Community Archaeology North CIC (CANCIC): Test Pit CHAP25 TP7

Location of Test Pit: 15 Hextol Terrace, Hexham, NE46 2DF
Owner:
Date of Excavation: 13-14 September 2025
Area of Excavation: 1.0m x 1.0m
Weather conditions: Sunny, dry, occasional showers
Excavators: Tracy McLoughlin, Andrew Waters, Matthew Bacon, Lorraine Clay
Report: SM with Team
Grid reference and height above sea-level (mOD): NY 92958 63708, c.74mOD

Introduction

15 Hextol Terrace is part of terrace of Victorian houses, set back from the road behind long front gardens, creating 'generous and relaxed space', a 'rare commodity' at the end of the nineteenth century (Tynedale Council 2009, 19-20). Hextol Terrace lies on high ground to the west of the abbey and town centre. OS maps show that in the 1860s the land was open fields outside of the built-up area of the town (Figure 1)

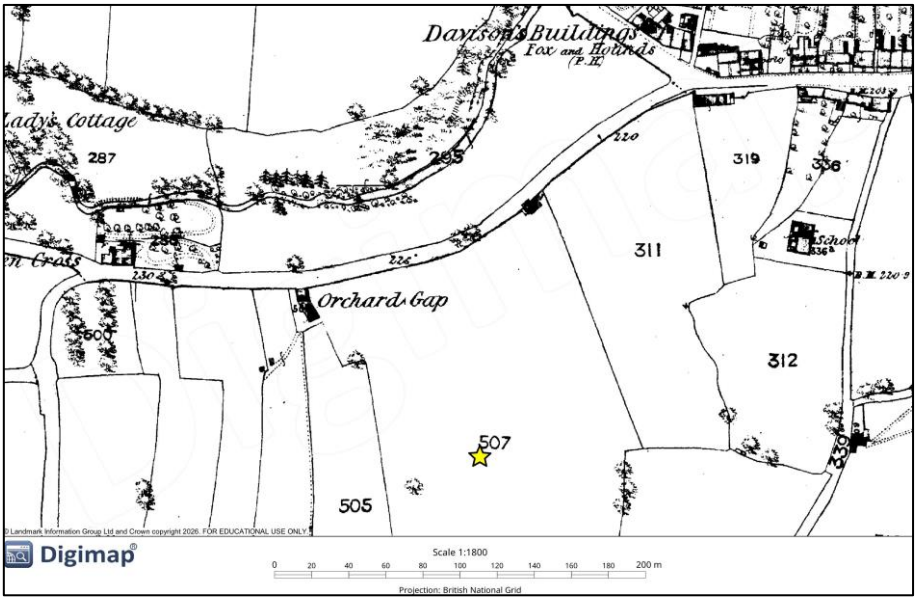


Figure 1 Location of TP8, 15 Hextol Terrace 1860s OS map

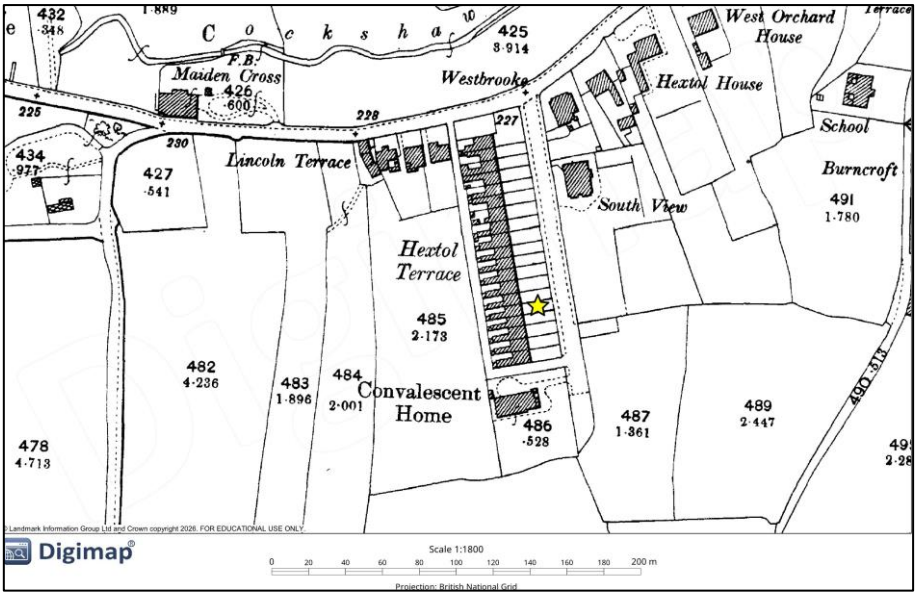


Figure 2 Hextol Terrace 1890s OS map series

By the 1890s, Hextol Terrace has been constructed (Figure 2), along with the adjacent substantial convalescent home Hextol Court built in 1892/93 (Figures 3 & 4) and a number of larger villas set in extensive grounds. The convalescent home became a VAD hospital during the First World War, and a convalescent home again by 1929 (Hextol Court Gallery – Hexham Local History Society) There is little further development nearby by the 1920s map editions, and it is only in the 1970s OS maps that the present level of housing density is apparent.



Figure 3 Hextol Court Convalescent Home



Figure 4 Hextol Court Convalescent Home, 1909

The houses of Hextol Terrace were built shortly after the convalescent home, likely on land originally within its grounds. Test pit 7 was excavated in the front garden of the house, on an uncultivated grassy area between flower beds and hedging (Figure 5).

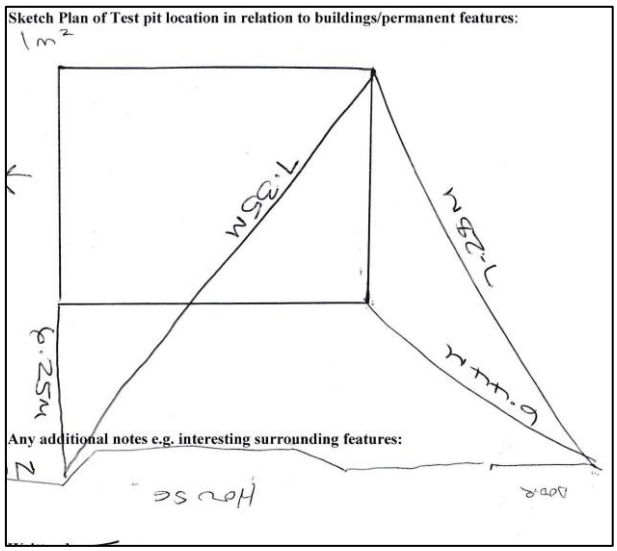


Figure 5 Measured location of TP8, 15 Hextol Terrace

Excavation Summary

The test pit was hand de-turfed and excavated in 100mm spits, using hand trowels and mattocks from a depth of 200mm owing to compacted clay-rich soils. All spoil was 100% hand-sorted or sieved, and all finds recorded.

Spit (100) was firm, and compact in places, light greyish brown clayey silt in north and more hummic and silty in south. The soil contained frequent fine roots form the turf above and rare (<5%) small sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (10-100mm). A large tree root ran

east-west across the centre of the test pit, which was left in situ throughout the excavation. Spit (100) contained the greatest quantity of finds, including a clay pipe stem; animal bone fragments; 19th and 20th pottery sherds; a glass marble and glass fragments. A perforated worked stone weight, either for fishing or for a loom, was found in the north-east corner of the test pit.

Spit (101) was increasingly dry and compact with greater quantities of light yellowish brown clay with depth, particularly in the north of the excavated area. The spit contained rare (<5%) small sub-angular and sub-rounded stones (10-100mm) and frequent fine grass roots. Finds were fewer, but included a 17th century pottery sherd, glass fragments, metalworking slag and a button.

The absence of finds and increasing quantity of clay in the northern half of the test pit persisted through spit (102), requiring a mattock to excavate. A sondage (200mm x 2000mm) was dug in the north-east corner to test the assumption that undisturbed natural had been reached in this area of the test pit. The homogenous nature of the soil and absence of finds suggested that this was the case. In the south-western corner of the excavated area, the soil was darker and more hummic. There were no finds recorded.

In spit (103), the test pit was half sectioned, and the area south of the central large root was excavated to depth of 300mm from surface. The soil in the south-east was a firm and compact, light yellowish silty clay, and increasingly dark greyish brown clayey silt towards the south-western corner. A quadrant of a possible sub-circular darker silty feature was visible in the south-west corner. There were no finds, but burned stone fragments were located in the western area of the pit.

The darker silty cut feature was excavated to a depth of 400mm from the surface and recorded as spit (104). The dark greyish brown clayey silt was increasingly friable and silty with depth and contained coal, CBM and a glazed terracotta coloured pot sherd. The feature had steeply sloping sides and a concave base, and was likely a pit.

The test pit could not be excavated fully to natural owing to time limitations and the compact and difficult nature of the clay soils.

Conclusion

There is an absence of documentary evidence for domestic occupation in the area of Hextol Terrace prior to the late 1890s/1900s. However, the presence of pottery sherds dating from the 17th to 19th centuries and the stone fishing/loom weight suggest occupation prior to the construction of the terrace with its spacious front gardens, and possibly predating the first series of OS maps in the 1860s. The cut feature, likely a pit, in the south-west corner of the test pit supports this assumption.

Results

Spit	Type of deposit	Description	Comments and photos
(100)	Spit	**Soil:** Light greyish brown, firm and compact in places clayey silt (30:70) in north, more hummic/silty in south (20:80) **Inclusions:** rare small sub-angular and sub-rounded stones <5% (10-100mm) **Contamination:** frequent fine grass roots, large tree root E-W across width of test pit **How dug:** spade for turf removal, hand trowel **Finds**: clay pipe stem; animal bone fragments; 19c. 20c. pottery sherds; glass marble; glass fragments **Special finds**: perforated worked stone ?fishing/loom weight **Distance from top of context:** 100mm	Compacted garden soil below turf. Most finds from areas south of large root. Stone weight in N-E corner.  Base of spit (100), looking north
(101)	Spit	**Soil:** Dry, firm and compact in places light greyish brown, light yellowish brown clayey silt (50:50) **Inclusions:** rare small sub-angular and sub-rounded stones <5% (10-100mm) **Contamination:** frequent fine grass roots **How dug:** trowel **Finds**: 17c pottery sherd; glass fragments; metalworking slag; button **Special finds**: None **Distance from top of context:** 200mm	Soil increasingly clay with depth to the north. Fewer finds that earlier spit.  Base of spit (101), looking north
(102)	Spit	**Soil:** Dry, firm and compact light yellowish brown silty clay (30:70) in north of test pit. Friable, dark brown clayey-silt (40:60) in south, darkest in south east corner. **Inclusions:** rare small sub-rounded stones <5% (10-100mm) **Contamination:** rare small roots **How dug:** mattock, shovel, trowel, **Finds**: none **Special finds**: none	Increasingly compact and dry clay soil. Sondage 200mm x 200mm dug to depth of 100mm (300mm from surface) in the NW corner to test whether natural had been reached.

		Distance from top of context: 200mm in spit, 300mm in sondage	 Base of spit (102), looking north  Sondage dug to depth of 300mm, looking east
(103)	Feature	**Soil:** Dry, firm and compact, light yellowish silty clay (30:70) in south-east, increasingly dark greyish brown clayey silt in south-western corner (30:70), darkest in SW corner. **Inclusions:** rare small sub-rounded stones <5% (10-100mm), burned stone fragments **Contamination:** rare fine grass roots **How dug:** trowel, shovel **Finds**: none **Special finds**: none **Distance from top of context:** 300mm	Southern half of test pit excavated to depth of 300mm from surface. Darker sub-circular silty feature in SW corner, possible pit .  Looking east, spit (103) darker silty feature excavated in SW corner
(104)	Feature	**Soil:** Dry, firm and compact, dark greyish brown clayey silt in (30:70), in SW corner, increasingly friable and silty with depth.	Quadrant of sloping sided cut feature in SW corner of test pit.

		Inclusions: coal fragments at base **Contamination:** infrequent fine- medium roots **How dug:** trowel **Finds**: glazed terracotta pot x1, CBM **Special finds**: none **Distance from top of context:** 400mm in feature	 Excavated feature (104) looking south  Excavated feature (104), looking west

References

Tynedale Council 2009, *Hexham Conservation Area Character Appraisal*.