WRITTEN SCHEME OF INVESTIGATION FOR ARHAEOLOGICAL WORKS AT BLANCHLAND ABBEY 2024

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Introduction

This Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) has been prepared by Dr Robert Young on behalf of the '6 A's of Blanchland Project', Newcastle A.D.C. and Blanchland P.C.C. It details the methodology for a programme of work to:

a) Investigate and clear the external drainage system running along the west wall of the church up to the boundary wall between the churchyard and the Lord Crewe Arms garden. This work to facilitate the insertion of a new drainage pipe in the course of the existing drain. It is proposed that the new pipe should come through the boundary wall at approximately ground level (Note the ground level to the south side is much lower than the grave yard). It is then proposed to run the pipe along the Lord Crewe side of the boundary wall at approximately ground level, with very shallow excavation to reduce impact on archaeology and the planting along this boundary. The pipe can be covered with earth where it is above ground and will be masked by the vegetation. A small length of pipe would then be inserted into a trench excavated in the path to connect to Northumbria Water's combined sewer connection at existing manhole.

(Scheduled Monument Consent for this aspect of the work will be required from the Secretary of State and DCMS). (It is thought that leakage and water back-up from this blocked drain is causing issues with water ingress and dampness within the church itself).

b) To assess whether the drainage system runs around the northern and eastern sides of the base of the Tower, beyond the Scheduled area.

c) To explore the potential archaeology beneath the main access path (Scheduled Monument Consent for this aspect of the work will be required from the Secretary of State and DCMS) in advance of levelling work to create disabled access to the church and

d) To assess, in more detail, the area of the proposed kitchen and toilet extension on the north side of the church tower.

Blanchland is located on the north bank of the river Derwent, 11 miles west of Shotley Bridge, 10 miles south of Hexham and 9 miles north of Stanhope, in the south-western corner of Northumberland at NGR NY965504. The Derwent is the boundary between Durham and Northumberland at this point, and the village lies at the center of a small, level, area between the river Derwent and rising land to the north. This area is occupied by fields and extends about a kilometer upstream and downstream from the village. Upstream, at Baybridge, the hills converge to form a narrow, steep sided, valley and two kms further upstream, the source of the Derwent is located at the confluence of the Beldon and Nookton Burns. About a kilometer downstream from Blanchland, the hills converge again to form a narrow valley before this opens out again at Ruffside from where the stream flows into the Derwent Reservoir (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Village Location

The village and the Church have developed from the remains of one of only six Premonstratensian Abbeys in North-Eastern England (Fig. 2). It was founded in 1165 by Walter de Bolbec and it is the only Premonstratensian Abbey in the country to retain part of its original Church as the current parish Church. All of the extant Church/Abbey fabric would appear to date to the C13th.

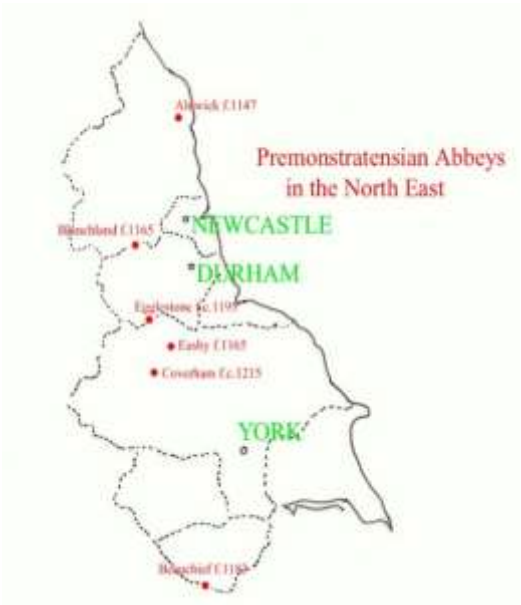

Fig. 2: Premonstratensian Abbeys in the Northeast of England (after P. Ryder).

The Premonstratensian order of 'canons regular' was founded at Prémontré near Laon in France in 1120 by Saint Norbert, (they are also known as 'Norbertines') and at the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII they had 35 religious houses in England. As Ryder has pointed out, 'Blanchland is unique in the manner in which the remains of the monastic complex, both cloister and outer court, were recast in what has been termed a 'model village;' in the 18th century by the Lord Crewe Trustees.' (Ryder, 2012, 1). (Fig. 3).

The Church itself, and the above ground remains of the priory that can still be seen embedded within the current village structure, were the subject of late nineteenth/very early twentieth century antiquarian interest (e.g., Johnson, 1894; Featherstonehaugh, 1868, 1893; Knowles, 1902; Northumberland County History (NCH), 1902). Recent work on the Church, the Priory and the village in general has been carried out by Peter Ryder and the Newcastle-based Archaeological Practice (see below and Ryder, 1985, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2017; The Archaeological Practice, 2014). In 2023 a programme of archaeological evaluation was carried out inside the church to aid in decision making about the feasibility of installing underfloor heating.

Fig. 3: The Monastic Complex as the modern village of Blanchland (CACA, 2008, 26)

The Priory Church itself is a Garde 1 Listed building, while the Scheduled area of the complex is shown on Fig. 4 below. The details of the Scheduling List Entry read:

> *The monument comprises the site of the nave, south transept, cloister garth, east claustral range and part of the monastic graveyard of Blanchland Abbey. Remains of all these features survive beneath the modern ground surface. The later 12th/early 13th century standing cross west of the church tower is also included. The Abbey was founded for the Canons of the Order of Premontre (the Premonstratensians) by Walter de Bolbeck in 1165. Although never a very large house, it was visited by Edward III in 1327 following its*

burning by Scots raiders. The monastery was initially dissolved in 1536 only to be reformed by the King in 1537 before being finally dissolved in 1539. The site passed through secular hands and was acquired by the Forster family in the early 17th century. By this time or soon after, the cloister had become the core of the mansion, parts of which survive today as the Lord Crewe Arms Hotel (Listed Building Grade II). The northern and western walls of the former parish burial ground are included in this scheduling as they are considered to incorporate areas of medieval fabric. Other walls demarcating the edge of the area of the monument are not included in the scheduling. A row of buildings to the rear of the Hotel adjacent to the south boundary of the monument are excluded from the scheduling, but the ground beneath them is included. The area of the scheduling comprises only part of the former monastic precinct. It should be noted that the following features of the abbey are not included: 1) the parish church which comprises the north transept and choir of the monastic church. 2) the present parochial graveyard east of the parish church; 3) the remains of the west and south ranges of the cloister and of buildings which originally formed four sides of the monastic outer court (including the precinct gatehouse) which have been converted in various ways into dwellings etc. 4) the village square and adjacent roads. These are all considered at present to be adequately covered by other forms of statutory protection, notably listed building legislation and conservation controls.*

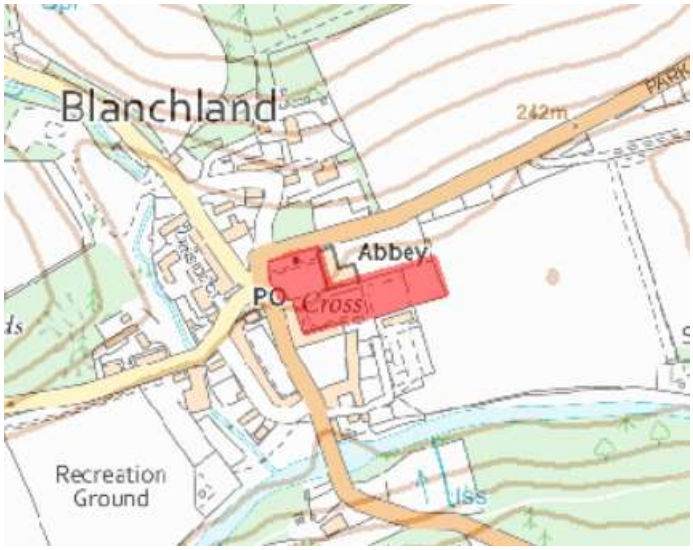

FIG. 4: Blanchland Scheduled Area

The work will be carried out as a community archaeology project with volunteers working under professional supervision. Supervisory staff will include Dr Robert Young, Dr Sheila Newton, Dr Andrew Newton. On site and public liability insurance will be covered by the Blanchland Abbey ‘Resilient Heritage Project’.

The proposed works will provide sufficient data for informed decisions to be made regarding:

i) The course, and condition of the N/S orientated external drain and whether it continues around the base of the church tower.

ii) The nature and extent of work required for the repair and maintenance of the existing structure and to allow the insertion of a new drain pipe to carry away water from

structure to the existing Northumbrian Water drainage system as detailed in Fig. 5 below.

iii) The extent and nature of works required to facilitate ease of disabled access to the church through the main door.

iv) The nature of any archaeological features revealed in the course of exploratory work on the church path and in the area of the proposed kitchen/toilet extension on the east side of the church tower. The church architect has discussed the proposed building extension with the project's structural engineers. It is proposed to install a concrete raft foundation to support the new extension. Given the current ground floor level and the potential levels of the new kitchen it is estimated that the base of the new raft foundation will require an excavation around the perimeter of the building in the order of 650mm and 550mm across the rest of the extension footprint.

v) The archaeological significance and importance (*sensu* the National Planning Policy Framework, 2023) of any features revealed in the course of the proposed evaluation work.

vi) The likely impact of the proposed development works upon any such features and

vii) Working with the Church Architect and the DAC Archaeologcal Adviser, the development of an appropriate strategy to mitigate the impact of the proposed developments on recovered archaeological remains.

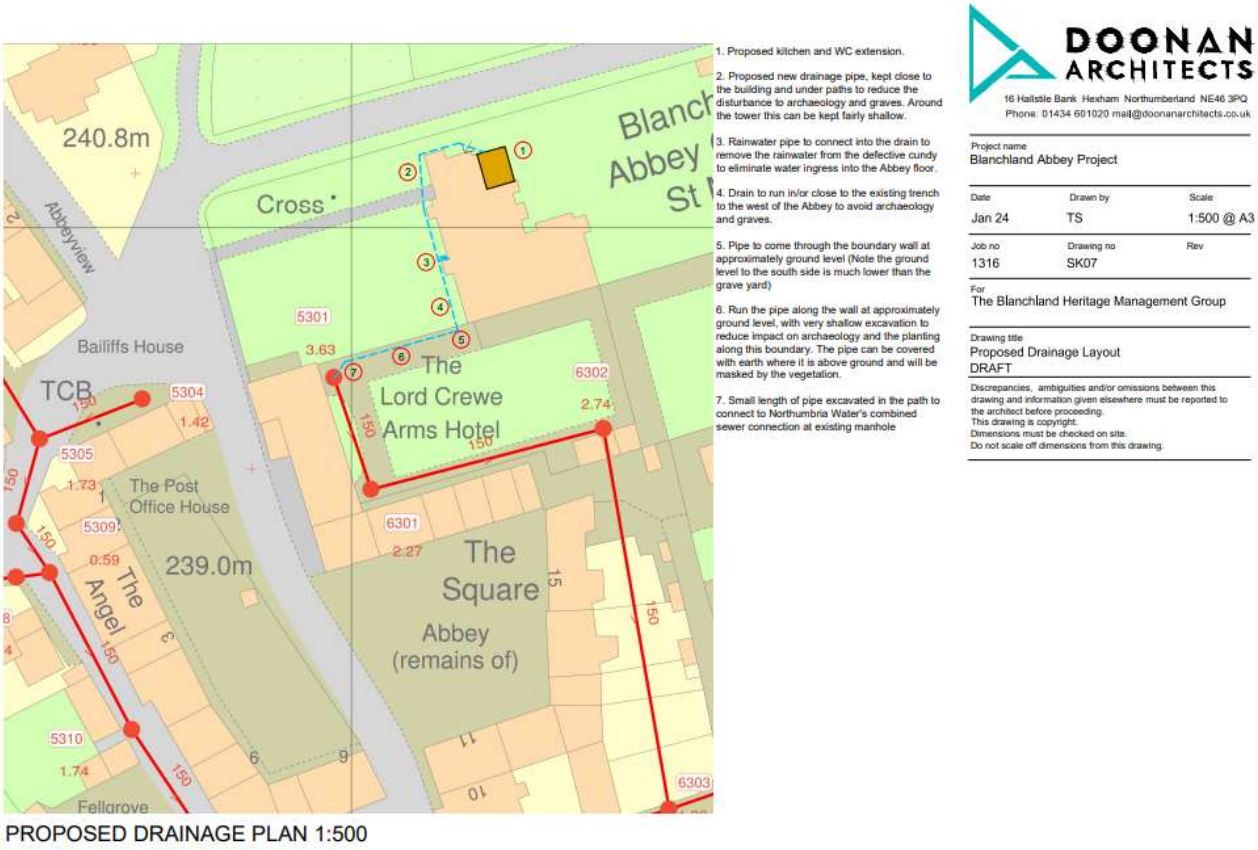

Fig. 5: Draft Architect's drawing showing proposed drainage layout.

Methodology (Fig. 6 below indciates areas of proposed work)

Project initialisation

i) Scheduled Monument Consent must be secured by the PCC before any works can be carried out along the North/South orientated drain.

ii) The contractor will inform the Northumberland County Council Archaeology Officer and the regional Historic England Inspector of Ancient monuments at least one week in advance of the commencement of fieldwork.

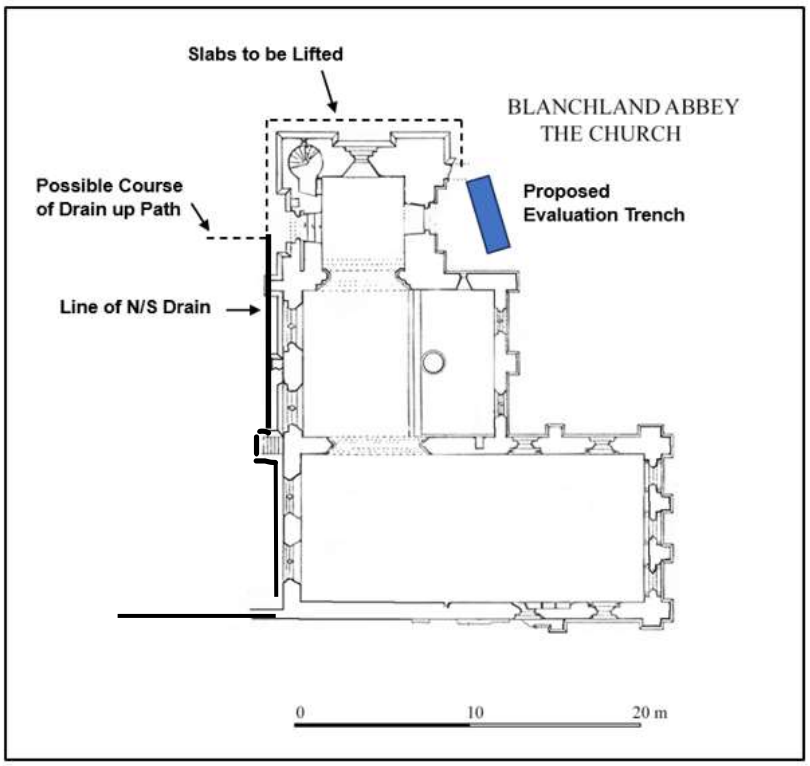

Fig. 6: Location of Proposed Works

Drainworks (Figs. 5 and 6; Pl. 1)

i) Drain cover slabs will be photographed and recorded and then lifted from the drain in Pl. 1 (below) northwards to follow its course. Slabs will be maintained in sequence of removal for later re-laying. The same will be done with paving slabs running around the base of the Tower on its northern and eastern sides.

ii) The N/S drain will be cleared, archaeologically, paying due attention to any observable stratigraphic data and relationships within the structure. Any finds will be recorded and retained.

iii) The course of the drain will be recorded photographically and in drawn plan view and the sides and base will be also recorded photographically and as elevation drawings and drawn plans.

Pl. 1: Location of N/S orientated drain running along West Wall

Pathway (Figs. 5 and 6; Pl.2)

Pl.2: Pathway from Gate to main Church Entrance

i) The incline of the pathway, from the church gate to the main doorway, needs to moderated to facilitate disabled/wheelchair access. The tarmac will have to be lifted and the levels physically altered. This will necessitate an archaeological evaluation of the area of the proposed intervention.

ii) The church architect has suggested that a length of pathway some 7m west of the main steps down to the church door will need to be levelled.

iii) It is proposed to examine the area in a series of 7 small, hand dug, sondage type trenches measuring 600mm x 600mm (the size of a paving slab) spaced 500mm apart along the path.

iv) There will be a presumption of the need to cause the minimum disturbance to the site consistent with adequate evaluation.

v) Significant archaeological features (e.g., solid, or bonded structural remains, building slots or postholes), will be preserved intact even if fills are sampled. And excavation will be undertaken with a view to avoiding damage to any archaeological features or deposits which are demonstrably worthy of preservation in situ.

Archaeological Finds

i) All identified finds and artefacts will be collected and retained and bagged and labelled according to their context. Finds of significant interest will be given a 'small finds' number, and information on their location will be entered on a separate pro-forma sheet that will form part of a dedicated 'Small Finds Register'.

ii) No finds will be discarded without assessment by an appropriate finds specialist, or approval of the DAC Archaeological Adviser.

iii) All finds and samples will be treated in a proper manner during the excavation and post-excavation stage and to approved IFA standards.

iv) If required, conservation will be undertaken by approved conservators in line with the First Aid for Finds guidelines (Watkinson and Neal 1998).

v) The guidelines for handling post-Roman ceramics produced by the Medieval Pottery Research Group will be followed (MPRG 2001) if required.

vi) The terms of the Treasure Act 1996, as amended, and the Treasure (Designation) Order 2002 will be followed regarding any finds that might fall within its purview. All finds of gold and silver, and associated objects, will be reported to the coroner according to the procedures relating to the Treasure Act 1996 (and the act's amendment of 2003 to include prehistoric objects such as metalworking hoards and other non-precious metal items), after discussion with the DAC Archaeological Adviser, and the County Finds Liaison Officer.

vii) Ownership of any finds recovered during archaeological works rests with the Diocese and Church Authorities except where other law overrides this (e.g., Treasure Act 1996; Burial Act 1857). However, the contractor will seek to obtain 'in principle' agreement that any recovered artefacts should be donated to The Great North Museum.

viii) A full written, drawn, and photographic record will be made of all features revealed during the archaeological evaluation. Plans will be completed at a scale of 1:20 (as appropriate), with section drawings at a scale of 1:10. All plans will be tied in with the Ordnance Survey National Grid with levels given to above OD.

ix) A digital photographic record will be produced and collated in a designated photographic register. This will be maintained throughout the course of the fieldwork and will include as a minimum:

- the site prior to commencement of fieldwork
- the site during work, showing specific stages of fieldwork
- the layout of archaeological features within each trench
- individual features and, where appropriate, their sections
- groups of features where their relationship is assessed to be important

x) Following excavation and recording of any archaeological remains, and with the agreement of the DAC Archaeological Adviser following a monitoring visit, the evaluation trenches will be backfilled with the previously excavated material.

Evaluation Trench to East of Tower (Fig. 5)

i) This trench will measure c. 1m x 8m and will be orientated to cross the area of the proposed kitchen/toilet extension. Data from this intervention will be an adjunct to information recovered in the evaluation carried out in Feb 2023 and recently reported on (Young 2024).

ii) The same methodology as set out above will be followed in this trench.

Specialist Finds Consultants

Assessment and analysis of finds, environmental samples and human remains will be undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced specialists, if required.

Medieval/Post-Medieval Pottery - Dr Rob Young

Medieval/Post-Medieval Metalwork – Dr Rob Young

Building Remains – Peter Ryder

Paleoenvironmental sampling strategy (If required)

i) Soil samples will be taken from all suitable features or deposits for palaeoenvironmental and sampling. This will comprise the removal of a bulk sample from every securely sealed and hand-excavated context, excepting those with excessive levels of residuality or those with minimal 'soil' content (such as building rubble).

ii) Bulk samples will comprise the maximum amount of material practicable to collect. These will be used to recover a sub-sample of charred macroplant material, faunal remains and artefacts where necessary, as well as any industrial residues.

iii) If buried soils or other deposits are encountered, column samples may be taken for micromorphological and pollen analysis.

iv) Environmental material will be stored in a controlled environment and specialists consulted during the course of the work if necessary.

v) The post-excavation processing of any palaeoenvironmental samples will be undertaken in line with nationally accepted standards e.g., *Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods from sampling and recovery to post-excavation (2011) a*nd by qualified specialists.

Human remains

i) As the evaluation will be undertaken within an historic churchyard and church interior there is a high potential that the groundworks could disturb human remains from earlier burials. The overriding presumption must be to prevent the disturbance of human remains unless unavoidable.

ii) If human remains are unavoidably disturbed, then the present incumbent and a representative from the DAC must be informed immediately. The remains must then be dealt with in accordance with the guidelines produced by the Church of England and Historic England (2017) and the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England (2013).

iii) There will be no excavation of the remains beyond the limit of the ground works (Church of England and Historic England 2017, 32, Annex E5).

iv) All remains will be hand-excavated.

v) Where disarticulated human remains are encountered, their location must be recorded and an in situ photographic record made before removal from the ground.

vi) The remains should be briefly assessed on site, to record the anatomical elements present, and then reverently reburied as close as possible to the point of discovery. Depending on the extent of the material encountered an osteoarchaeologist may need to be consulted.

vii) In the event of the discovery of articulated human remains all work on site must cease, and the remains be screened from public view. The DAC must be notified, and an application made to the Court if permission for excavation is sought. To enable an informed decision to be made, the archaeological contractor will need to detail the appropriate treatment of excavated human remains at all stages (including provisions for reburial), propose a realistic timetable for subsequent analysis, and an indication of costs. If permission by the Court is granted, the remains should be hand excavated and recorded in accordance with current guidelines (ADCA 2013; Historic England 2013).

viii) Following recording, the remains may not be removed from site without permission from the Court. Pending the application, the remains should be lifted, bagged, and retained on site and the advice of the DAC sought as to how to proceed.

ix) If an application to remove the remains from site is granted by the Court, the remains should be removed from site, washed, and assessed by a suitably qualified osteoarchaeologist.

x) If the Court does not grant permission for the remains to be removed from site, then the remains must be reverently reburied as close to their point of discovery as possible.

xi) The marking of the reburial site should be discussed with the PCC.

Unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries

i) Should unexpectedly extensive, complex, or significant remains be uncovered that warrant, in the professional judgment of the archaeologist on site or the DAC Archaeological Adviser, more detailed recording or extensive excavation than is appropriate within the terms of the WSI, the scope of the WSI will be reviewed.
ii) In the event of a review of the WSI being required, the contractor will contact the client and the DAC Archaeological Adviser with the relevant information to enable them to resolve the matter.
iii) This is likely to require an on-site meeting between the relevant stakeholders to review the archaeological remains on-site and identify a way forward.
iv) Any variations to this WSI will be put in writing and agreed by the relevant stakeholders including the DAC, DAC Archaeological Adviser, the PCC and Northumberland County Council Archaeology Officer

Monitoring

i) The Diocesan Archaeology Adviser, in liaison with the County Archaeology/Heritage Team and Historic England's Regional Inspector of Ancient Monuments, will be responsible for monitoring progress and standards throughout the project. This will include the fieldwork, post-excavation, and publication stages.
ii) Notification of the start of work will be given by the contractor to the monitoring bodies one week in advance of its commencement.
iii) Any variations to the written scheme of investigation will be agreed with the Diocesan Archaeology Adviser, County Archaeology/Heritage Team, prior to them being carried out (see above).
iv) No backfilling will take place until the Diocesan Archaeology Adviser, in liaison with the County Archaeology/Heritage Team, has inspected trenches and is satisfied that the work has been carried out to an appropriate standard.

Post Excavation Assessment

The post-excavation assessment work will comprise the following:

- checking of drawn and written records during and on completion of fieldwork.
- production of a stratigraphic matrix of the archaeological deposits and features present on the site, if appropriate
- cataloguing of photographic material
- cleaning, marking, bagging and labelling of finds according to the individual deposits from which they were recovered.
- processing and assessment of any environmental samples
- finds requiring specialist conservation will be sent to appropriate specialists for assessment, including identification and initial dating.

Results and reporting

i) The Archaeological Contractor must produce an interim report of 200 words minimum two weeks after the completion of the fieldwork for the client, and the Diocesan Adviser, and for dissemination to all interested parties.

ii) The full archive report on the trial trenching must be submitted within a length of time (but not exceeding 12 months) from the end of the fieldwork, to be agreed between the client, the Archaeological Contractor, and the Diocesan Archaeology Adviser. Upon agreement of the archive report, copies to be sent to the Northumberland County Council Archaeology Officer, Northumberland County Council HER

The Report must include as a minimum:

- Title page detailing site address, site code and accession number, NGR, author / originating body, client's name and address
- Non-technical summary of the findings of the evaluation
- Description of the topography and geology of the site
- Description of the archaeological background to the site
- Discussion of the aims and methods adopted during the trial trenching programme.
- Location plans of trenches in relation to the plan of the Church.
- Site narrative- interpretation, structural and stratigraphic history of the site, including relevant Harris Matrices.
- Plans showing all major features, and deposit spreads by phase and any section locations.
- Sections of trench axes and through excavated features with levels.
- Plans and Elevations of any walls etc. revealed during the works.
- All drawings to be of publication standard.
- Artefact reports, including full text descriptions and illustrations of finds.
- Tables and matrices summarising feature and artefact sequences.
- A full context list.
- Archive descriptions of contexts grouped by phase (not for publication).
- Deposit sequence summary (for publication/deposition).
- Colour photographs of trenches, archaeological features and finds.
- Any commissioned laboratory reports, summaries of dating and environmental data. with statements of collection methodologies.

- A consideration of the significance of the results of the work within the wider research context (e.g., ref. NERRF).
- Recommendations for further work on the site or further analysis of finds or environmental samples.
- Details of archive location and destination, together with a catalogue of what is contained in that archive.
- References and bibliography of all sources used
- Copy of the OASIS entry form and any entry updates
- Copy of this brief.

Archive Preparation and Dissemination

i) All archival material should be deposited with the Great North Museum if possible. The Archaeological Contractor should discuss provision for archive deposition with the Museum Staff, The Diocesan Archaeology Adviser, and Blanchland PCC prior to commencement of the works. Failing deposition with the Museum the material record will remain in the possession of the PCC.

ii) All parts of the OASIS online form must be completed for submission to the HER.

iii) The Site Archive (records and materials recovered) should be prepared for deposition at the Great North Museum in accordance with:

- *Archaeological Archives – A Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation* (Brown, 2011).
- *Standard and Guidance for The Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives* (CIFA, 2014)
- Great North Museum Archive Deposition Policy

Documentary Archive

i) The Documentary Archive will consist of all records made during the archaeological work (including all those in hard copy and digital form) e.g., all written records, indexes, object records, bulk find records sample records, skeletal records, photographic records, drawing records, drawings, level records, site notebooks, spot dating and conservation records, report drafts, published work, publication drawings and photographs etc.

ii) All paper-based material will be stored in conditions that minimise the risk of damage, deterioration, loss, or theft.

iii) All documents will be marked with the relevant site code or with the museum accessions number.

Material Archive

i) The Material Archive comprises all objects (artefacts, building materials, environmental remains) recovered in the course of the works.

ii) All recovered materials will be cleaned as appropriate and packed in appropriate materials to ensure their long-term survival.

iii) All finds must be marked or labelled with the relevant site code and contextual information and, where relevant, small find numbers.

iv) Permanent ink must be used to mark all finds bags.

Digital Archive

i)The Digital Archive will consist of a copy of the report on CD and all digital images.

Archive Deposition

i) The requirements for archive storage shall be agreed with the appropriate museum (The Great North Museum) and confirmed to the Diocesan Archaeological Adviser and the County Archaeology/Heritage Team.

ii) If the finds and archive are to remain with the landowner, a full copy of the archive shall be housed with the appropriate museum.

iii) The full archive shall be deposited with the appropriate museum within 1 month of the completion of the report and confirmed with Diocesan Archaeology Adviser and the County Archaeology/Heritage Team.

iv) A summary of the contents of the archive shall be supplied to the Diocesan Archaeology Adviser and the County Archaeology/Heritage Team at the time of deposition with the museum.

Health and Safety

i) The CIfA Standard guidance for archaeological excavation states that: "Health and Safety regulations and requirements cannot be ignored no matter how imperative the need to record archaeological information; hence Health and Safety will take priority over archaeological matters. All archaeologists undertaking fieldwork must do so under a defined Health and Safety Policy. Archaeologists undertaking fieldwork must observe safe working practices; the Health and Safety arrangements must be agreed and understood by all relevant parties before work commences. Risk assessments must be carried out and documented for every field project, in accordance with Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations…." (CIfA, 2014f, updated October 2020). Health and safety issues will take priority over archaeological matters and all archaeologists will comply with relevant Health and Safety Legislation e.g., the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992, as well as all other relevant Health and Safety legislation, regulations, and codes of practice in force at the time.

ii) The Blanchland Community Development Organisation will supply a copy of their Health and Safety Policy and a Risk Assessment will be prepared by the Contractor prior to the start of site works The Risk Assessment will have been read and understood by all staff attending site before any survey and investigation works commence.

iii) In addition to health and safety considerations, in terms of site security, where appropriate, the archaeological excavation area should be adequately fenced.