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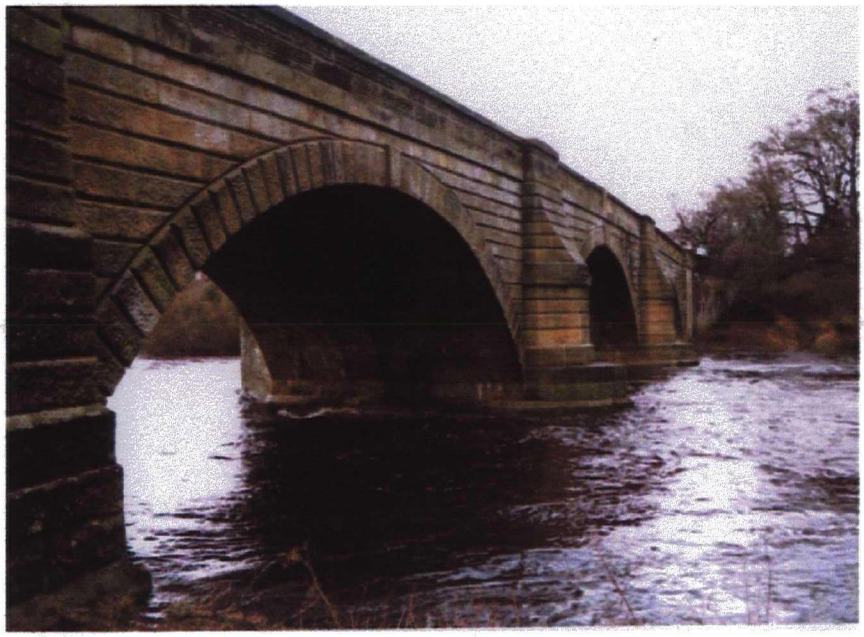

TANFIELD BRIDGE
WEST TANFIELD
NORTH YORKSHIRE

A Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

by Isabel Mason

REPORT NUMBER 2004/69

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REPORT ON AN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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The east side of Tanfield Bridge, from the north bank of the River Ure

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at Tanfield Bridge, West Tanfield (NGR SE 27007870) between 16 and 23 March 2004 This entailed the observation and archaeological recording of a hand and machine-dug cable trench. The watching brief encountered a road surface earlier than the present one and some evidence for the construction of the bridge although no dating evidence was found.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 16 and 23 March 2004 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) conducted an archaeological watching brief at Tanfield Bridge, West Tanfield (NGR SE 27007870). The work was carried out on behalf of British Telecom, to the specification supplied by North Yorkshire County Council. The aim of the watching brief was to assess the depth and character of the surviving archaeological remains in the area and record any such remains encountered during the works. The Tanfield Bridge is Listed as Grade II as well as being a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SMR No. NYM21550).

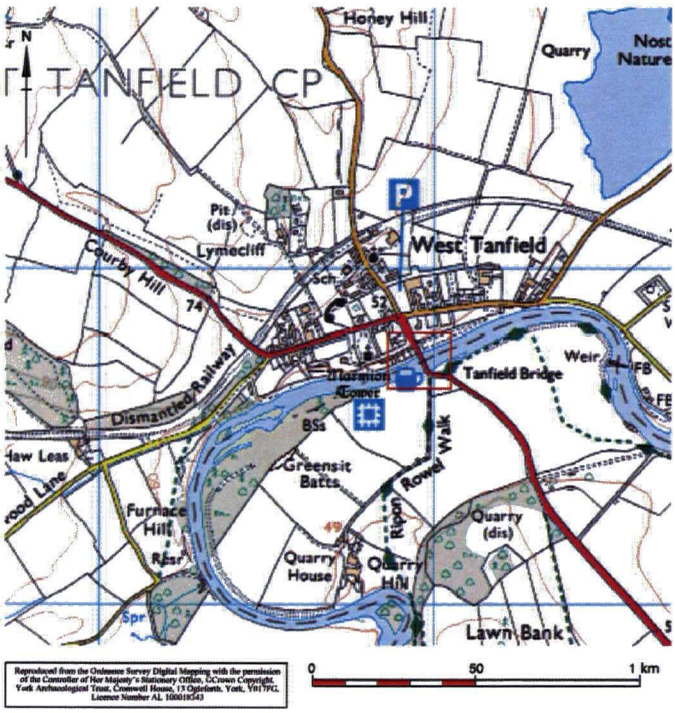
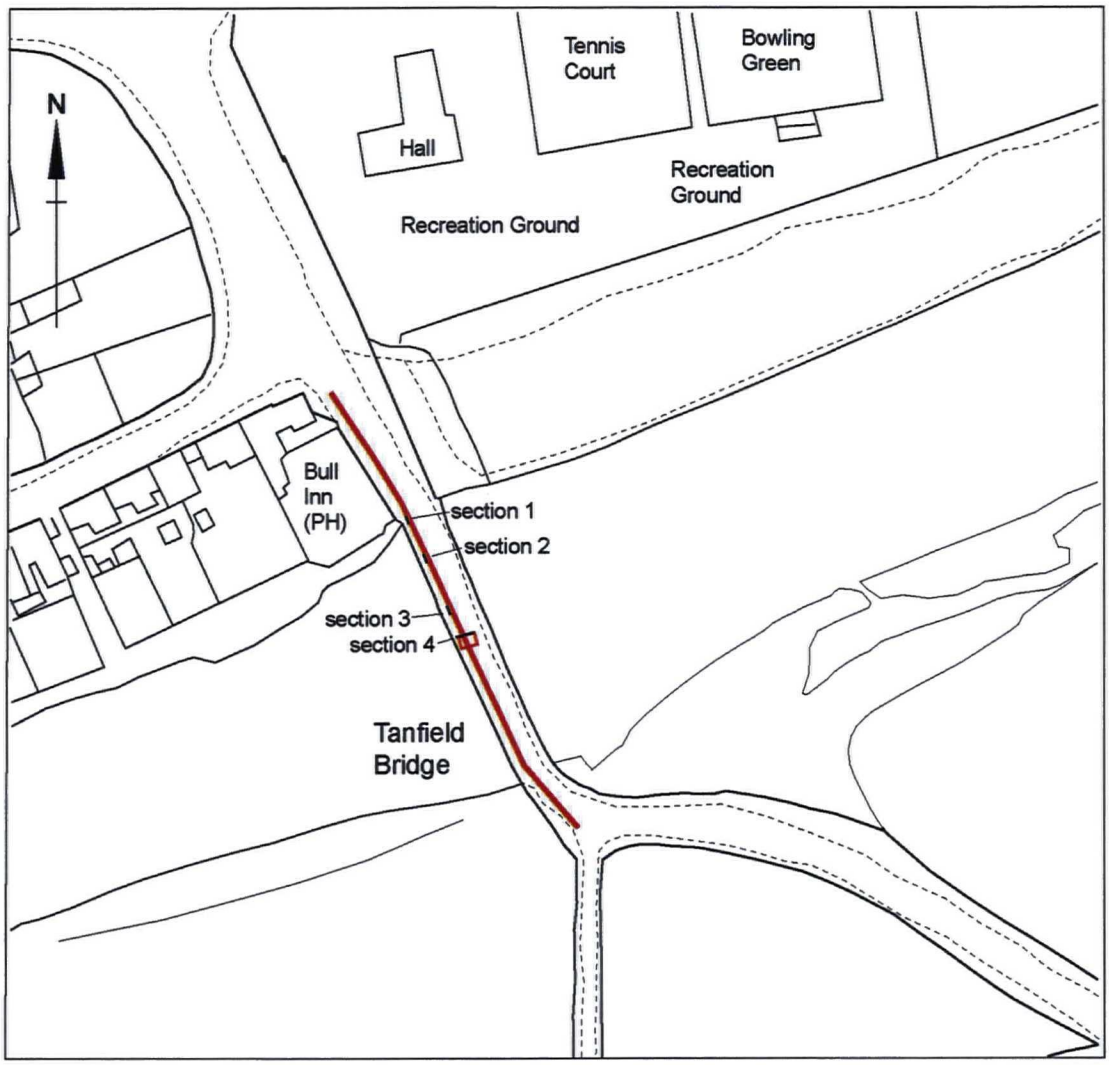


Fig 1: Site location for West Tanfield Bridge

2. METHOD STATEMENT

A hand and machine-dug trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.71m below ground level. The trench was located c.2m from the west side of the bridge and was observed for the whole length of the bridge. Three sections were recorded in the trench, two at points where the nature of the archaeology was seen to change (Fig.2). An exploratory test pit was located 1.30m north-east of the boundary stone marking the centre of the bridge. This test pit measured 1.10m by 47m and a section (Section 4; Fig.3) within it was recorded.



Not to scale

Fig. 2: Location of trench observed during the watching brief with approximate locations for the sections.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The village of West Tanfield is located c.3.5 miles to the south-east of Masham and c.5 miles north-west of Ripon, North Yorkshire. The village lies on the north bank of the River Ure and the Tanfield bridge carries the A6108 across the river. Approximately 250m upstream of the bridge the former gatehouse to Tanfield castle, known as the Marmion Tower (Scheduled Monument no. 13274), has significant surviving upstanding medieval remains. The precise location and extents of the demolished Tanfield castle, the fortified manor house of the Marmion family is not known, but there is good potential for some of these remains to survive below ground in the vicinity of the bridge.

Tanfield Castle was located at a river crossing point. A ford was located close to the present bridge (VCH 1914, 384), and at low water it is possible to see remains of this in the river bed. There does not, however, appear to be any surviving recorded evidence of a bridge across the river in the medieval period, and there seems to have been no bridge in 16th century since John Leland crossed the river at West Tanfield by ferry (VCH 1914, 384), nevertheless there could have been an bridge earlier than the present one on the site.

There is documentary evidence from the North Riding Quarter Sessions that in October 1609 a sum of £30 was allowed for the 'erecting of a new stone bridge at West Tanfield' (Jervoise 1931, 79). A bridge raised on three arches is described in 1725 and is reported to be in some decay in 1733 and it was rebuilt in 1737 after further damage caused by flooding (VCH 1914, 384). The money allocated for this re-build was recorded by the North Riding Quarter Sessions in April 1734 as £250 (Jervoise 1931, 79). The current ashlar bridge, possessing three segmental arches with voussoirs and hoodmoulds to throw off the rain, dates from this rebuild, but has been the subject of some later alteration. Jervoise describes the bridge at West Tanfield as 'an 18th century bridge with three segmental arches, which has been widened downstream to give a width of nearly 20 feet' (1931, 79). The 'seam' where the added build of the widening joins with the earlier part of the bridge can be seen clearly beneath the arches (Plate 1). One of the two very heavily weathered inscriptions on the western face of the bridge reads:

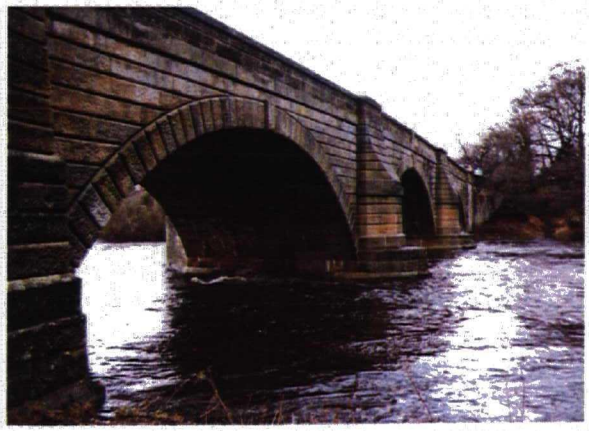


Plate 1: The east, downstream side of Tanfield Bridge

'The W .....
widened .....
by John Edw....
BERNARD HAR.....
Surveyor 18...2

The date of either late 18th century or 1842 for the widening is proposed by Eric Branse-Instone in his report for the English Heritage Monument Protection Programme following an inspection of the bridge in 2002.

The boundary at the centre of the bridge is marked by an inscription on the inner face of each side of the bridge. The stone on the upstream side reads 'Division of the W. and N. Riding' and the stone on the downstream side reads 'Division of the N. and W. Riding' (Plates 2 and 3).

Plate 2: The inner, west side of Tanfield Bridge from showing the division between the North and West Ridings

Plate 3: The inner, east side of Tanfield Bridge from showing the division between the North and West Ridings

Eric Branse-Instone's report for the English Heritage Monument Protection Programme, following an inspection of the bridge in 2002, states that it is not known if the bridge was strengthened by saddling in the 20th century, but that in 1994 the bases of the piers were encased in concrete to protect them from scouring by the river. He surmised that the internal structure of the original bridge with its 19th century widening survives.

There are a number of 20th century alterations. In recent years four ducts carrying communication services for companies other than BT have been installed and have been buried to a presumed depth of 600mm in the road crossing the bridge (Ratcliffe pers. comm.). This ducting is thought to have been placed along the eastern side of the bridge.

In 1979 Tanfield Bridge was designated as a Scheduled Historic Monument, and was numbered as North Yorkshire Monument Number 64. It retains that number and also has North Yorkshire Sites and Monument Number NYM21550.

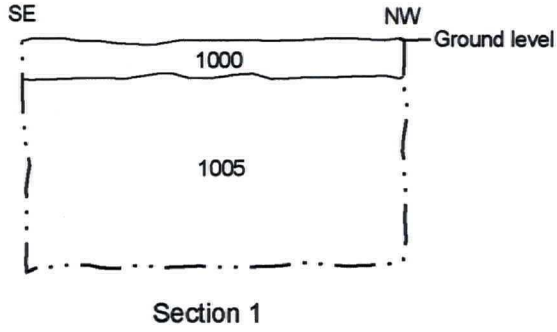
4. RESULTS

The section through the north-western end of the trench (Section 1, Fig. 3) revealed redeposited natural (1005) beneath the tarmac (1000) at 0.11m below ground level to the base of the trench at 0.71m (Fig. 3). Context 1005 consisted of small, medium and large cobbles within a matrix of pale to mid grey brown and pale orange brown, coarse-grained sand.

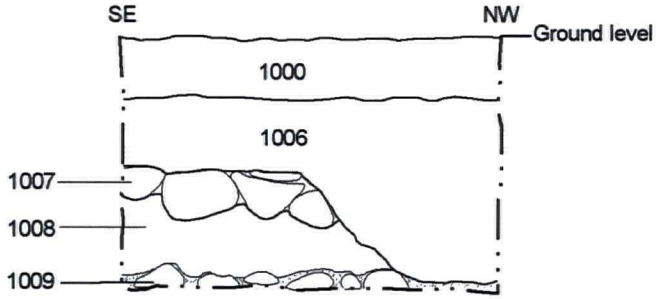
Two additional sections were recorded within this trench. Section 2 revealed that the deposits were identical to those recorded in Section 1. However, Section 3 (Fig. 3), recorded 9.30m from the north-western edge of the bridge was positioned at the point where additional deposits were encountered. This section recorded 80mm of mortared cobbles (1009) at the base of the trench beneath dark coarse river sand (1008) appearing at 0.42m below ground level. This deposit was 0.15m in depth on the south-eastern edge of the trench and gradually sloped down towards the base of the trench on the north-west side. Lain on this deposit were cobble setts (1007) beneath re-deposited natural (1005) and tarmac (1000).

A test pit was excavated 1.3m north-east of the boundary marker in the centre of the bridge and the south-east facing section (Section 4, Fig 3) revealed the continuation of 80mm of mortared cobbles (1004) beneath 0.13m of dark coarse river sand (1003). Again, lain on this deposit were the cobble setts (1002) which measured 0.13m in depth. These context were underlying 0.12m of hardcore (1001) and 0.17m of tarmac (1000). The observation of the trench excavation revealed that the cobbled setts continued for a further 10.80m towards the south-eastern end of the bridge.

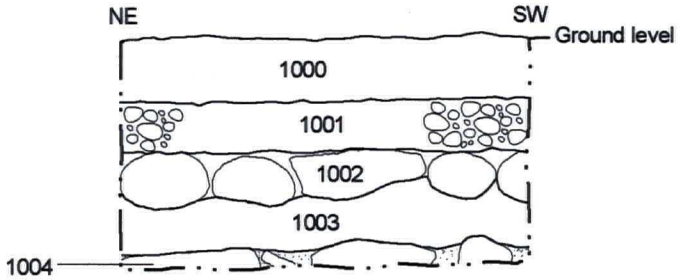
Two square voids filled with concrete were also recorded within the trench measuring approximately 1.2m square. One was positioned 4m south-east of the boundary stone, the other was 3m to the north-west. According to the locals these small trenches were dug by the Home Guard for explosives during World War II. This may be possible as the trenches were positioned at the weakest point of the bridge, however, no additional information has been found to support these stories.



Section 1



Section 3



Section 4

scale 1:20

Fig. 3: Sections 1, 3 and 4.

5. CONCLUSION

This watching brief encountered an earlier road surfaces found existing beneath the modern tarmac, although no dating evidence was found for this surface. Section 3 revealed that these deposits did not extend the full length of the trench as there appear to have been disturbed by modern deposits. Contexts 1002 and 1007 represent the road surface and context 1003 and 1008 are the sand bedding. Context 1004 and 1009 are compact mortared cobble, these are thought to be the infill of the stone piers which support the arches of the bridge

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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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