Community Archaeology North CIC (CANCIC): Test Pit CHAP25 TP13

Location: 8 Park Avenue, Hexham, NE46 3EN
Owner:
Date of excavation: 14 September 2025
Area of excavation: 1.0m x 1.0m
Weather conditions: Mostly sunny, occasional heavy showers
Excavators: Andy Parsons, Chris Mole, Geoff Mole, Lee Robertson
Report: SM and the Team
Location grid reference and height above sea-level, mOD: NY92984 644504 c.66mOD

Introduction



Figure 1 Aerial photograph showing TP13 location

8 Park Avenue, Hexham is located on a ridge to the north-west of the town centre at approximately 60-70m above sea level. Test pit 13 was one of three (TPs 9, 12 and 13) excavated in land east of Park Avenue (Figure 1) within an area of orchards and allotments.

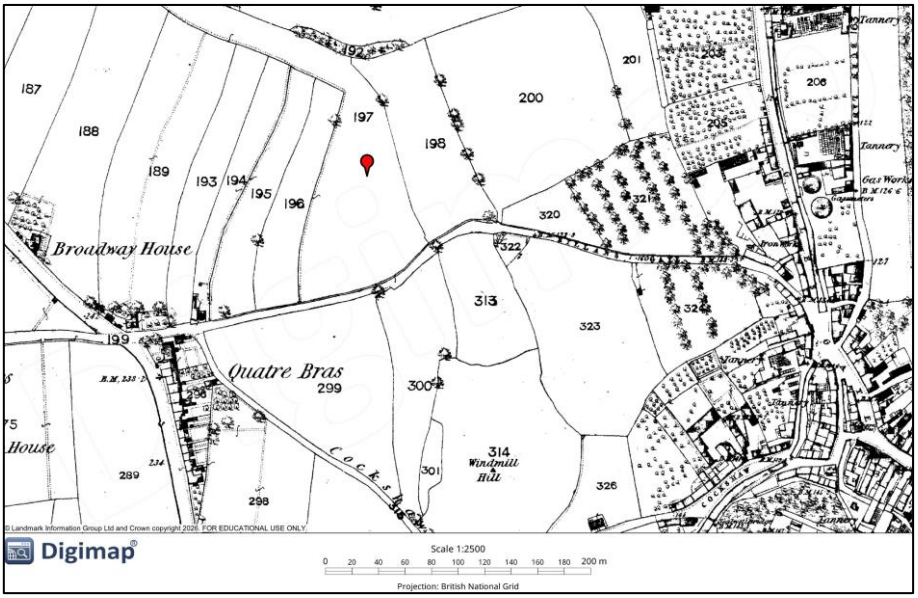


Figure 2 Location of TP13 1860s edition OS map

The1860s edition OS map shows the location is an area of agricultural land north of Eilansgate which runs north-west from the town centre towards Quatre Bras (Figure 2) and onwards towards the site of the medieval St Giles Hospital (established c.1114-1201). A possible early (but unmapped) footpath runs close to Park Avenue towards the Hospital site. In the 1890s the beginnings of infill to the south are apparent, around the orchard areas of Quatre Bras (Figure 3). Development to the north of Eilansgate is evident in 1920s edition OS map (Figure 4), with Park Avenue one of the earliest residential areas, surrounded by allotment gardens to the east and west, with the cricket ground below the ridge to the east.

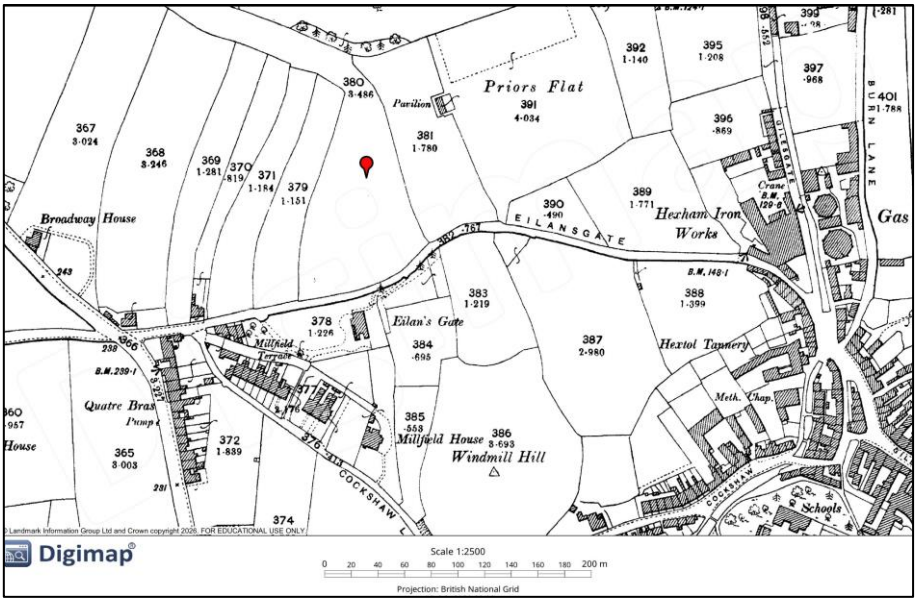


Figure 3 Location of TP13 1890s edition OS map

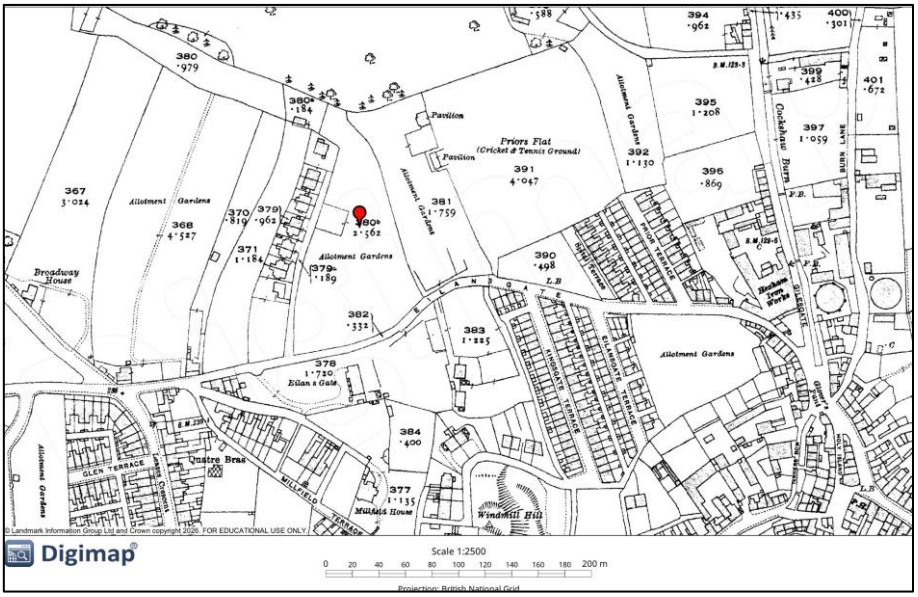


Figure 4 Location of TP13 1920s edition OS map

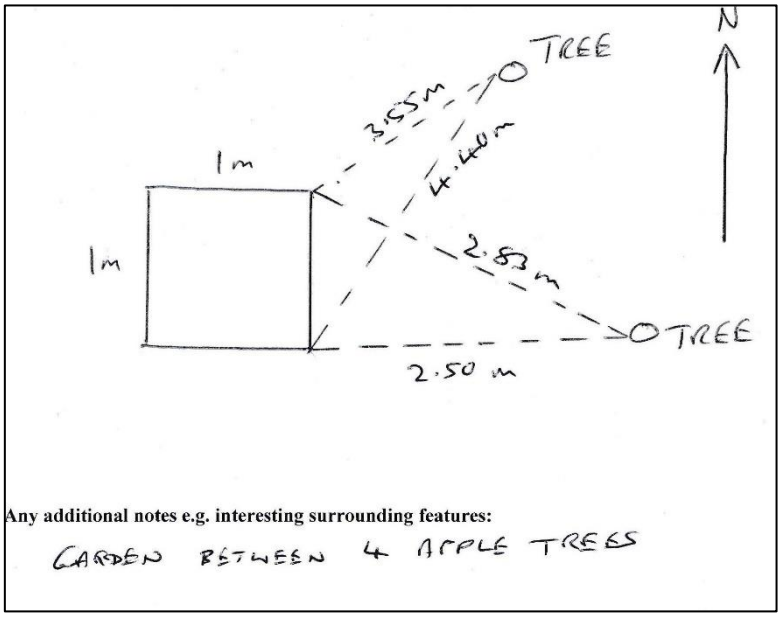


Figure 5 Measured location of TP13

Test pit 13 was excavated within an established area of allotments and orchard. It was located between a group of apple trees, close to garden outbuildings, just west of an area of established vegetable and fruit beds. Figure 5 shows the measured test pit location in relation to adjacent apple trees.

Excavation Summary

Test pit 13 was excavated over one day rather than the usual two. It was deturfed by hand and excavated in 100mm spits to a depth of approximately 0.5m. Excavated soil was 100% sieved and all finds recorded.

Below the turf spit (100) was friable light-greyish brown silty sand with frequent fine grass roots, rare (<5%) small stones (10-50mm) and fragments of charcoal. Finds were varied and

included 17th and 18th century pottery sherds; clay pipe stem, iron nails, a broken horse shoe; animal bone and building debris such as CBM, mortar and broken tile.

Spit (101) was increasingly sandy with depth, with darker, more silty patches. The volume of stone inclusions broadly reflected those in spit (100). Finds included 17th to 18th century pottery sherds, clay pipe stems; CBM, mortar and tile fragments; animal tooth and metal working slag. A piece of plastic was found in a darker, silty area in the west, likely a cut feature from more recent shrub or tree planting or removal and backfill.

Owing to time constraints, the test pit was half-sectioned north-south and the eastern half excavated to a depth of 300mm from the surface. Soil in spit (102) was less homogenous, mid-darkish yellow silty sand, with light-greyish brown patches of sandy silt and a discrete darker brown silty area in the north-east corner. Stone quantity increased with around 35% sub-rounded stones (20-50mm) suggesting a possible expedient packed surface. Finds were fewer but consistent with those in earlier spits: pottery sherds; clay pipe stem; glass fragments and slag, coke and CBM.

The test pit was excavated to a depth of 500mm in spit (103) and was increasingly sandy, mid yellowish-brown with dark greyish brown patches, with a discrete darker silty area in the north-east corner. This latter likely the edge of a small pit. A sherd of late medieval green pottery was found, with other glazed pot sherds and clay pipe stem. The quantity of stone decreased and instead of a surface may have been a natural deposit.

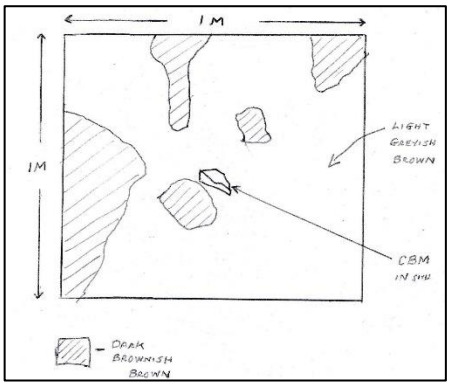
Conclusions

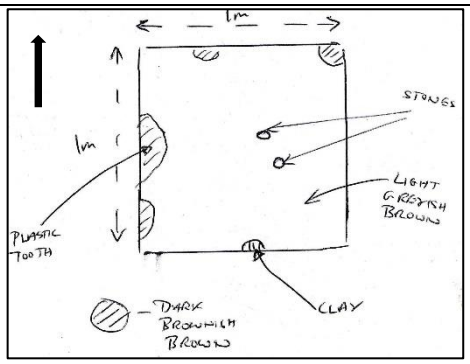
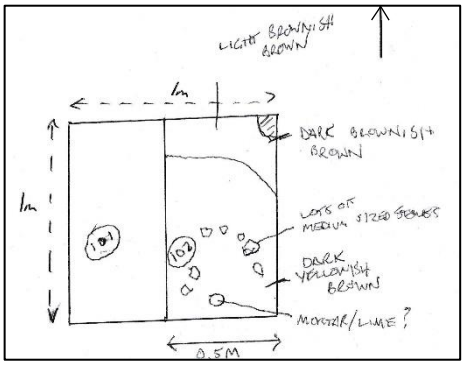
The range of finds are consistent with the test pit being in or close to an area of domestic occupation and agricultural working. The pottery identified during excavation dates from around the 16th to 19th centuries, with nothing more recent. This is consistent with this being an area of settlement prior to being used as open agricultural fields and allotments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as evidenced by historic map research. Taken together with results from nearby TPs 9 and 12 it seems likely that the ridge upon which Park Avenue now sits was the location of early small farms or a collection of small holdings for which we have no documentary evidence.

The small amount of slag in spits (100) and (101) may reflect nearby small-scale blacksmithing work associated with a farmstead. Test pit 12 also contained slag and this may be an associated deposit.

The evidence for possible stone surface is unclear, and could only be resolved through further excavation. However, TP9 did contain a more coherent cobbled surface and TP12 another possible expedient surface. The area of Park Avenue would benefit from further excavation to add to the story of early settlement in Hexham.

Results

Spit	Type of deposit	Description	Commments and photos
(100)	Spit	**Soil:** Dry, friable, damp in places. Light greyish brown; darker brown where damp; silty sand (30:70) **Inclusions:** Small sub-rounded stones <5% (10-60mm); small fragments of charcoal **Contamination:** frequent fine roots; **How dug:** Spade for turf removal; trowel. **Finds**: pottery sherds (17th-18c); metal working slag; clay pipe (one burnt); Fe nails; CBM; broken horse shoe; animal bone; tile; mortar **Special finds**: none **Distance from top of context:** 0-100mm	Homogenous topsoil below turf.  Base of spit (100), looking south  Sketch plan spit (100) post-ex, north to top
(101)	Spit	**Soil:** Dry, friable light greyish brown, silty sand (30:70); patches of darker brown silty sand (50:50), small clay lens in south **Inclusions:** Rare small sub-rounded stones <5% (10-20mm), medium sub-rounded stones <2% (20-50mm); **Contamination:** occasional fine roots, worms **How dug:** Hand trowel **Finds**: clay pipe; pottery sherds (17c.-19c.); animal tooth; Fe nail; CBM; tile; lime mortar; broken plastic; metal working slag; coal fragments; flint; ?worked stone/fossil **Special finds**: none	Darker more silty area in west containing plastic possibly from more recent tree/shrub removal in orchard area.  Base of spit (101), looking south

		Distance from top of context: 100-200mm.	 Sketch plan spit (101) post-ex
(102)	Spit	**Soil:** Friable, mid-dark yellowish brown silty sand (30:70), light greyish brown patches sandy silt (40:60), discrete dark brown silty area in north-east corner **Inclusions:** frequent small sub-rounded stones <30% (<20mm), infrequent medium sub-rounded stones <2% (<50mm), charcoal flakes and pieces **Contamination:** fine and medium roots **How dug:** Hand trowel **Finds**: pottery sherds; clay pipe; glass fragments; lime mortar; CBM; slag; coke **Special finds**: None. **Distance from top of context:** 200-300mm in half section	Test pit half-sectioned N-S and eastern half excavated to depth of 300mm from surface. Darker patch N-E corner possible result of tree/shrub planting. Increase in number of stones possible expedient surface.  Base of spit (102), looking west  Sketch plan spit (102) post-ex

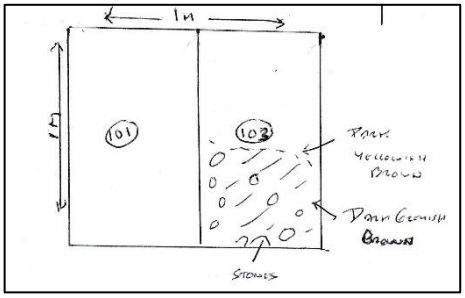
(103)	Spit	**Soil:** Dry and friable, mid-dark yellowish brown silty sand (30:70), dark greyish brown patches, clay lenses; discrete darker brown more silty area in north-east corner **Inclusions:** sub-rounded stones 10% (40-50mm) well sorted, charcoal and coal pieces and flakes **Contamination:** rare roots **How dug:** Trowel **Finds**: Tudor green pottery sherd; glazed pottery sherds; clay pipe stem **Special finds**: none **Distance from top of context:** 300-500mm in half section	Darker silty corner possible edge of a small pit. Natural not reached.  Base of spit (103), looking north  Sketch plan spit (103) post-ex



Figure 6 TP13 under excavation among fruit trees



Figure 7 The Park Avenue Team: TPs 9, 12 and 13