



GEOTECHNICAL PITS IN EGREMONT, CUMBRIA

Archaeological Watching brief



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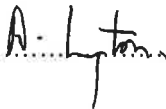
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SUMMARY

WYG Environment Planning Transport Ltd, on behalf of the Environment Agency, requested that Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) provide an archaeological watching brief during Geotechnical investigations conducted in Egremont, Cumbria.

The geotechnical works entailed the excavation of 11 trial pits. The groundworks necessitated permanent archaeological monitoring during the excavation of the test pits in order to determine the presence or absence of below-ground remains.

The work took place between 7th April and 10th April 2015 at two sites, one on pasture land at Howbank Farm north-west of the town, and the other on the playing fields of West Lakes Academy and SASRA Falcon Club.

The stratigraphy of the trial pit sections confirmed that the ground has been made up to level the area for the playing fields with evidence of an extant relict soil horizon. Other than the undated ditch in trial pit TP4G no further archaeology was revealed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank Katie Foster of WYG (WYG) Environment Planning Transport Ltd for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to David Onanuga of WYG for his help on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Steve Clarke, with the drawings produced by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Alan Lupton, who also edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF PROJECT

- 1.1.1 WYG Environment Planning Transport Ltd, on behalf of the Environment Agency, requested that Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) provide an archaeological watching brief during Geotechnical investigations conducted in Egremont, Cumbria.
- 1.1.2 The geotechnical works entailed the excavation of 11 trial pits. The groundworks necessitated permanent archaeological monitoring during the excavation of the test pits in order to determine the presence or absence of below-ground remains.
- 1.1.3 The work took place between 7th April and 10th April 2015 at two sites, one on pasture land at Howbank Farm on the outskirts of the town, and the other on the playing fields of West Lakes Academy and SASRA Falcon Club.
- 1.1.4 The following report documents the results of the archaeological watching brief, and discusses them in their historical and archaeological context.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The sites are situated in the centre of Egremont and on the north-west edge of the town. The site covering the playing fields of West Lakes Academy and the SASRA Falcon Club lies towards the centre of Egremont, Cumbria (Fig 1), to the west of Main Street. Egremont is a small historic town, probably founded in the twelfth century, which lies within the West Cumbrian Coastal Plain, a pastoral landscape that fringes the upland fells to the east (Countryside Commission 1998, 25). The other site is situated to the north-west just north of Howbank Farm.
- 1.2.2 Topographically, the site of the playing fields is situated on fairly flat ground lying at approximately 50m above Ordnance Datum. The solid geology within the proposed development area, as characterised by Ordnance Survey geological mapping, consists of Bockram bedrock, which is overlain by superficial deposits of Devensian till and alluvium. The site at Howbank Farm is in a small vale with steep sides on the south, east and west with a stream on the east boundary.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 **Introduction:** the following section provides a summary account of the archaeological and historical background pertinent to the development site.
- 1.3.2 **Prehistoric:** there is no direct evidence for prehistoric activity within the development site, or within its immediate environs. However, evidence from the wider area suggests that Mesolithic (10,000-3,500 cal BC) communities were active within the eastern Cumbrian uplands and also along the coast, between Haverigg and St Bees, where they were probably exploiting both food

and raw-material resources (Cherry and Cherry 2002, 2-5; Hodgkinson *et al* 2000, 69).

- 1.3.3 Several funerary and ceremonial monuments form evidence of Neolithic (3,500-2,200 cal BC) and Bronze Age (2,200-700 cal BC) activity within the vicinity of Egremont. These include those at Blakely Raise and Studfold, which may be early Bronze Age in date (Burl 2000, 109), as well as monuments that have now been destroyed at Egremont le Wheles, Lamplugh, and Wilton (Waterhouse 1985, 34). A, now destroyed, stone circle (HER 1198) was also located to the south-east of Egremont, and it is possible that this may be the tumulus and circle of ten large stones known as 'Ringing Stones' which was described by Hutchinson in 1794 (CCC 2006, 4). In addition, Ehenside Tarn, located approximately 4km south of Egremont, has produced an abundance of Neolithic cultural material (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000, 71). Finds of Bronze Age stone tools have also been recovered around the Beckermest and Seascale areas, to the south of Egremont (*op cit*, 76), whilst, further to the east, the remains of burial and clearance cairns indicate that the uplands areas were also exploited during the Bronze Age (Quartermaine and Leech forthcoming).
- 1.3.4 During the Iron Age it is possible that the area around Egremont was utilised by later prehistoric communities. Although no direct evidence for this is presently available, possible Iron Age settlements and field systems have been identified across the Solway Plain to the north, and to the east within the uplands of the Lake District (Bewely 1994; Quartermaine and Leech forthcoming).
- 1.3.5 **Roman:** the forts at Ravenglass, to the south, and at Moresby, to the north, are the closest Roman military sites to the development site (Shotter 1993, 44). Although there are no Roman roads recorded running between these two forts, a road ran southwards from Papcastle to the River Ehen near Egremont (*ibid*) and may have continued as far as Ravenglass (Margary 1973, 395–6). A Roman road is also thought to be located at St Thomas's Cross, south-east of Egremont, possibly part of a road running from Thornhill to Blackbeck, and on to Calder (HER 1210; HER 1255). A coin hoard was found at Braystones, south of Egremont, near to the River Ehen, and finds of Romano-British pottery have been found at Eskmeals further south (Bellhouse 1989, 61–3). However, direct evidence for Roman activity within Egremont is confined to a Roman coin of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-61), although the exact location and circumstances of this find are not known (HER 4620).
- 1.3.6 **Medieval:** there is no firm evidence for medieval activity within Egremont prior to the eleventh century. Indeed, the place-name Egremont first appears during the Norman period, and this name may derive from the Latin *acri mons* or the French *aigre mont*, meaning 'sharp-pointed hill'. An alternative derivative is 'hill beside the [river] Ehen', particularly as the Latin for Ehen, in the *Register of St Bees*, is *Egre* (Armstrong *et al* 1971, cited in CCC 2006).
- 1.3.7 Historically, Cumberland did not come under Norman rule until 1092 (Newman 2006, 93), and the Barony of Egremont was one of three estates forming the Forest of Copeland, which was established sometime after 1120

(Todd 1995). The early history of Copeland is not clearly understood, but in the first quarter of the twelfth century, Henry I placed William Meschin as the overlord of Copeland (Fair 1937). William Meschin founded a chapel in Egremont in 1122 and Egremont Castle in *c* 1125 (CCC 2006).

- 1.3.8 A grant of land and privileges to a community of burgesses by Richard de Lucy, the Lord of the Barony of Copeland in *c* 1200 indicates that the urban settlement of Egremont had its origins in the late twelfth century (Winchester 1979). The grant details the agricultural rights of the burgesses, and the duties they were to carry out in return. This grant also mentions '*the assize of dyers, weavers and fullers*', indicating that these industries were taking place by the late twelfth/early thirteenth century. In 1267, Egremont received a royal market charter; the market subsequently serving the area between Workington and Ravenglass (*ibid*). An early, possibly thirteenth-century, market cross was also discovered in 1922, and now stands within the castle grounds (HER 4447). Winchester (1979) has located the core of the medieval settlement as falling on Main Street and it is clear from early nineteenth-century mapping that the area on the western side of Main Street, which extends into the proposed development area, originally contained medieval burgage plots.
- 1.3.9 The fourteenth century represents a period of economic and social instability that was probably caused by several rebellions and feuds in Cumbria, as well as raids from Scotland (Winchester 1987). These attacks were led by Robert the Bruce in the first half of the fourteenth century (Rollinson 1996, 50) and included an assault on Egremont Castle in 1315 (Turnbull and Walsh 1994, 79). In addition, outbreaks of the plague also devastated vast areas during this period (Rollinson 1996, 50).
- 1.3.10 It is known that during the early part of the fourteenth century, John de Multon held the Barony of Egremont from 1322 until his death in 1334. The area was then divided between his three sisters, the rents from the burgesses in Egremont were also divided by three (Winchester 1979).
- 1.3.11 A survey carried out in Egremont in 1334 allows the form of the medieval settlement to be reconstructed to some degree (Curwen 1913; Winchester 1979). Significantly, this survey recorded: the castle; a dovecot; the park below the castle; fisheries; 194 acres of demesne land and 47.5 acres of demesne meadow. Also listed were: 138 burgage plots; a number of waste places, including eight unbuilt burgage plots; two mills, one for fulling and one for corn; and two smithies (*ibid*). An annual fair was held as well as the weekly market, whilst the town's industries seem to have been predominantly associated with the processing of local animal products (Winchester 1979).
- 1.3.12 From the fifteenth century, a series of truces brought relative stability to the area, and by 1578, two-thirds of Egremont had passed to the Percy family, the Earls of Northumberland (Liddell 1966). The Percy Survey of the Copeland Forest was ordered by the then Earl of Northumberland in 1578 (*ibid*). The survey recorded 101 burgage plots in Egremont, as opposed to 138 recorded in the 1330s. This, plus the description of the castle in 1578 as 'almost ruined', suggests that there was a decline in the town between the latter part of the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (Curwen 1913).

- 1.3.13 **Post-Medieval:** during the seventeenth century Egremont and the surrounding areas were partially engaged in the production of linen, wool, and leather goods, some of which were sent to Whitehaven for export to the American markets (Collier 1991, 26-7). By the nineteenth century a number of industrial sites associated with these industries were therefore located within, or close to, the town. These included seven water mills on the banks of the River Ehen and several tanneries (Winchester 1979).
- 1.3.14 In addition to these industries, haematite mining became an important industry within Egremont from the eighteenth century onwards (Lancaster and Wattleworth 1977). This led to the establishment of several mines within Egremont during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which included the late nineteenth-century Falcon Pit mine located within the grounds of West Lakes Academy. This mine was worked by the Wyndham Mining Company and was served by the Gillfoot Branch Railway, which connected the pit with the main line railway line running to Whitehaven (http://www.dmm.org.uk/lom/1914_206.htm).
- 1.3.15 Other significant nineteenth-century sites located within the grounds of West Lakes Academy are plotted on nineteenth-century mapping. The earliest of these sites formed part of a brewery, and was a square outbuilding, which is first depicted on the 1842 tithe map as falling within a plot of land termed 'Brewery Croft'. In contrast, the remaining nineteenth-century sites located within the development area date to the latter part of the nineteenth century. These include two adjacent buildings which are denoted on the 1899 Ordnance Survey map as 'Public Slaughter Houses', and a square building to the east which is denoted as 'Auction Mart' on this map

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 The watching brief comprised the monitoring of the excavation of eleven trial pits, three on pasture land at Howbank Farm, four on the playing field of West Lakes Academy and four on the playing field of SASRA Falcon Club; the precise positioning and size being determined by the client (Fig 2).

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

2.2.1 A permanent archaeological presence was maintained during the excavations. The purpose was to identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains encountered.

2.2.2 A daily record of the nature, extent and depths of groundworks was maintained throughout the duration of the project. All archaeological contexts were recorded on OA North's *pro-forma* sheets, using a system based on that of the English Heritage former Centre for Archaeology. A digital photographic record was maintained throughout.

2.3 ARCHIVE

2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IfA and English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 2006). The paper and digital archive will be deposited in the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle on completion of the project.

3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The objective of the watching brief was to identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains encountered during the excavation of eleven trial pits on two sites situated at Egremont, one in a field at Howbank Farm on the north-west edge of the town, and the second site on the playing fields of West Lakes Academy and SASRA Falcon Club. The following is a summary of the findings. The area of the watching brief is plotted in Figure 2.

Trailpit	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)
TP1A	1.5	0.6	1.7
TP1B	1.9	0.6	1.2
TP1C	1.6	0.6	1.5
TP4A	1.5	0.6	2
TP4B	1.6	0.6	1.8
TP4C	1.6	0.6	2.5
TP4D	1.6	0.6	2
TP4E	2	0.6	1.5
TP4F	1.5	0.6	1.7
TP4G	3	2	2
TP4H	1.9	0.6	2

3.2 RESULTS

3.2.1 Trial pits TP1A, TP1B and TP1C are situated in Site 1, a field to the north of Howbanks farm, and were aligned north/south towards the eastern side of the field. These trial pits have a similar stratigraphy of a shallow sandy clay topsoil over a clayish gravel with frequent inclusions of medium to large sub-angular and sub-rounded stones. The depths of the trial pits are relatively shallow on this site due to the waterlogged nature of the ground causing the sides to collapse. No archaeological features were revealed.



Plate 1: Trial pit TP1B

3.2.2 Trial pits TP4A to TP4H are within Site 4. This site is situated just to the west of Egremont town centre and encompasses the playing fields of the SASRA Falcon Club and West Lakes Academy. The topsoil of all these trial pits is a similar brown friable slightly sandy silty clay. The trial pits showed evidence of redeposited soil and clay over an earlier soil horizon, which is at a depth of over a metre at the north end of the site.



Plate 2: Trail Pit TP4C with extant soil horizon

- 3.2.3 The trial pits revealed no archaeology except TP4G which exposed a shallow ditch running east/west at the north end. The ditch is cut into a firm yellowish gray clay layer (possibly redeposited) overlaying deposit of disturbed gravelly clay. The gravelly clay natural has a depth of 0.3m to 0.4m sloping down to the north. The profile in the west section shows the ditch having shallow concave sides and concave base. The fill is a moderately friable blackish brown silty clay. The ditch appears to be cut into the disturbed subsoil of a previous soil which has been removed to level the ground for the playing field.



Plate 3: Trial Pit TP4G showing section of ditch

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The trial pits excavated on Site 1 revealed the waterlogged state of the site with water running through the natural deposits. This and the lack of evidence of human activity suggest an absence of any archaeology.
- 4.2 The trial pits excavated on Site 4 was undertaken adjacent to an area which has been the focus for human activity from the medieval period onwards (OA North 2009). The trial pits indicate that the ground below the playing fields comprised of made up ground, which increased in depth to the north. The only potential evidence of pre-twentieth-century activity is the shallow ditch at the south end of the site, which shows evidence of truncation due to the ground being levelled down.
- 4.3 It is possible that any archaeological remains may have survived the development of the playing fields, especially towards the north end of the site with evidence of an extant soil horizon below the made up ground

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Site Location Map

Figure 2: Location of trial pits at Site 1

Figure 3: Location of trial pits at Site 4

6.2 PLATES

Plate 1: Trial pit TP1B with collapsed sections

Plate 2: Trail Pit TP4C showing extant soil horizon

Plate 3: Trial Pit TP4G showing section of ditch

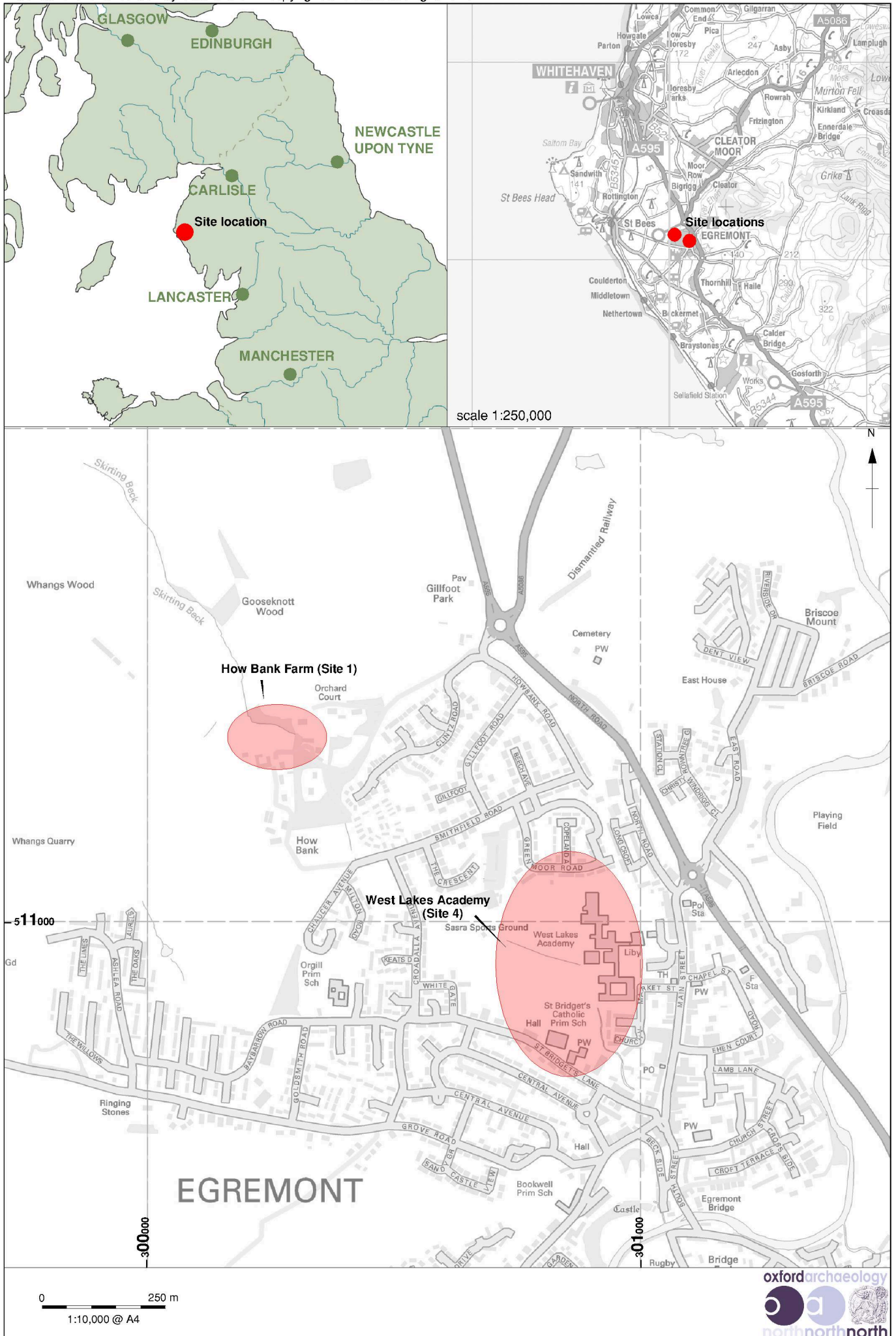
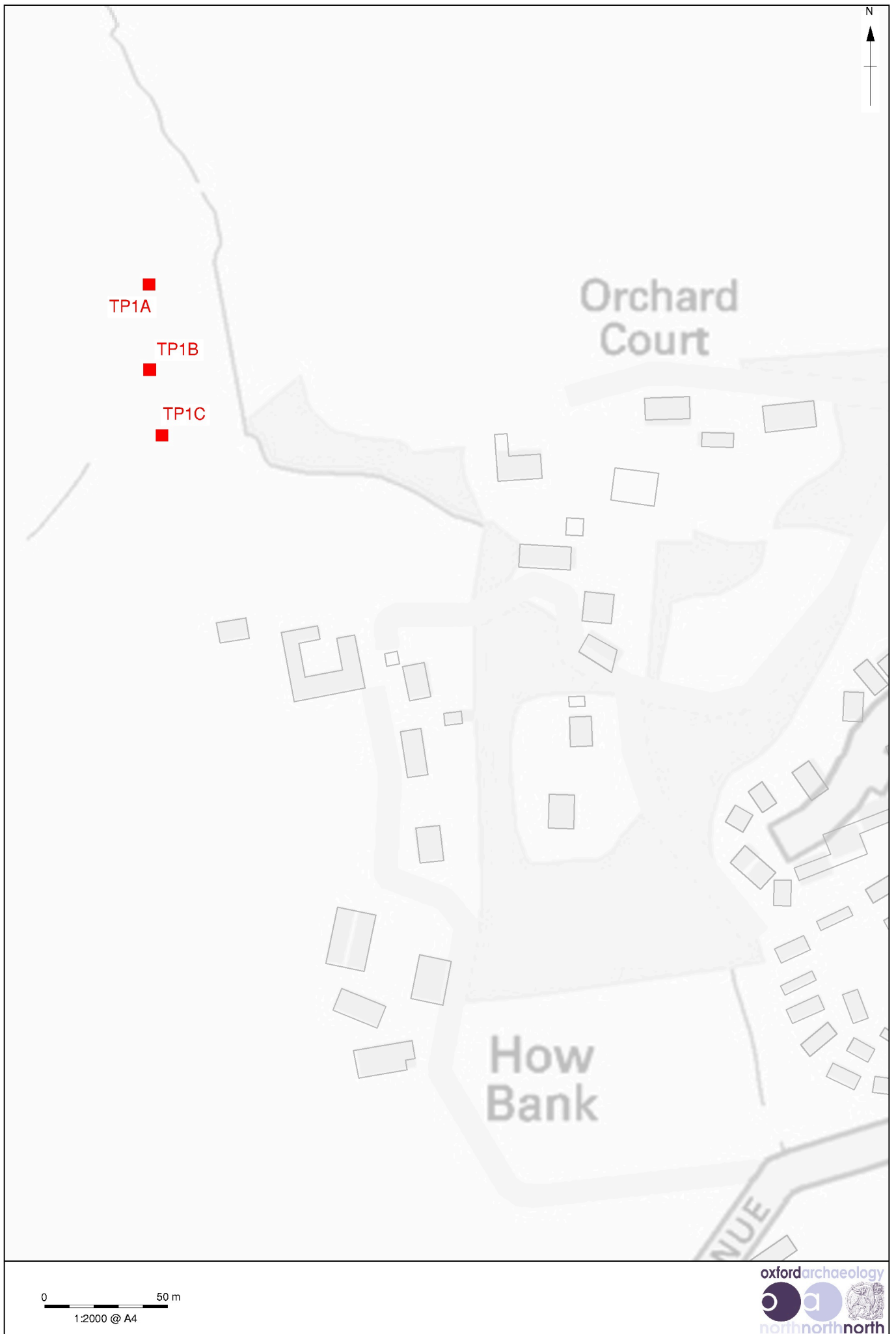
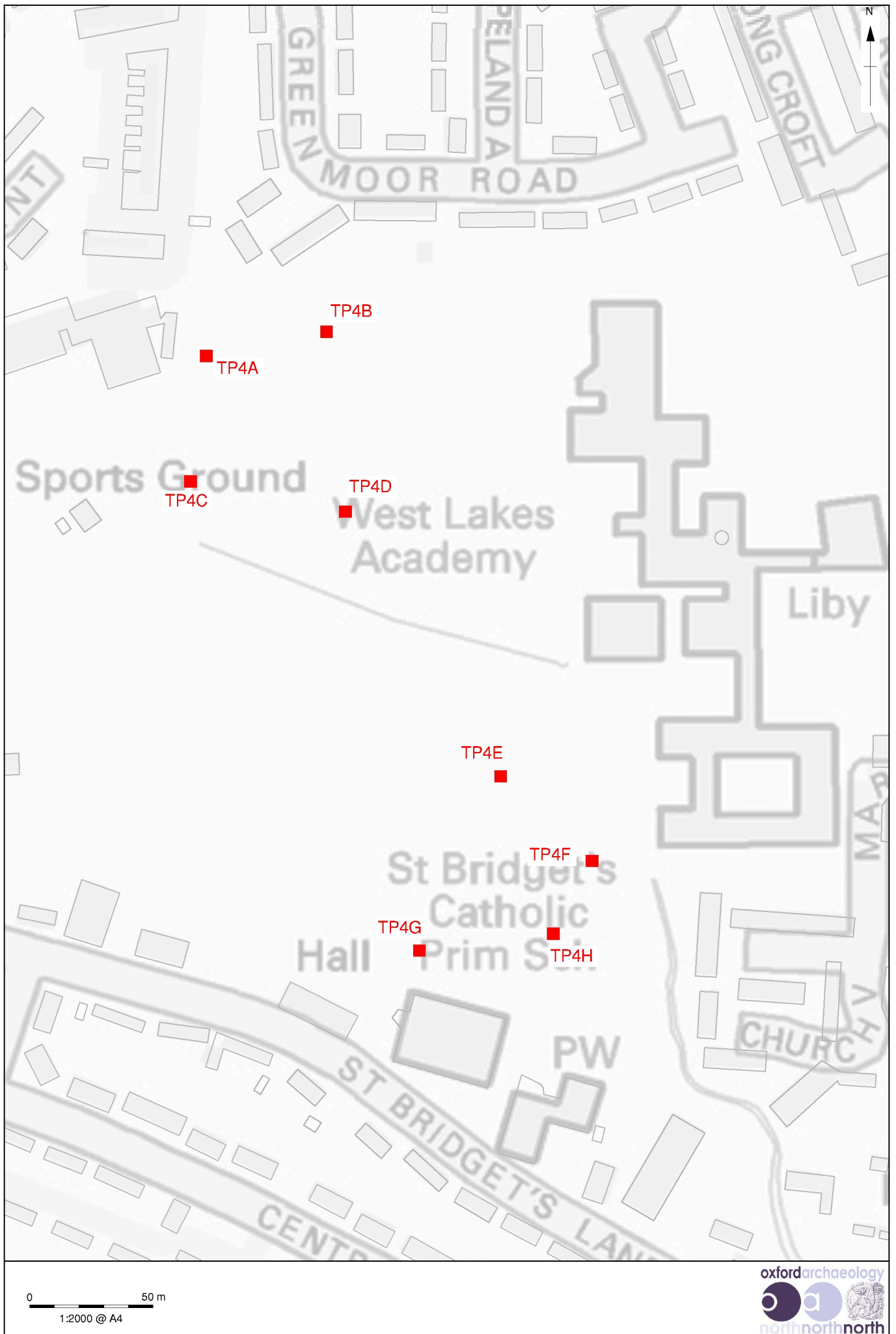


Figure 1: Site location



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Figure 2: Location of trial pits at Site 1



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Figure 3: Location of trial pits at Site 4



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