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# ELECTRICITY SUPPLY TRENCHES, PRECY STREET NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

## REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

November 2007

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PERCY STREET,  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF CARRIED  
OUT IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2007

Prepared by:

*The Archaeological Practice Ltd.*



**Frontispiece:** View of watching brief Trench 3 during excavation.

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

An archaeological watching brief was requested by the Archaeological Officer of the Newcastle City Council Conservation Team at Percy Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, in order to mitigate the potential impact of trenching for the provision of electricity supplies by NEDL. The watching brief was duly carried out on a trench cut along the east side of Percy Street which extended across the road to the west (*Illus. 01 & 02*).

## 2. CULTURAL HERITAGE BACKGROUND

The area of the watching brief falls outside the walls of the medieval town but within the area occupied in the post-medieval and modern periods by dwellings and a range of business premises, including breweries and inns.

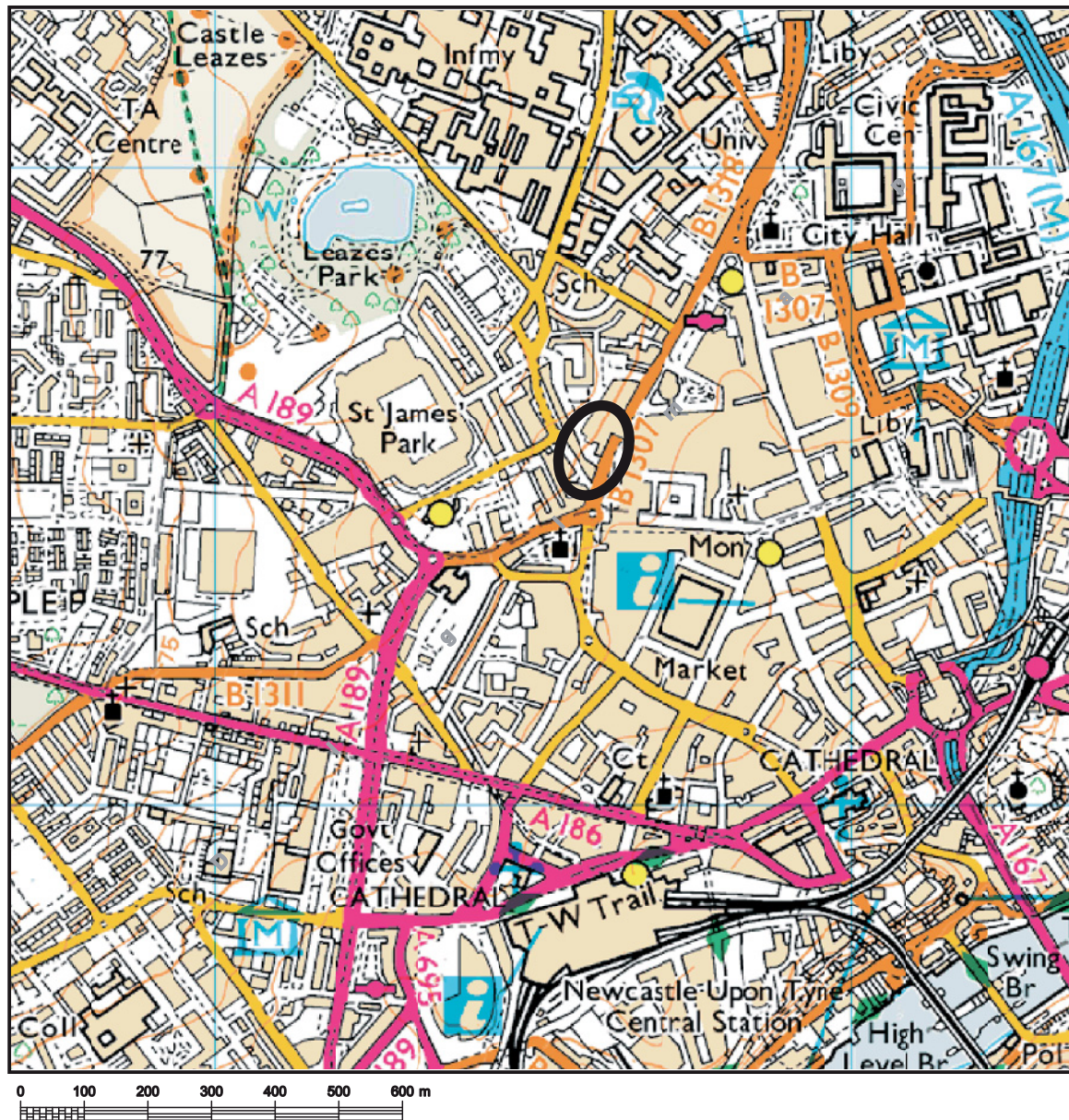
On the accession of King Stephen in 1135 settlement spread rapidly outside the town walls. At the same time King David presented the religious houses with the land between the town walls and the new development, covering the present Cloth, Groat and Bigg Markets. The accession of Henry 2<sup>nd</sup> to the throne of England led to the immediate revocation of the agreement with Scotland, however, and hostile incursions by the Scots began again. This led to the construction of a new town wall enclosing the area of the new settlements as well as the religious houses. This wall, including the New Gate, was begun in the reign of King John and continued into the reign of Edward I. The northern section of the town wall ran through St Andrew's churchyard and east along the modern line of Gallowgate and Blakett Street. Although nominally defining the boundary of the medieval town, archaeological evidence indicates that it cut through existing property boundaries and does not delimit the extent of the medieval city.

By 1175 Westgate was the main street in the town but Newgate Street was also developing, and during a period of rapid development, a continuous line of properties developed by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century between St Andrew's church and St. Nicholas's. Newgate Street may have originated as a Roman route northwards from the fort, and certainly grew in importance following the construction of the Norman castle (there is also a strong body of opinion that places the Anglian settlement of Monkchester upon Newgate Street). Despite its somewhat turbulent subsequent history, Newgate Street seems to have retained something of its medieval character in later centuries, specifically in the variety of trades carried out in its back alleys and courtyards until well into the nineteenth century, and in the quantity of inns that survived there even more recently, particularly before its redevelopment in the 1970s.

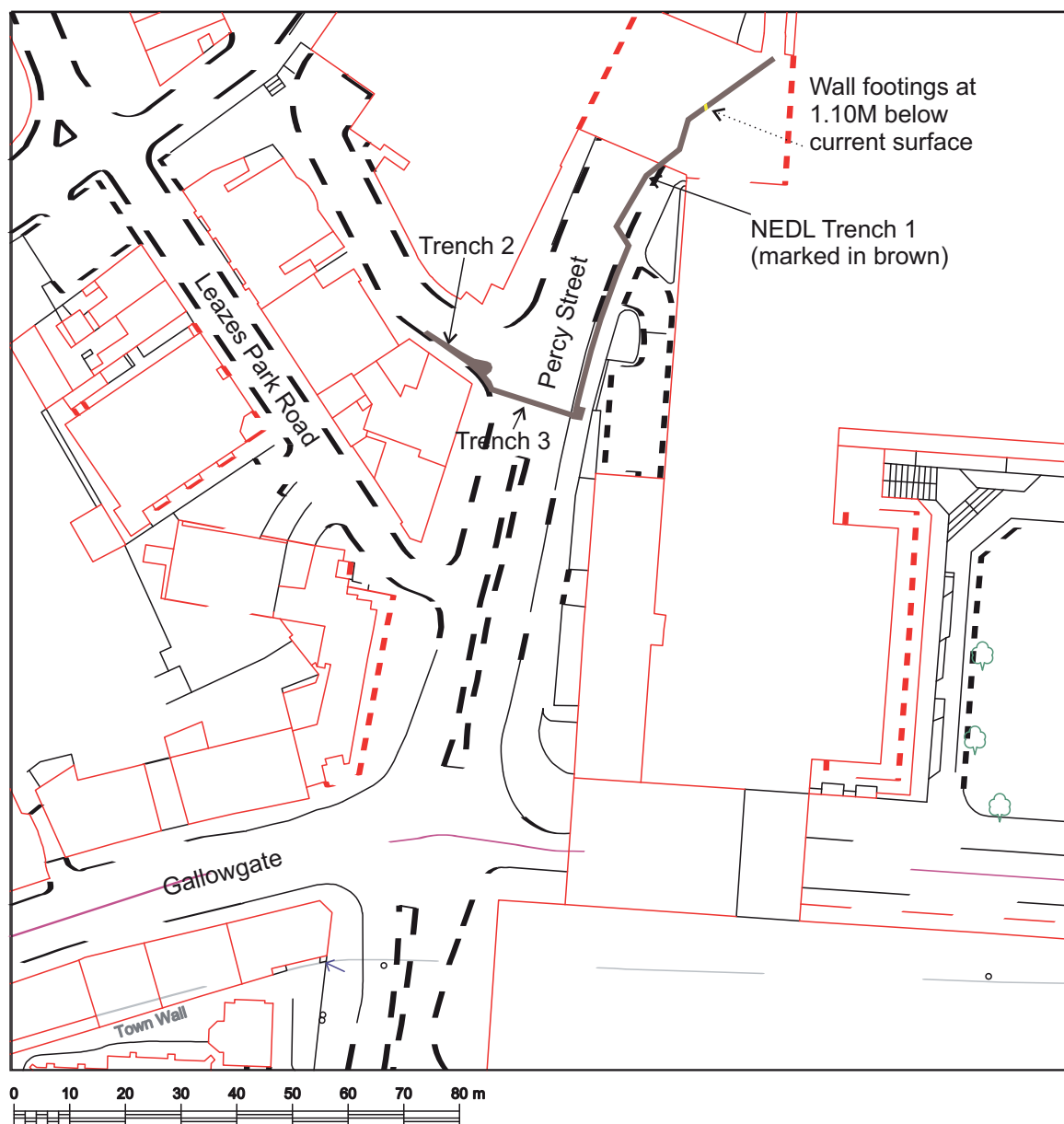
The earliest graphic indication of urbanisation over the area of the present watching brief is represented on Speed's map of 1610 (*Illus. 03*) which shows development, presumably mainly residential in character, spreading along Newgate Street to the New Gate and beyond the walls to the north. Subsequent maps also show development in this area, notably spreading along the street frontages.

The medieval character and, to some extent, appearance of Newgate Street and the south part of Percy Street remained well into the modern period (*Illus. 04 & 05*) and even survived Grainger's redevelopment of the area, lying just beyond the area of his redevelopment. In the eighteenth century, for example, the first Newcastle Directory of 1778 lists merchants as well as coopers, tanners and millwrights in the area - much of this small-scale industrial activity was undertaken in the courts, or yards - and even after 1850 leather workers, tanners,



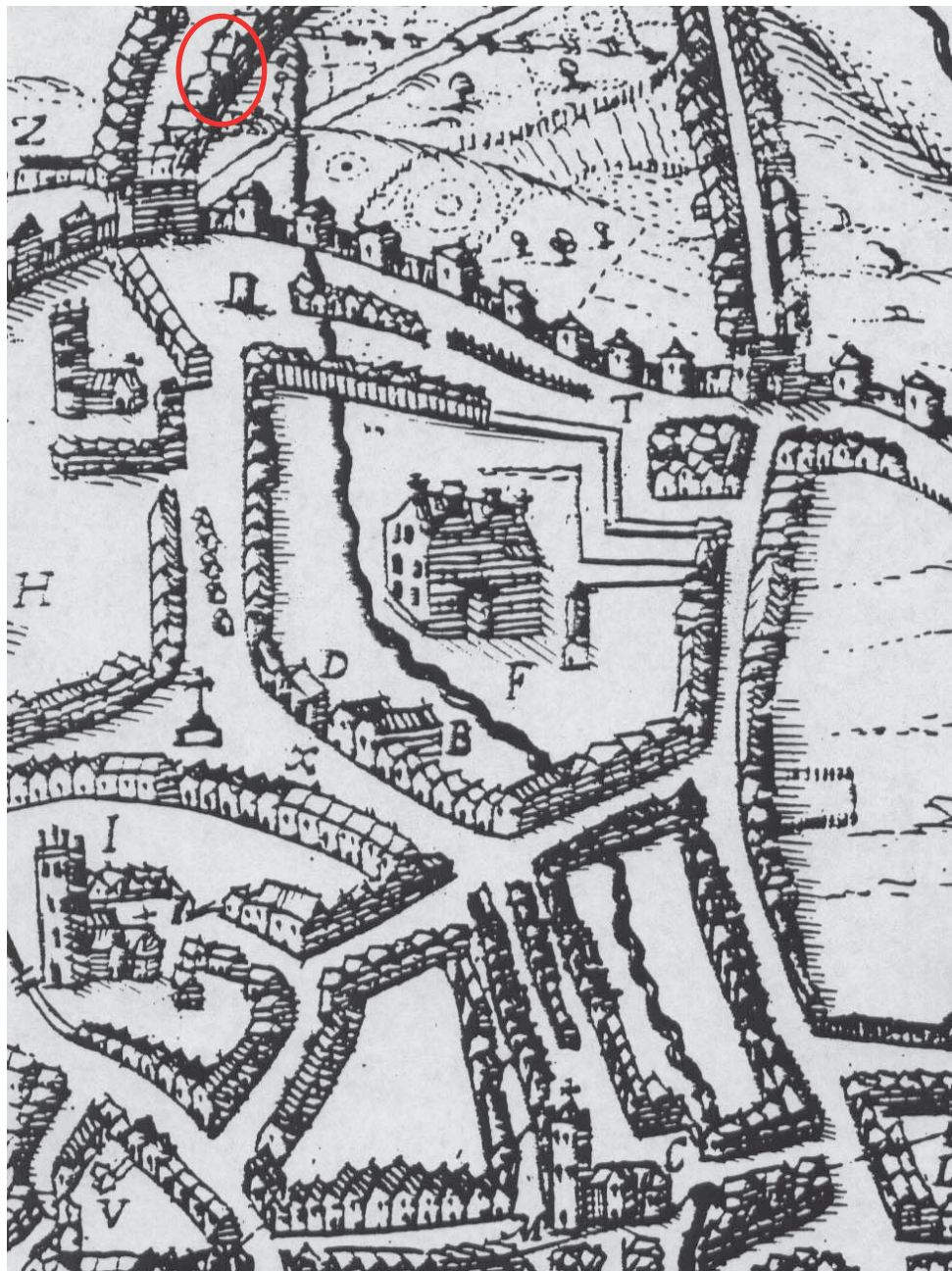


*Illus. 01: The location of the watching brief on Percy Street (circled).*



**Illus. 02:** Trenches excavated by NEDL on Percy Street, Newcastle upon Tyne in October and November 2007.





**Illus. 03:** Speed's map of Newcastle, 1610, showing Anderson's Newe House (centre) and the location of the present watching brief (circled)





*Illus. 04: Hutton's map of Newcastle, 1770*





**Illus. 05:** First edition Ordnance Survey Series, 1859.

bakers, dressmakers, and basket makers, amongst other crafts and trades, are mentioned. These small tradesmen had largely disappeared by the 1930s, however, but the public houses for which the Newgate Street was particularly well-known survived until its wholesale redevelopment in the early 1970s.

The remaining houses on the east side of Percy Street (some of possible post-medieval origin) were demolished to make way for the Eldon Square complex.

### 3. WATCHING BRIEF

The aims of the watching brief were to determine whether archaeological features or deposits were present in service trenches excavated on Percy Street and a service road joining it to the east (*Illus. 02*), and to make an appropriate record of any such finds by photographic and other means. Attendance by an archaeologist was requested by the Archaeological Officer of the Newcastle City Council Conservation Team.

A single, long trench was excavated in stages by a mechanical excavator. For convenience this trench is divided into three sections (Trench 1-3, below). Some of this work (notably the excavation across Percy Street) was carried out overnight in order to minimise the impact upon traffic flow.

The first part of the trench (Trench 1) was excavated along the south side of Percy Street in the position indicated on *Illus. 02* with its northern terminus in the bus station entrance. This trench was 0.75m wide, except at its extreme southern end where a box measuring 1.4 x 1.4 was opened (see *Illus. 02*). The depth of the trench was up to 0.60 metres, except towards the north end where it increased to a maximum of 1.40 metres.

The second trench (Trench 2) was excavated from the south side of the junction of a service road north of Leazes Park Road (east) with Percy Street, extending westwards along the south side of the service road, as indicated on *Illus. 02*.

The third trench (Trench 3), approximately 12m in length by 0.75m wide was excavated across Percy Street from the southern end of Trench 1 to the east end of Trench 2 (see *Illus. 02*).

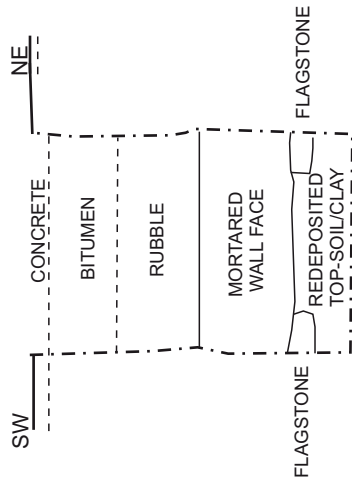
### 4. RESULTS

The work was carried out in October and early November 2007. A single trench was excavated in several sections using a mechanical excavator.

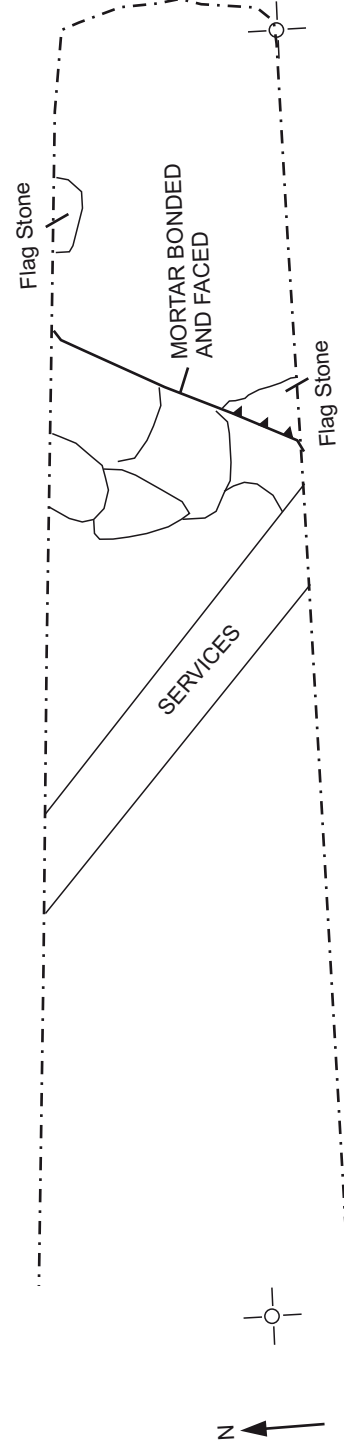
#### **Trench 1:**

The trench excavated along the east side of Percy Street revealed road deposits comprising successive tarmac surfaces upon a hardcore layer. Below the modern road surface materials was a backfill deposit of dolomite covering existing services at a depth of 0.60-80m. Outside the immediate course of the service cables, the trench section revealed a dark deposit of mixed topsoil below the dolomite. In a single location, towards the north end of the trench, part of a stone wall in neatly dressed sandstone was revealed at a depth of 1.08 metres below the present ground level (*Illus. 06 & 07*), apparently within the mixed topsoil deposit noted above. The narrowness of the trench and covered location of this part of the trench (within the covered bus concourse) prevented satisfactory examination of this feature, which





**Illus. 06:** East-facing section of a fragment of NE-SW wall recorded in a service trench excavated on the south side of Eldon Square bus station, November 2007.



**Illus. 07:** Plan of NE-SW wall on the south side of Eldon Square bus station.



**Illus. 08:** The position of the watching brief across Percy Street (Trench 3).



**Illus. 09:** Breaking the road surface prior to excavation of watching brief Trench 3.



**Illus. 10:** The position of watching brief Trench 3 - new tarmac section is the location of the section viewed in Illus. 11 & 12.



**Illus. 11:** View of watching brief Trench 3 during excavation.



**Illus. 12:** Close-up view of a section of watching brief Trench 3 during excavation.



**Illus. 13:** The position of the watching brief along the east side of Percy Street (Trench 1).



**Illus. 14:** View of the course of Trench 3 from its centre to southern end.



**Illus. 15:**  
The remains of a section of walling found in Trench 1 - viewed from the east



**Illus. 16:** View of watching brief Trench 1, north end (position of wall remains to right of mini-excavator) during excavation.



**Illus. 17:** Back-filling of the service trench following excavation.



appeared to lie on the approximate curve of the former east frontage of Percy Street, as revealed on historic maps (*Illus. 03-05*).

**Trench 2:**

The trench excavated E-W across the southern end of Percy Street was approximately 12m in length by 0.75m wide, and excavated to a depth of 0.80m. Under 0.10m of modern road surface was an older tarmac road surface, again 0.10m in depth. Below this was a 0.25m hardcore layer consisting of concrete and pebbles, and under this was a 0.35m backfill deposit of dolomite which covered existing services at a depth of 0.80m. No features, finds or deposits of cultural heritage significance were recorded during this excavation.

**Trench 3:**

The trench excavated E-W along the south side of a service road off the west side of Percy Street contained similar deposits to those described (above) for Trenches 1 & 2. No features, finds or deposits of cultural heritage significance were recorded during this excavation (*Illus. 12 & 13*).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were observed in Trench 1, other than the footings of a wall of probable post-medieval or modern origin. The position of the wall is consistent with the position 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century historic maps of residential and commercial properties lining the east side of lower Percy Street.

The remains of this wall were left intact by the trenching and subsequent back-filling.

No remains of any significance were observed in Trench 2 or Trench 3, which were excavated to a relatively shallow depth in modern made ground below modern road surfaces.

The excavations had no significant impact upon the cultural heritage resource of Newcastle upon Tyne, but show that remains of potential significance may survive in this area.