisade did not extend across the development area, nor was there any evidence for the presence of Milefortlet 11.



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PLATE 1: TRENCH 1 – LOOKING NORTH-WEST (PHOTO C.JONES)





PLATE 2: TRENCH 1: SOUTH-EAST FACING SECTION (PHOTO C.JONES)