



ST WILFRID'S CE PARISH CHURCH, RIBCHESTER, Lancashire

Archaeological Watching Brief



Oxford Archaeology North

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**IWA Architects/ St Wilfrid's
and St Saviour's Parochial
Church Council**

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SUMMARY

Following a desk-based assessment and visual inspection report by Oxford Archaeology North in 2004 (OA North 2004), it was recommended that a watching brief be carried out during any groundworks associated with the restoration of St Wilfrid's CE Church, Ribchester, Lancashire (NGR SD 69964 35038). Accordingly, a watching brief was undertaken by OA North on 31st January and 2nd February 2006 during the excavation of new and replacement land drains to the immediate exterior of the church. No archaeological horizons were encountered during the watching brief, but an assemblage of finds of Roman origin were recovered from the up-cast spoil. Whilst of interest, the finds were from unstratified deposits and their presence was not entirely surprising given the site's proximity to a known Roman fort. Overall, the excavations did not extend beyond the topsoil horizon and, therefore, there was nothing exposed during the course of the works that might enhance our understanding of the development of the church from its inception in the medieval period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) would like to thank IWA Architects and the Parish Church Council of St Wilfrid's and St Saviour's for commissioning the work. Thanks are also due to Charles Catlow and colleagues of Historic Property Restoration Limited for their efforts and good humour on site.

The watching brief was undertaken by David Tonks, who also wrote the report. The finds assemblage was examined by Sean McPhilips. The drawings were compiled by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Alison Plummer, who also edited the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 IWA Architects have been required by English Heritage to conduct an archaeological building investigation of St Wilfrid's Parish Church, Ribchester, Lancashire (NGR SD 69964 35038; Fig 1), prior to extensive renovations being carried out at the site. In response to this, OA North was requested to submit a desk-based assessment and visual inspection report (OA North 2004), in which it was recommended that a watching brief be undertaken during any associated groundworks. Accordingly, a watching brief was carried out during the excavation of new and replacement land drains immediately to the exterior of the church. This report sets out the results of the watching brief in the form of a short document.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

- 2.1.1 Close liaison was maintained between OA North staff and the site contractors during the watching brief. The programme comprised observation during the groundworks and the examination of any horizons exposed. The groundworks were effected manually with a pick and shovels.
- 2.1.2 The recording comprised a full description and preliminary classification of features or structures revealed on OA North *pro-forma* sheets and, where appropriate, their accurate location in plan. In addition, a photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was compiled.

2.2 ARCHIVE

- 2.2.1 A full archive of the work undertaken has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (English Heritage 1991). The archive will be deposited in the Lancashire County Record Office in Preston, and a copy of the report will be forwarded to the Lancashire Sites and Monuments Record, along with an index to the archive.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 THE SETTING

- 3.1.1 **Topography:** the Millstone Grit outcrop of Pendle Hill forms part of the northern boundary to the area (*Countryside Commission 1998*). When combined with the fells of the south Pennines, this higher ground surrounds the site and serves as an important backdrop that dwarfs the scale of the settlement in the valley bottom (*ibid*). Ribchester are also bordered to the west by Longridge fell. Although the industrialized towns of Burnley, Accrington and Blackburn dominate much of the Lancashire Valleys, Ribchester lies to the western edge of the area and is surrounded by agricultural land. The field boundaries are hedgerows that give way to stone walls and fencing on higher ground (*ibid*). Woodland is restricted to small woods and there are several areas of parkland within the Lancashire Valleys connected to large houses (*ibid*).
- 3.1.2 **Geology:** the underlying solid geology around Ribchester is dominated by Sabden shales of the Millstone Grit Group masked by thick boulder clay deposits (Aitkenhead *et al* 1992). The drift geology is also characterised by typical brown alluvial soils of the Alun association (Ordnance Survey 1983).

3.2 BACKGROUND ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

- 3.2.1 **Introduction:** the historical background is covered fully in the previous report (OA North 2004). The following is intended only as a brief summary of the historical developments as detailed in that report.
- 3.2.2 The church is built on the site of the Roman fort of *Bremetennacum*, although there is no secure evidence for a Christian presence as early as the Roman period. However, Celtic missionaries are thought to have preached in this part of Lancashire in the seventh century AD and fragments of early-medieval crosses have been found within the churchyard (OA North 2004). It is, therefore, reasonable to conjecture that a Celtic church may have been established on the site.
- 3.2.3 The church is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and the first actual record of a church building is in AD 1200, a date corroborated by the core architecture of the nave and chancel. In the subsequent centuries it was subject to several alterations and extensions, although there are conflicting accounts as to when some of the additions were made. A porch was built in the fourteenth century, two chantrys were added between the mid-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, and the West Tower was erected sometime between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (OA North 2004).
- 3.2.4 Considerable changes to the fabric of the building were also made between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1881, a Vestry was built. The church was partly destroyed by fire in 1917, requiring further restitution and refurbishment. The church is presently protected as a listed building (Grade I).

4. RESULTS

4.1 OBSERVATIONS

- 4.1.1 **Introduction:** the groundworks were effected over a two-day period and a total of five trenches and one sump were opened (Fig 2).
- 4.1.2 **Trench 1:** oriented north/south, this measured 3.0m x 0.5m x 0.5m and the stratigraphy entirely comprised loose, dark-brown sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of brick and sandstone fragments. This was wholly previously disturbed ground above an existing drainpipe. There were no finds and no archaeological horizons were encountered.
- 4.1.3 **Trench 2:** oriented east/west, this measured 11.0m x 0.5m x 0.5m and the stratigraphy (Plate 1) entirely comprised loose, dark-brown sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of brick and sandstone fragments. There were no finds and no archaeological horizons were encountered.
- 4.1.4 **Trench 3:** oriented east/west, this measured 3.0m x 0.4m x 0.6m (Plate 2) and the stratigraphy entirely comprised dark-grey/black sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of up to 30% small-to-medium sized stones and some sandstone fragments. The trench was mostly excavated down through previously disturbed ground above an existing drainpipe. There were no finds and no archaeological horizons were encountered.
- 4.1.5 **Trench 4:** oriented north-west/south-east, this measured c 12m x 0.4m x 0.6m (Plate 3) and the stratigraphy (Plate 4) entirely comprised dark-grey/black sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of 10% small-to-medium sized stones and some sandstone fragments. Some previously redeposited human bone was encountered at the base of the trench, but the remains were below the level required by the groundworks and were left *in situ* and not further undisturbed. Some finds were retained (Section 4.2) but there were no archaeological horizons encountered.
- 4.1.6 **Trench 5:** oriented north-east/south-west, this measured c 7.0m x 0.4m x 0.6m (Plate 5) and the stratigraphy entirely comprised dark-grey/black sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of 10% small-to-medium sized stones and some sandstone fragments. Some finds were retained (Section 4.2) but there were no archaeological horizons encountered.
- 4.1.7 **Sump:** the soakaway measured 1.3m in diameter and was 1.2m in depth (Plate 6). The upper stratigraphy entirely comprised 1.0m dark-grey/black sandy-clay topsoil with inclusions of 10% small-to-medium sized stones and some sandstone fragments. At 1.0m, a layer of grey clay with some sand was encountered, possible natural subsoil. No archaeological horizons were encountered.

4.2 FINDS

- 4.2.1 In total, six artefacts (*Appendix 2*) were collected from unstratified deposits across the site, comprising Roman pottery, an iron nail and a copper alloy pin, melted glass/frit, and an undecorated nineteenth century clay tobacco pipe.
- 4.2.2 **Pottery:** two worn decorated body sherds of colour-coated pottery deriving from a single vessel, were recovered from Trench 4. The vessel retained faint residues of a hunting scene decoration coated within a dark red slip, on a pale brown fabric. The pottery resembled the type of vessel produced in the Nene Valley area during the later second and third centuries.
- 4.2.3 **Glass:** a single piece of melted olive green glass resembling frit was collected from the site. It is possible the glass was Roman in origin, suggesting glassmaking nearby, although it was difficult to ascribe a date with certainty.
- 4.2.4 **Metalwork:** an encrusted copper alloy dress pin with a conical head was recovered from Trench 4. The pin had a thin curved stem measuring 15mm and thickness of <2mm, and its head measured 9mm in diameter. The pin bears resemblance to a type recovered at Birdoswald (Wilmott 1997), which had a suggested date from the second to third century. The iron nail was a flat round headed type that was impossible to date with precision.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 CONCLUSION

- 5.1.1 Despite the trenches all being located within very close proximity to a known Roman fort, the depth to which they extended was evidently insufficient to impact on any archaeological horizons. The stratigraphy encountered in each trench entirely comprised topsoil and only in the sump was possible natural ground exposed at a depth of 1.0m below the current ground surface.
- 5.1.2 The finds assemblage was of some interest and comprised mainly Roman material (*Section 4.2*). However, all the finds were from unstratified deposits and had been redeposited in the topsoil. Therefore, no specific conclusions can be drawn from them and their presence is not wholly surprising given the overall context of the site.
- 5.1.3 There were no finds from the medieval period which may have enhanced our understanding of the development of the church from its inception during this period. Again, given the paucity of evidence for medieval activity in Lancashire generally, this is not entirely unexpected although some medieval fragments have been found previously (OA North 2004).
- 5.1.4 Overall, no archaeological horizons were encountered and no further recommendations are made for archaeological intervention during the course of the present refurbishment.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

6.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

Ordnance Survey 1983, Soil Survey of England and Wales

6.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Aitkenhead, N, McBride, D, Riley, NJ, and Kimbell, SF, 1992 Geology of the Country around Garstang, *Memoir for 1:50 000 sheet 67 England and Wales*, Brit Geol Surv, London

Countryside Commission, 1998 *Countryside Character, Volume 2: North West*, Cheltenham

English Heritage, 1991 *Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edn, London

OA North 2004 *St Wilfrid's Church, Ribchester: an archaeological desk-based assessment and visual inspection*, unpl rep

Wilmott, A, 1997 *Birdoswald* London

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This project design has been compiled for IWA Architects with reference to the requirement for an archaeological building investigation of St Wilfred's CE Parish Church. Section 2 states the objectives of the project, Section 3 deals with OA North's methodology. Section 4 addresses other pertinent issues including details of staff to be involved, and project costs are presented in Section 5.
- 1.2 OA North has considerable experience of the assessment and investigation of historic buildings of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large-scale projects during the past 20 years. Watching briefs and building investigations have taken place within the planning process, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables. Recent church projects include St Paul's and St Mary's in Preston, St Laurence, Chorley, St Helen's, Waddington and St Conan's Kirk in Argyll.
- 1.3 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 objectives of the building investigation are to provide an outline analysis of the church prior to and during building works, which will serve to both preserve by record and inform the project engineers.
- 2.1.1 To achieve the objective outlined above the following listed specific aims are proposed.

Stage 1:

- (i) to undertake a desk-based assessment and visual inspection of the church;
- (ii) to produce a report and archive in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991).

Stage 2:

- (iii) to undertake an archaeological watching brief;
- (iv) to produce a report and archive in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition, 1991).

3 METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 Stage 1 - DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

- 3.1.1 The following will be undertaken as appropriate, depending on the availability of source material.
- 3.1.2 **Documentary and Cartographic Material:** this work will comprise a rapid desk-based assessment of the existing resource. It will include an appraisal of the data in the CSMR (Preston), appropriate sections of County histories, early maps (printed and manuscript), and such primary documentation (tithe and estate plans etc.) as may be reasonably available. Particular attention will be paid to field and place names recorded on early cartographic sources relating to estate and parish boundaries, field boundaries, woodlands and routes, as these often provide important evidence of archaeological activity and transformation of the historic landscape. All available published and unpublished documentary sources will also be examined and assessed. The Lancashire Record Office (Preston) and relevant local studies library will also be consulted.
- 3.1.3 **Visual Inspection:** a brief visual inspection of the church will be undertaken to RCHME level I-type survey. This level of survey is purely descriptive and will result in an outline development and use of the building.
- 3.1.4 **Photographic Archive:** a photographic archive will be produced utilising a 35mm camera to produce both black and white contact prints and colour slides. The archive will comprise general shots of the church (both internal and external) and surroundings, and detailed coverage of agricultural features.

3.1 Stage 2 - WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.2.1 **Methodology:** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving architectural/archaeological features exposed during the reduction to external ground levels and the removal of any plaster during the internal works. This work will comprise observation and the systematic examination of features exposed during the course of the works, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features identified during observation.
- 3.2.2 It is assumed that OA North will have the authority to stop the works for a sufficient time period to enable the recording of important features. It may also be necessary to call in additional archaeological support if a find of particular importance is identified or a high density of archaeology is discovered, but this would only be called into effect in agreement with the Client and the County Archaeology Service and will require a variation to costing. In normal circumstances, field recording will also include a continual process of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of the data, in

order to establish the necessity for any further more detailed recording that may prove essential

3.2.3 **Burials:** should evidence of burials be identified, the 1857 Burial Act would apply and a Home Office Licence would be sought. This would involve all work ceasing until the proper authorities were happy for burials to be removed.

3.2.4 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). 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.

3.2.5 OA North generally calculates a 1:0.5 ratio of fieldwork: post-fieldwork (archive, analysis, and report preparation) if the level of archaeology observed is low or 1:1 if the level of archaeology is high.

3.3 STAGES 1 AND 2 - REPORT AND ARCHIVE

3.3.1 **Report:** one bound and one unbound copy of a written synthetic report will be submitted to the client, and a further two copies submitted to the Lancashire SMR (one paper copy and one digital copy) within eight weeks of completion of fieldwork. The report will include a copy of this project design, and indications of any agreed departure from that design. It will present, summarise, and interpret the results of the programme detailed above and will include a full index of archaeological features identified in the course of the project, together with appropriate illustrations, including detailed plans and sections indicating the locations of archaeological features. The report will also include a complete bibliography of sources from which data has been derived.

3.3.2 This report will identify areas of defined archaeology. An assessment and statement of the actual and potential archaeological significance of the identified archaeology within the broader context of regional and national archaeological priorities will be made. Illustrative material will include a location map, section drawings, and plans. This report will be in the same basic format as this project design.

3.3.3 **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). 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. OA North conforms to best practice in the preparation of project archives

for long-term storage. This archive will be provided in the English Heritage Centre for Archaeology format and a synthesis will be submitted to the Lancashire 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 appropriate County Record Office.

- 3.3.4 **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.
- 3.3.5 Monitoring of this project will be undertaken through the auspices of the LCAS Archaeologist, who will be informed of the start and end dates of the work.

4 TIMETABLE AND RESOURCES

- 4.1 The desk-based assessment will take five days to complete; a further one day will be required for the visual inspection.
- 4.2 The duration of the watching brief will depend upon the progress of the contractor.
- 4.3 The final report will follow within eight weeks of completion of the data collection and fieldwork, although a shorter deadline can be negotiated.
- 4.4 The project will be under the direct management of **Alison Plummer BSc (Hons)** (OA North senior project manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.
- 4.5 The desk-based assessment is likely to be undertaken by **Daniel Elsworth MA** (OA North supervisor). Daniel has a great deal of experience in the assessment and analysis of historic buildings throughout the NorthWest.
- 4.6 Present timetabling constraints preclude detailing exactly who will be carrying out each specific task, but all elements of the project are likely to be supervised by an OA North project supervisor experienced in this type of project. All OA North project officers and supervisors are experienced field archaeologists capable of carrying out projects of all sizes.
- 4.7 OA North has a professional indemnity cover to a value of £2,000,000; proof of which can be supplied as required.

APPENDIX 2: FINDS SUMMARY

Trench	Material	Quantity	Description	Date
4	Pottery	2	Nene valley colour coat	Second to third century
4	Copper alloy	1	Dress pin	Second to third century
-	Iron	1	Nail	Not closely datable
-	Glass	1	Melted frit?	Roman?
-	Clay tobacco pipe	1	Undecorated moulded stem	Nineteenth century

ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1: Site Location Plan

Fig 2: Trench location plan

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1: North-facing section Trench 2

Plate 2: Plan of Trench 3 facing east

Plate 3: Plan of Trench 4 facing north-west

Plate 4: North-east facing section Trench 4

Plate 5 : Plan of Trench 5 facing north-east

Plate 6 : Sump facing south-east

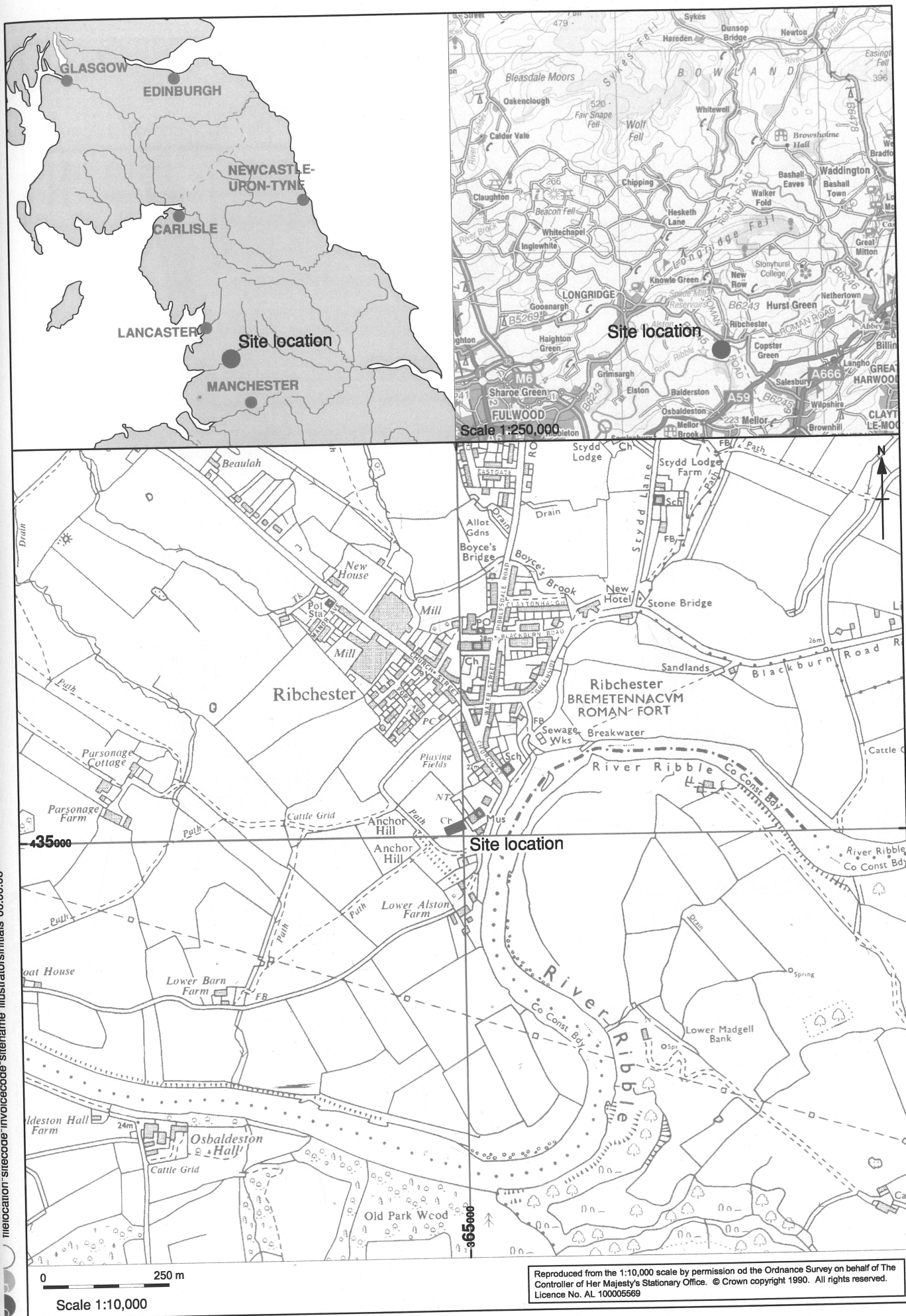


Figure 1: Site Location

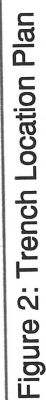


Figure 2: Trench Location Plan



Plate 1 : North-facing section Trench 2



Plate 2 : Plan of Trench 3 facing east



Plate 3 : Plan of Trench 4 facing north-west



Plate 4 : North-east facing section Trench 4



Plate 5 : Plan of Trench 5 facing north-east



Plate 6 : Sump facing south-east