**Community Archaeology North CIC (CANCIC): Test Pit CHAP25 TP12**

**Location**: 6 Park Avenue, Hexham, NE46 3EN
**Owner:**
**Date of excavation**: 13-14 September 2025
**Area of excavation:** 1.0m x 1.0m
**Weather conditions:** Mostly sunny, occasional heavy showers
**Excavators:** Rob Handyside, Rhonda Handyside, Steve Cunningham, Lorna Swan Graham, Katherine Wright, Bennie Wright, Jane Brantom
**Report:** SM and the Team
**Location grid reference and height above sea-level, mOD:** NY93014 64481 66mOD

## Introduction




**Figure 1 Aerial photograph showing TP12 location**

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 12 was excavated to the rear of the allotment gardens east of 6 Park Avenue, Hexham (Figure 1) within an area of orchard.

Figure 2 shows the test pit location in relation to the adjacent chestnut tree and greenhouse.

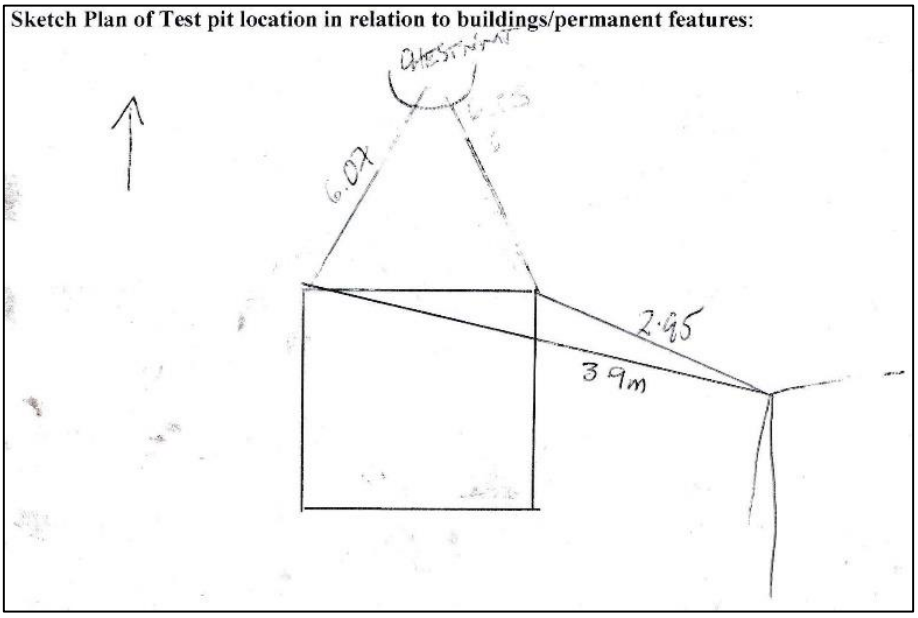



**Figure 2 Measured location of TP12**

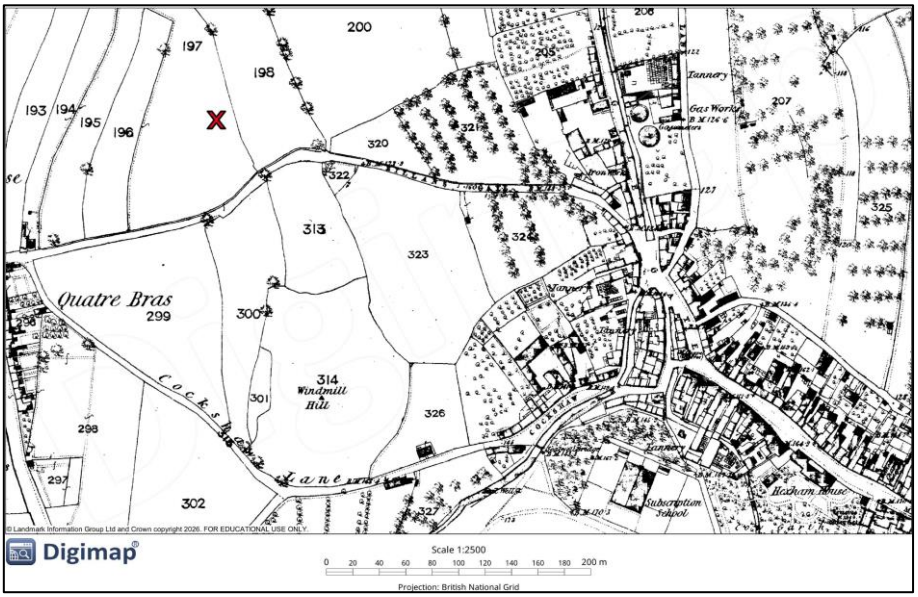



**Figure 3 Location of TP12 1860s edition OS map**

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 3) 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 4). Development to the north of Eilansgate is evident in 1920s edition OS map (Figure 5), 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.

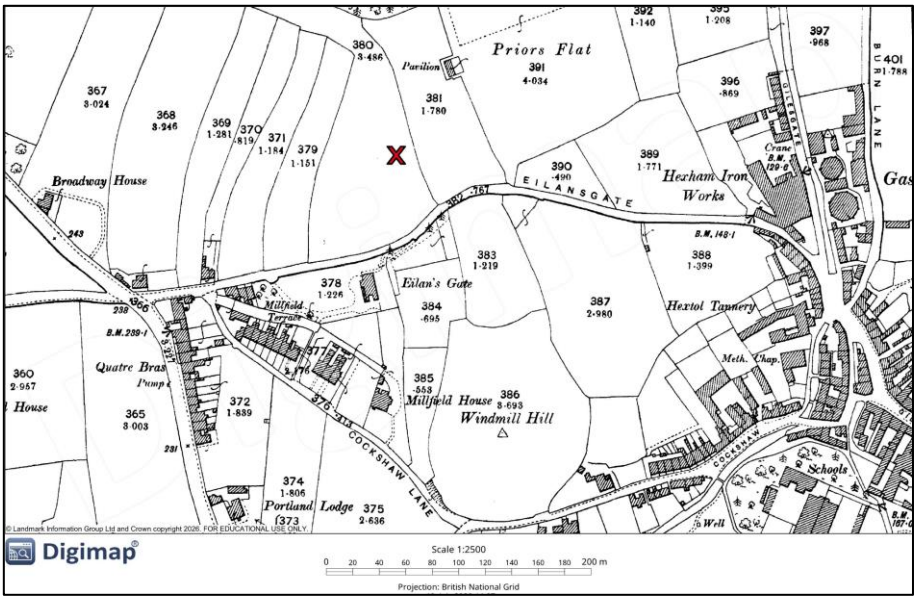



**Figure 4 Location of TP12 1890s edition OS map**

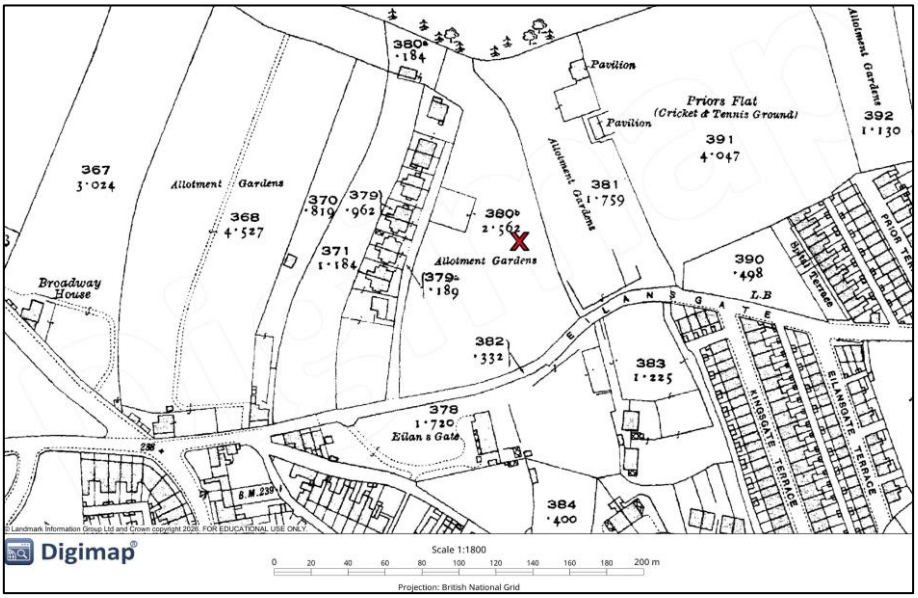



**Figure 5 Location of TP12 1920s edition OS map**

## Excavation Summary

The test pit was excavated using hand trowels in 100mm spits to natural at a depth of approximately 0.4m. Excavated soil was 100% sieved and all finds recorded. The spoil heap was regularly checked using a hand held Garrett metal detecting pointer. The test pit

location was within an established area of allotments and orchard and this was reflected in the hummic soils in the upper spits.

Following hand de-turfing Spit (100) was friable mid blackish brown sandy silt with frequent fine grass roots, rare (<5%) small stones (10-50mm) and fragments of coal and slate. Finds included 7 pieces of clay pipe stem, 2 iron nails, glass fragments and melted/fused glass, 2 glazed 18c. pot sherds, a blue glazed pot sherd, and very small fragments of brown and white pottery.

Spit (101) was dry, friable and increasingly sandy silt towards 0.2m depth. Stone inclusions broadly reflected those in Spit (100) and grass roots were fewer with depth. The base of a broken wooden stake in the west of the excavated area was consistent with planting of a tree or shrub which had since died or been removed. Finds were in higher quantities, with 25 pottery sherds, 6 clay pipe stems and 3 clay pipe bowls, 1 iron nail and a metal clasp as well as a number of glass fragments. These are consistent with the test pit being in or close to an area of domestic occupation with homogenous soils.

Spit (102) differed from those above with lighter, less homogenous sandy silt soil and an irregular damper, darker area in centre and south-east of the excavated area. A reddish-brown, iron rich patch of soil was visible in the north-east. Stones increased in quantity and size, with around 20% sub-rounded stones and 20% sub-angular stones (50-80mm) suggesting a possible surface. Proximity to a metal working area was suggested by the presence of a quantity of slag and further clay pipe stems. In addition to these were animal bone and teeth as well as a broken bone button and a 16$^{th}$ c. pottery sherd.

Increasing evidence of nearby metal working, although likely not in situ, was provided in spit (103) by 15 pieces of different types of slag as well as nails, a hooked iron item and a broken knife blade along with charcoal and coal. The damper, darker patch persisted through the spit revealing a cut feature filled with more hummic soil than the surrounding sandy silt with reddish-brown patches. This was likely a root hole from the planting of a tree or shrub in the orchard garden, possibly associated with the broken wooded stake in spit (101). Decorated pipe bowl fragments and a copper alloy harness or strap fitting may provide dating information, and 13 pottery sherds, animal bone and oyster shells further suggest nearby domestic activity. Well-sorted, rounded stones (60-70mm) suggested the presence of a dispsered and disrupted cobble surface (see image below).

Spit (104) was initially half-sectioned N-S and eastern half removed to explore the possible cobbled surface and the cut feature. This latter was surrounded by larger stones, likely associated with the planting process as well as charcoal pieces and flakes. At upper levels the soil was firm, mid greyish brown sandy silt becoming increasingly mid-yellowish brown silty sand with depth. The eastern half of the test pit contained more than 50% well-sorted, sub-rounded and rounded pebbles (60-70mm) and 25% sub-angular stones (10-60mm). These did not have the appearance of a deliberately placed packed cobbled surface and may have been a natural deposit of riverine pebbles over the iron-rich sandstone natural at the base. The only find in this spit was one animal tooth. Once natural was reached the western half of the spit was also removed.

**Conclusions**

The finds and nature of the soil in TP12 were consistent with this being an area of domestic and light industrial metal working activity prior to being used as agricultural fields and allotments. In conjunction with results from nearby TP9 and TP13 it seems likely that the ridge upon which Park Avenue now sits was the location of an early small farm or collection of small holdings for which we have no documentary evidence. The pottery identified during excavation dates from the 16th and 18th centuries, with nothing more recent. This is consistent with historic map evidence for the area being one of open fields and allotments up until the early twentieth century.

The metal working evidence in spits (102) and (103) suggests nearby small-scale work, likely a smithy associated with the farmstead where horse shoeing and small-scale work were carried out.

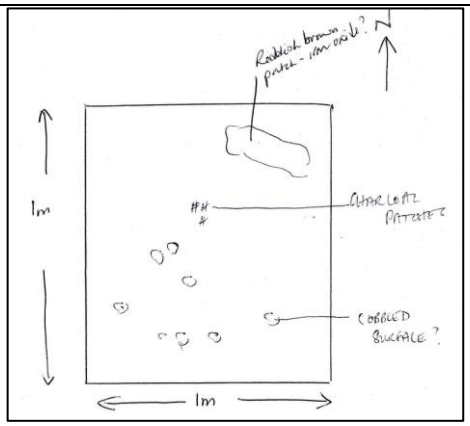
The evidence for possible cobbled surface is unclear and could only be resolved through further excavation. It may be a natural deposit which was utilised for hard standing, or could have been badly disrupted by subsequent agricultural and orchard-related planting (as evidence by the broken stake and cut feature). The evidence for a more organised packed cobble surface at a similar depth in TP9 and another possible expedient surface in TP13 close-by provides an interesting comparison.

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:** Friable, firm in places. Mid blackish brown. Sandy silt (10:90)<br>**Inclusions:** Small sub-angular limestone < 5% (10-50mm), sub-rounded stones <5% (10-50mm); small fragments of coal and slate<br>**Contamination:** frequent fine roots; worms<br>**How dug:** Spade for turf removal, hand trowel.<br>**Finds**: clay pipe stem x7; 18c. glazed pot sherd x2; blue glazed pot sherd; white and brown glazed pot very small sherds; glass fragments; melted/fused glass x1; Fe nails x2<br>**Special finds**: none<br>**Distance from top of context:** 0-100mm | Moderately compacted garden topsoil below turf.<br><br>Base of spit (100), looking north |

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| (101) | Spit | **Soil:** Dry, fine, friable mid greyish brown, sandy silt (40:60)<br>**Inclusions:** Small sub-angular fragments of limestone <5% (20-50mm), sub-rounded stones <10% (20-50mm)<br>**Contamination:** occasional fine and medium roots, worms. Remains small broken wooden stake in west.<br>**How dug:** Hand trowel<br>**Finds**: clay pipe stem x6; clay pipe bowl fragments x 3; Fe nail x1; metal clasp (2cm) x1; glazed pottery sherds x25; glass fragments, clear and coloured peach and green x8;<br>**Special finds**: none<br>**Distance from top of context:** 100-200mm. | Homogenous garden/orchard topsoil with infrequent stones, remains of a tree stake in western side. Quantity of pottery sherds and clay pipe fragments suggest an area of domestic or agricualtural acivity.<br><br>Base of spit (101), looking north |
| (102) | Spit | **Soil:** Friable, dry, light-mid greyish brown sandy silt (40-60), discrete damper, irregular dark brown area from centre to south east, reddish brown patch in north east<br>**Inclusions:** sub-rounded stones <20% (50-80mm), sub-angular stones <20%, charcoal patches<br>**Contamination:** infrequent fine roots<br>**How dug:** Hand trowel<br>**Finds**: clay pipe stems x6; metal working slag; animal bone fragments, animal teeth, broken bone button; mortar, 16c pottery sherds<br>**Special finds**: None.<br>**Distance from top of context:** 200-300mm. | Soil lighter and less homegenous with depth, evidence of metal working not present at higher levels. Possible associated area of reddish brown iron oxide. Increasing quanity of stones, possible remains of cobbled surface.<br><br>Base of spit (102), looking north |

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| | | | <br>Sketch plan of spit (102) post-excavation |
| (103) | Spit | **Soil:** Friable, dry with discrete damper patch in centre, mid greyish brown sandy silt (30:70), reddish brown iron oxide patches<br>**Inclusions:** sub-rounded stones 25% (60-70mm) well sorted, charcoal and coal pieces and flakes<br>**Contamination:** infrequent fine roots<br>**How dug:** Trowel<br>**Finds**: variety of slag pieces x15; glass fragments x3; pig tooth; animal bone; Fe nails x3; ?broken knife fragment; hooked Fe object; clay pipe stem and bowl fragments x6; pottery sherds x13; glass bottle neck; oyster shells<br>**Special finds**: Copper alloy harness/strap fitting<br>**Distance from top of context:** 200-300mm. | Well-sorted, rounded stones suggested a dispsered and disrupted cobble surface. Increasing evidence of nearby metal working, although likely not in situ. Damp area possibly due to overnight rain revealing cut feature containing more humic soil. Possibly root hole from tree/shrub planting in orchard.<br><br>Base of spit (103), looking north-east<br><br>Well-sorted cobbles from spit (103) |

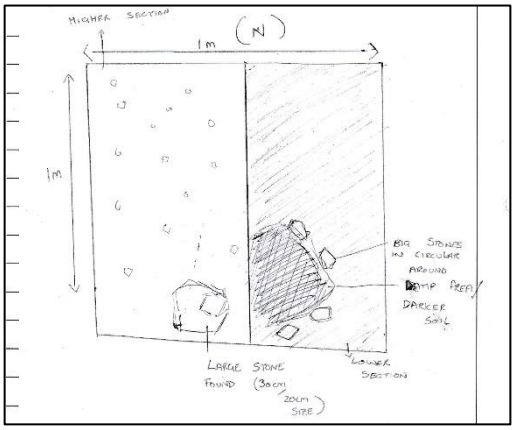
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| (104) | Spit | **Soil:** Firm, compact in places, mid greyish brown sandy silt (40:60) at upper levels, mid-yellowish brown silty sand (30:70) at base<br>**Inclusions:** sub-rounded and rounded pebbles >50% (60-70mm) well sorted; sub-angular stones (10-60mm) <25%; occasional larger sub-angular stones (100-150mm; 200-300mm); charcoal pieces and flakes concentrated around cut feature<br>**Contamination:** infrequent fine roots<br>**How dug:** Trowel and hand shovel<br>**Finds**: animal tooth x1<br>**Special finds**: None<br>**Distance from top of context:** 300-400mm. | Spit initially half-sectioned N-S and eastern half removed to explore possible cobbled surface and cut feature at centre surrounded by larger stones, likely deliberate deposited and associated with tree planting. Natural reached in eastern half, so western half also fully removed. Natural reached below likely natural layer of riverine cobbles and gravel. Iron-rich sandstone at base.<br><br>Spit (104) half-sectioned, looking east<br><br><br>Spit (104) plan at half section<br><br>Spit (104) fully excavated |



**Figure 6 TP12 under excavation**



**Figure 7 TP12 team recording a spit**



**Figure 8 The TP12 team and completed test pit**



**Figure 9 Bennie backfilling**



**Figure 10 The Park Avenue Team: Test pits 9, 12 and 13**