



# **34 ROMAN WAY, KIRKHAM LANCASHIRE**

## **Archaeological Watching Brief**



**Oxford Archaeology North**

April 2005

### **Quality Windows**

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## SUMMARY

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Oxford Archaeology North was commissioned by Quality Windows to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a conservatory on the south side of 34 Roman Way, Kirkham, Lancashire (centred SD 43090 31824). The watching brief involved the excavation of a 0.6m wide trench for the footings of the conservatory. The work was undertaken on 8th February 2005.

The site lies in an area of archaeological potential. Documentary research combined with an archaeological excavation undertaken in 1993, during the construction of houses on Roman Way, suggests that the south-east corner of a second century AD Roman fort probably lies some 50m to the north-east of 34 Roman Way. The 1993 excavation also revealed some evidence of industrial activity in the area just to the north of the site. This is thought to be part of one of several workshops which would have been dotted around the outside of the fort, with a civilian settlement located further away. In addition, Roman artefacts including pottery, metalwork, and leather have been recovered in recent years from the area around Dowbridge, to the east of the site.

The watching brief revealed no evidence for archaeological features or deposits. However, it appears that the ground level had been made up, probably during the construction of the house and neighbouring dwellings in the late twentieth century. The trench for the footings was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.35m into made ground. It was not certain, however, if any surviving archaeological deposits had been truncated or whether the made ground overlay archaeological deposits preserved *in situ*.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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OA North would like to express its thanks to Quality Windows for commissioning the project and for their cooperation on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by Kathryn Blythe, who also wrote the report and produced the drawings. The report was edited by Emily Mercer and Alan Lupton. Emily Mercer managed the overall project.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned by Quality Windows to undertake an archaeological watching brief at 34 Roman Way, Kirkham, Lancashire (SD 43090 31824; Fig 1). Lancashire County Archaeological Service (LCAS) requested that archaeological supervision should be maintained on site during all excavation works in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.
- 1.1.2 The watching brief was undertaken on 8th February 2005 in accordance with OA North's project design (*Appendix 1*). This report sets out the results of the watching brief in the form of a short document, including a brief historical background for the site and the findings

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 FIELDWORK

- 2.1.1 The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with the agreed method statement detailed in the project design (*Appendix 1*) and was recorded in the prescribed manner. The watching brief involved monitoring the excavation of a trench for the footings of the east, west and north sides of the conservatory in an area approximately 6m x 6m. The trench was excavated manually and measured 0.6m in width and 0.35m in depth.
- 2.1.2 The work 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). Close liaison was maintained between OA North staff and the site contractors during the excavations.
- 2.1.3 The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or structures revealed on OA North *pro-forma* sheets, and their accurate location in plan. In addition, a photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was compiled.

### 2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 The archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design (*Appendix 1*), and to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive includes *pro-forma* field recording sheets, a photographic archive, and hand-drawn large-scale plans.
- 2.2.2 The paper archive will be deposited with the Lancashire Record Office in Preston. A copy of the report, together with an index to the archive, will be deposited with LCAS for inclusion in the Lancashire SMR.

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### 3. BACKGROUND

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#### 3.1 SITE LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1.1 The property undergoing development, 34 Roman Way, lies within the modern town of Kirkham (Fig 1). The development comprised the digging of a foundation trench for the proposed conservatory which will adjoin the back of the house. The site is positioned within the former hamlet of Dowbridge, to the east of medieval Kirkham.
- 3.1.2 Kirkham lies on a low glacial moraine, which runs through the Fylde westwards from Preston, and terminates in low sea cliffs at Blackpool. The recently excavated stone Roman Fort at Dowbridge (Howard-Davis and Buxton 2000) lies approximately 50m to the north of 34 Roman Way and straddles one of the highest points of this moraine.
- 3.1.3 The solid geology of the Fylde is largely obscured by the drift deposits laid down during the Devensian era (*c* 8000 BC), although the lowlands are underlain by a series of Permo-Triassic rocks with Bunter sandstone to the east and mudstones to the west (Middleton *et al* 1995).
- 3.1.4 The drift deposits result from two distinct processes of deposition. The first, categorised as colluvium deposits in which soils moved downslope by the force of gravity, relate to the River Ribble rapidly cutting through the glacial sands allowing the movement of overlying till deposits onto the floodplain. The second type of deposits are riverine alluvium (river-borne silts and clays) that fringe the edges of rivers such as the Ribble around narrow floodplains. An example of this can be seen in the valley of Carr Brook to the north of Kirkham (*ibid*).

#### 3.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 The North West Wetlands Survey, undertaken by OA North in its former guise as Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU), and funded by English Heritage, has resulted in a detailed study of the prehistoric and later archaeology and environment of the Fylde (*ibid*). This area saw relatively intensive activity from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age, with a number of find spots and larger sites recorded frequently on sand ridges. Palaeoenvironmental evidence from the survey has shown that there is some evidence for clearance during the Bronze Age, although cereal cultivation does not appear on any great scale until the late Iron Age/Roman period. The lack of cereal cultivation during the later prehistoric period perhaps suggests a reliance on a shifting pastoralist regime (*ibid*).
- 3.2.2 Climatic deterioration towards the end of the Bronze Age appears to have led to an apparent reduction in the density of settlement in the area. Iron Age sites and even chance finds dating to the Iron Age period are rare in Lancashire, although palaeoenvironmental investigations indicate continued land clearance and the beginnings of cereal cultivation during this period. Few permanent Iron Age settlements probably existed within the Kirkham area when the



Romans arrived (*ibid*).

- 3.2.3 Excavations undertaken by LUAU at Dowbridge Close, now known as Roman Way, suggest that the earliest Roman activity at Kirkham is represented by a series of temporary camps defined by relatively insubstantial, successive and re-cut military ditches (Howard-Davis and Buxton 2000). None of these camps seem to have been in use for a long period of time, although the presence of some internal features suggests that some periods of occupation were long enough to warrant semi-permanent structures (Buxton and Shotter 1996). The southern limits of these marching camps lie to the north of 34 Roman Way, but at present their northern extent is unknown. The construction of a small ditched and defended fortlet on the top of the hill enclosing what might be a tower may be associated with these temporary camps (Howard-Davis and Buxton 2000). This fortlet also lies to the north of 34 Roman Way.
- 3.2.4 Artefactual evidence suggests that the earliest Roman activity at Kirkham was Agricola in date (*c* AD 78). Environmental research and sea level studies (Middleton *et al* 1995) suggest that the Fylde was inhospitable during the Roman period, much of it probably covered in raised bogs, with the Fylde coastline lying much closer to Kirkham than it does today. The tower within the fortlet may have functioned as a beacon or lighthouse, and it is possible that the first forts or marching camps were used to accommodate troops landed from the sea en-route to Agricola's northern campaigns (Buxton and Shotter 1996). Small Roman vessels could have easily been beached on the shoreline around Kirkham without the need for complex handling facilities, thus explaining Roman interest in this otherwise inhospitable location. Kirkham would be about a day's sail from the Dee at Chester, and the Lune at Lancaster, making it an excellent staging point for coast hopping (*ibid*).
- 3.2.5 A conventional stone fort was constructed at Kirkham in the early second century AD. The excavations at Dowbridge Close revealed the south-eastern defences of this structure, which seems to have had a relatively short period of occupation (Howard-Davis and Buxton 2000). The excavations also suggested that the areas immediately beyond the fort were cobbled, perhaps creating an effective *cordon sanitaire* (Buxton and Shotter 1996, 88).
- 3.2.6 Kirkham was linked with other Roman sites in the Ribble valley (Walton-le-Dale and Ribchester) by a road running along the north bank of the river. Indeed, a comparison between second century AD activity at Kirkham and Ribchester suggests that their fates were closely linked (*ibid*). During the second century AD the pacification and stabilisation of the northern frontier led to a reduction in military activity in the area, and the evidence from Kirkham suggests that the fort was abandoned in *c* AD 160, and unlike others in the hinterland of Hadrian's Wall, was never reoccupied.

### 3.3 PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

- 3.3.1 Casual finds from the area include a shield boss (SMR 271), found in *c*1800, near the Dow Brook, east of Roman Way, and other finds, such as Roman coins (SMR 129) and pottery (SMR 1380, 1381 and 2050), were found around

Dowbridge and Myrtle Drive to the north of Roman Way (LUAU 1998). Evidence of Roman burials was found on the north bank of the Dow Brook (Singleton 1980, 1), and what was almost certainly a tombstone of the 'cavalryman and barbarian' type, similar to one at Ribchester, was seen and destroyed when the parish church was rebuilt in 1844 (Croston 1893, 360). A coin hoard in a small Samian jar was found during the construction of Kirkgate in 1853 (Sutherland 1936), and much pottery, leather and other material was observed by local enthusiasts in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the area of Pennine View and Myrtle Drive. In addition, indications of a rampart were seen about the same time, when the RAF married quarters were built (formerly Dowbridge Close now Roman Way) (B Edwards pers comm), and a complete jar in orange fabric was recovered from the Dow Brook to the west of Carr Lane in 1971 (*ibid*).

- 3.3.2 Several excavations have been undertaken in Kirkham. In the 1930s, Mr Burrows of Poulton-le-Fylde excavated west of the Dow Brook and found Roman material. He was, however, at the time much more concerned to discredit the existence of the Roman road from Ribchester into the Fylde via Kirkham than to prove the existence of a fort (Collingwood and Taylor 1928). Evidence of ramparts was seen during the building of the RAF houses, and subsequently a society was formed which excavated under the direction of a local amateur (Mr E Pickering), between 1957 to 1964 (LUAU 1998).
- 3.3.3 A small excavation in the corner of 33 Myrtle Drive in 1985 demonstrated that Roman stratigraphy exists to a considerable depth in this area in the form of a deep depression which may well have been a defensive ditch (B Edwards pers comm). The owner of 16 Myrtle Drive recovered several large sherds of Roman pottery (including mortaria and amphora) and a fragment of a quern stone from a foundation trench, whilst constructing an extension to his house in 1997 (P McCrone pers comm).
- 3.3.4 LUAU also undertook a small-scale evaluation at 14 Myrtle Drive in June 1998, which recovered Roman material, and helped to clarify the extent of Roman activity by revealing the presence of ditches and slots dating from the Roman period (LUAU 1998).

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## 4. FIELDWORK RESULTS

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### 4.1 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

- 4.1.1 A foundation trench was excavated for the footings of the conservatory at the back of the dwelling of 34 Roman Way, with the longest run extending from the west wall of the house, southwards for 5.3m (Fig 2). The foundation trench then turned south-east forming an arch shape which extended a further 1.1m to the south, and 3.5m to the east. The trench then ran westwards for a further 2m, turned towards the north-east for 1m and then ran northwards for 4.3m where it met the back wall of the house (Plate 2). The conservatory therefore will occupy a space with maximum dimensions north/south of 6.4m, and east/west 6.3m. The trench was a maximum of 0.6m in width and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.35m.
- 4.1.2 The uppermost layer disturbed by the foundation trench comprised turf overlying mid-dark brown sandy clay topsoil which was an average 0.2m thickness. This overlaid a layer of compacted clay with moderate inclusions of modern building rubble that was at least 0.15m in depth, and continued beneath the limit of the excavation.
- 4.1.3 A modern drain was observed running southwards from the south-west corner of the house, at a depth of 0.35m, and two further drains aligned east/west were seen to cross both the eastern and western trenches at the same depth (Fig 2), approximately 0.8m and 3m from the south wall of the house respectively.

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## 5. DISCUSSION

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### 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 The watching brief of the groundworks revealed no archaeological features. However, the ground has been recently disturbed by the construction of the houses along Roman Way in the early 1990s. The watching brief revealed that the topsoil overlay a deposit of clay with inclusions of building rubble. This indicates that the ground has been levelled or made up to create the garden area. This layer was apparent throughout the trench and continued beneath the limit of excavation. Therefore, the presence or absence of surviving archaeology beneath this layer was not ascertained; it was not clear as to whether the excavation was within made ground or if it had been truncated and then levelled.
- 5.1.2 Given the proximity of Roman Way to the fort and, consequently, its high potential for surviving archaeology, it is recommended that any further groundworks in the area be subject to a watching brief.

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Figure 1: Location Map

Figure 2: Trench monitored under watching brief

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Plate 1: Working shot of the manual excavation of trenches for the conservatory

Plate 2: Trench for the east side of the conservatory, looking north





based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:50000  
with the permission of the controller of HMSO  
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0 500 1000  
metres

Figure 1: Location Map



# 34 Roman Way



Figure 2 : Trench monitored under watching brief





Plate 1: Working shot of the manual excavation of trenches for the conservatory

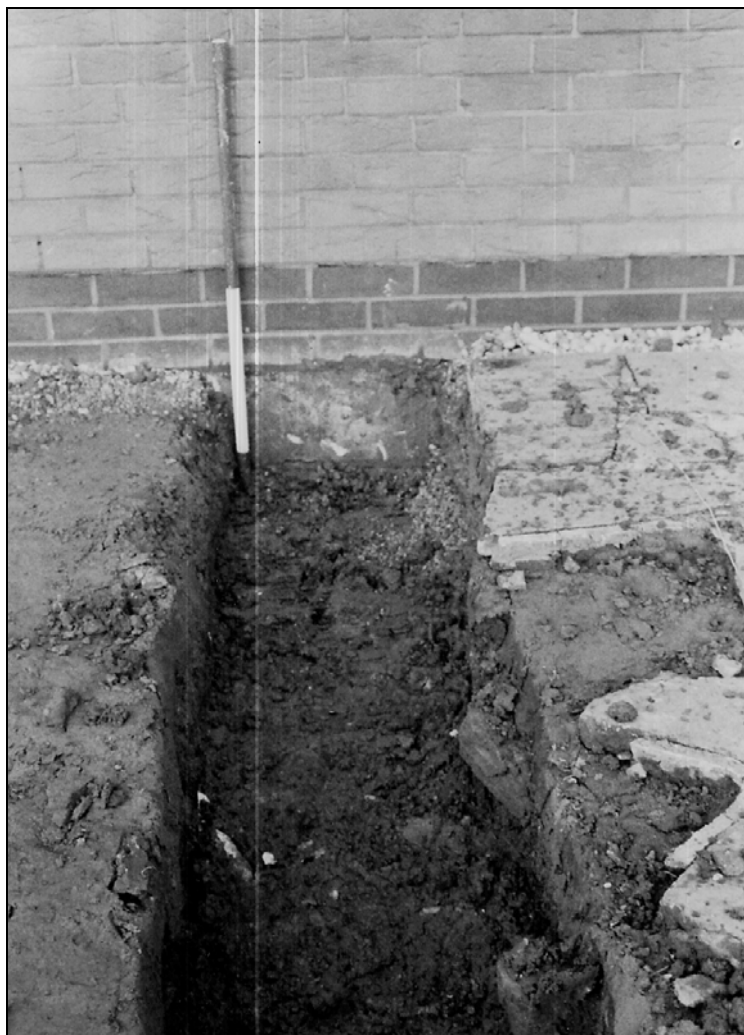


Plate 2: Trench for the east side of the conservatory, looking north

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## APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 1.1.1 Quality Windows (hereafter the client) has requested Oxford Archaeology North submit proposals to undertake an archaeological investigation at the domestic dwelling of 34 Roman Way, Kirkham, during the construction of a conservatory. Lancashire County Archaeology Service (LCAS) have requested that an archaeological watching brief of the groundworks on the site be undertaken.

#### 1.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 The proposed conservatory at 34 Roman Way, Kirkham lies within an area of Roman activity. The earliest evidence of such is Agricola in date (c AD78) and mainly in the form of a series of temporary marching camps in the area. Some camps were occupied for long enough periods to warrant the presence of semi-permanent structures. The southern extent of the marching camps lies to the south of the study area. However, the northern limit is not known. To the south and west of the study area is a small ditched and defended fortlet on the top of the hill enclosing a possible tower which may be associated with the marching camps.
- 1.2.2 The site of the Roman fort at Kirkham to the west of the site (PRN 1356). The conventional stone fort was constructed in the early second century AD but appears to have had a relatively short period of occupation. Excavations at Dowbridge Close, in 2000, revealed the south-eastern defences of the structure and evidence that the areas immediately beyond the fort were cobbled.
- 1.2.3 A civilian settlement, or vicus, is known to have existed to the east of the fort with evidence in the form of a number of artefacts and the remains of timber cill beam based buildings having been located in Myrtle Drive (PRN 4149). To the rear of 69 Dowbridge Roman fine and coarse pottery and iron nails have been found, with additional finds of Roman pottery having been recovered from the Dow Brook 85m east of the site. In the nineteenth century a bronze shield boss was also found in the Dow Brook, now housed in the British Museum.
- 1.2.4 The fort was linked to the forts at Ribchester and Walton-le-Dale along the road in the Ribble Valley. Around AD160 evidence suggests the fort at Kirkham was abandoned, with Ribchester also undergoing a similar fate. This was due to the reduction of military activity resulting from the stabilisation of the northern frontier.
- 1.2.5 The North West Wetlands Survey, undertaken by OA North in their former guise as Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) and funded by English Heritage, resulted in an extensive and detailed survey of prehistoric and later archaeology and environment of the Fylde. The results showed intense activity from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age. Although there is evidence for clearance during the Bronze Age, cereal cultivation does not appear on any great scale until the late Iron Age/Roman period.
- 1.2.6 At the time of the Roman invasion it appears that there were very few permanent Iron Age sites in the Kirkham area. This was due to the climatic deterioration from the Bronze Age onwards and a reduction in the density of settlement in the area.
- #### 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 Kirkham.

- 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.
- 2.3 **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 SMR (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 bound copy and digital copy supplied as pdf files will be 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 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.