

# THE LIMES, BLACKBURN ROAD, RIBCHESTER LANCASHIRE



## Archaeological Watching Brief



**Oxford Archaeology North**

January 2005

**Mrs P Howarth**

Issue No: 2004-5/334

OA North Job No: L9478

NGR: SD 65861 35410

Planning Application No:  
3/04/1023/p

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LANCASHIRE

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**Client Name:** Mrs P Howarth

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## SUMMARY

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Following a proposal by Mrs Pauline Howarth to build an extension and garage at the domestic dwelling of The Limes, Blackburn Road, Ribchester (SD 65861 35410), an archaeological watching brief of the groundworks was requested by the Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS).

The town of Ribchester is an area of very high archaeological potential. It is the site of the Roman Fort of *Bremetennacum* and associated extra-mural settlement, dating from the first century AD. The fort lies on the south-west edge of town and is protected as a Scheduled Monument (SM 14255). The site is positioned to the north-east of the Roman bath house and may lie on the edge of the *vicus* or civilian settlement area. Blackburn Road, on which The Limes is situated is thought to overlie a Roman road leading east from Ribchester Fort.

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) undertook the watching brief in January 2005. The foundation trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.35m, revealing topsoil between 0.2-0.5m in depth overlying natural sandy subsoil. The watching brief did not reveal any finds or features of archaeological significance.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxford Archaeology North would like to express its thanks to Mrs Pauline Howarth for commissioning the work and to Ivor Moores for his assistance during the groundworks. The watching brief was carried out by Kathryn Blythe, who also wrote the report and produced the drawings. The project was managed by Emily Mercer, who also edited the report along with Alan Lupton.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Mrs Pauline Howarth submitted a planning application (ref 3/04/1023/p) to Lancashire County Council for a garage and extension to the domestic dwelling known as The Limes, Blackburn Road, Ribchester (Fig 1) (NGR SD 65861 35410).
- 1.1.2 The Limes is situated on Blackburn Road that is thought to overlie a Roman road leading east from *Bremetennacum*, Ribchester Fort. It is also positioned to the north-east of the Roman bath house and may lie on the edge of the *vicus* or civilian settlement area. Due to the archaeological potential of the site LCAS recommended that a watching brief should be undertaken during groundworks on the site. In accordance with the brief, a project design (*Appendix 1*) was produced by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) outlining the proposals for the required work which was undertaken during January 2005.
- 1.1.3 This report sets out the results of the watching brief in the form of a short document. This outlines the historical background for the site and the results of the watching brief.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 A project design (*Appendix 1*) was submitted by OA North, in response to a request by the client, for an archaeological watching brief. The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and generally accepted best practice.

### 2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.2.1 A programme of field observation was undertaken during the groundworks to record the location, extent and character of any surviving archaeological features and deposits revealed during the ground disturbance.
- 2.2.2 The foundation trenches for the extension and garage were undertaken using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket under constant archaeological supervision. A monochrome and colour slide photographic record was maintained throughout.

### 2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full archive of the project has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive comprises all the information gathered during the course of the project and will be deposited at Lancashire County Record Office (Preston) on completion of the project. In addition, a copy of the report will be archived with the Lancashire County SMR in Preston.

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### 3. BACKGROUND

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#### 3.1 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

3.1.1 **Site Location:** The Limes (NGR SD 658610 35410) is located approximately 600m from Ribchester, on Blackburn Road which heads east out of the town, and 250m to the west of the River Ribble (Fig 1). The town of Ribchester is in central Lancashire, roughly mid-way between the central Pennine uplands and the Irish Sea.

3.1.2 **Geology:** the solid geology around Ribchester is dominated by Sabden shales of the Millstone Grit Group masked by thick (up to 50m to rockhead) boulder clay deposits (Aitkenhead *et al* 1992). Ribchester town and the fort are thought to stand on deposits of a second terrace of the Ribble (*ibid*) which rises to *c* 3-4m above the floodplain. This terrace formation is being actively eroded with about one third of the area of the fort lost to fluvial processes to date. Soils of the second terrace comprise 0.6-0.8m of unmottled sandy loams overlying slightly mottled sandy clay loams (*ibid*)

#### 3.2 HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

3.2.1 **Prehistoric Period:** little is known of prehistoric Ribchester, although Bronze Age activity was recorded by Olivier and Turner (1987) who excavated a circular ditch enclosing an arc of five cremation burials in collared urns to the north of the town. Soil analysis has indicated some agricultural disturbance on the banks of the Ribble during the Bronze Age, but also implied that the site had been abandoned some hundreds of years before the arrival of the Romans (Buxton and Howard Davis 2000). The nearby hillfort of Portfield Camp, near Blackburn, appears to have been established during the Late Bronze Age, continuing in use throughout the Iron Age, and possibly re-fortified at the time of the Roman invasion (Beswick and Cooks 1986).

3.2.2 Although there is increasing evidence for Iron Age activity in the south of the county (Nevell 1999) only very occasional finds of Iron Age date have been made in central or northern Lancashire. Indeed, the county is noted for this as yet little discussed, or fully explained, anomaly (Haselgrove 1996).

3.2.3 **Roman Period:** the presence of extensive Roman remains at Ribchester is well known and its identification as *Bremetenacum* is secure, based on a third century dedication to Apollo Maponus (RIB 583) from the town (Rivet and Smith 1981, 277). The site was strategically well-placed at the western end of one of the few major trans-Pennine routes, and its intersection with a major north-south road. In addition, it was also at or close to a crossing point of the River Ribble at the approximate point where it becomes navigable. The road south (Margary 7; 1973, 370) led to Manchester and on to Chester, and to the north passed along the Lune/Eden corridor and on to Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall. The Roman road eastwards ran over the Pennines to the fort at Elslack and then on to Aldborough and York, while to the west it ran along the



northern side of the Ribble Valley. This connected Ribchester with the enigmatic industrial site at Walton-le-Dale and the fort at Dowbridge, Kirkham (Buxton and Howard-Davis 2000).

- 3.2.4 As the frontier moved north during the first and second centuries AD, the fort would have dominated the hinterland between the settled and “Romanised” region around Chester and “the Wall” frontier (*ibid*). The fort and settlement at Ribchester lay within the western territory of the Brigantes and, therefore, the garrison must have fulfilled something of a policing function. Evidence from the recent excavations (1989-1990) suggests a timber fort was established in the early AD 70s, during the governorship of Petilius Cerialis (AD 71-73/74), and modified *c* AD 82-86. Subsequent demolition of this fort, and its rebuilding in stones, probably occurred around AD 125-135, possibly as a result of activity in the area of Hadrian’s Wall (*ibid*).
- 3.2.5 Roman occupation of Ribchester is known to have continued into the third century AD. The identity of the Ribchester garrisons is uncertain for the first two centuries AD, although Legion VI and Legion XX are attested epigraphically (*ibid*). Later, the fort was garrisoned by a *numerus equitatum Samatorum* (soldiers from what is now modern Hungary). These are thought to have been settled at or around the fort after discharge as veterans; hence the name of the settlement, *Bremetennacum Veteranorum* (*ibid*).
- 3.2.6 Both the fort and the settlement, which have been well known from the sixteenth century onwards (Edwards 2000), lie largely beneath the church and glebe lands of St Wilfrid. Extra-mural settlement has been proven as far as 500m to the north of the fort, and evidence from other parts of the town indicate that it is unwise to assume any area in the vicinity of the fort, even if partially damaged, has little or no archaeological value (Buxton and Howard Davis 2000).
- 3.2.7 Since the mid-sixteenth century, antiquarian writers have commented on the richness of the site and there have been numerous chance finds from the town, including the well known Ribchester Helmet, a second century cavalry parade helmet, now in the British Museum. In the last two centuries numerous excavators have opened trenches in both the fort and the extramural settlement, establishing the existence of a long, detailed, and well-preserved archaeological sequence which spans the entire period of the Roman occupation. Unfortunately, as is common, a great deal of information from the earlier work has been lost. These smaller excavations have been most coherently summarised by Edwards and Webster (1985; 1987a; 1987b; 1988) in their consideration of the township during the Roman occupation. The majority of the excavations undertaken in Ribchester in recent years have, however, been in response to threats to archaeology from actual development, and have therefore been concentrated to the north and east of the fort. These excavations have been summarised recently in Buxton and Howard-Davis (2000).
- 3.2.8 **Post-Roman Ribchester:** the circumstances of Ribchester in the early post-Roman period are uncertain. Whitaker suggested the town was abandoned, and then later inhabited by ‘... a few Saxon settlers of uncertain period’ (1823), and

certainly a number of items recorded by antiquarians as coming from Ribchester, and a small collection of objects in the Museum, suggest that there was post-Roman occupation. Complete abandonment of the site on the withdrawal of Rome from Britain would appear increasingly unlikely in face of the growing body of evidence from sites such as Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall (Wilmott 1997) for continuity of occupation from the Roman to the early medieval period. The church of St Wilfrid, within the walls of the fort, was reputedly built in *c* AD 596 (Baines 1870, 2), and a church certainly stood on the site before the Domesday Survey (Farrer and Brownbill 1912) when Ribchester is listed as *Ribelcastre* (Hinde 1985, 154). The town is thought to have lain waste at that time, as it may well have undergone 'sweeping desolation' as a result of the rebellions of 1069-70 (*ibid*), a fate which appears to have befallen the community again around 1320 'by the great incursion of the Scots' (Whitaker 1823).

- 3.2.9 It seems unlikely that there was much significant change in the layout or status of Ribchester until the Industrial Revolution when several textile mills were built on the outskirts of the settlement, affecting both the layout and economic focus of the town. Corry (1825) notes that in 1821 Ribchester had 300 houses, 303 families, and was inhabited by 1760 persons.

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## 4. WATCHING BRIEF

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### 4.1 RESULTS

- 4.1.1 The ground on the east side of The Limes was outlined for the area of the drive and garage. It measured approximately 19m in length (north-south) and a maximum of 8m in width (Fig 2). The topsoil was stripped off the whole of this area using a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket, to a maximum depth of 0.6m. This revealed the actual depth of topsoil to be 0.5m in depth, comprising a clean mid-dark brown silty-sand. Underlying this was a light-mid orange silty-sand natural subsoil. No features of archaeological significance were observed in this area.
- 4.1.2 A rectangular foundation trench for the garage, measuring 7.35m x 5.3m, was excavated within this area, 1.5m from the east wall of the bungalow. A 0.6m wide toothless ditching bucket was used to excavate a further 0.3m through the natural orange silty-sand subsoil.
- 4.1.3 The foundation trenches for the extension to the dwelling were situated to the north and west of the house (Fig 2). These were excavated using a 1m wide toothless ditching bucket and comprised Trenches 1, 2, 3 and 4. Trenches 1 and 2 were positioned at the back of The Limes, measuring 3.5m and 14.25m respectively. Trench 1 abutted the north-east corner of the dwelling and was aligned north/south. Trench 2 ran east/west and parallel to the north wall, or back, of the house. Beyond this, Trench 2 dog-legged to the south slightly to form the western part of the extension. At its western end it joined Trench 3, which was 6.2m in length and aligned north/south, parallel to the west wall of the house. At the southern end, the trench turned eastwards to form Trench 4, which abutted the west wall of the house, and measured 4.7m in length (Fig 2).
- 4.1.4 The trenches were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.35m beneath the existing floor level of the house. The topsoil was approximately 0.25m in depth, and directly overlay the natural orange silty-sand, which was seen to continue beyond the limit of excavation at the base of the trench.
- 4.1.5 A septic tank was situated to the north of the north-east corner of the house and three water pipes were observed crossing Trench 2. A third water pipe was also seen in Trench 3, extending beyond the trench limits. All three pipes were aligned north/south. No other features were present in the trenches.

### 4.2 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.2.1 The watching brief did not reveal any features of archaeological significance. Modern features to the immediate north of the house may possibly have truncated earlier features; however the majority of the excavated trenches revealed undisturbed natural subsoil underlying the topsoil.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Figure 1: Location map

Figure 2: Plan of groundworks covered by the watching brief

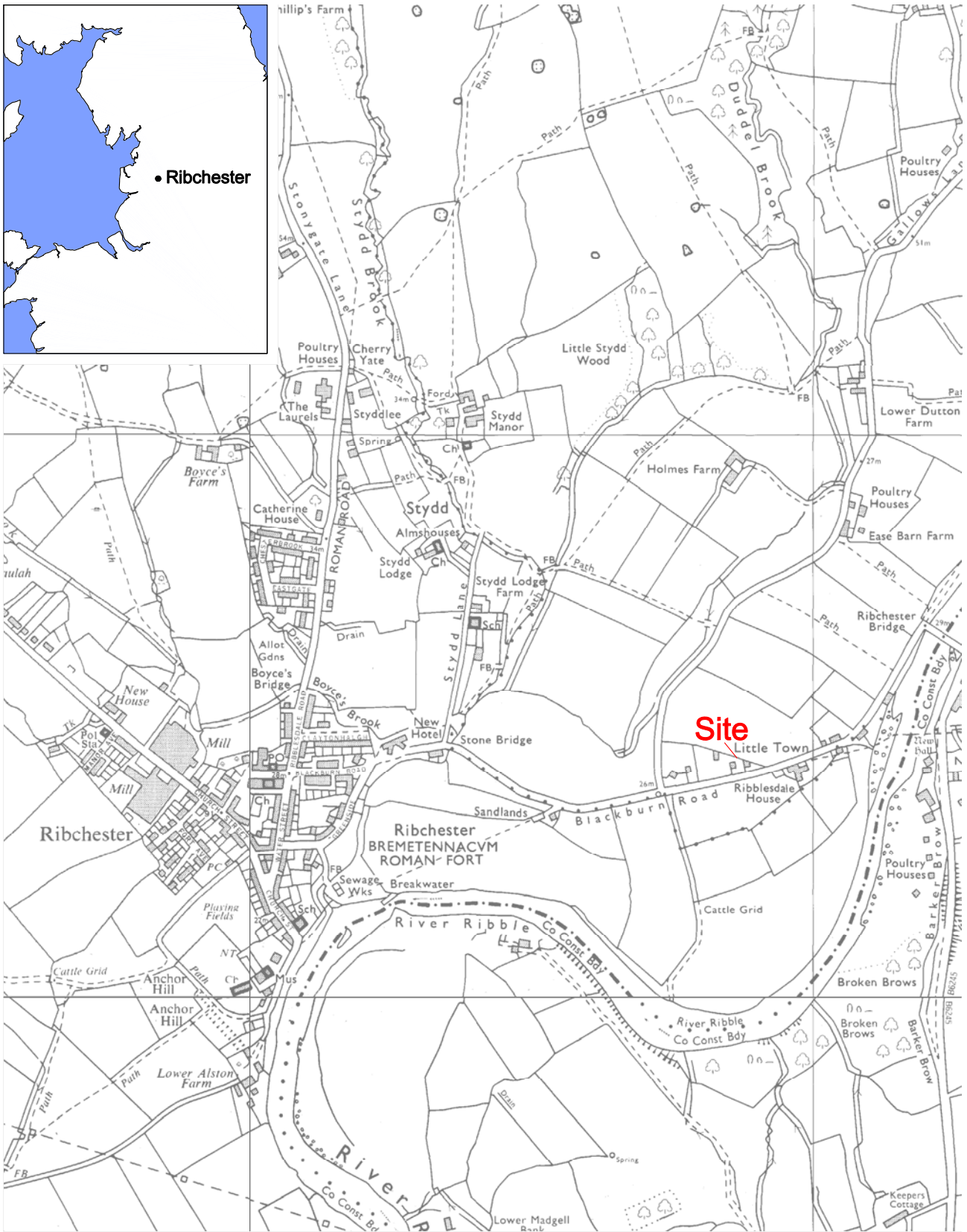
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Plate 2: West-facing section of Trench 4 against the west wall of The Limes

Plate 3: South-facing section of Trench 3, looking north

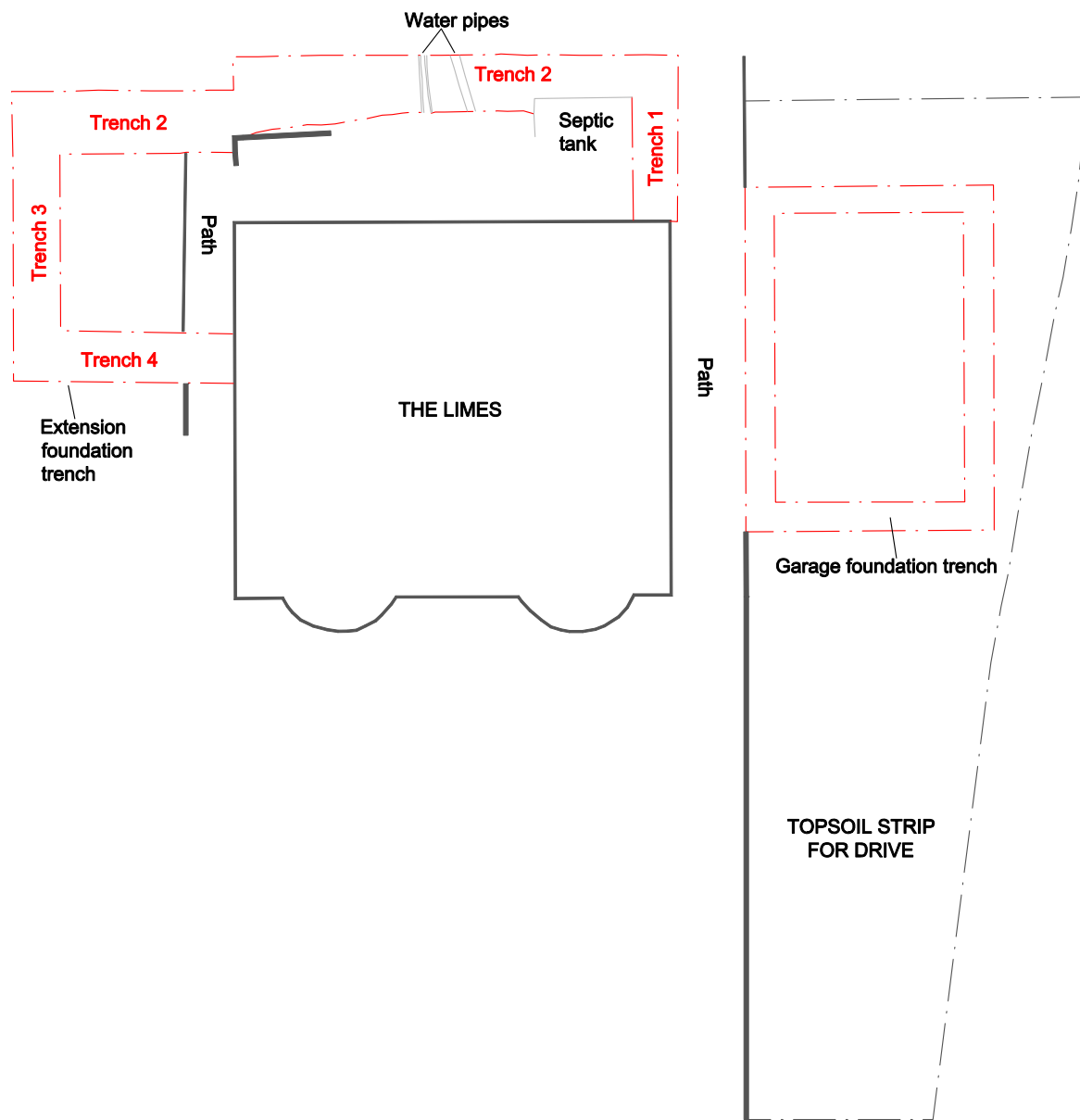
Plate 4: Foundation trench for garage, looking north-east



based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:10000  
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Figure 1: Location Map



- · — · — · Extent of topsoil stripped area
- · · · · Foundation trenches



Scale 1:150 at A4



Figure 2: Plan of groundworks covered by the watching brief





Plate 1: Trenches 1 and 2, looking north-west



Plate 2: West-facing section of Trench 4, abutting the wall of The Limes



Plate 3: South-facing section of Trench 3, looking north



Plate 4: Foundation trench for garage, looking north-east

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## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1 Mrs Pauline Howarth (hereafter the Client) has requested Oxford Archaeology North submit proposals to undertake an archaeological investigation at the domestic dwelling of The Limes, Blackburn Road, Ribchester. Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS) have requested that an archaeological watching brief of the groundworks on the site be undertaken. The village of Ribchester is an area of very high archaeological potential and the site is positioned to the north-east of the Roman bath house and may lie on the edge of the *vicus* or civilian settlement area.

#### 1.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

1.2.1 The Ribchester area has been settled since prehistoric times and is the site of *Bremetennacum*, a Roman fort and associated external settlement dating from the first century AD. The fort lies on the south-west edge of the town, and is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument; hence much of the town, including the site in question, lies within the setting of that monument. Both the fort and the settlement, which have been well known from the sixteenth century onwards, lie largely beneath the church and glebe lands of the church of St Wilfrid, with extra mural settlement proven as far as 500m to the north of the fort. There have been both numerous chance finds (including the well-known Ribchester Helmet, now in the British Museum), and excavations within the fort and extra mural settlement.

1.2.2 Remains of the fort and settlement are exposed to view within the town and more extensive archaeological deposits are present below the surface. The fort and settlement have been recognised as of national importance.

1.2.3 The fort and settlement at Ribchester lie within the western territory of the Brigantes. The site is strategically well placed at the crossing of a major trans-Pennine route with an important north-south road. The location of Ribchester, at a crossing of the Ribble, may also have allowed it to oversee river traffic to and from the West Coast.

1.2.4 As the frontier moved north during the first and second centuries AD, the fort would have dominated the hinterland between the settled and “Romanised” region around Chester, and “the Wall” frontier zone. Evidence from the recent excavations (1989-90) suggests a timber fort was established in the early AD 70’s, and modified cAD 82-86. Subsequent demolition of this fort, and its rebuilding in stone, probably occurred around AD 125-135, possibly as a result of activity in the area of Hadrian’s Wall, with the Roman occupation of Ribchester known to have continued into the third century AD.

1.2.5 The north-east corner tower of the stone fort, which was uncovered in the garden of 2 Church Street by Mr J Ridge and the Time Team (Channel 4 1994). Similarly, the bathhouse was discovered by labourers in 1837, and is now open to the public. Excavations in 1927 and 1966-68 revealed a hypercausted room, stone walls, furnaces, and a tiled floor, while excavations in 1977-78 uncovered further features associated with the bath house and a preceding structure on the same site. A broad second century AD date has been given to these structures and their associated activity, although it is likely that both the bath complex and the general area may have remained in use during the third century.

#### 1.3 OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY NORTH

1.3.1 Oxford Archaeology North has considerable experience of excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large scale projects throughout Northern England during the past 24 years. Evaluations, assessments, watching briefs and excavations have taken place within the planning process, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables. OA North has undertaken numerous excavations and watching briefs in Ribchester (particularly in its former guise as Lancaster

University Archaeological Unit). The excavations from 1980, 1989-1990 have been published (Buxton and Howard-Davis 2000).

- 1.3.2 OA North has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. OA North is an Institute of Field Archaeologists (**IFA**) **registered organisation, registration number 17**, and all its members of staff operate subject to the IFA Code of Conduct.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The following programme has been designed to identify any surviving archaeological deposits and provide for accurate recording of any archaeological remains that are disturbed by ground works for the proposed development.
- 2.2 **Watching brief:** to carry out a watching brief during associated ground disturbance, to determine the quality, extent and importance of any archaeological remains on the site.
- 2.4 **Report and Archive:** a report will be produced for the client within eight weeks of completion of the fieldwork. A site archive will be produced to English Heritage guidelines (MAP 2) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990).

## 3 METHOD STATEMENT

### 3.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.1.1 **Methodology:** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the proposed ground disturbance. This work will comprise observation during the excavation for these works, including building foundations and service trenches, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed during the course of the groundworks, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation.
- 3.1.2 The watching brief will cover the whole of the area to be disturbed by the development including building foundations, service trenches and other earthmoving activities.
- 3.1.3 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified by the machining process, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand, using either hoes, shovel scraping, and/or trowels depending on the subsoil conditions, and where appropriate sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated (ie. selected pits and postholes will normally only be half-sectioned, linear features will be subject to no more than a 10% sample, and extensive layers will, where possible, be sampled by partial rather than complete removal).
- 3.1.4 During this phase of work, recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, and their accurate location (either on plan and/or section, and as grid co-ordinates where appropriate). Features will be planned accurately at appropriate scales and annotated on to a **large-scale plan provided by the Client**. A photographic record will be undertaken simultaneously.
- 3.1.5 A plan will be produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance and one or more dimensioned sections will be produced.
- 3.1.6 **Contingency plan:** in the event of significant archaeological features being encountered during the watching brief, discussions will take place with the Planning Archaeologist or his representative, as to the extent of further works to be carried out. All further works would be subject to a variation to this project design. In the event of environmental/organic deposits

being present on site, it would be necessary to discuss and agree a programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling and or dating with the Planning Archaeologist.

### 3.2 ARCHIVE/REPORT

3.2.1 **Archive:** the results of all archaeological work carried out will form the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991). This archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format and a synthesis will be submitted to the CSMR (the index to the archive and a copy of the report). OA North practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic and plastic media) with the County Record Office, and a full copy of the record archive (microform or microfiche) together with the material archive (artefacts, ecofacts, and samples) with an appropriate museum.

3.2.2 **Report:** one bound and one unbound copy of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the client, and a further three copies submitted to the Lancashire SMR within eight weeks of completion of fieldwork. Any finds recovered will be assessed with reference to other local material and any particular or unusual features of the assemblage will be highlighted. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived.

3.2.3 **Confidentiality:** all internal reports to the client are designed as documents for the specific use of the Client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and project design, and should be treated as such. They are not suitable for publication as academic documents or otherwise without amendment or revision.

### 4 PROJECT MONITORING

4.1 Monitoring of this project will be undertaken through the auspices of the Lancashire County Council Archaeologist, who will be informed of the start and end dates of the work.

### 5 WORK TIMETABLE

5.1 The duration of the archaeological presence for the watching brief is as yet unknown, being dictated by the schedule of works.

5.2 The client report will be completed within approximately eight weeks following completion of the fieldwork.

### 6 STAFFING

6.1 The project will be under the direct management of **Emily Mercer BA (Hons) MSc AIFA** (OA North Senior Project Manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.

6.2 The watching brief and any subsequent excavation will be supervised in the field by **Kathryn Blythe** (OA North project supervisor). Kathryn is a very experienced field archaeologist and is capable of carrying out projects of all sizes.

6.3 Present timetabling constraints preclude detailing at this stage exactly who will be undertaking the watching brief element of the project.

6.4 Assessment of the finds from the evaluation will be undertaken under the auspices of OA North's in-house finds specialist **Chris Howard-Davis** (OA North project officer). Chris acts as OA North's in-house finds specialist and has extensive knowledge of all finds of all periods from archaeological sites in northern England.

7 INSURANCE

- 7.1 OA North has a professional indemnity cover to a value of £2,000,000; proof of which can be supplied as required.