

***A Watching Brief at
Llanyblodwell Bridge,
Shropshire, 2010***

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Shropshire
Council

**A WATCHING BRIEF AT
LLANYBLODWELL BRIDGE,
SHROPSHIRE, 2010**

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A Report for
Highways and Transportation,
Development Services, Shropshire Council

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Photo 6: Heavily eroded joint in the central span

SUMMARY

Llanyblodwell Bridge is a fine three-span sandstone structure dating to the early 18th century. However the invert between the piers of the bridge had become badly eroded and so Shropshire Council's Highways and Transportation section put in place a programme of repairs to the bridge. The bridge is a scheduled Ancient Monument and one of the requirements of the scheduled monument consent was that a programme of archaeological recording should accompany the repairs. The Archaeology Service was commissioned to carry out this recording work on the repairs, which took place in July and August 2010.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The village of Llanyblodwell is situated in northwest Shropshire, about 27km northwest of the centre of Shrewsbury. The river Tanat flows through the village and is crossed by a fine stone bridge (Historic Environment Record No. 01114). The bridge is a scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument No 229, Llanyblodwell Bridge) and a Grade II listed structure (No. 256632)

1.2 Llanyblodwell Bridge is a three span bridge of regularly coursed and dressed Cefn-y-Fedw sandstone blocks. The central span is a four-centred arch flanked by triangular cutwaters, carried up to form pedestrian refuges. The northern and southern spans are segmental arches. There is a low parapet surmounted by cast-iron railings, probably of 1888. The abutments are of un-coursed rubble.

1.3 Inspection had shown that the bridge's piers are located in the river and appear to have shallow foundations. The invert between the piers was seen to be badly weathered and in need of repair. Moreover, the River Tanat has been identified by the Environment Agency as being one of the biggest flash-flood risks in Shropshire. Until the invert was repaired, the structural integrity of the bridge was considered to be at risk in the event of a flood.

1.4 The original invert of the spans comprised a timber frame in which stones were laid on a concrete bed. However, much of the existing paved invert had been either lost or undercut, and elsewhere was highly weathered. The founding level of the piers also appeared to be only marginally below the top surface of the paved invert, and in places the southern pier was being undercut by the river.

1.5 Following a site meeting, a programme of repairs was planned. In the centre and southern spans the existing stones and heavily weathered timber frames would be taken up. The repair of the centre span would be achieved by constructing a new concrete invert. A stone strip, approximately 1.5m wide, would extend across the river along the western edge of the invert. The invert of the southern span would be repaired by casting a concrete slab which would then have a stone invert bedded on top of it. The invert of the northern span, which was in a better condition, had already been repaired in a manner that retained the existing timber frame.

1.6 It was agreed that a programme of archaeological work should accompany these repairs. The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, was asked to undertake this programme of archaeological work.

1.7 The aim of the programme of archaeological work was to allow for the preservation by record of the remains of the timber-framed invert and any other archaeological remains that were encountered during the repair works.

2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Documentary sources An assessment was made of the documentary sources for the bridge held in Shropshire Archives with the aim of identifying where possible further details of the bridge's construction and previous episodes of repair. A search of the Shropshire Archives' CALM database and the "Discovering Shropshire's History" website (www.shropshirehistory.org.uk) revealed that Shropshire Archives holds some papers relating to the bridge, arranged chronologically as 13 folders within three boxes (Shropshire Archives ref DP92). A summary of these documents is shown in Appendix 1.

2.2 A bridge is recorded at Llanyblodwell in 1684 (Watkin, 1907, p24). The Court of Quarter Sessions for Shropshire (1709-1800) records that in 1709 an assessment was made on the townships of Oswestry for £80 for repairs to the bridge and again a further assessment of £50 was made in 1710. Presumably the repairs involved substantial rebuilding, as a tablet said to exist in one of the downstream recesses (or on the underside of the parapet) gives the date 1710 for the building of the bridge ("This bridge was erected with stone at ye charge of the Hundred of Oswestry. Anno. Dom. 1710"). Further assessments for repairs were made in 1745, 1770, and 1772, and again in 1784 when the bridge was damaged by a flood. (Watkin, 1907, pp24-5).

2.3 The bridge is not shown on John Rocques county map of 1752, but the cartography of this part of Shropshire on the map is poor. The bridge is shown on the Baugh map of 1808. By the early 19th century the bridge was again in need of repairs, which were carried out in 1814 to a scheme prepared by Thomas Telford. (Shropshire Archives DP92/1-3 & /9).

2.4 The bridge was repaired again in 1886 and 1898 (Watkin, 1907, p25), and was taken over by Shropshire County Council in 1899 (there is a plaque commemorating this on the north parapet wing wall (east side) (Blackwall 1985; HER 01114).

3 THE WATCHING BRIEF

3.1 The invert in the northern, central, and (presumably at one time) the southern spans of the bridge appear to have been reinforced with a timber lattice containing stone setts. It was unclear whether this was an original structural feature or an early repair to the bridge. The timber lattice survived poorly, and had been replaced in the past by concrete in places, and this too was badly weathered.

3.2 The timber lattice in the invert in the northern arch was in better condition than in the central and southern spans (Figure 2). In the northern span all the main timbers of the frame survived, though they were heavily weathered and most of the joints were in a poor condition. Some of the iron pegs at the joints were also still in place. The stone setts in this section had already been re-set in a concrete bed within the lattice before the commencement of the watching brief.

3.3 The surviving stone setts and concrete repairs in the central invert were removed prior to the watching brief to expose the timber lattice frame. However, only a few members of the timber lattice survived. The timbers of the frame appeared to have originally been c. 15cms x 15cms (6" x 6") in section, but they were mostly badly weathered and rotted. The timbers comprising the western edge of the frame in this section were slightly larger, at 20cms x 20cms (8" x 8"). The surviving joints were plain halved joints pegged with iron rods. Most of the joints were particularly weathered (presumably because the timbers had already been reduced in thickness). Several of the iron pins which pegged the joints survived in the timbers (Photos 5 & 6). Along the west (upstream) side of the bridge, the western side of the timber lattice was reinforced with a palisade of short planks vertically set in the stream bed. Some of these were removed and were seen to have a pointed end. One had an iron shoe over the point.

3.4 The timber lattice in the invert of the southern span did not survive. The stone sets here were bedded in concrete, probably of late 19th or 20th century date. The sets and concrete bedding in the centre of this span had been eroded away. (see Photo 4)

4 REFERENCES

Blackwall, A, 1985: *Historic Bridges of Shropshire*, Shrewsbury, pp11-2

Greenwood, C & J, 1827: *Map of the County of Salop*

Jervoise, E, 1936: *Ancient Bridges of Wales and the West of England*, p131, Fig 73. (SA Ref XLS3087)

Ordnance Survey c. 1880: 25" (1:2,500) Shropshire Sheet XXV.4, 1st Edition, surveyed 1874

Watkin, I, 1907: *History of the Parish of Llanyblodwell*, Montgomeryshire Collections vol XXXIV, pp1-80 & 147-178

ABBREVIATIONS

CBA Council for British Archaeology

HER Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council

OS Ordnance Survey

PRO Public Record Office

SA Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury

TSAHS Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society

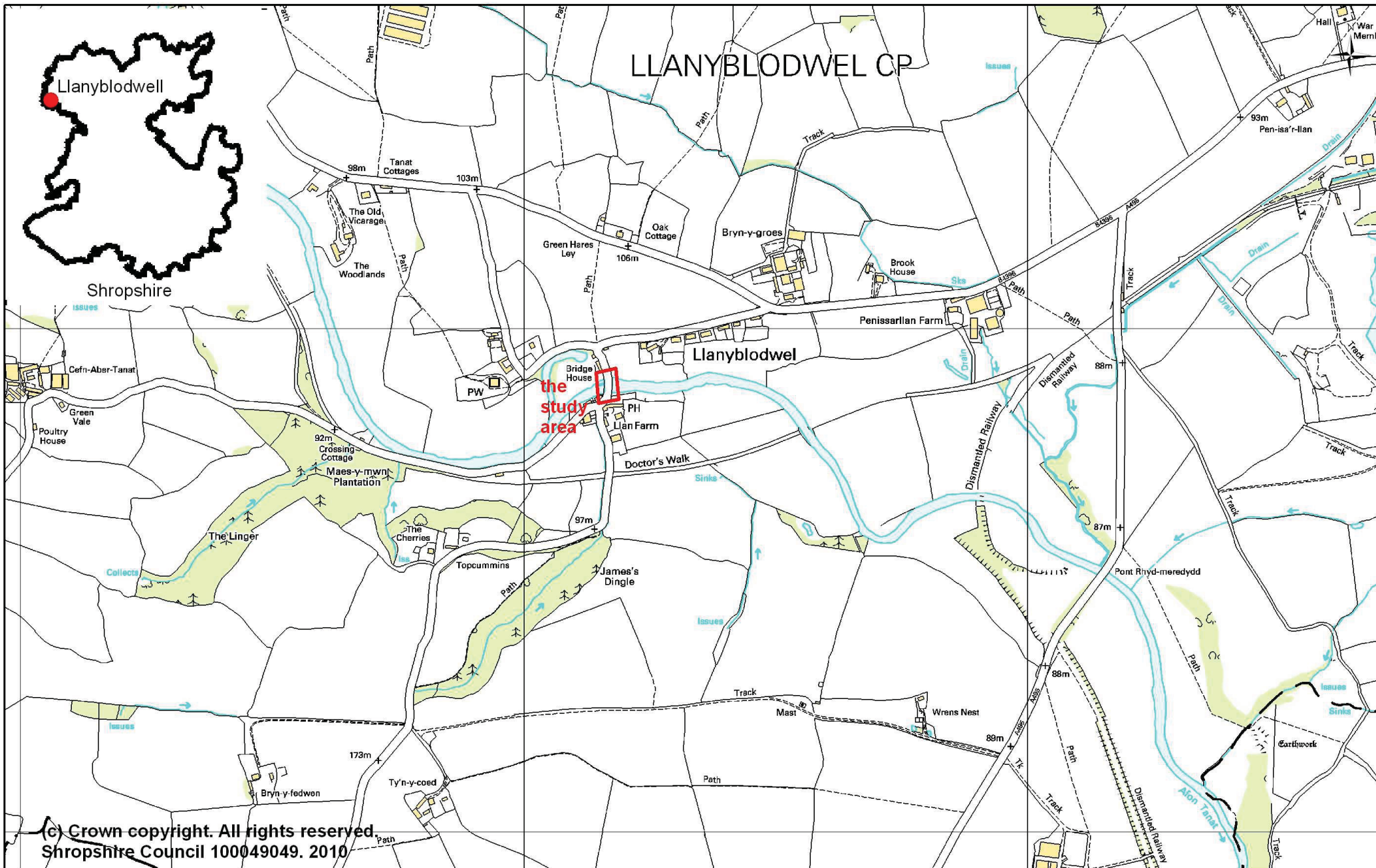
TSAS Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society

APPENDIX 1: List of documents relating to Llanyblodwell Bridge held at Shropshire Archives

SA Ref	Title	Date	Description
DP92/1	Llanyblodwell Bridge - legal papers	nd (c1814)	Two cases and opinions whether the County at large or the Hundred of Oswestry are to pay for 'Mr Telford's plan' at a cost of £608. Brief for the prosecution: the King against the Inhabitants of Oswestry, in King's Bench
DP92/2	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1814	Includes articles of agreement for the work, and court order levying a fine of £608 be levied on the Inhabitants [of the Hundred of Oswestry] and detailing the amounts to be contributed by each town, parish or place
DP92/3	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence	1815	In a signed and sealed report to Joseph Loxdale, Clerk of the Peace (30 Jan 1815), Thomas Telford concludes that the bridge "promises long to remain one of the finest Bridges in this or any other County".
DP92/4	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence	1816	Includes a special verdict recorded at Hereford Spring Assizes: "That there was a Hundred of Oswestry before the commencement of legal memory [1189], but of what it consisted the Jury are ignorant"; also a hand-drawn map of the northern Welsh Marches
DP92/5	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1817	Includes: - draft brief quoting the special verdict as in /4 above; - translation of charter of Thomas, Earl of Arundel (1407); - sketch maps of the Hundred of Oswestry; - a copy of Speed's map (1610); - an account (£30 18s 10d) for searches in and translations of the records of the Augmentation Office; - County rate lists (1815); - lists of the parishes and their townships within the Hundred of Oswestry (1720 and nd); - references to cases at the Hereford Spring and Lent Assizes [verdict given for the Crown in March] (1817)
DP92/6	Llanyblodwell Bridge - further legal papers	1817	Nine copy documents extracted from the records of the Court of Chancery in the Tower of London, each with a translation
DP92/7	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1818	Includes bills, and a schedule of documents sent to Chambers in London "by the Prince of Wales Coach from the Talbot Inn at half past nine this morning and arrives at the George and Blue Boar, Holborn, tomorrow evening" (4 Feb 1818)
DP92/8	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1819	Includes order of Shropshire Quarter Sessions (18 Oct 1819) that "The Inhabitants of the Hundred of Oswestry having been duly convicted, a fine of £1100 be levied" and detailing the proportions to be paid by the "Parishes, Townships and Places"; also payment reminders and bills.

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DP92/9	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1820	Includes ruling of Shropshire Quarter Sessions (10 Jul 1820) re outstanding expenses from recent repairs of Llanyblodwell Bridge and Penybont Bridge [parishes of Llanyblodwell and Llansilin], and sets out the proportions of a sum of £99 2s 2d to be raised among the parishes and townships etc. of Oswestry Hundred. Accounts include that of Thomas Telford - £20 3s 6d for work from 1814.
DP92/10	Llanyblodwell Bridge - legal accounts	1813-1820	Accounts including those of Messrs. Loxdale and Wace, Shrewsbury, solicitors for the prosecution; Presland and Proctor, legal advisors, Holborn [London]; and Edward Edmunds, Oswestry, solicitor for the defence
DP92/11	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence	1821-1824	Mainly concerning a further Quarter Sessions order (of 11 Oct 1821) re extra payment of £174 1s 0d required from the Hundred of Oswestry in respect of land taken and damage to other lands of Lord Francis Godolphin Osborne
DP92/12	Llanyblodwell Bridge - correspondence and legal papers	1826-1828	Includes statement by Thomas Stanton re Lord Osborne's property compensation [amounting to £474 by May 1828]; Quarter Sessions order for Hundred of Oswestry to pay £220 (9 Jul 1827); summary of events from August 1823, and local rate calculations
DP92/13	Llanyblodwell Bridge – correspondence	1855-1886	Papers of 1855-1856 mainly concern repairs. Reports in 1886 of Thomas Penson of Oswestry and of a Magistrates' Committee re repairs (with account for £429) and subsequent proposal for acceptance as a County Bridge
QC/22/2/105-106	Bundle of miscellaneous correspondence.	1885-1889	Letter and list of Llanyblodwell Bridge Committee, Feb 1886



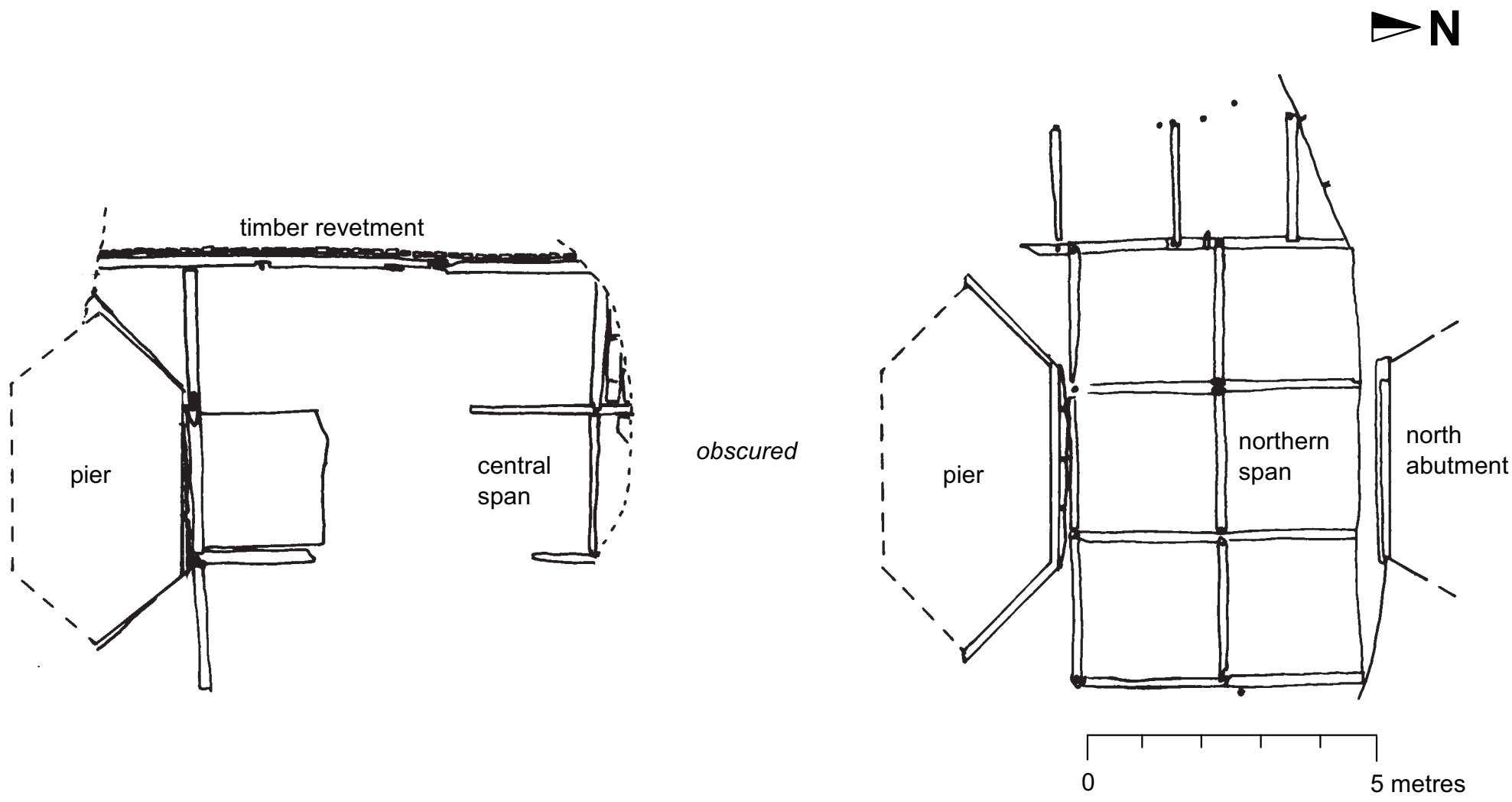
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Figure 1: Location of the study area

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Scale: 1:10,000



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Figure 2: Plan view of the invert showing the surviving timbers of the central and northern spans; scale 1:100