

AD125

**Beacon Public House,  
Green's Place,  
South Shields**

**Archaeological Desk-based Assessment**



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This archaeological desk-based assessment was commissioned by Gary Craig Building Services Ltd. and was carried out by AD Archaeology in advance of a proposed residential development at the site of the former Beacon Public House. The development site lies to the north of Arbeia Roman Fort on a strip of land between the outer defensive ditches and a steep scarp above the riverbank. The areas immediately outside the fort were utilised for a number of military and civilian purposes (civilian settlement, parade ground, cemetery and port linked by a series of roads). Previous excavation suggests that a parade ground lay to the north-east of the fort (15m south-east of the development site). Given the extent of extra-mural activity there is the possibility that Roman period features may exist, or have once existed in the area of the development. The construction of the Beacon Public House and associated cellars may have impacted on any potential archaeological features. Should groundworks associated with the proposed development penetrate beneath pre-modern levels then they may impact on archaeological features, if present.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.1 The Project**

1.1.1 This archaeological desk-based assessment was commissioned by Gary Craig Building Services Ltd. and carried out by AD Archaeology in advance of a proposed redevelopment of the former public house as residential apartments.

1.1.2 This report includes the synthesised results of a documentary and cartographic search for the land-use history of the site and assesses the probability of surviving archaeological remains on the site. Therefore this work will provide the information necessary to make an assessment as to the likely impact of the scheme on the archaeological heritage of the site.

### **1.2 Methodology: Desk-Based Assessment**

1.2.1 This document contains the results of an assessment of the cultural heritage of the study area. This assessment comprised two distinct stages of investigation; the desk-based work and a site visit. The desk-based work is essentially a collation of existing written and graphic sources, primarily undertaken to identify the nature of known and potential archaeological or cultural heritage features. These features may include buried archaeological features, extant earthworks, historic buildings and historic industrial remains. For the purposes of this assessment, a study area of 500m radius around the site has been defined to allow study of the wider area to set the site into its context. This is distinct from the site, which refers only to the area of the proposed development.

1.2.2 The following organisations and sources were consulted during the compilation of the desk-based assessment:

- Tyne and Wear Historic Environment Record (HER)
- Tyne and Wear Archives
- South Shields Library
- National Monuments Record Swindon
- Access to Archives online catalogue

1.2.3 The Historic Environment Record (HER) is a register of known archaeological sites and features within the county. The information has been collated from a wide range of sources, which include publications, unpublished reports and records, aerial photographs and private individuals. It also lists Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings.

1.2.4 A site visit was undertaken on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

### **1.3 Location and Land Use (see Figures 1 and 2)**

1.3.1 The development site is currently occupied by the Beacon Public House, which fronts onto Green's Place. The site is 22m by 12m in size (centred on NZ 3650 6805).

### **1.4 Geology, Geomorphology and Topography**

1.4.1 Across the area of the site lies a blanket of firm brown clay up to 12m in thickness dipping downwards toward the river. Included within the boulder clay are sundry lenses of sand and gravel that may have been deposited by streams in between the glacial periods when the clay itself was deposited.

1.4.2 The site occupies sloping ground on the Lawe-Top a short distance south of a steep scarp at a level above the riverbank.

## 2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Names of historical periods as used below are intended as a representation of the date of origin and duration of use of a site or feature; terms are used simply to refer to the time period and are not intended to infer any social or political connotations. The usual historical periods stated are: Palaeolithic (c. 45,000 BC- c. 12,000 BC); Mesolithic (c. 12,000 BC- c. 4,000 BC); Neolithic (c. 4,000 BC- c. 1,800 BC); Bronze Age (1,800 BC- 600 BC); Iron Age (c. 600 BC- AD 43: taken together, these periods are collectively referred to as prehistory); Romano-British (AD 43- AD 410); early medieval (AD 410- 1066); medieval (AD 1066- 1485); post-medieval (1485-1837); Victorian (1837-1901) and modern (1901 to the present).*

### 2.1 Prehistoric Period

2.1.1 There is evidence for prehistoric settlement activity on the Lawe-Top. Excavations within the area of the Roman Fort to the south of the site have revealed occupation evidence from the Mesolithic period to the Iron Age (Hodgson, Stobbs and Van der Veen 2001).

2.1.2 Other finds of Prehistoric date from the proximity of the site include flints from excavations at the Roman cemetery at Morton Walk and a Bronze Hallstadt-type sword, dating from the later-Bronze Age recovered from the Tyne (HER 769 Fig. 12 No. 19).

### 2.2 Romano-British Period

2.2.1 The history and chronology of the fort (HER 914, Fig. 12 No. 1) has been established from archaeological work undertaken between 1875 and the present day. The fort was in use from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century to at least the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century, going through several different phases of use as a garrison and a supply base (Bidwell and Speak 1994).

2.2.2 In 1875 many of the present streets on the Lawe-Top were laid out when the land was sold to the Corporation of South Shields. A committee was formed to record features associated with the fort and several areas were exposed and archaeologically recorded. The excavations were published by the Rev. R.E. Hoopell (1878) and Dr. J. Collingwood Bruce (1884). In addition to recording large areas within the fort, portions of all four gates and sections of the perimeter walls were identified on all sides of the fort. Although primarily focused on the central area of the fort the excavations established the north-eastern corner of the fort, which lies 30m south of the site.

2.2.3 Between 1949-50 Sir Ian Richmond led extensive excavations in the central and northern part of the site (Roman Remains Park) and established much of the chronology of the site. Between 1959-62 the South Shields Archaeological and Historical Society undertook excavations in the area immediately surrounding the fort, including the closest archaeological excavations to the development site (Fig.



13). To the north-east of the fort a parade ground (HER 904 No. 17) was found (Thornbarrow 1959) at the eastern end of Beacon Street, 36m outside the north-east corner of the fort. A series of 18 trenches (A1-C6, with three extensions – Trenches X, Y and Z), 15ft by 3ft 4in in size, were laid out within a 50ft square area (Figs. 13-14). At the northern corner of the excavated area were cobble foundations, 1.8m square and 0.9m high, for a platform or dais (Trenches A5 and X). Close to this was the head and torso of a sandstone statuette, probably representing Mars. Three *in situ* altar bases were found at a depth of 5ft below ground level in Trench A3, fragments of a large altar (Trench A4 at 5ft below ground level) and three fragments of an uninscribed sandstone panel (Trench A2 at a depth of 6ft 3in) were also located. Given the altar bases and possible shrine area the excavators made a careful search for buildings enclosing these features. The lack of any structural evidence led excavators to conclude that the most likely interpretation is that the features represented a series of altars and a dais at northern end of a parade ground. In the central and western trenches (B1-6 and C1-6) no further features were located apart from a north-south depression running through C1-C6. At western end of the trenches natural clay lay at 11-12 ft, but above this was a considerable deposit of clay and earth suggesting to the excavators a levelling up for a parade ground.

2.2.4 In 1960 further excavations took place in a plot of land immediately to the east of the Beacon Public House (Fig. 13). The excavation proved unfruitful and was abandoned (Thornbarrow 1960, 9). There is no record of size, depth and scale of this excavation.

2.2.5 At Beacon Street in 1960 a section was cut across the outer defensive ditch, at a point between the north gate and north-east angle (Thornbarrow 1960) 35m south-west of the site. In the trench, only the outer half of the ditch was excavated as the inner half lay under the modern street. The ditch was 1.5m deep and its outer lip lay 11.4m from the fort wall. In a further excavation outside the north-west corner of the fort the outer ditch was shown to be 5.6m wide.

2.2.6 In mid 1960s removal of Victorian housing began across much of the Roman fort. Between 1966-7 J.P. Gillam undertook extensive excavations exposing the north gate and north-west angle (Dore and Gillam 1979). In 1974 the site passed into the care of Tyne and Wear Museums and between 1977-81 much of circuit of defences was exposed and consolidated (Miket 1983). From 1983 further excavations were undertaken principally within the central and southern sector of the site (Bidwell and Speak 1994) with evidence for an earlier fort coming to light. Excavations to the west and south-west of the fort identified components of the civilian settlement (*vicus*) (Snape, Bidwell and Stobbs 2010) and cemetery (Snape 1994). The location and form of the port (HER 910) are unknown but was probably situated at some point along the riverbank. Several archaeological excavations to locate the Roman port have been undertaken along the line of the riverbank without success. Finds of Roman date that relate to activity along the river include a possible shipwreck (HER 4672) and a coin (HER 907 Fig. 12 No. 18).

2.2.7 Whilst the majority of activity of Roman date has been located on the Lawe-Top in 1937 there was the discovery of a Roman drain during the repair to the sea wall opposite the Pilot Office 25ft below modern street level (HER 1898, Fig.12 No.21). It is likely that the foreshore in the Roman period lay close to the line of River Drive.

### 2.3 Early-Medieval Period

2.3.1 Evidence of post-Roman occupation has been excavated at the fort (Bidwell and Speak 1994), with an assemblage of 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century artefacts recovered from later levels indicating occupation activity on the site during the Anglo-Saxon period.

2.3.2 Antiquarian and historical accounts of South Shields suggest that there was a substantial settlement near South Shields during this period. The earliest extant reference to the area is thought to be Bede's statement that St. Cuthbert stayed at a convent on the mouth of the Tyne, probably the nunnery founded by St. Hilda, which is believed to have occupied a site at or near the present St. Hilda's Church (Hodgson 1903). This site would also have been likely to have had some form of harbour or beaching area for ships. In this context, the presence of related archaeological remains in the Mill Dam Area is a strong possibility. Hodgson (1903) suggests the arrival of the Vikings in 875 as the date of abandonment of this convent based on evidence from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

### 2.4 Medieval Period

2.4.1 While evidence of the smaller villages in the area can be found in charters as early as the late-eleventh century, the first reference to South Shields by name dates to the Melsanby Buke of 1239 (Hodgson 1903). It appears that the Bishop of Durham used South Shields as a port for trade in and out of the northern part of the county, and the later-thirteenth century is characterised by complaints and trade restrictions on South Shields imposed by the Corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne. A prosecution of 1275 suggested that the 'vill called Sutheseles' had been set up 30 years earlier by the prior of Durham (Hodgson 1903). The main focus of the settlement was in the Mill Dam area with records of activities such as salt working, brewing and milling.

2.4.2 In 1353, an agreement was reached to allow fishing from South Shields, overturning a ban of 1335. Complaints from Newcastle continued into the fifteenth century, though the courts appear to have favoured the Bishop of Durham's authorities as often as those of Newcastle (Hodgson 1903); South Shields evidently continued to grow and prosper.

2.4.3 Presumably as a result of the importance of fishing to the local economy, the salt trade grew in South Shields. The earliest mention of salt working in the area dates to 1489 (Hodgson 1903), though it seems likely that the trade had commenced in the area before then.

2.4.4 There would have been activity along the riverbank through the late medieval and early post-medieval period and evidence from excavations show the existence of a sequence of quay walls.

## 2.5 Post-Medieval Period

2.5.1 In 1643 a star fort (No.15 HER 949) was built on the Lawe. Its approximate position is shown on maps as close to the Roman fort, but its exact location is yet to be established.

2.5.2 The later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the continued importance of the salt and fishing trades to the development of South Shields. The importance of South Shields as a port was growing also. Documentary evidence suggests that the salt trade remained the mainstay of the local economy during this period, but it is clear that the ballast hills and shores had begun to accumulate during the earlier seventeenth century, suggesting a large quantity of maritime trade in the area. Certainly the Tyne was famously difficult to navigate under sail. The earliest licence granted by the corporation of Newcastle upon Tyne to build a new ballast shore was granted in 1741, apparently in recognition of a process which had been occurring for much longer.

2.5.3 The earliest documentary reference to industrial activity within the study area is to a shipyard traditionally thought to have been established around 1720 by Robert Wallis (Flagg 1979) (HER 8408 Fig. 12 No. 12). The Newcastle Courant advertised the sale of houses, a yard, waste ground and a quay to the east of Coble landing (Flagg 1979). By the late-eighteenth century, three further shipbuilders (William Forster, John Wright and James Evans) are recorded as having operated within this part of South Shields.

2.5.4 Flagg (1979) notes the disastrous consequences on the shipbuilding industry of the end of the Napoleonic wars, and while some firms appear to have continued in operation into the 1820s and 1830s, there was a definite hiatus in the industry at this time. The most notable firm to emerge from this depression was that of Thomas Marshall, who built over 100 vessels between 1839-59. The middle years of the nineteenth century saw a boom in the shipbuilding industry in this area, with yards belonging to Rennoldson, Readhead and Softley being constructed. Three shipyards (HER 2334 Fig. 12 No. 8) are shown at Sand End to the north of the Lawe at South Shields on the First edition Ordnance Survey plan (Fig.5). The yards were divided by narrow landings. Internal features include slipways and small structures, the functions of which are not indicated, but may well have been for repairing vessels. By the time of the Second edition Ordnance Survey plan (Fig. 7), the west yard had been bought by Rennoldson and converted to iron construction. The middle yard had fallen into disuse, but is annotated 'Engineering Works (disused)' and the slipways shown on the First edition Ordnance Survey plan are now described as 'old'. By the 1900s, the middle yard was once again in use as a shipyard. Rennoldson's shipyard (HER 2439, Fig.12 No.9) was the most long-lived which included

Rennoldson's shipping building (HER 14428 Fig.12 No. 10) which stands just to the north-west of the development site.

2.5.5 The commanding position of the headland on the Lawe-Top meant that it was used for a battery of guns during the Napoleonic Wars (HER 950 Fig. 12 No. 16). The guns were removed to Tynemouth shortly after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Subsequently two Russian cannons captured from the Crimean War (1853-1856) were set in a walled enclosure being presented to South Shields Corporation in 1858 by Lord Panmure as a spoil of war. The original guns were still on site in the 1930s but are now replaced by replicas (HER 11977 Fig. 12 No. 5). In 1832 the Lawe Beacon was constructed (HER 2347 Fig. 12 No.13) consisting of a brick obelisk with stone base and cap. This is one of a pair (with the eastern beacon-HER 2346), of guides for vessels entering the mouth of the Tyne. The beacons were designed as high and low navigation marks complementing the lights of North Shields.

2.5.6 The development of the Lawe-Top and the riverside below can be traced through the mapping evidence. Murphy's Plan of 1827 (Fig. 3) shows the area of the site as undeveloped with some structures to the west on Green's Place and others to the east at the northern end of the Lawe Road. By the time of a plan of 1833 (Fig. 4) structures extended east along Green's Place, although it is unclear whether the structure occupying the site was a public house or a domestic structure. This map shows a ropery running east-west south of Green's Place with a ballast railway further to the south crossing the fort. The development of the riverbank with shipbuilding yards is also evident on this figure.

2.5.7 The first edition OS map of 1861 (Fig. 5) shows greater detail with houses beginning to be built fronting onto the southern side of Beacon Street. It is still unclear whether the structure occupying the site was residential or a public house. However, the second edition OS map of 1898 (Fig. 7) clearly labels the structure occupying the site as Beacon Inn. This edition of the OS map also depicts some of the Roman fort structures and traces the line of the fort wall as established by the excavations of 1875.

2.5.8 The third edition OS map of 1915 (Fig. 8) shows Beacon Street further developed with a row of houses fronting the northern side of the street. Between 1936-8 the riverside at South Shields was extensively re-developed. This process can be seen on the fourth edition OS map (Fig. 9) of 1941, where there are empty plots on the riverfront. The OS map of 1956 shows the redevelopment of the riverbank with factories and shipbuilding yards constructed (Fig. 10). The 1970 OS map (Fig. 11) shows demolition of some of the buildings on Beacon Street and Green's Place. Subsequently new structures were built on Green's Place and the remainder of Beacon Street was demolished.

### **3. POTENTIAL FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES ON THE SITE**

#### **3.1 Statutory constraints**

3.1.1 There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) on the development site. Arbeia Roman Fort which lies 30m to the south of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No. 2 and is part of the UNESCO Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site). The development site lies within the archaeological notification zone (STMBC) associated with Arbeia Roman Fort. A number of houses on Green's Place (HER 4518 Fig. 12 No. 2) (HER 4519 Fig. 12 No. 3) (HER 4520 Fig. 12 No. 4) that are listed buildings lie within 100m of the site. The beacon (HER 2347 Fig. 12 No. 13) to the east of the site is listed. The new building has been sympathetically designed to fit in with the existing townscape setting.

3.1.2 The landscape setting of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site is considered to have a high cultural heritage value. English Heritage guidance emphasises the role that the area around a designated asset (its setting), plays in its significance. In relation to the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site, the significance of the setting is that it allows a comprehension and appreciation of Roman military planning and land use. Whilst an unsympathetic development would have a harmful effect on its setting, the proposed scheme has been designed to improve and enhance the setting and minimise any harmful effects. The development would replace a disused building which is currently detrimental as it stands and has a negative impact upon the setting of the World Heritage Site.

#### **3.2 Extant Structures**

3.2.1 The Beacon Public House occupies the site. The pub consists of a two-storeyed building with dormer windows on a third-floor. A photograph of the 1940s shows the frontage consisting of two sets of three-light semi-transparent windows with wooden doors to either side (Fig. 15). Placed centrally above the windows is the original name of the pub, Beacon Inn. In the second half of the twentieth century the frontage was much altered with the rectangular windows being replaced with arched windows, the eastern door being blocked up and a new sign "The Beacon" with lighting above being added (Fig. 16). There is an 'L' shaped basement which extends from the front corner of the building approximately 8.30m along the frontage, and 7.60m up the side (Fig. 13). The first record of the public house was in 1853 when it was advertised as the Beacon Inn by Anthony Percy (Burnett 2014). A search was made for Goad Insurance Plans but none were held for South Shields at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

#### **3.3 Sub-surface Archaeological Features**

3.3.1 The development site lies to the south of Arbeia Roman Fort on a strip of land between the outer defensive ditches and a steep scarp to the riverbank. The areas

immediately outside the fort were utilised for a number of both military and civilian purposes, linked by a series of roads. Previous excavation suggests that a parade ground occupied the area to the north-east of the fort (15m south-east of the development site). There is the possibility that Roman period features may exist, or have once existed in the area of the development.

3.3.2 Any potential archaeological remains may have been disturbed by the construction of the Beacon Public House. In particular cellars focused on the northern side of the property are likely to have impacted on any archaeological deposits that are not deeply buried.

## **4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

### **4.1 Assessment of Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Value**

4.1.1 The North East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment (NERFF) makes the recording of the Roman Military Presence a key research aim. Research Agenda Riii sets out the rationale and strategy for recording Roman Military features.

### **4.2 Impacts to Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Features on the Site**

4.2.1 Groundworks have the potential to impact on surviving sub-surface archaeological features, although any such features may be deeply buried. The southern portion of the site is the most likely area to contain sub-surface archaeological remains as cellars are located in the northern portion of the site.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 The development site lies to the north of Arbeia Roman Fort in a strip of land between the outer defensive ditches and a steep scarp above the riverbank. The areas immediately outside the fort were utilised for a number of military and civilian purposes (civilian settlement, parade ground, cemetery and port linked by a series of roads). Previous excavation suggests that a parade ground lay to the north-east of the fort (15m south-east of the development site). Given the extent of extra-mural activity there is the possibility that Roman period features may exist, or have once existed in the area of the development. The construction of the Beacon Public House and associated cellars may have impacted on any potential features. Should groundworks associated with the proposed development penetrate beneath pre-modern levels then they may impact on archaeological features if present.

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**APPENDIX 1: CATALOGUE OF HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FEATURES**

ID	HER No	Easting	Northing	Description	Date	Statutory Designation
1	914	365	679	Arbeia Roman Fort	Roman	Scheduled Ancient Monument
2	4518	3636	6799	Nos. 68-70 Green's Place-housing	19 <sup>th</sup>	LB 2
3	4519	3640	6802	No. 81 Green's Place	19 <sup>th</sup>	LB 2
4	4520	3642	6804	No. 83-85 Green's Place	19 <sup>th</sup>	LB 2
5	11977	3655	6806	Lawe Top canons	19 <sup>th</sup>	
6	2434	3622	6823	Commisioner's Staiths	19 <sup>th</sup>	
7	2464	3658	6816	Oil Depot	19 <sup>th</sup>	
8	2334	3639	6810	Sand End Shipyards	19 <sup>th</sup>	
9	2439	3628	6804	J.P. Rennoldson & Sons Shipyards	19 <sup>th</sup>	
10	14428	3637	6807	Rennoldson's Shipping Building	19 <sup>th</sup>	
11	4672	367	682	Possible Roman Shipwreck	Roman	
12	8408	363	680	Shipyards	18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup>	
13	2347	3654	6806	Lawe Beacon (west)	19 <sup>th</sup>	LB 2
14	910	361	679	Roman port	Roman	
15	949	365	680	Post-medieval fort	17 <sup>th</sup>	
16	950	365	681	Lawe Bank battery-subsequently moved to Tynemouth	19 <sup>th</sup>	
17	905	365	680	Parade ground	Roman	
18	907	367	682	Roman coin	Roman	
19	769	365	682	Bronze sword	Prehistoric	
20	1897	3633	6798	Roman pottery and walls	Roman	
21	1898	3638	6805	Roman drain	Roman	
22	11136	364	681	Sculpture	20 <sup>th</sup>	
23	2438	3646	6818	Staith	19 <sup>th</sup>	
24	2437	3655	6822	Staith	19 <sup>th</sup>	