

August 2001

# PIPEWELLGATE GATESHEAD TYNE AND WEAR

**Watching Brief Report** 

Commissioned by:

Padgett Lavender Associates

on behalf of

Leftbank Properties Limited

# Pipewellgate, Gateshead Tyne and Wear

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Report no 2000-2001/089/AUA8117

Checked by Project Manager.				
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#### **SUMMARY**

A watching brief was undertaken by Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) in March 2001, at Pipewellgate, Gateshead, near Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear (NGR NZ 252 636). The work was commissioned by Padgett Lavender Associates on behalf of Leftbank Properties Limited and followed on from an earlier evaluation which recommended that a watching brief should be carried out (LUAU 2001). The evaluation had demonstrated the presence of medieval remains and the area was documented as having been densely occupied throughout the post-medieval period (Manders 1973).

The watching brief was undertaken in a series of trenches corresponding to the lines of wall foundations for the new build. Trench 3 revealed rubble and a possible wall, the orientation and position of which suggested that it related to the medieval structures recorded during the evaluation. Associated with this possible wall was a single piece of medieval pottery. Trench 5 revealed a series of wooden stakes driven into natural clays and silts. Although this was undoubtedly a component of a timber structure, the form of that structure was not evident from the small amount exposed. An area of black silty clay with some organic content was identified to the north of this timber structure.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks are due to Padgett Lavender Associates, for commissioning and supporting the work, and to Thomas Armstrong Construction for supplying and operating the mechanical excavator. Particular thanks are due to Bob Holt of Thomas Armstrong Construction for all his help on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Daniel Elsworth. The final drawings and report were prepared by Daniel Elsworth and the finds analysis was by Chris Howard-Davis. The report was edited by Jamie Quartermaine and Rachel Newman, the project being managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 A planning application by Padgett Lavender Associates for the construction of a public house on land, presently used as a car-park, to the south-east of Pipewellgate, Gateshead (NGR NZ 252 636), had been approved by the Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council. The proposed development affects an area which was found, in the course of an earlier evaluation (LUAU 2001), to contain some density of medieval archaeology; consequently, the Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist recommended that a watching brief be undertaken in the course of the groundworks for the foundations of the public house. The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with a verbal brief from the Tyne and Wear County Archaeologist.
- 1.1.2 The building was to be on piled foundations, incorporating reinforced concrete ground beams. Sixteen pits were intended to be dug in the positions of the piles and six pairs of these were to be linked by ground beams running roughly north/south (Fig 2). All but six of the 'pile pits' had been dug prior to LUAU being called out to undertake the watching brief, and most of these had already been filled with concrete. Three of the ground beams had also already been dug and filled. The remaining three ground beams and associated 'pile pits' were excavated under archaeological supervision.

#### 1.2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.2.1 Pipewellgate is a narrow lane on the south bank of the Tyne, running west from the Swing Bridge towards Redheugh, at the foot of the river escarpment, bounded by the Rabbit Banks on the south and the Tyne on the north. It lies within the Bridges Conservation Area.
- 1.2.2 The area has been partially terraced into the bank to the south-east, with a brick wall revetting this terrace. To the north-east, the site is demarcated by Bankwell Stairs, which run down to the north-west from Bankwell Lane (now closed). The south-west edge lies adjacent to one of the piers for the High Level Bridge.
- 1.2.3 *Geology:* the geology of the riverside area of Gateshead consists of drift deposits of glacial clay between 10m and 30m thick, overlying a bedrock of Carboniferous Sandstone, which contains interleaving seams of coal. The drift deposits have been cut by drainage channels, leading to the steep-sided banks of the Tyne on which Newcastle and Gateshead developed. The quaysides on both sides of the river have been reclaimed and are artificially high (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998).

#### 1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

1.3.1 *Prehistoric:* little prehistoric material has been recovered from the area. Bronze swords and a spearhead were recovered in the nineteenth century from dredging in the River Tyne (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998), and some prehistoric features and pottery, of probable Iron Age date, were found during

- recent excavations on the west side of Bottle Bank, some 125m to the south-east (LUAU/NCAS forthcoming).
- 1.3.2 **Roman:** Roman activity is well known on both sides of the Tyne and a Roman bridge is thought to have stood approximately on the position of the medieval Tyne Bridge, now the site of the late-nineteenth century Swing Bridge, though there is as yet no definite evidence to support this (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998). On the north side of the river, on the site of the Castle, are the remains of the fort of *Pons Aelius* which protected the river crossing. On the south side of the river, and almost opposite the fort, extensive Roman remains have been uncovered between Bottle Bank and Bankwell Lane, consisting of inter-cutting ditches, part of a road, fragmentary remains of buildings and other structural features (LUAU/NCAS forthcoming).
- 1.3.3 *Early Medieval:* there is little evidence for early medieval activity in Gateshead, and nothing can be related to Pipewellgate. The Venerable Bede's somewhat ambiguous reference to 'Utta, a well-known priest and Abbot of Gateshead' in his 'Ecclesiastical History of the English Peoples' (Colgrave and Mynors 1969) has prompted speculation that there may have been an Anglo-Saxon monastic settlement in the area. The street name 'Bottle Bank', which is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'botl' meaning buildings, again suggests some form of occupation at this period (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998); however, apart from a few fragments of putatively early medieval pottery found at Oakwellgate in 1999 (ARCUS forthcoming), no other evidence for the existence or nature of early medieval occupation has been found.
- 1.3.4 *Medieval Pipewellgate:* the origin of the Pipewellgate name is obscure. Fields to the south and south-west were known from the fifteenth century as the Pipe-hills or Pape-hills (Manders 1973, 25), and there is traditionally an association with conduits bringing water into the town (*ibid*). There is no connection with the clay tobacco pipe making industry, for which Gateshead became noted in the late seventeenth century.
- 1.3.5 Firm documentary references to the area, later known as Pipewellgate, begin in the twelfth century, with a grant of land from the (Tyne) bridge end westwards by Bishop Hugh de Puiset of Durham to Thorold of London. Thorold's son was subsequently engaged in clearing land from the waste (*op cit*, 6). By the mid fourteenth century this estate seems to have become an independent township under control of the Gategang family, Alan Gategang being referred to in 1348 as the 'Lord of Pipewellgate'; it is not clear, however, if the street name was in use by this date. Another reference to a 'bailiff of Pipewellgate' in 1349, and descriptions from as late as 1539 of 'Pipewellgate' and 'Gateshead near Pipewellgate' (*ibid*) support the interpretation that the area enjoyed a high level of administrative independence (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998).
- 1.3.6 Pipewellgate as a street probably originated as a track along the highest part of the Tyne foreshore and close to the foot of the escarpment, where it was not inundated at high tide. This is thought to have been the pattern on the north side of the river, where the street called the Close emerged in the thirteenth century (Fraser *et al* 1994). On the north side of Pipewellgate street the river foreshore was probably reclaimed at the same time and was subsequently built upon. As with the Close, the later waterfront development was influenced by the Tyne Bridge at the east end of the street. The low and narrow arches of the bridge, which formed the only river

- crossing until the nineteenth century, precluded sea-going shipping from reaching further west, and the principal quays on the north and south sides of the river developed east of the bridge.
- 1.3.7 Staiths were being built in Pipewellgate in 1349, marking the beginning of the development of the Gateshead waterfront west of the bridge (Manders 1973, 6). It is likely that these staiths belonged to tenements on the south side of the street, since deeds from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries refer to land extending from the Bishop's 'heddyke' across the 'via regia' to the 'grondebb' of the Tyne' (Tyne and Wear Sites and Monuments Record No. 293). The 'head dyke' demarcated the boundary of the Bishop's estate and may have followed the line of modern Rabbit Banks Road at the top of the escarpment to the south-west. The street, which emerged in the medieval period, was narrow, being no more than 8' wide along its 330 yard length. Physical expansion on the south side of the road was constrained by the small area of level ground available between the street and the foot of the escarpment, and in the following centuries buildings rapidly climbed the slope above on a series of terraces.
- 1.3.8 In the course of the earlier evaluation of the site (LUAU 2001) two trenches were excavated, adjacent and at right angles to the street frontage. Several archaeological features were noted in both trenches, directly beneath the hardcore for the car-park on the site. Trench 1 revealed a section of foundation for a wall, directly overlying and cutting into natural deposits. Trench 2 yielded similar stonework, comprising sizeable blocks of sandstone rubble, also likely to be a wall foundation. Medieval ceramics (mid-thirteenth to fourteenth century) were found in association with both walls.
- 1.3.9 *Post-Medieval:* by the eighteenth century cartographic information shows that the south side of Pipewellgate was already densely occupied, with buildings and gardens mounting the slope above (Corbridge 1723, Thompson 1746, Hutton 1770/2). Little evidence exists for the nature of these properties, though mid-late nineteenth century photographs show that many of the houses fronting the street on the south side were two storied and that some were entirely stone built. The ranges running southward up the escarpment were sometimes of simple timber-framed construction, and may date from as late as the second half of the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century Pipewellgate was becoming synonymous with squalor, the narrow, poorly ventilated and overcrowded conditions encouraging the spread of 'fever', which in 1790 'committed considerable havock (sic) amongst the poor' (Manders 1973, 177).
- 1.3.9 Conditions worsened rapidly in the nineteenth century as the population of Gateshead expanded to serve the growing number of industries on both sides of the Tyne. In 1834 Pipewellgate was described as 'an inconveniently narrow and dirty street' (Mackenzie and Ross 1834, 99). Tenements and alehouse lay side-by-side with industries, including tobacco-pipe manufactories, two foundries, a blacking factory, a whiting and colour manufactory, a glue factory, a skinnery and a flint glass works. Narrow stairs such as Bankwell Stairs ran alongside the ranges which climbed the bank to the rear of the frontage, where single rooms were being let as tenements. In 1835 there were ten lodging houses, in one of which, the Poor Law Enquiry Commission was informed, were found '34 persons, chiefly Irish, 1 child lying dead the whole party drinking spirits'. There were no sewers and human and

- animal waste, together with 'the washings of tripe shops', was thrown into the street (Manders 1973, 178, 181).
- 1.3.10 In 1843 the dingy tenements were crammed with 2,040 people, served by just three privies, and the area had a mortality rate of 1 in 30, close to that of Liverpool, which had the highest in the country at that time. The houses clinging to the escarpment were described in 1849 as 'damp and ill-ventilated, and the inhabitants generally are a very dirty class' (op cit, 179, 163). The crowded south side of Pipewellgate was the area of Gateshead principally affected by the cholera outbreaks of 1831, with the highest number of deaths occurring there; this was repeated in 1849. The latter outbreak was brought to the town by a tramp staying in Williams's lodging house in Pipewellgate (op cit, 180).
- 1.3.11 By the mid-nineteenth century Pipewellgate was recognised by the authorities as a slum area. With the construction of the High Level Bridge in 1849 much of the north/south traffic, which had formerly supported the area, began to bypass the thoroughfare and the street declined in importance, with many houses falling into ruin (University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998). The dereliction continued into the early years of the twentieth century, with the opening of the Tyne Bridge pulling even more traffic away from the area. Much of Pipewellgate was subject to slum clearance between 1932 and 1936, and by the 1940 OS map all trace of buildings had vanished from the south of the street (OS 1940; University of Newcastle Archaeological Practice 1998). The cleared embankments were landscaped in 1969 (*ibid*).

#### 2. METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 The work undertaken by LUAU complied with current legislation and accepted best practice, including the Code of Conduct and the relevant professional standards of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). Due regard was given to the requirements of the client and his representatives in respect of such matters as site access. Close liaison was maintained between LUAU and the site contractors at all times. A permanent presence watching brief was maintained for the duration of the groundworks associated with the excavation of the ground beam foundations.
- 2.1.2 A programme of field observation accurately recorded the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features within the groundworks. This work comprised observation during the groundworks, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation. The machine used by the contractor consisted of a JCB wheeled excavator, fitted with a ditching bucket to facilitate the trenching.
- 2.1.3 The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, on LUAU *pro-forma* sheets, and their accurate location, either on plan and/or section. Records were kept of all the sections of the watching brief even if the results were negative. A plan was produced of the areas of groundworks showing the location and extent of the ground disturbance (Fig 2). All areas of archaeological interest were fully photographed both in general terms and in specific details.

#### 2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 The results of all archaeological work carried out forms the basis for a full archive to professional standards, in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The project archive represents the collation and indexing of all the data and material gathered during the course of the project. The deposition of a properly ordered and indexed project archive in an appropriate repository is considered an essential and integral element of all archaeological projects by the IFA in that organisation's Code of Conduct.
- 2.2.2 LUAU conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives for long-term storage. The archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format. LUAU practice is to deposit the original record archive of projects (paper, magnetic and plastic media) with the appropriate County Record Office, and, where appropriate, a full copy of the record archive (microform or microfiche) together with the material archive (artefacts, ecofacts, and samples) with a designated museum approved by the Museums and Galleries Commission. The paper archive, which will be deposited with the Northumberland Record Office, consists of field recording sheets, a photographic archive and this report. The finds archive will be deposited with Tyne and Wear Museums.

#### 3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

#### 3.1 GROUND BEAM TRENCHES

- 3.1.1 Only five of the six ground beam trenches have been recorded; the most westerly trench had already been excavated and filled by the time of the watching brief. Two of the trenches were not supervised during their excavation, but were still exposed at the outset of the archaeological watching brief and the stratigraphy in the sections was duly recorded. Only the most easterly three trenches were supervised during excavation.
- 3.1.2 *Trenches 1 and 2:* despite having already been excavated and part filled prior to the start of the watching brief, some archaeology was noted in the northernmost 'pile pit' of Trench 2. A large wooden post had been removed by machine during the excavation, which had been found upright at the base of the trench; this was probably, as with the other trenches, at around 0.9-1.0m below the surface. This post was a boxed timber, now badly eroded, but originally with scantling, c120mm-160mm. One end was broken, the other cut at a slight angle, giving a shallow wedge point. The underside was well preserved, showing evidence that the point had been cut by multiple axe blows, using a tool with blade width in excess of 80mm. Two associated fragments were both tangentially-connected oak posts of similar appearance to those in Trench 5. Trench 1, which had been excavated and filled prior to the watching brief, did not reveal any evidence of archaeological activity.
- 3.1.3 Trench 3: Trench 3 consisted of two 'pile pits', each 1.3m square, linked by a trench 0.6-0.7m wide and 6m long. The overburden consisted of a mid-brownish yellow dolomite and sand hardcore (c0.3m thick) which lay on top of a sheet of terram. Below this was a compacted mid-brownish grey silty clay, up to 1m thick. In the north end of the trench, however, this was overlain by a spread of rubble, comprising medium to large sub-angular mid-yellow sandstone within a dark greyish brown matrix, which was between 0.2m and 0.7m thick, and sloped down to the north. Where the rubble was at its deepest, it sealed the remains of a wall composed of a similar material; the wall was c0.5m wide and 0.4-0.7m below the surface; the rubble continued to the north of the wall where it had a much blacker silty clay matrix. At the far north end were the remains of a further possible wall, comprising similar material but only 0.4m wide, and this was observed in the westfacing section. Within the rubble layer were pieces of pottery (including a fifteenth century sherd (Section 3.2)), glass, bone and some fragmentary wooden lathes, with maximum surviving dimensions 40m x 10mm, as well as some faced slabs of sandstone up to 0.4m square and 0.2m thick. Towards the south 'pile pit' was a shallow lens of mid-brown sandy clay (at most 0.2m thick and 1m wide) which was just below the rubble layer. This appeared to be sterile and may have been no more than a variation in the natural fluvial silts and clays below it. At the very base of the trench, at a depth of around 1.3m, was a layer of mid-yellow sandstone which corresponded to that discovered during the evaluation (LUAU 2001), interpreted as bedrock.
- 3.1.4 **Trench 4:** Trench 4 consisted of two 'pile pits', each 1.3m square, which were linked by a trench 0.6-0.7m wide and 5.5m long. The northern part of the trench extended into the eastern part of the evaluation Trench 2, and at higher levels re-

excavated the backfill of the earlier trench. The overburden consisted of a 0.4m thick layer of mid-yellow dolomite and sand hardcore on a sheet of terram. This in turn was on top of a layer of firm mid-brownish grey silty clay which extended to the base of the trench, which was at a depth of 1.2m. At the base of the trench was a solid layer of sandstone with some charcoal and iron staining, interpreted as bedrock in the earlier evaluation trenching (LUAU 2001, Trench 2). No archaeology was recognised, although at the northern end of the ground beam trench was an area of clearly defined disturbance which was a result of the excavation of the evaluation Trench 2 (LUAU 2001). This evaluation trench had revealed a single course of sandstone rubble wall foundation, which was not seen during the watching brief, because that area of the trench had been subject to modern disturbance. Just south of the centre of the ground beam trench, a band of charcoal or coal about 0.1m thick was apparent at a depth of 0.7m within the general clay fill of the trench.

- 3.1.5 **Trench 5:** Trench 5 consisted of a pair of 'pile pits' linked by a 5m long, 0.6-0.7m wide, trench. As in Trenches 3 and 4, the overburden consisted of a 0.35m thick layer of dolomite and gravel hardcore, although at the southern end this was replaced with about 2m of a concrete foundation running northwards from the retaining wall defining the southern edge of the site. Below the concrete foundation was a thin layer of relatively modern demolition material comprising between 0.05m and 0.22m of black loose sandy clay containing brick, mortar and ash. This sealed a thick layer of sandy and silty mid grey and orange clays up to 0.8m thick (to the base of the trench). Cut into or lying on top of this was a layer of rubble made up of medium-sized angular and sub-angular yellow sandstone blocks.
- Driven into the silty clay, but seen only in section, were up to nine wooden stakes 3.1.6 varying in length from 0.3m to 0.7m long and between 0.1m and 0.2m square in section. The largest was boxed timber of scantling, 140mm x 120mm, with a flat base, cut by an axe with a blade in excess of 80mm. The tool marks on the roughly dressed surfaces indicated the use of a blade in excess of 120mm in width, presumably a broad axe, hinting at a medieval date for the wood working. majority of the remainder of the wood had been tangentially cut from trees of considerable girth, subsequently subdivided. One fragment (c60mm x 40mm) retained a well-preserved axe-cut four-facet point. There was also a single hardwood post, with a diameter of c65mm, with a two-facet point, which survived in good condition, retaining axe marks that are sufficiently preserved to show tool signatures. Immediately to the north of these stakes, and probably associated with tem were two upright timbers linked by horizontal timbers up to 0.7m long and 0.2m wide, associated with stones on the south side. This formed a fence-type structure across the trench, running roughly east/west, about 0.6m wide. Sealed below the silty sand to the north of this wall was a layer of black silty clay up to 0.4m thick and 1.35m long, which contained various pieces of wood, including a fragment of a radially converted, adze-dressed oak plank, a single hole indicating its origin in a significant timber structure, and a fragment of medieval pottery, possibly as early as twelfth to fourteenth century. Below this was red sandstone bedrock.

#### 3.2 FINDS

Tr 2		Two tangentially riven fragments of oak, the surfaces possibly axe-dressed	
		One large boxed post with shallow axe-cut point. The timber is now badly damaged but its scantling was probably originally around 120mm. Tool marks indicate an axe with blade in excess of 80mm	
Tr3	Rubble layer	One fragment redware with yellow glaze	Early post- Medieval?
		One fragment neck and applied rim of natural blue-green glass bottle	Eighteenth century
		One animal bone; rib	
Tr3	Rubble and clay north of wall	One fragment purplish stoneware - Midlands purple-type? or later	Fifteenth century or later
		One fragment stoneware sewer pipe	Modern
		Six fragments of a single smashed and burnt animal bone	
Tr3	Wall	Two fragments sand cast earthenware roof tile, one with partial suspension hole surviving. Eight small fragments of wooden lathe, the largest <i>c</i> 40m x 10mm	Post-medieval
Tr5		One base fragment of reduced hard-fired gritty fabric, sagging-based cooking pot, heavily sooted. It is probably in the Northern Gritty ware tradition and can be dated to the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.	
		One large boxed conversion post with flat base, scantling c140mm x 120mm. The base is irregular and has clearly been axe cut. Although now worn there is a splayed mortice visible, approximately 200mm from the end, suggesting that the timber is reused. Numerous tool marks survive, indicating a bladed tool in excess of 120mm wide, possibly a broad axe	
		One hardwood post, with a diameter of <i>c</i> 65mm, point damaged but probably originally cut to a two-facet point. Tool marks and signatures survive.	
		Six broken fragments of tangentially-riven timber, originally cut as posts. It is probably oak and possibly subdivided splits from large trees. One fragment retains the original point, cut to a four-or five-facet point with an axe	

	One fragment radially split plank, well preserved with the shallow rippled surface characteristic of adze dressing. One end was probably cut square, the other broken. It has a single augered peg hole, 15mm in diameter	
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3.2.1 Excluding wood (which is described in the context of each trench), 13 fragments of artefacts or ecofacts were recovered during the watching brief; of these seven were animal bone. Only three fragments of pottery vessels were recovered, one early post-medieval in date, the other two possibly earlier. One of these bears a relatively strong resemblance to Midlands Purple-type wares but may well be later, reflecting the widespread hard-fired blackware tradition which grew out of Cistercian ware production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The other fragment of pottery (Trench 5) is of the Northern Gritty ware tradition and is datable to the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

#### 4.1 DISCUSSION

In some respects the watching brief was able to confirm the results of the 4.1.1 archaeological evaluation, which demonstrated that modern overburden extended down to the depth of the natural subsoils or bedrock, but that there was the potential for archaeological survival of negative features cutting into the natural horizons. However, significantly it also identified in localised areas that there were surviving archaeological silty or sand clay deposits. In Trench 5 a line of stakes was identified orientated east/west, set into these silty clay deposits, and parallel to this, but separated by loose rubble was a fence-type structure comprising wooden stakes with horizontal cross beams. Whilst there was no direct relationship between the fence-type structure and the stakes, their parallel alignments and spatial association would suggest that they were related features. The structure was associated with a fragment of pottery of Northern Gritty ware implying a medieval date for the structure. The timbers within this context have the potential to relate to some form of quayside although other early structural features were identified during the evaluation (LUAU 2001), set closer to the present river edge than these timbers. Such a configuration would be possible if the timber quayside was of a relatively early date with subsequent riverside reclamation extending the building line northwards into the river.

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### **FIGURES**

- Fig 1 Pipewellgate: Location Map
- Fig 2 Trench Location Plan
- Fig 3 Sketch of Western Section of Trench 3
- Fig 4 Sketch of Eastern Section of Trench 5

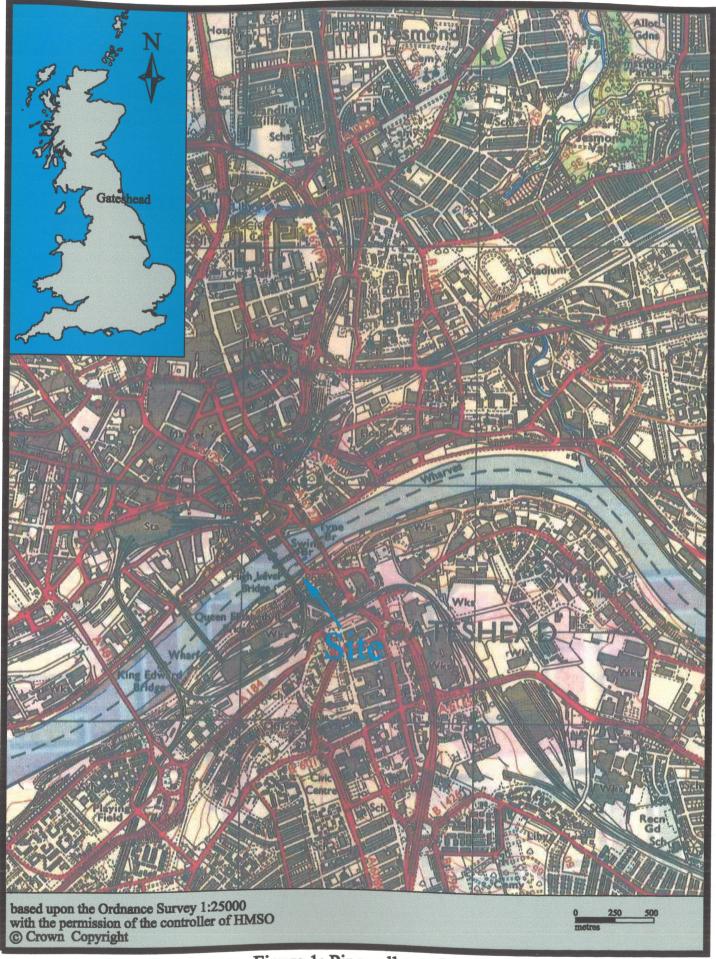


Figure 1: Pipewellgate: Location Map



Figure 2: Trench Location Plan

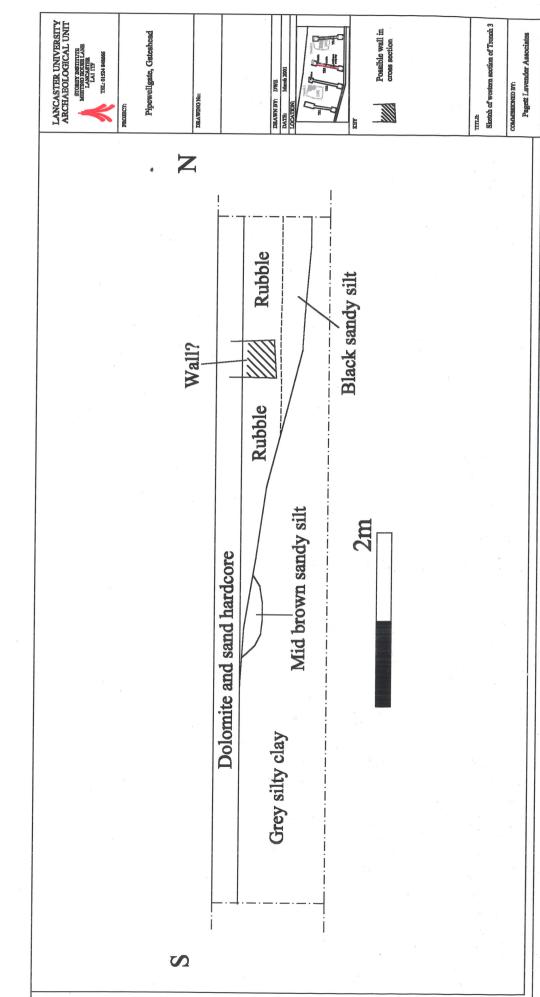


Figure 3: Sketch of western section of trench 3

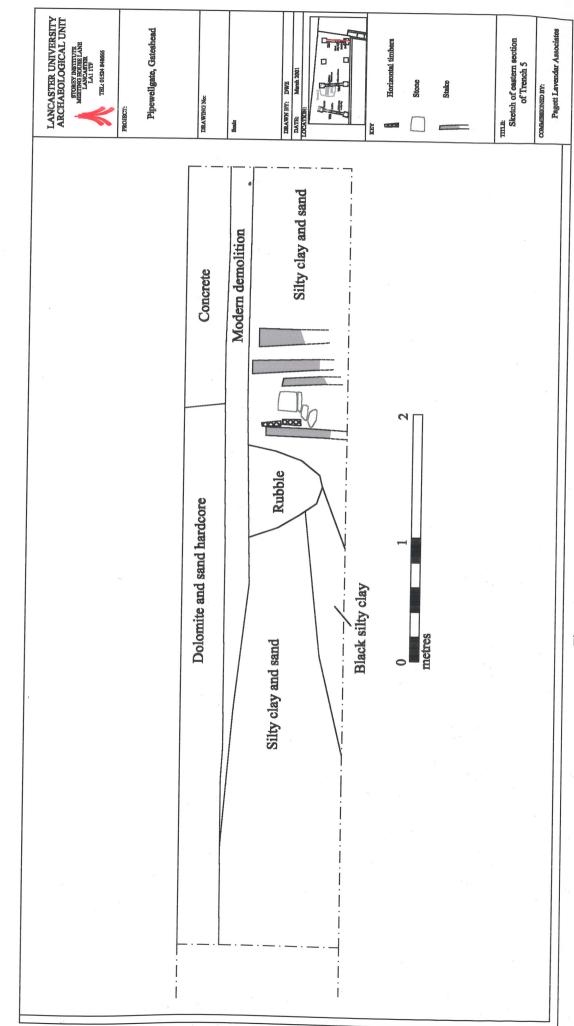


Figure 4: Sketch of eastern section of Trench 5

# **PLATES**

Plate 1: Wall in Trench 3

Plate 2: Timbers exposed in west-facing section of Trench 5



Plate 1: Wall in Trench 3



Plate 2: Wood and stone fence in west-facing section of Trench 5