

NORTHERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATES LTD

BARNARD CASTLE WEIR

Negative Watching Brief Report

Site name: Barnard Castle Weir

Grid reference: NZ 047 167

Parish: Barnard Castle

District: Teesdale

County: Durham

Administrative Authority: Durham County Council

Development: Repairs to weir across River Tees

Monitoring Dates: 7/8/13 to 11/9/13

Client: Environment Agency

Project Officer: Greg Speed

Project Manager: Oliver Cooper

Reasons for watching brief

The scheme comprised the repair of an existing weir across the River Tees upstream of Barnard Castle Bridge (Figure 1), together with improvements to an associated 'fish pass'. The weir was nearly 50 years old and erosion from the river had caused the concrete structure to break up in places. Before repair work could start, the scale of the damage needed to be assessed, which could only be achieved in the dry. This required the construction of a temporary wall in the River Tees to divert the channel. Work on the right bank commenced in Autumn 2012, and was completed in Summer 2013. The work on the left bank was planned to follow on.

Environmental assessment and consultation had suggested that the potential for impacting upon archaeological remains was low. However, the project had raised local interest as it was felt that the northern (left bank) end of the weir lay close to the line of a possible Roman ford. In June 2013 Northern Archaeological Associates were asked by members of the community to visit the location to confirm this interpretation. The assumption that there was a Roman ford is based on the village name Startforth, derived from 'street ford'; the street place-name element is usually an Anglo-Saxon reference to a Roman road (Ekwall 1960, 439). The findings of the visit were reported in the Teesdale Mercury of 19 June 2013 (Teesdale Mercury, online).

Site visit

The site visit demonstrated that what was believed to be the Roman ford was in fact the remains of an 'apron' fronting a weir constructed in the late 18th century to direct water to Ullathorne's Mill (Bridge End Mill; flax, and later shoe-thread

manufacturing), which was built c.1760 (Newcastle University, online). The remains of the sluice and mill-race survive in a relatively intact condition (Plate 1), whilst the mill weir was recorded on Wood's map of 1827 (Pictures in Print, online), and on the early Ordnance Survey maps, such as the First Edition 6-inch map of 1859 (Figure 2), and the subsequent revision at 25-inch (1:2,500) in 1897. Interestingly, one of the main proponents for the Roman ford being in this location features a stone-by-stone plan of the surviving mill weir apron (Brigantes Nation, online), together with a copy of an early 20th-century photograph of the mill weir *in-situ*.

While the route of the Roman road heading south-west to a fort at Bowes and north-east towards Dere Street near Bishop Auckland is well recorded (Margary 1967, 436–7; Wright 1937, 194–204), the precise Roman crossing point of the Tees is unknown. Considering the relatively rapid rate of water level rise following heavy rain, it would seem that a ford would be unreliable, whilst a bridge would provide a secure crossing. Nevertheless, as yet no bridge abutment has been identified.

Given that the groundworks had the potential to impact upon previously unrecorded remains of the 18th to 19th-century mill weir, and that the location of the Roman crossing of the Tees at this point remains unknown, monitoring of excavations on the left bank was commissioned.

Results

The monitored work comprised the excavation of the river bed down to natural bedrock deposits, to facilitate the construction of a temporary wall allowing the face of the weir to drain (Plate 2). Due to the limited space available, continuous monitoring was not possible, therefore a series of visits was undertaken during the work.

The bedrock was encountered at a depth of up to 4m below the water level, as a series of 'steps' cut by the river through the natural bedding (Plate 3). There was no evidence for any remains associated either with a Roman river crossing or the post-medieval mill weir, and no artefactual evidence was identified except a few sherds of 19th to 20th-century white-ware pottery, which were not retained.

No further work is considered necessary for the remaining weir repairs.

References

- Ekwall, E. (1960) *The Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*. Oxford University Press
- Margary, I. D. (1967) *Roman Roads in Britain*. London: John Baker
- Wright, R. P. (1937) 'The Roman road from Bowes to Binchester'. *Archaeologia Aeliana*. Fourth Series, vol XIV; 194–204

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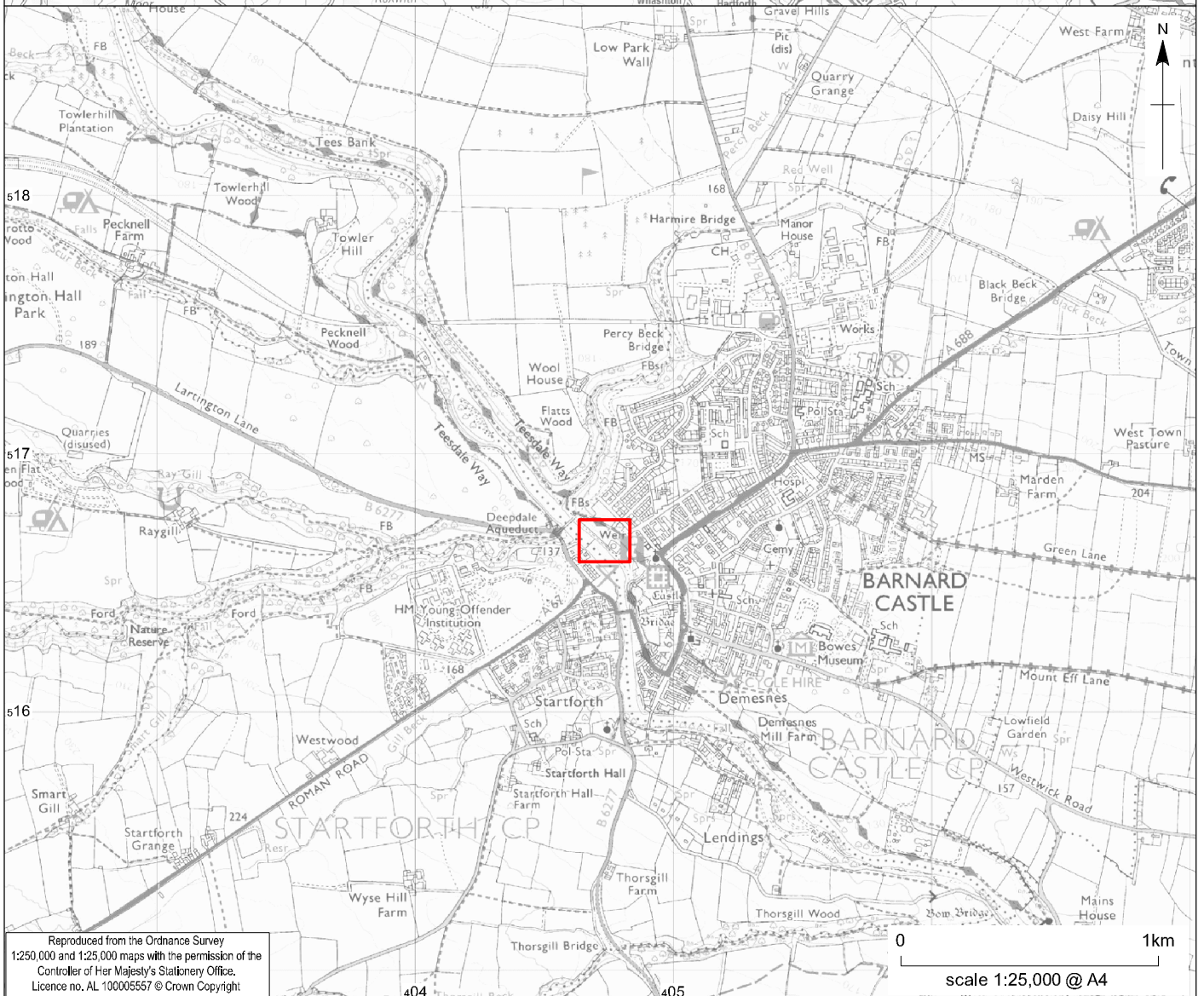
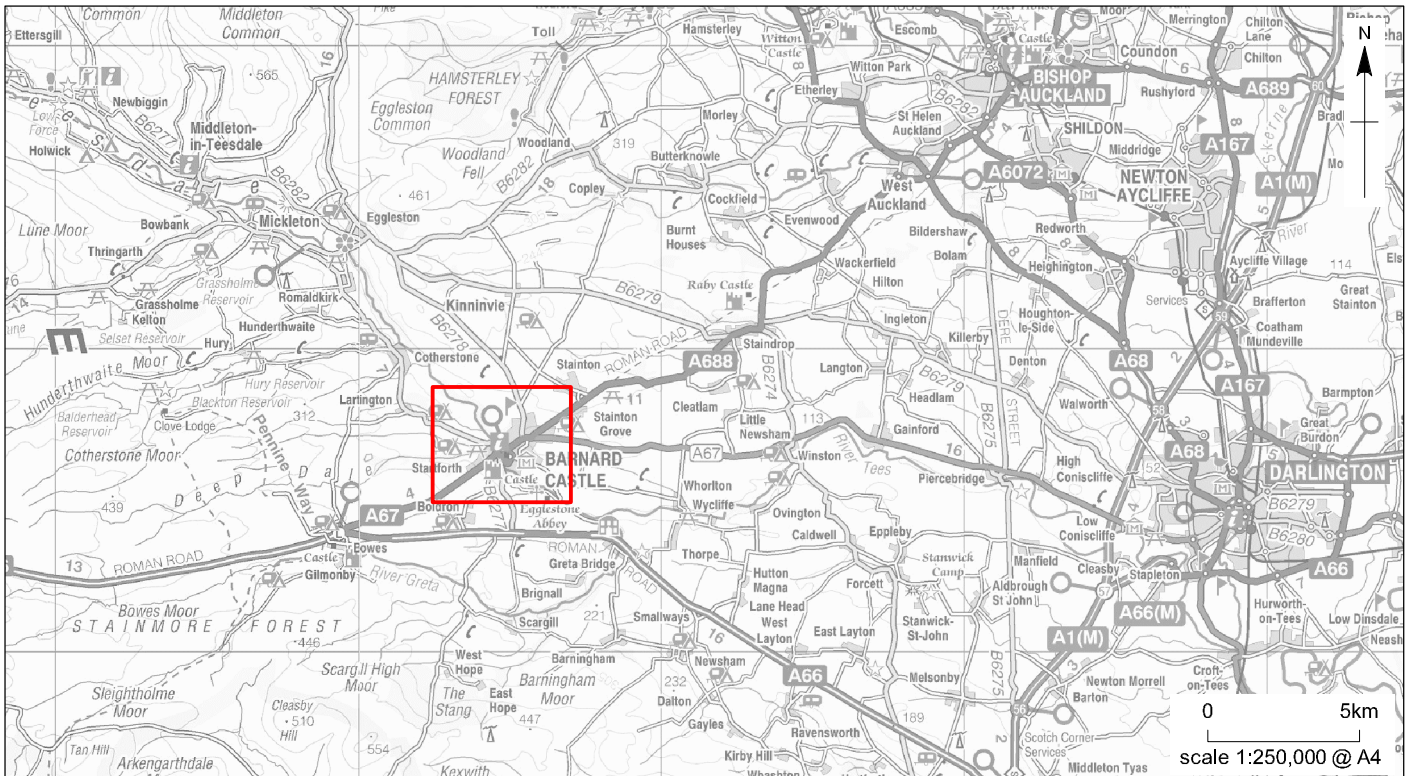
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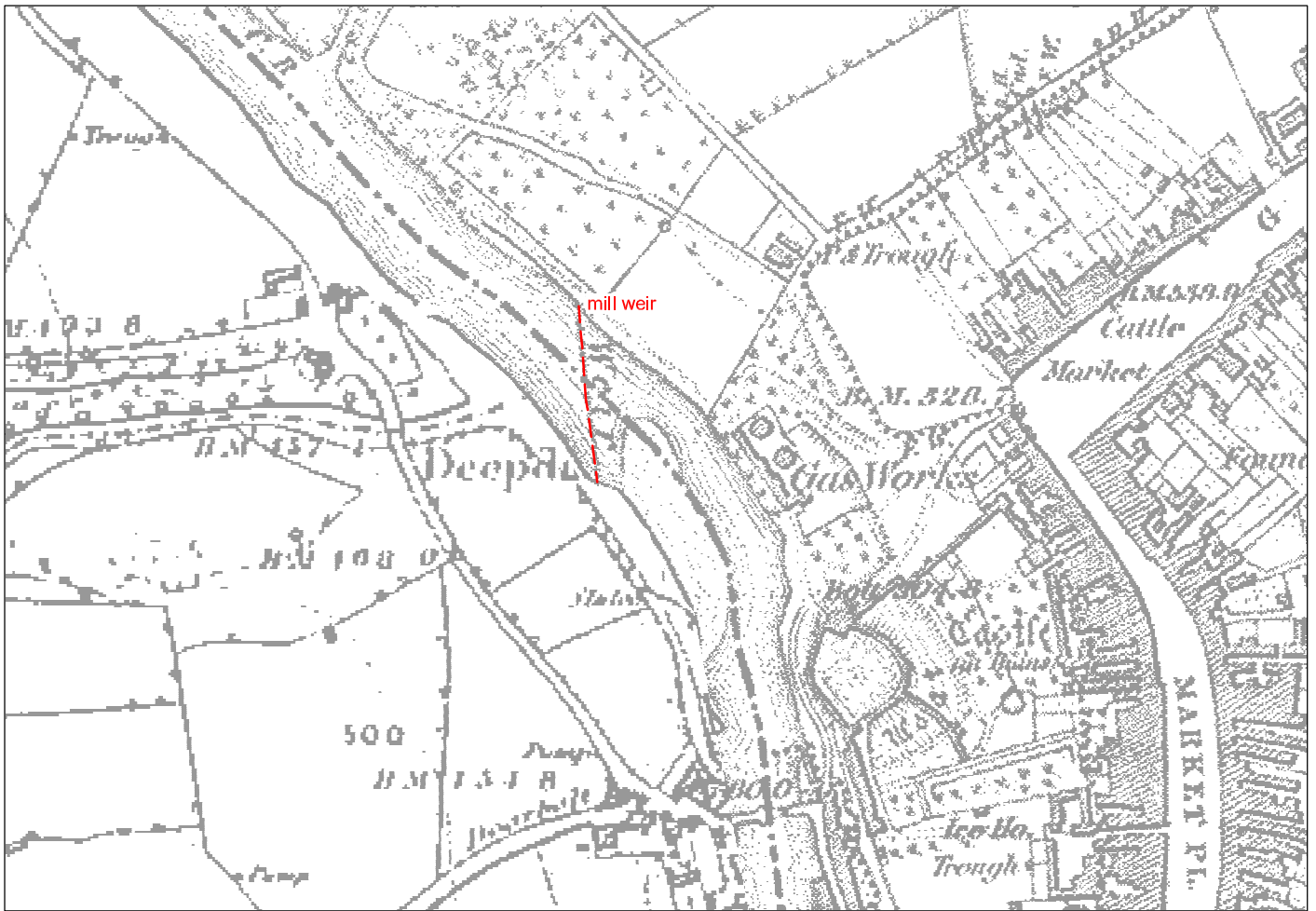


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Barnard Castle Weir: site location

Figure 1



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Barnard Castle Weir: Ordnance Survey map, 1855-8, showing location of mill weir

Figure 2



Barnard Castle Weir: sluice-gate for Ullathorne's Mill

Plate 1



Barnard Castle Weir: temporary wall in River Tees

Plate 2



Barnard Castle Weir: natural bedrock