

Eagle Parade Water Cistern

The Market Place

Buxton



A Report on the Archaeological Monitoring

Planning application: HPK/2025/0367

NGR: SK 05757 73194

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1. Summary

- 1.1. Archaeological monitoring of groundworks with the potential for excavation was requested as the proposed development area fell within the adopted Buxton Area of Archaeological Interest. The site is also close to the known centre of Medieval Buxton and the presence of Roman material recorded in South Street. The proposed restoration work on the cistern could impact buried archaeological remains.
- 1.2. The excavation of two trial trenches to assess the below ground remains revealed that recent works carried out in the area of the Market Place in 2004 had not impacted below ground archaeology and that the original foundations for the cistern had been laid in made-up ground. There was no evidence of medieval material culture in either test trench.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Enrichment Through Archaeology was commissioned by Buxton Civic Association to produce a written scheme of investigation for archaeological monitoring of the Eagle Parade Water Cistern located in the Market Place, Buxton, Derbyshire (NG reference SK 05757 73194) as part of the proposed remedial work on redevelopment (Planning application no: HPK/2025/0367). The proposal comprises the stabilisation of the structure and reinstatement of railings.
- 2.2. The planning application attracted the attachment of conditional permission as the site sits with the Buxton Area of Archaeological Interest (BAAI). The County Archaeologist noted its proximity to Roman material recorded on South St and that the Market Place is located squarely in the centre of Medieval town. This being the case, it was stipulated that the following condition should be attached to any planning consent:
- i. “No development shall take place until a written scheme of investigation (WSI) for archaeological work has been submitted to and approved by the local planning authority in writing. For land that is included within the WSI, no development shall take place other than in accordance with the agreed WSI, which shall include the statement of significance and research objectives; and:
 - The programme and methodology of site investigation and recording and the nomination of a competent person(s) or organisation to undertake the agreed works
 - The programme for post-investigation assessment and subsequent analysis, publication & dissemination and deposition of resulting material. This part of the condition shall not be discharged until these elements have been fulfilled in accordance with the programme set out in the WSI.”
- 2.3. The project’s WSI was written after the completion of consultation visits to the site on January 5th and March 2nd 2026 . The trial trenches were undertaken on March 16th 2026 to assess the scope and scale of the proposed groundworks, their sequence and impact.

3. General Background

- 3.1. Buxton lies in the north-west of Derbyshire close to the counties of Cheshire and Staffordshire. Situated at the southern end of the Pennines at some 300m AOD, the underlying geology is carboniferous limestone at its boundary with carboniferous sandstones and shales.
- 3.2. Buxton has a rich archaeological record within 2km of the site, with evidence of human activity from the Mesolithic period (e.g. Otter Hole Farm) and of settlement from the Neolithic period (e.g. Lismore Fields). There is strong evidence of Roman occupation of the area including the presence of baths in the lower part of the town.
- 3.3. The history of the town has been the subject of several studies (e.g. Langham, 2001; Morris, 2007; Stroud, 2002) and there is general agreement on the history of the town prior to the 16th century and there are no extant buildings prior to this. The town has been defined as having several distinct conservation or character areas by the local authority (Morris, 2007). For the purposes of this work, only two will be considered at this point.
- 3.4. Character Area 1 (The Crescent) broadly features the area in the vicinity of The Crescent and the valley of the River Wye. Old Hall (MDR361), built in 1572, a property of the Earl of Shrewsbury, was used as one of the many locations around England to hold Mary Queen of Scots and behalf of Elizabeth I. Mary was held at the Old Hall on no less than eight occasions. However, it was in the 18th century that significant development of the town began. In Lower Buxton some of the more important buildings of this time are the Grove Hotel (MDR24346), site of the first coffee house in Buxton, and of course The Crescent (MDR317), but there are other significant buildings which attest the growth of the town such as the George Public House & Mansions (MDR24364) and the White Lion Hotel (MDR23567).
- 3.5. The site of the Cistern/Conduit, on the western side of the Market Place, is in Character Area 2, or Higher Buxton (Morris, 2007). Like Lower Buxton this part of the town also has a range of extant post-medieval buildings such as the early 17th century church of St Anne (MDR365) Higher Buxton too has several coaching inns e.g. The Eagle (MDR24368), The Sun (MDR24384) and Cheshire

Cheese (MDR24387) and residential properties e.g. Buxton House on Terrace Rd (MDR24343).

- 3.6. The Eagle Parade Water Conduit or Cistern was built on behalf of the 6th Duke of Devonshire in 1840 and provided the first piped water supply in the town, drawing on cold springs. A Statement of Significance has been prepared by Bench Architects and is included in the planning application (Bench Architects, 2025). This details the history of the Cistern and repetition in this report would offer little advantage. It is one of several public drinking fountains in the town which includes the more well-known St Anne's Well (MDR24328) and the Samuel Turner Fountain (MDR24341). The cistern does not appear on the 1848 Buxton Tithe map (Fig. 2.) but does feature on the 1878 Ordnance Survey and subsequent maps. It also appears on 19th century paintings of the Market Place such as those of Godfrey Sykes (1849) and John Cummings Bates (1851) both of which are held in the collections of Buxton Museum & Art Gallery.
- 3.7. The cistern had a relatively short working life after developing problems due to corrosion and inoperability in freezing weather and by 1853 other water supplies had been constructed to serve the population in the vicinity. The site was subject to multiple episodes of disturbance for repairs and finally in 1939 the iron railings were removed as part of the war effort in the town. Today the cistern shows significant signs of deterioration and destabilisation. It has lost decorative elements such as the Cavendish serpent motif on the eastern face noted in the Statement of Significance (Bench Architects, 2025: 11) and the urn which sat atop. In 2024 the trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement transferred to Buxton Civic Association the Cistern at Buxton. This was on the basis of the transfer of such right title and interest as Chatsworth had to the cistern. Formal ownership is being process via an application the Land Registry.

4. Archaeological Background

4.1. Prehistory

There are no finds or other evidence of any prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity of the Market Place.

4.2. Roman

Despite strong evidence of Roman occupation elsewhere in Buxton (e.g. Holker Road - MDR320), the only evidence of any Roman period activity in the area is that of a paved road thought to be Roman which was uncovered in 1949 (MDR345).

4.3. Post-Roman/Early medieval

There are no significant archaeological remains from the post-Roman period in the BAAI.

4.4. Medieval

On the earliest known map of Buxton, the 1631 map by William Senior, the area now occupied as the Market Place is simply labelled *Buxton Towne*. It covers an area in keeping with other local examples of medieval market places such as Hartington and Tideswell, but the town did not obtain a market charter until much later. What is clear from the map is the layout of the settlement on the west, north and southeast sides. Also shown are strip fields, particularly to the east. These have all since been obliterated by later development although traces can be seen elsewhere in the town, for example at Otter Hole Farm (MDR8979). Despite this, there are no significant archaeological remains from the Medieval period in the BAAI (Stroud, 2002: 8).

4.5. Post-medieval

As was noted above the site is located in Character Area 2 of Buxton and the post-medieval development of the Market Place has been detailed by Morris (2007) and Strong (2002). In the 18th century the Market Place became a focal point for coaching inns, concomitant roads and residential buildings with some examples noted above. Scarsdale Place on the eastern side of the Market Place dates to the second or third quarter and has seen repeated redevelopment such as that currently taking place. In the 18th century this was the site of a large hotel, the White Hart, and

glimpses of this building may still be seen to the rear of nos 10-13 Scarsdale Place (Morris, 2007). On the north side, a Dissenter chapel and manse were built in the northwestern corner in 1725. The chapel was later demolished and replaced by houses that are now form a part of Hall Bank development. A market hall was built in 1857, some years after the awarding of a market charter, but this burned down in 1885 and was replaced by the current Town Hall. The west side of the Market Place has also been extensively redeveloped. Between the Eagle Hotel and the Dissenter chapel were a number of two and three storey buildings, used for a variety of purposes. These are illustrated in Morris (2007: PL 17 & 18). These too have been demolished and replaced by the development known as Eagle Parade. The Eagle Hotel in its current form, dates to 1760 and replaced an earlier inn – the Eagle and Child – and this was later extended on its southern side. There have been a range of buildings occupying the rest of the west side of the Market Place. The building now used as a Sainsbury's supermarket has in the past been a garage/petrol station and police station. It was originally a stable block for the Eagle. In 1848 the Wesleyan Methodist church was constructed in the southwest corner of the Market Place. The immediate area around the cistern is now laid to tarmac and forms part of the Market Place car park, which was subject to improvement works in 2004.

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1. The purpose of field monitoring as stated by the ClfA is:

“to gain information about the archaeological resource within a given area or site (including its presence or absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality), in order to make an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, leading to one or more of the following:

- a. the formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource
- b. the formulation of a strategy to mitigate a threat to the archaeological resource
- c. the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research”

(ClfA, 2014a: 4).

5.2. The following observation has been made by the County Archaeologist regarding the site: “In relation to below-ground archaeology the site is within the Buxton Area of Archaeological Interest which principally relates to Roman Buxton but also spans the area of the medieval town. The current site may be a little peripheral to the Roman activity (though I note the record for a paved road at South St only about 90m away to the E); it would however be squarely in the medieval centre of the settlement. It is therefore a location of archaeological potential.”

5.3. Of greater relevance is the location of the cistern to the Market Place and its place in the medieval and post-medieval development of the town (Knight et al 2012; Research Objective 8.1 Urbanism: morphology, functions and buildings). To date there has been a disappointing amount of archaeological investigation of this period in Buxton. It is also noteworthy that the most recent observation dates to 1995 when it was observed that only 18th century ceramics and in-situ clays were present (SDR22892). The original proposals specified a new concrete base for the cistern and the County Archaeologist stated that; “presumably this will require a certain depth of excavation – and this process may therefore have archaeological implications in exposing and/or impacting on stratigraphy beneath the Market Place with medieval...origins.”

5.4. The trial holes have evidenced that the cistern and railing plinth footings are sound, and the bed-rock high; therefore, the footings can be retained in situ to support the reassembled cistern ashlar and railing plinth. The compacted clay deposited in the trenching at the time of the cistern's 1840 construction, is to be replaced with a well compacted Type 3 - limestone hardcore. As the trenching is of sterile character it therefore seems highly unlikely that any medieval and post-medieval material evidence would remain in the unexcavated areas around the cistern.

6. Methodology

- 6.1. Given the potential of further evidence of the development of Buxton and the proximity to known sites, the County Archaeologist identified that the scope and scale of the WSI would depend on the “proposed works and sequence.” The archaeological monitoring therefore reflected both the potential of the site and recent archaeological interventions in the area. To that end the monitoring involved the observation, detailing and recording of any archaeological remains encountered during the removal of any topsoil and groundworks for the reassembled structure. This WSI was agreed in advance with the County Archaeologist.
- 6.2. Discussion with HPBC Conservation Officer was also undertaken regarding any anticipated work they felt appropriate. It was agreed that a Level 3 Building recording would be undertaken by Bench Architects and included with the Listed Building and Planning Application submissions.
- 6.3. The initial groundwork investigations were undertaken by a separate contractor – Peak Drilling (www.peak-drilling.co.uk). These comprised the removal of modern stone slabs and the excavation of 2 trial-pits circa 450mm - 600mm to reveal the footings construction, geometry and their depth. The investigations were carried out under direct observation and supervision at all times.
- 6.4. All sub-surface stratigraphy down to the natural was cleaned using hand tools and all sub-surface stratigraphy was recorded and interpreted by the archaeologist.

7. Observations

- 7.1. The trial trenching took place on the 16th March 2026 and the works were conducted by the assigned contractor (Peak Drilling). The removal of the concrete slabs on the north (Trench a) and south side (Trench b) of the structure revealed a layer of modern cement.
- 7.2. The removal of the concrete on both sides exposed the below ground faces of the structure and the edges of the original retaining wall. Between these was a deposit of stiff mid-brown clay (see Fig. 5.).
- 7.3. The exposure of the cistern's structure below ground revealed two courses of worked limestone approximately 15cms which were bedded on a thin layer of ash/burnt material immediately on top of the natural bedrock.
- 7.4. On both the northern and southern faces of the cistern there were traces of badly degraded metal running between both horizontal and vertical joins of the foundations (see Fig. 6.).
- 7.5. The inner faces of the original walls which supported iron railings were found to consist of three elements. Topmost was a layer of cement covering a single course of red brickwork, which in turn was laid on a single course of worked limestone. There was no layer of ash/burnt material at the base.
- 7.6. In both trial trenches the E facing and W facing sections contained only the stiff mid-brown clay.
- 7.7. There were no small finds recovered from the excavation.

8. Analysis

- 8.1. The trial excavations revealed the extent of the foundations of the cistern which are undisturbed. There are remains of badly degraded ironwork in-situ which strongly suggests that the original pipework for the cistern passed through the stonework of the foundations and into the cistern itself. The deposit of clay in both trenches between the cistern and the outer wall coupled with its sterile character suggests that this is made-up ground which was added to the structure during construction.
- 8.2. The picture is one of a significant trench being opened for the construction of the cistern during the course of which any evidence of both medieval and post-medieval material culture was removed. It therefore seems highly unlikely that any such evidence remains in the unexcavated areas around the monument. Nevertheless, and if required, an archaeological watching brief can be undertaken during the full excavation of the clay trenching between the retained footings.

9. References

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10. Figures.

Figure 1. Location of Buxton

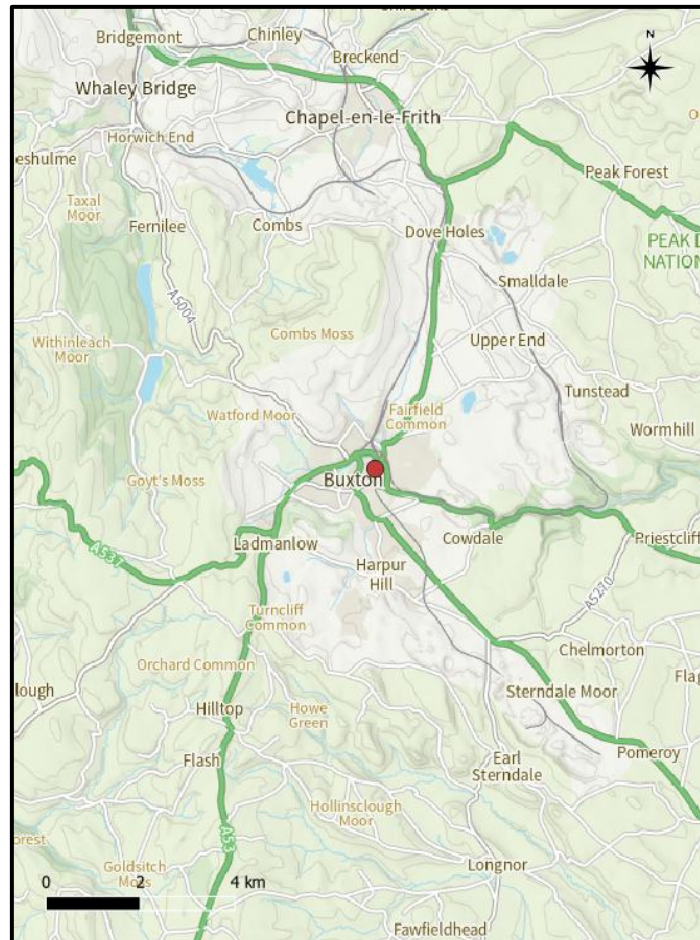


Figure 2. Location of Market Place, Buxton, 1848 Tithe map.



Figure 3. Detail of Market Place, Buxton, 1878 Ordnance Survey map.



Figure 4. Foundations of cistern (north facing).



Figure 6. West facing section of Trench b during excavation.



Figure 6. Detail of base of foundations showing badly degraded pipework (Trench a).

