Community Archaeology North CIC (CANCIC): Test Pit CHAP TP4

Location of Test Pit: 10 Quatre Bras, Hexham, NE46 3JY
Owner:
Date of Excavation: 19/7/2025 to 20/7/2025
Area of Excavation: 1.0m x 1.0m
Weather conditions: Overcast and dry until 12:30 then heavy rain on day 1 with overnight rain and sunny and occasionally overcast on day 2.
Excavators: Andy Parsons, Christine Ward, Rob Handyside, Rhonda Handyside, Jean Blaylock (both days), Delia Barnes, Mahli Barnes, Hilina Barnes (Day 1), Steve Cunningham (Day 2)
Report: AP based on team recording
GPS location and height above sea-level, mOD: 92864, 64343; 70 mOD

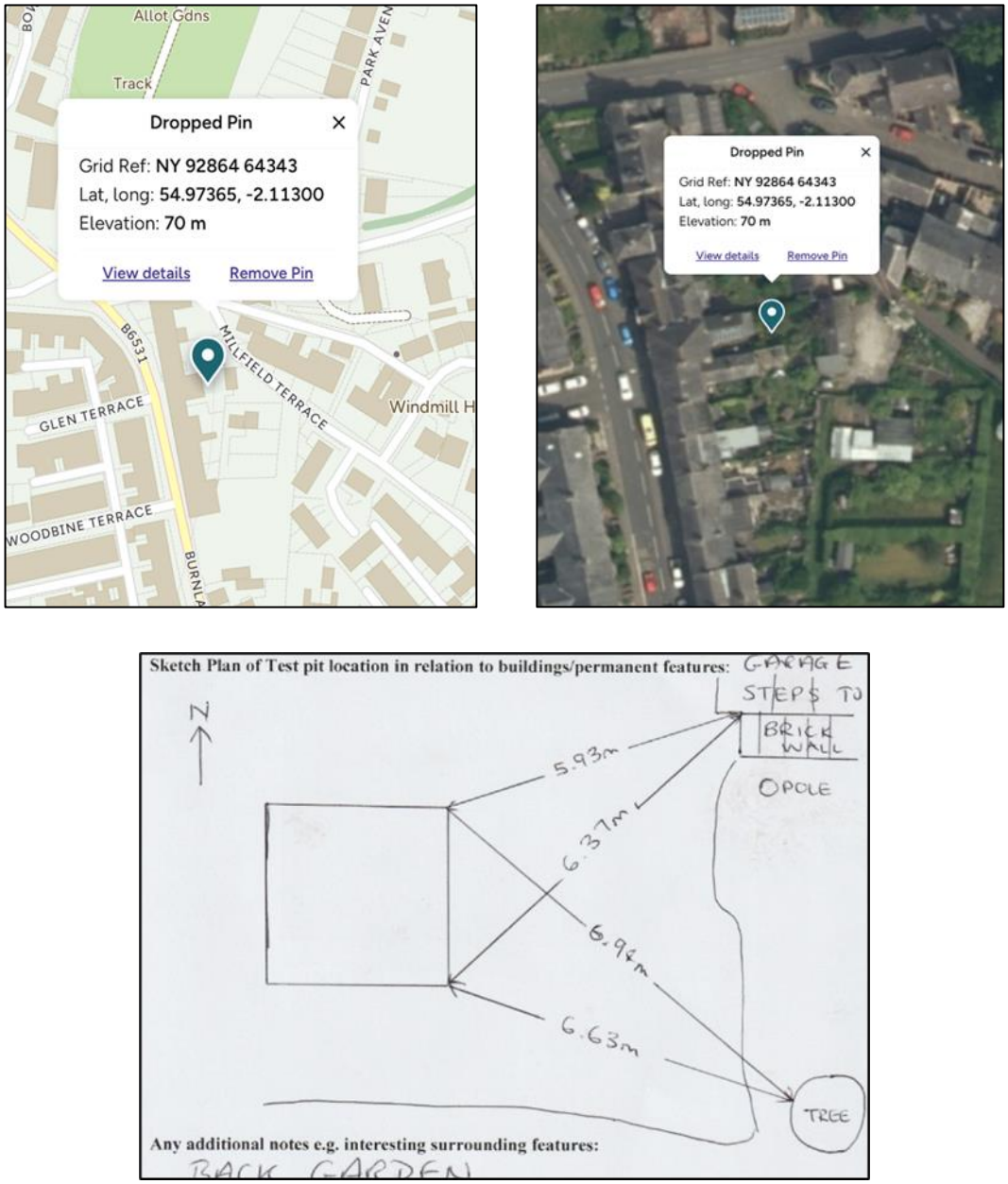


Fig. 1: location of TP4 on explore.osmaps.com and recording sheet

Introduction

Quatre Bras (four arms) is at an old crossroads to the West of Hexham. There is no identified evidence of this name prior to the 1826 mapping by Wood. The area is perhaps named after the famous battle of Quatre Bras the day before Waterloo in 1815 so the name may have originated after this time. However, the area was also the meeting of four routes – four arms – so the name may have older origins

On the 1826 map there are 3 buildings visible: an inn at the crossroads and then, going south along the main road towards the old main west-east road south of Hexham, another two separate buildings, one of which is locally understood to have been a farmhouse. The main road continues north then west along the Tyne with another road going west; the eastern road splits into two both of which arms end up at Holy Island in Hexham at the end of Gilesgate. Before it was absorbed into the tannery quarter Holy Island may have been a market on the way to the original Tyne crossing. This road splits north and south around Windmill Hill with the southern branch Cockshaw Loaning, on the 1853 map, going down to the burn and past the tanneries.

Cockshaw Loaning (Lane) formed the back of the Quatre Bras properties before turning away, with the area between it and the main north road as fields and orchards apart from the narrow V which was blank in 1826 but had developed as continuous buildings with gardens by 1853. This was the situation in 1870 but by 1890 there was development on the other side of Cockshaw Lane and by 1920 Quatre Bras had been joined to Hexham with continuous infill.

The existing 10 Quatre Bras is not old enough to have existed in 1826, although the back end of the house may have been a small, unmarked building as it is older than the street frontage. However,9 Quatre Bras is thought to have originally been a farmhouse. The back garden where the test pit was located would have been between the buildings with the orchard marked on the maps along the side of Cockshaw Lane within the blank V mentioned above.



Fig. 2a: Extract from Wood Hexham 1826



Fig. 2B: Rawlinson 1853 Survey Extract

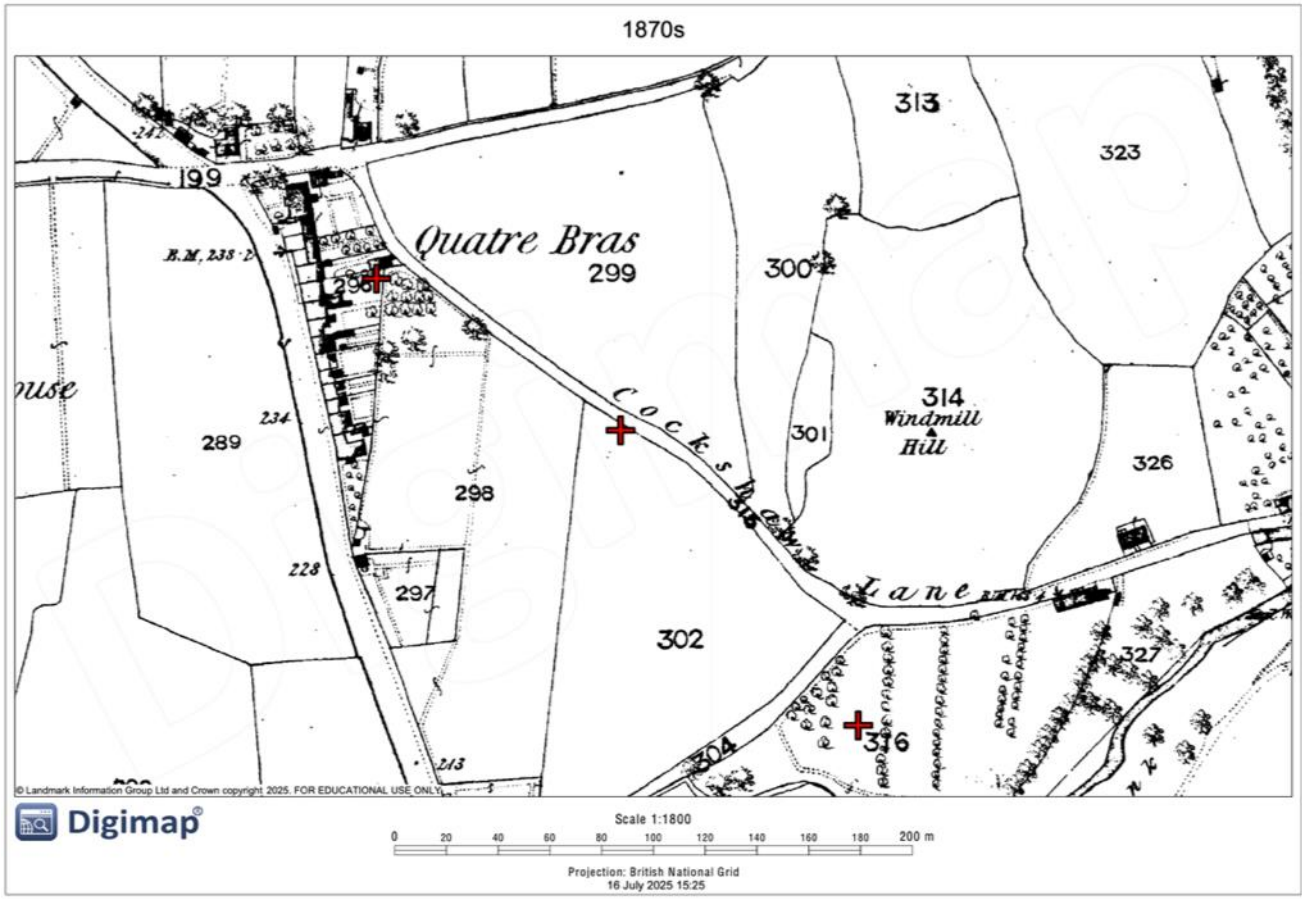


Fig. 3: Digimap Hexham 1870

Excavation Summary

TP4, one metre square, was dug in the rear garden on the house across a narrow diagonal track the length of the garden from the SW (steps down to the garage) to NE (back door), with a slight dip and longer lusher grass along its length. This passed close to a roughly circular depression to the SE of the diagonal track which was thought by the householder Jean Blaylock to be the site of an old well.

The first spit 100 comprised loose dry garden soil with some damper dark patches to the SE and NW across where the track crossed the spit with <10% small, rounded stones. The finds from this layer consisted of glass, sherds of pottery, a lead lump and section of pipe, CBM, sandstone, small fragments of bones and animal teeth, clay pipe stems, rusted iron nails and slag and what appeared to be a rusted tanged iron blade.

The nature of the next spit 101 was like that above with the darker damp areas in the SE and NW continuing down and being joined by another damper area in the SW corner. There were again <10% small, rounded stones however there was 20% slate mainly concentrated in the damper dark areas especially in the E side. The finds from this spit were as above glass including parts of a glass bottle, shards of pottery, CBM, bones and animal teeth, clay pipe stems, rusted iron nail and broken slate. However, most of the slate, bones and pottery came from the darker areas on the E of the spit indicating that this may have been a rubbish pit.

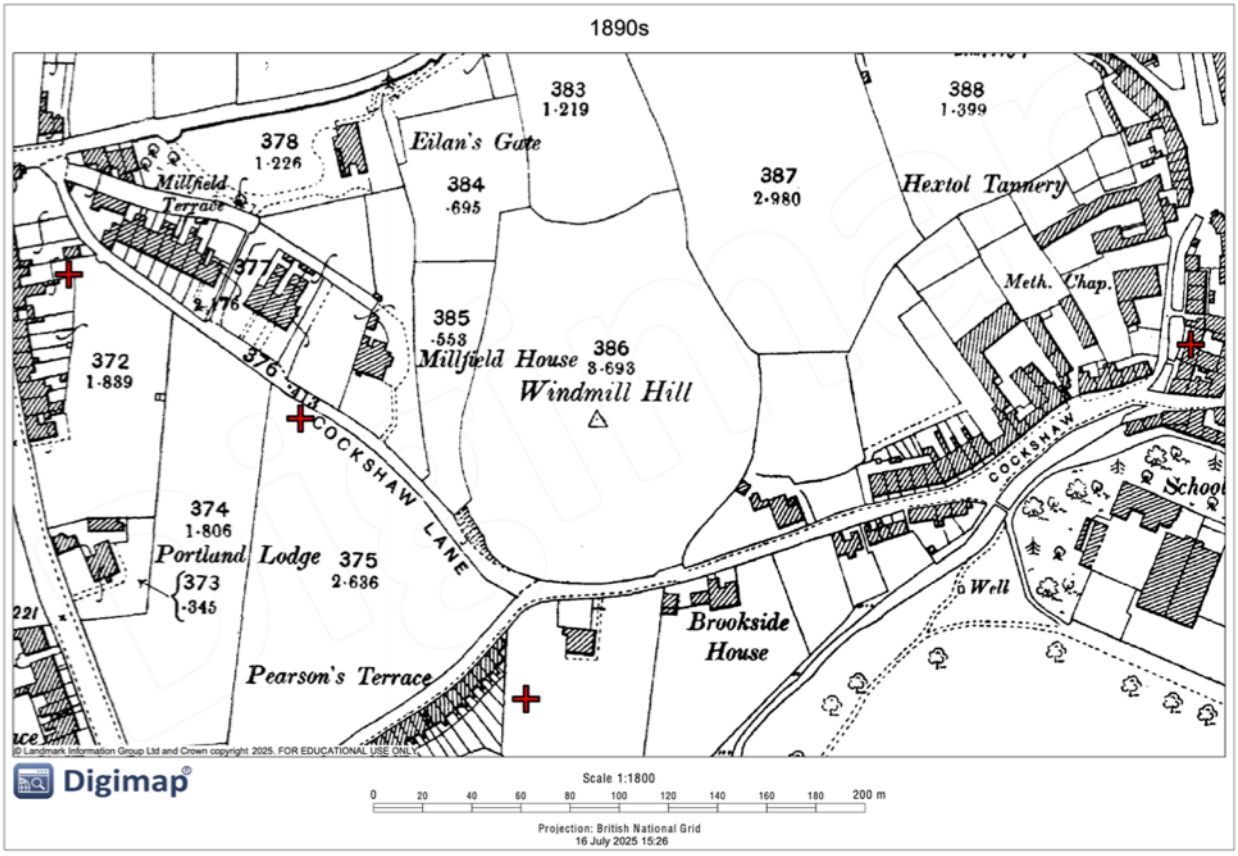


Fig. 4: Digimap 1890

Due to the weather, it had been necessary to abandon activity after lunch on the first day so to ensure that sufficient depth was reached a sondage was put into the S half of the test pit. Thus spit 102 is a sondage of the S half of the test pit. The nature of the dryer soil in the spit was like the spits above but with <1% rounded stones and similar but fewer finds including coal. The darker area in the W showed as a narrow cut in the E facing section directly under the diagonal track with <5% broken slate whereas the two E darker areas joined up and consisted of 50% broken slate and few other finds.

Spit 103 continued the sondage of the S half of the test pit. The nature of this spit was similar to spit 300 with 50% broken slate in the E and <5% in the W and <5% small rounded sones. There were fewer finds again but again they were mostly in the darker damp areas and included a decorative wooden moulding, coal,

charcoal and lime wash along with the finds normal to spits above with a full-length rib bone below the slate in the E. The spit showed a distinct slate layer in the E of the sondage beneath which the nature of the soil changed from dark brownish grey sandy silt to dark brownish brown silty sand which was uniform across the sondage. This under slate level had fewer finds and was the layer from which the rib bone was extracted and appeared to be below the level of the potential pits.

Spit 104 took the sondage down into the uniform sandy silt layer which was uniform and slightly damp with 2% rounded stones <70mm. There were finds of bone, glass, coal, charcoal, pottery, clay pipe and CBM but very few.

Spit 105 was like spit 104 above but was more friable and had some clay becoming evident towards the bottom with 5-10% rounded/sub rounded stones <70mm and 5-10% charcoal. The few finds included clay pipe, bone, charcoal, coal, CBM, pottery and shattered stone.

All the spoil was 100% sieved and the spoil heap was checked by metal detector.

Conclusion

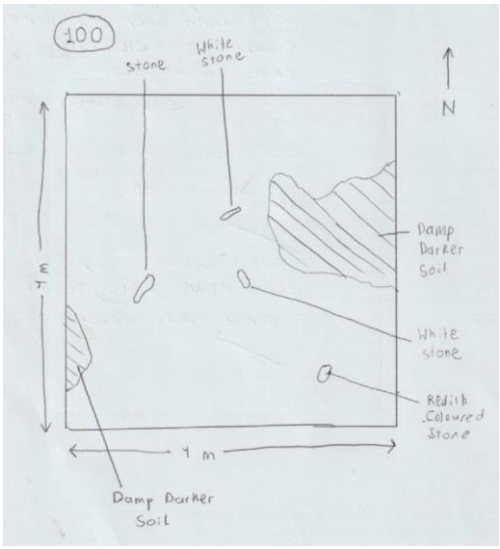
The 1826 map above shows 3 structures along the road known as Quatre Bras: from local knowledge s an inn at the crossroads and potentially 2 farms with 10 Quatre Bras probably not existing, although the area that was built on may have been either part of the inn or a farm. Then on the 1853 map there is a structure shown on the location of 10 Quatre Bras and in 1870 the location of the test pit is shown as in a garden next to an orchard.

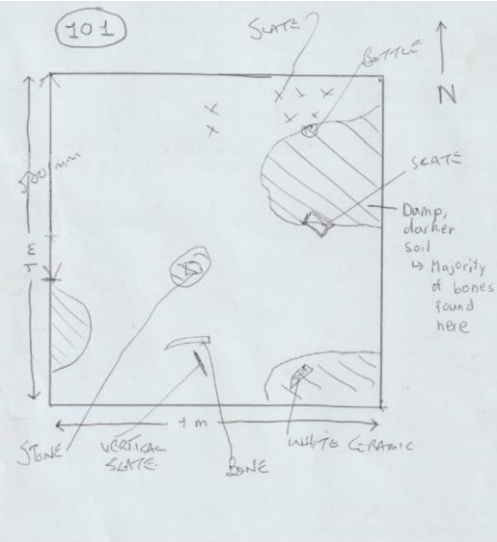
Overall, there would appear to be 3 levels indicated by the test pit. A base layer of silty sand potentially with some clay coming in below with limited finds which may indicate that this was not natural and relates to a time when the area was not heavily built up but near to buildings, possibly the inn and a farm. Above this was the first layer of sandy silt (garden soil) with finds associated with more intensive occupation which may indicate that it was already a garden for a house. This layer had pits or ditches dug into it holding animal bones and a large quantity of broken slate roofing tiles and CBM with a shape which resembled pointing around roof tiles. This was then overlain with another layer of silty sand (garden soil) which was sealing the ditches or pits.

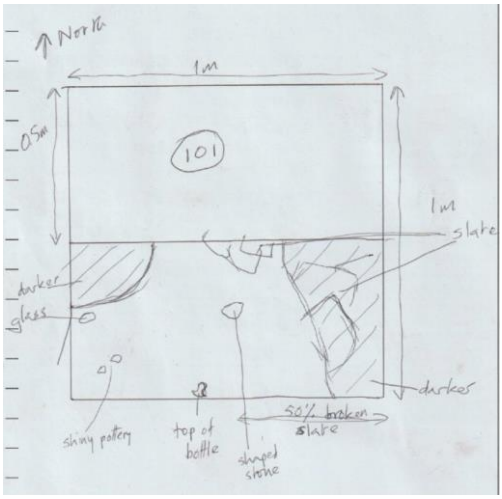
From discussions with Jean Blaylock and looking at the house's architecture, it was evident that the rear of the house was older than the street frontage and that its roof had been raised at some point in the past to allow windows and full height in a second storey. It seems likely that this was the point at which the broken slates and CBM in the pits were deposited as building rubble with the newer garden being laid over the pits and the well. This implies that the original building probably had a slate roof.

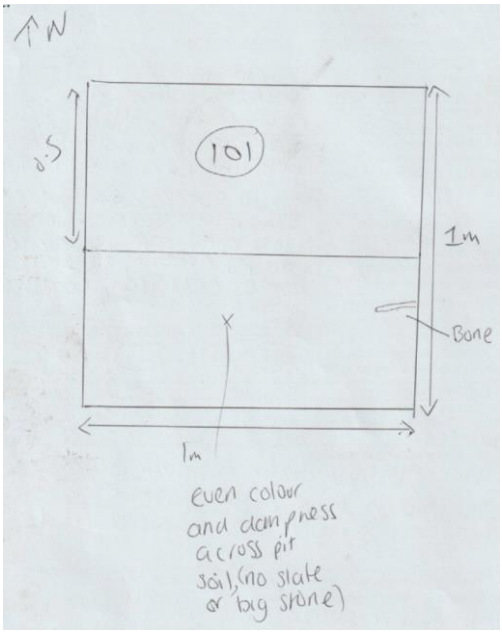
It seems unlikely that a small building would be roofed in slate, which is not local and probably came from Wales, prior to the arrival of the railway to Hexham in the 1830's. This could then give an earliest date for a building (house) with a garden on the site which would tie in with buildings showing in 1853 but not 1826. Also given that the 1853 map indicates that Quatre Bras was not on mains water at this time and that this is unlikely to have happened until the developments linking it to Hexham had occurred - sometime after 1870 - it is likely that a well would have been of use when that initial slate roofed building was constructed. Then at some time, either when the roof was raised or the house was extended, the house had access to mains water and the well could be filled in and a garden laid over the top.

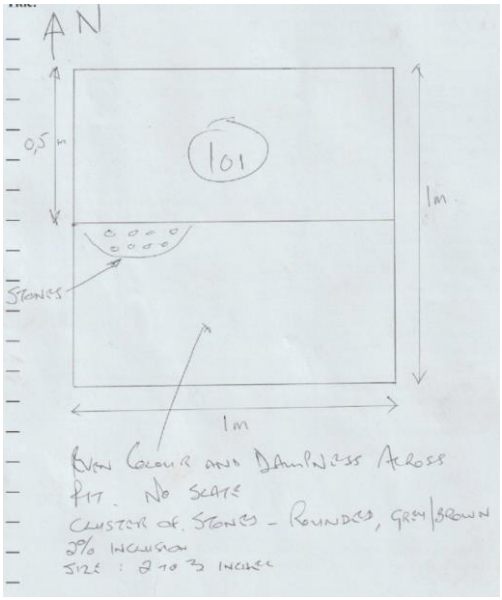
Results

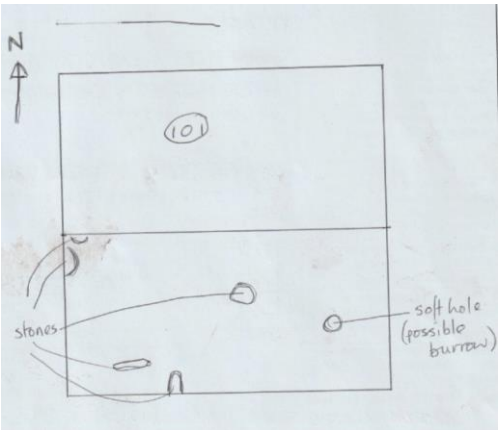
Spit	Type of deposit	Description	Comments and photo
(100)	spit	**Soil:** Loose dry Mid Brownish Grey, with damper patches Dark Brownish Grey. Sandy Silt (10:90). **Inclusions: <**10% small mainly rounded stones (90% <10mm, 10% 10-30 mm) **Contamination:** Light roots, small worms **Finds:** Glass, ceramic, lead pipe, CBM, bone, sandstone, clay pipe stem, slate, lead slag, iron nails, iron lump and slag, animal tooth (ruminant and possible pig), iron tool with tang (possible knife) **Special finds:** iron tool with tang (possible knife) **Distance from top of context:** Ground level to 100mm **How excavated:** Spade to take off grass and Trowel down to 100mm	Homogenous garden soil with small inclusions and finds evenly spread throughout spit with darker patches diagonally across SW to NE appearing to underly the track noted in the lawn.  

(101)	spit	**Soil:** Loose dry, Mid Brownish Grey with Dark Brownish Grey areas. Sandy Silt split (10:90) ***Inclusions:*** **<**10% small mainly rounded stones (90% <10mm, 10% 10-30 mm), 20% slate **Contamination:** Roots, small worms **Finds:** Bone, iron nails, ceramic, CBM, slate, glass, clap pipe stem, glass bottle **Special finds:** none **Distance from top of context: 100**mm down to 200mm below ground **How excavated: Trowel** down to 200mm 	Garden soil similar to spit 100 above except in and around darker areas two of which were aligned on the SW to NE track with an additional patch the SE corner towards the suspected well. Finds were few outside darker patches which contained a lot of broken slate, ceramics and bones. Potentially this was rubbish infill to a mix of ditch and pits. 

(102)	Spit	**Soil:** Loose dry, Mid Brownish Grey, with patches Dark Brownish Grey damp patches Sandy Silt (10:90) **Inclusions: East** dark patch and central of N face of sondage cut 50% broken slate. West dark patch of sondage <5% broken slate. Central area <1% rounded stones 10-50mm **Contamination:** rooted and worms **Finds:** CBM, ceramic (glazed and unglazed), clay pipe stem, bone, shaped stone, coal, degraded sandstone, glass bottle neck, slate, glass, iron nail, tooth (possibly horse) **Special finds:** None **Distance from top of context: 200**mm down to 300mm **How excavated: Trowel**  	Sondage of Southern half of test pit. Darker areas continued down as seen in the photos below. The E facing section shows a narrower dark cut going down and had few finds. The West facing section of the sondage was all dark and was mostly broken slate with fewer other finds and the lighter area had similar finds to 101 above. The quantity of slate tends to indicate it was the rubble from building work either when the house was built or when it was extended or the roof was raised. This was then dumped in a pit or trench.  View of E facing section of sondage  View of W facing section of sondage

(103)	spit	**Soil:** Loose damp dark brownish brown Silty sand (10:90). **Inclusions:** E side 50% broken slate, west side <5% broken slate, 5% small, rounded stones <20mm. **Contamination:** worms and roots **Finds:** decorative wooden moulding, slate (one with nail hole), glass bottle top, glass, clay pipe stem, glazed ceramic, rib bone, CBM, iron, coal, charcoal, lime wash **Special finds:** none **Distance from top of context: 300**mm down to 400mm **How excavated: Trowel** 	Distinct slate layer in East of sondage beneath which the nature of the soil changed and was more uniform across the pit. Some finds including bone but fewer. Potentially rubble backfill into preexisting pit / trench. 

(104)	spit	**Soil:** Loose damp dark brownish brown silty sand (10:90) **Inclusions: 2**% rounded stones <70mm **Contamination:** worms, roots **Finds:** bone, glass, coal, ceramic, clay pipe stem, charcoal, CBM **Special finds:** none **Distance from top of context:** 400mm down to 500mm **How excavated: Trowel** 	Sandy loam with few distinguishing inclusions or finds.  View of N facing section  View of E facing section  View of W facing section

(105)	spit 1	**Soil:** Friable damp dark brownish brown silty sand (10:90) with possible clay at bottom **Inclusions:** 5-10% rounded/sub rounded stones <70mm, 5-10% charcoal **Contamination:** worms, roots, possible burrow **Finds:** clay pipe stem, bone, charcoal, CBM, coal, unglazed ceramic, shattered stone **Special finds:** none **Distance from top of context:** 500mm down to 600mm **How excavated: Trowel** 	Sandy loam with few distinguishing inclusions or finds that became more clayish at the bottom.

References

Ordnance Survey Online (2025). Available at: https://explore.osmaps.com/location?lat=55.30342&lon=-1.79473 (accessed: 21 July 2025)

Rawlinson, R. (1853) Report to the General Board of Health Hexham Local History Society Available at: https://www.hexhamhistorian.org//wp-content/uploads/2020/12/HexhamSurveyOriginalImage.pdf (accessed:22 July 2025)

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