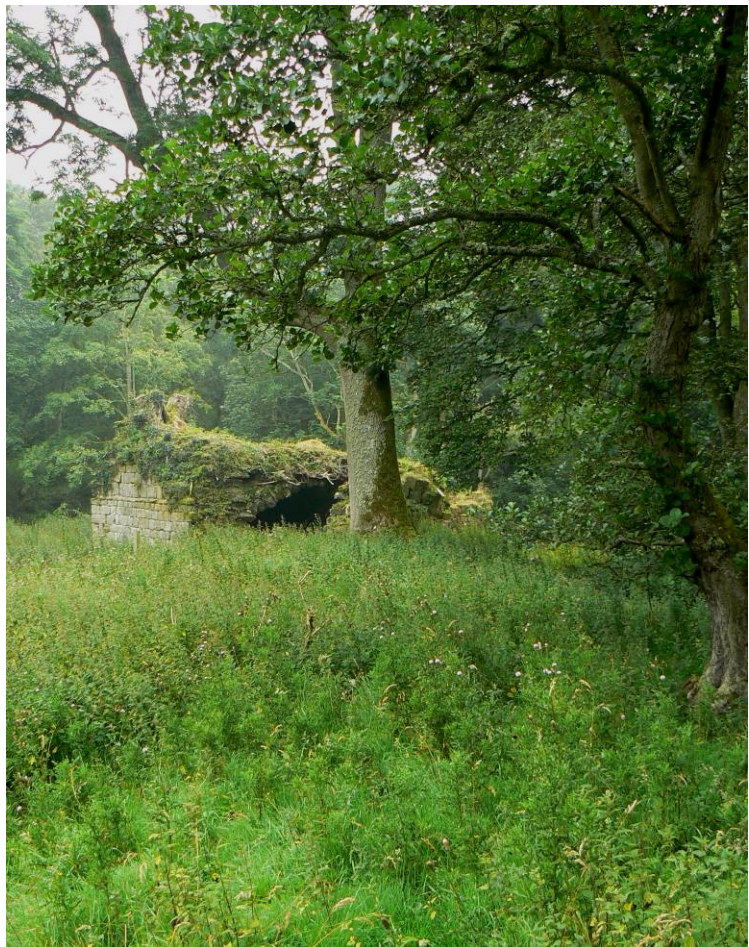


Overgrass Tower

Felton, Northumberland

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Summer-Autumn 2012



Prepared for Mr and Mrs Rogerson, Overgrass Organic Farms, Northumberland by:

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Site Name: Overgrass Tower, Felton, Northumberland

Site Status: Overgrass Tower is a Scheduled Monument (No. 31723) and a grade II listed building (No. 5/203; LBUID 236872).

Site Code OVG 2012

Proposed Development: Repair and Consolidation Works to Overgrass Tower through English Heritage Grant Funding

Clients: Mr J I and Mrs C Rogerson

NGR: NU 1440 0332

OASIS ID: alanwill1-133508

SUMMARY

English Heritage grant funding (through the Monuments and Designed Landscapes Scheme) is being sought for repair and consolidation of the scheduled and listed Overgrass Tower by its owners Mr and Mrs Rogerson. The tower lies within the County of Northumberland at NU1440 0332, five miles east of Rothbury, eight miles from the North Sea coast and deep within the valley of the Swarland Burn. Entered on the English Heritage 'At Risk' Register, it is in a ruinous and fragile condition and in imminent danger of further collapse.

The following report is one part of the required submission for grant application, providing an historical analysis of the field monument and its setting, describing its character, dating, form and archaeological and architectural development. It shows that Overgrass Tower is an important and rare survival of part of a manorial-status house probably constructed in the late 14th or early 15th centuries. Because of the chronic Anglo-Scottish warfare across the borders over much of the later medieval period, it was a defensible structure with thick walls, few and narrow windows and secure doors. It would probably have been a three-storey building incorporating storage arrangements (the basement), a hall, sleeping chambers and possibly a solar for the Lord of the Manor.

The tower survives today only as the majority of the vaulted basement. Walls at the south-east angle and the adjacent vault have gone. This has severely impacted on the double-door entrance lobby (only the west jamb surviving) and a newel stair (nothing visible) set into this angle.

There is little documentary evidence for the medieval settlement of Overgrass and nothing specifically relating to the tower. It is not known if other medieval buildings of manorial or lesser status lay around the tower as was frequently the case. There is no visible evidence today for any such structures although there may well be archaeological evidence below the ground surface. Nor is there evidence to suggest that the enclosure to the east [11] is of medieval date.

Map evidence from the 19th century shows that Overgrass Tower sat next to an important fording point of the Swarland Burn. Whether this existed in medieval times, and whether the tower was sited at least in part to watch over and control this crossing, is not known. If it were, it may explain its poor defensive location, overlooked by high ground on three sides.

By the middle of the 19th century the remains of the tower (when it fell into ruin is not known, but certainly before then) had become part of a farmstead or smallholding with buildings ([2] and [3]) appended to its north and east walls (that to the north which still survives in part constructed using facing stones from the tower) and surrounded by vegetable plots. Some evidence suggests that building [2] was a domestic structure, although by the time of its disuse it served as a hay store. Another agricultural building lay to the north alongside the Swarland Burn and Overgrass Corn Mill lay to the south, its race running past the tower.

Recommendations within the report propose that:

Prior to repair works commencing, and to guide and inform these works, a range of archaeological investigations should be carried out to establish the survival and nature of currently obscured features. This would include: Excavation of a test pit (or pits) on the first floor level to establish the presence of floor surfaces, walls and other discrete features beneath the current build up of soil and tree/shrub roots; Excavation of a test pit or pits within the basement to establish original floor level; Excavation of an area around the entrance complex and newel stair to establish the survival of these features prior to the removal of the large tree stump within the lobby area.

Conservation and repair works on the tower should be accompanied by archaeological monitoring and recording as fabric is exposed and areas cleared.

The terms of archaeological evaluation and monitoring should be set out in a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared for the project and approved prior to the commencement of works by English Heritage.

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1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1 Overgrass Tower House

The privately-owned medieval Overgrass Tower, a scheduled and listed monument, lies within the Northumberland parish of Newton-on-the-Moor and Swarland, five miles to the east of Rothbury, eight miles west of Amble and about mid way between the A1 and A697 trunk roads at NU 1440 0332. Newmoor Hall sits 150m to the north-west of the tower on the upper edge of the valley of the Swarland Burn. The tower itself lies deep within the wooded valley, overlooked on three sides by higher ground. It is in a ruinous and fragile condition and was entered on the English Heritage 'Heritage At Risk' Register in 2010. It is in imminent danger of further deterioration and collapse.

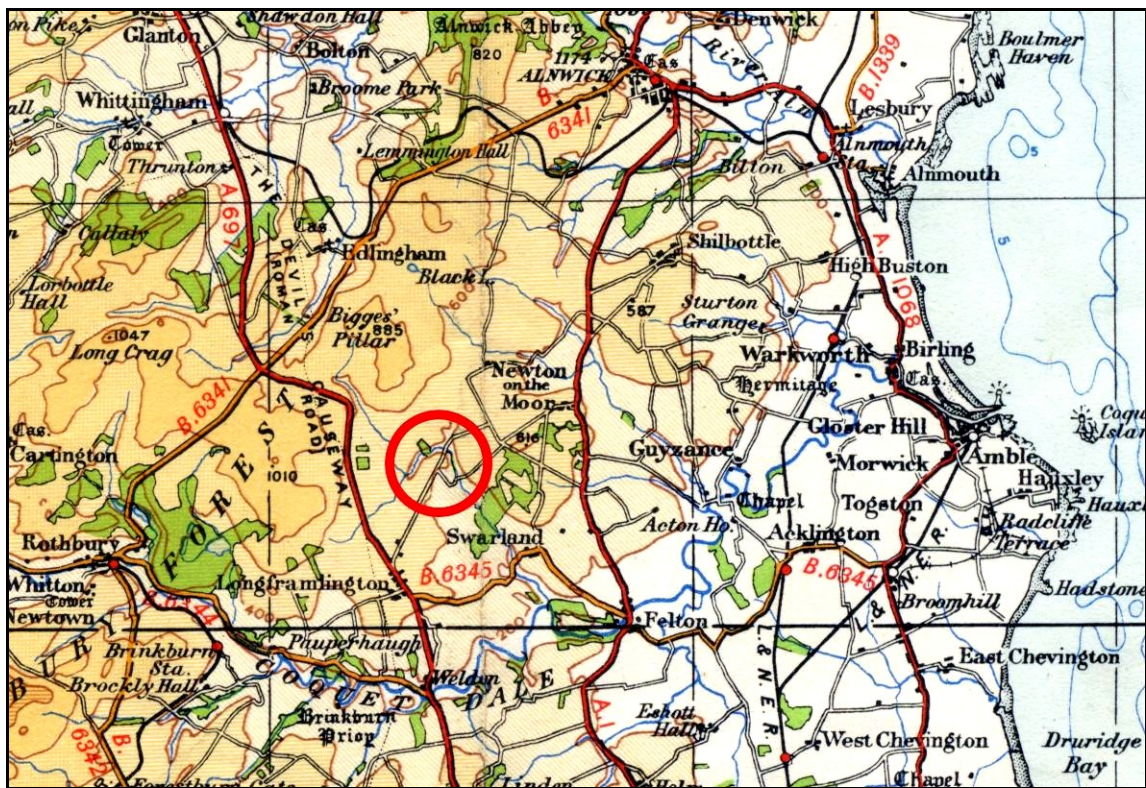


Figure 1: The location of Overgrass Tower in the County of Northumberland within the red circle

1.2 Consolidation Project

Through an English Heritage Project Development Grant, the owners of Overgrass Tower, Mr and Mrs Rogerson, have appointed Countryside Consultants Architects to act as lead professional advisors for a staged scheme of works to record, repair and consolidate the tower house. A laser-scanned survey of the tower house to the terms of a specification provided in a *Brief for Survey and Analysis of Overgrass Tower House, Northumberland* (English Heritage 2011) has been prepared as stage 1 of this project.

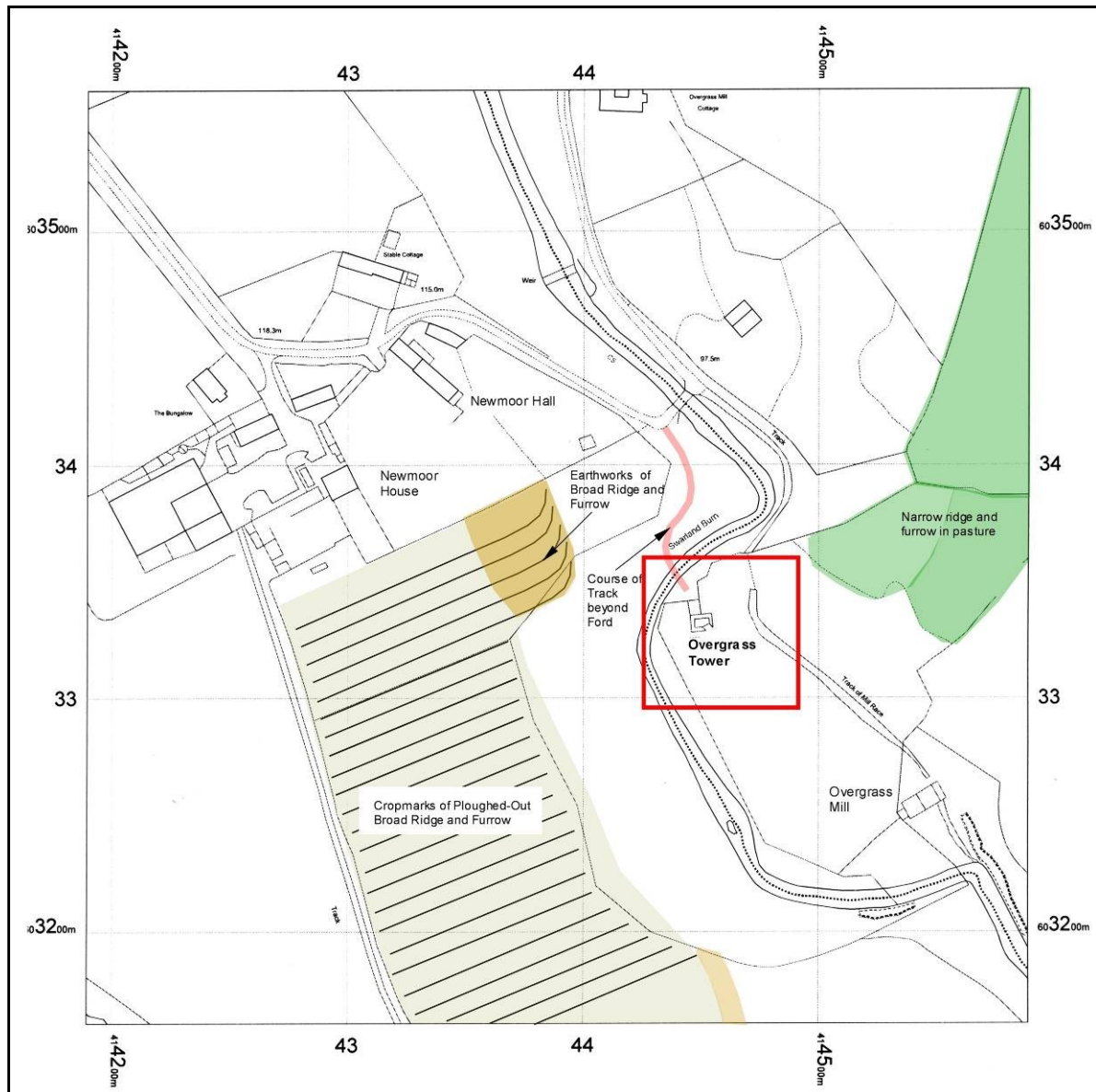


Figure 2: Overgrass Tower in its locality. The red frame indicates the extent of figure 3.
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1.3 This Report

This report forms part of stage two of the programme of works identified in the brief (EH 2011, 5). It provides an analysis of Overgrass Tower House and its setting, describing its character, dating, form and archaeological and architectural development utilising drawings based on the results of the building survey and ‘as existing drawings’ in particular, prepared by Ian Wells of Countryside Consultants Architects. It also looks at historic maps and any other useful archival sources, setting the tower in its context. This analysis will facilitate the preparation of a programme of repair works and provide supporting documentation for a grant application under the English Heritage Historic Buildings, Monuments and Designed Landscapes Grant Scheme.

1.4 Site Inspection and Site Recording

Visits to the site were made by Alan Williams during July and August 2012 to assess the tower and its environs. Recording of the standing building was carried out using photography and limited hand-measured survey, this last based on the previously prepared laser-scanned surveys by Academy Geomatics.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION (figures 2 and 3)

Overgrass Tower **[1]** lies 150m to the south-east of Newmoor Hall, within the valley of the Swarland Burn, and at the northern end of an area of haughland (now in pasture) opened up by the formation of a significant westward loop in the burn. The tower sits between the burn, flowing round its northern and western sides, and a rough farm-track to the east. It is overlooked by higher ground to north, east and west and survives only as a single-storey structure, the vaulted basement of an originally much taller building. At least two buildings have been appended to the tower in relatively recent times. The building on its northern flank **[2]** survives as a roofless and much tumbled ruin. The final use of this building was as a hay store (pers. comm. Mr J Rogerson) but it may have been built for domestic use. The second building **[3]** has entirely gone apart from a low platform marking its footprint, which highlights the line of its north wall, and a short remnant of its south wall next to the eastern loop of the tower house.

A little way to the north of the tower and alongside the Swarland Burn are the remains of a stone agricultural building **[4]** probably of later 18th or 19th century date (many pantiles lie around the remains and a tubular clay land-drain is inserted through the north wall as a ventilator). It is now roofless and mostly fallen apart from its north wall flanking the burn and a central cross-wall running south which are fairly substantial. Tumble of its walls, and a cover of nettles, has made the layout and extent of the building confusing. To the west of the ruins of this building is an old ford **[5]**, approached on the south bank by a ramp dropping down to the burn bracketed to east and west by grass-covered dry-stone retaining walls (**[6]** and **[7]**). The substantial remains of **[6]** can be traced as it runs up the bank and then returns sharply to building **[2]**. Above the bank, however, it has largely tumbled. Wall **[7]** turns to the east and abuts building **[4]**. The old track, curving north from the ford and terraced into the valley slope, can still be traced up to the present road from Newmoor Hall (see figure 2).

East of farm track **[16]** are the remains of a sub-rectangular dry-stone walled enclosure **[11]** with entrances in the north (probably original) and west sides. The walls, much tumbled especially on the south and west sides, are topped intermittently with substantial ash and

sycamore trees. A track [17] surfaced with loose cobbles and stones, runs east along the north flank of [11] from [16] and then south on the contour of the valley slope. A now reduced dry-stone wall [12] can be traced running along the eastern edge of track [16] and curving along the line of track [17] for several metres before branching to the south.

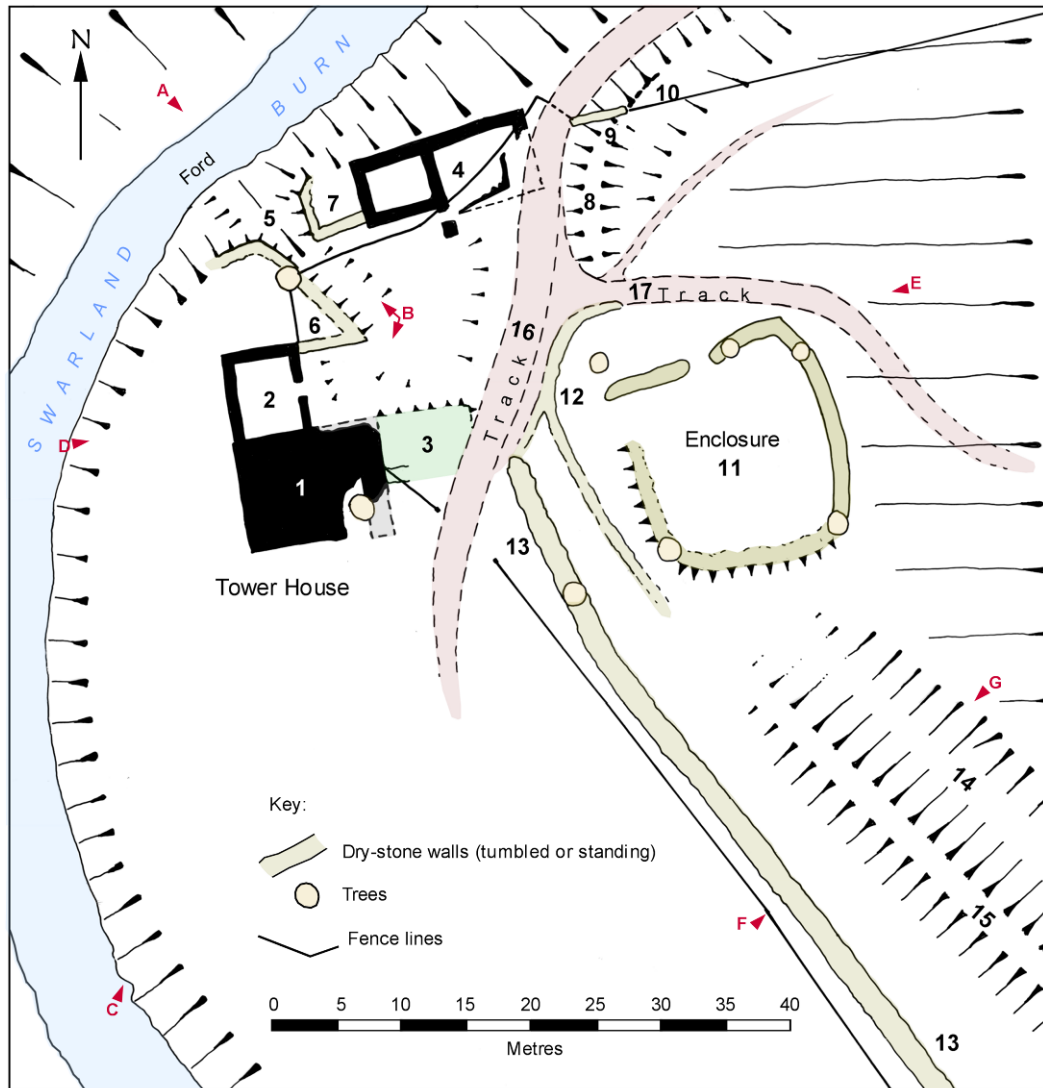


Figure 3: *Overgrass Tower House and surrounding features*

At the south-eastern end of the loop in the Swarland Burn, and at the end of a long headrace or leet, lie the substantial and impressive ruins of Overgrass Mill set against the east slope of the valley. The headrace [14] and its attendant bank [15] and dry-stone boundary wall [13] run across the loop towards the tower. The headrace is lost to the south of enclosure [11] where the ground level rises, but appears again alongside track [16] to the north marked by a bank [8] and beyond this a kerb of stones [9] set on edge. As shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey, the race originally ran at least as far as the present bridge over the burn around 100m to the north of the tower.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistoric and Roman

There is no known prehistoric or Romano-British context for the vicinity of the tower. The earliest evidence for human activity within the wider parish is two stone axes of Neolithic date (c. 4000 to 2200BC) found at Hazon High House (and recorded on Northumberland County Council's Historic Environment Record as HER 4262) and Lanehead (HER 4333), to the east and south-east of Overgrass Tower, respectively. Two Bronze Age (c. 2200-750BC) burial-cists have also been discovered within the parish some way to the south of Overgrass on high ground near Swarland Old Hall (HER 4329). There is evidence for a number of enclosure settlements within the parish, all possibly of Iron-Age date (c. 750 BC to 100AD). One of these, to the north-east of Overgrass, between Chesterhill and Newton Greens, survives as an earthwork and is scheduled (HER 4327). Three others, one at Wormitlees, north of Newmoor Hall (HER 4321) and the other-two east of Old Swarland (HER's 4354 and 4355), lie within ploughed fields and can be seen only as cropmarks on aerial photographs. The Devil's Causeway, a Roman road, runs north-south about a mile and a half to the west of Overgrass Tower heading towards the River Tweed. There are no known Roman stations or settlements in the parish.

3.2 Medieval Overgrass

There was a medieval settlement or 'vill' at Overgrass, a part of the Barony of Mitford. The name Overgrass is probably derived from the layout of the large medieval fields in the area. Wedge-shaped strips in the common fields were referred to as 'gores', the origin of the second part of the name. The first part 'Over' simply refers to these wedge-shaped ploughlands lying above the Swarland Burn (Watson 1970, 46). Modern aerial photographs show broad ridge and furrow of medieval appearance curving sharply immediately to the north of Overgrass Tower above the Swarland Burn as well as ploughed-out ridge and furrow to the west of the tower and the valley of the Swarland Burn visible as soil marks (figure 2).

The present settlement of Overgrass lies about half a mile to the north-east of Overgrass Tower and consists of Overgrass Old Farm (HER's 20254 and 20255) of late 17th or early 18th century date. Nineteenth century maps show another farmstead to the north of Old Farm called the Firth (HER 22403), which has now gone. There is no strong evidence to show that this was the site of the medieval settlement. Indeed, the County History (Hodgson 1904, 404) says:

The homestead of Overgrass [today's Old Farm] is about three-quarters of a mile north-west of Swarland Park and near the confines of the township, but the

old vill or hamlet of Overgrass occupied a sequestered site in the neighbouring dene on the left bank of the Swarland Burn

There is no current physical evidence to confirm the location of an early settlement, but Hodgson is presumably referring to the area around Overgrass Tower which occupies an admirably sequestered site. It is noteworthy that the Tower, although in a very poor defensive position, once lay in a busy area for routeways. 19th century maps, which may well reflect an earlier arrangement, illustrate the importance of the ford directly to the north of the tower; Fryer (1820), Greenwood (1828) and the first edition Ordnance Survey (1857) all show a route running down from Newmoor Hall, crossing over this ford and running on eastwards to the present settlement of Overgrass and beyond. Other routes are also shown fanning out from Newmoor and the ford. It is possible that the mention of a bridge abutment adjacent to the tower in Hodgson '*There are indications by the side of the stream of the abutment of a bridge*' (1904, 405) is referencing the western side of the walled ramp constructed for the ford [6] still visible today.

Hodgson also provides an overview of the documentary evidence for the settlement (1904, 403-410). Overgrass is first mentioned in the early 13th century when a David le Waylays paid 10s to the Mitford Barony for the rent of 40 acres of land in 'Oversigar'. At the Northumberland assizes of 1256 an action was brought against Roger Bertram of Mitford (Lord of the Barony) and a Peter de Monfort regarding disputes over the rights to pasture in 'Overgares'. At the same assizes, Peter de Monfort pursued an action against Hugh Page and Thomas the Provost for a trespass on his mill and mill dam at 'Oversgare'. The vill of Overgrass was sold by Roger Bertram some time around 1260 to William de Herle. In 1279, it was held by John de Herle. Overgrass was assessed along with Glantlees (Glantley cum Overgars) in the 1296 Lay Subsidy Roll (Fraser 1968, 161). The same Herle family held Overgrass until 1355 when Sir Robert de Herle died childless and was succeeded by his sister, Margaret, wife of Sir Ralph de Hastings of Allerston, Yorkshire.

Following this, there is a gap in references to the settlement for over a century.

No mention is made of Overgrass Tower in the list of fortalices, (defensive strongholds) of 1415, although it was probably already built; possibly during the previous century.

3.3 Tower Houses

The medieval Tower House is one architectural response to three hundred years of outright warfare or at the very least 'unquiet' times, across the Anglo-Scottish border (and physically

much more widely in Scotland), prioritising arrangements for defence and security. Ryder (in Pevsner 1994, 59) describes the form as:

...a loose and rather confusing classification covering a variety of building types...best seen as the Borderland equivalent of the small manor house.

It would appear that most did not stand alone and were parts of wider complexes but some undoubtedly were isolated structures. They appear frequently in Northumberland (just less than sixty survive - fragmentarily or whole - in the county) and Cumbria and in lesser numbers in County Durham as well as widely in Scotland, although here as a rather later response than in England.

The prototypes for the form in Northumberland (Ryder 1995, 5) were houses such as Bothal, Belsay or Chipchase (these around the mid to later 14th century) with a floruit of the form between the late 14th and early 15th centuries, but with examples such as Coupland and Duddo being constructed into the 16th century. Ryder (1995, 6) provides a description of the physical characteristics of the form. Of basements (the only surviving part of Overgrass Tower):

Several basic features are common...One is the nearly-universal vaulted basement, roofed by a barrel vault generally aligned with the long axis of the tower...Vaults are usually of plain barrel form. Basements [were] almost invariably entered at ground-floor level. The...typical entry has an outer doorway protected by a drawbar tunnel, opening into a mural lobby from which further doorways open into the basement, and into the base of a mural stair, usually of newel form. Some basements show evidence of a loft (cf. the range of corbels at East Kyloe), perhaps for hay or supplies. They were lit by small deeply-splayed loops, generally one in each end. Such loops are normally set high in the external face of the wall, none more so than the recently-exposed example at Elsdon Tower which is set well above the crown of the vault, with which it communicates by a steeply sloping tunnel within the wall thickness.

Overgrass conforms very closely to this general picture (see section 4.1.1). Of note is the square loop set in the west face of the tower at the apex of the vault which can be compared to Elsdon. Also, the wall sockets at Overgrass which are perhaps comparable to the corbels for loft (storage) arrangements in the basement at East Kyloe (AOC 2010).

The entrance to Overgrass Tower at the south-east angle, with a lobby entrance and newel stair set partly in a projection beyond the south face, is a variant on a theme. In some larger towers such as Chipchase or Lemmington, the newel stair could be set within a large projecting turret. Others, such as Cockle Park, had a turret dedicated to housing the stair. At Overgrass, the newel stair sat partially within a projection or buttress beyond the general line of the south wall.

As for the upper floors of tower houses (for which there is no *in-situ* evidence at Overgrass), there would also seem to be a fairly restricted pattern. As noted above, the majority were of three storeys - some taller - with the principal domestic apartments frequently at first-floor level and the sleeping chambers, and possibly the Lord's solar, on the second floor. Arrangements at the top of towers would have varied but all probably had a martial aspect in keeping with the style, including a choice of crenellations, angle turrets, bartizans or machicolations, behind which there would have been a walkway and almost certainly a gabled roof.

3.4 Post-Medieval Overgrass

Before the end of the sixteenth century, Overgrass was bought by the Forsters of Adderston. It stayed with this family until the early 18th century when Overgrass, Overgrass Stead and the mill were bought by Robert Heselrigg of Swarland Old Hall. He passed it on directly to his cousin, also Robert Heselrigg, of Sleekburn. The estate was passed on to his widow who in turn, through her will, passed them on to her granddaughter, Dorothy Metcalf, subsequently wife of Robert Chambers of Newcastle. As noted above, the later settlement of Overgrass lay some way to the east. In 1874, Overgrass Tower was purchased by Mr W J Robinson of Newmoor House and is today owned by Mr and Mrs Rogerson of Overgrass Farms.

4. BUILDING SURVEY

4.1 The Tower (Building 1)

Overgrass Tower survives as a low ruin (maximum 4m high), only to the level of first-floor above the nearly complete tunnel-vault forming the basement. Until recent felling, the tower was largely submerged within mature trees and shrubs which had grown into its fabric. Large stumps remain to be removed. The tower is rectangular in plan, 11.2m by 8.6m externally, its long-axis running ENE-WSW with walls between 1.8m and 1.9m thick. The survival of external facing is intermittent. This is of generally large blocks of coursed, squared sandstone. A chamfered plinth **[1.1]** runs around the four faces of the tower (at around 1.8m

from ground level at the south-west angle where there has been minimal build up of deposits) stepping-in the walls above by 100mm (4 inches) on each face.

Neither discrete features nor walls or floors are visible at the nominal first floor level. Whether any remains survive beneath the accumulated build up and disturbance of soil and tree roots is not known.

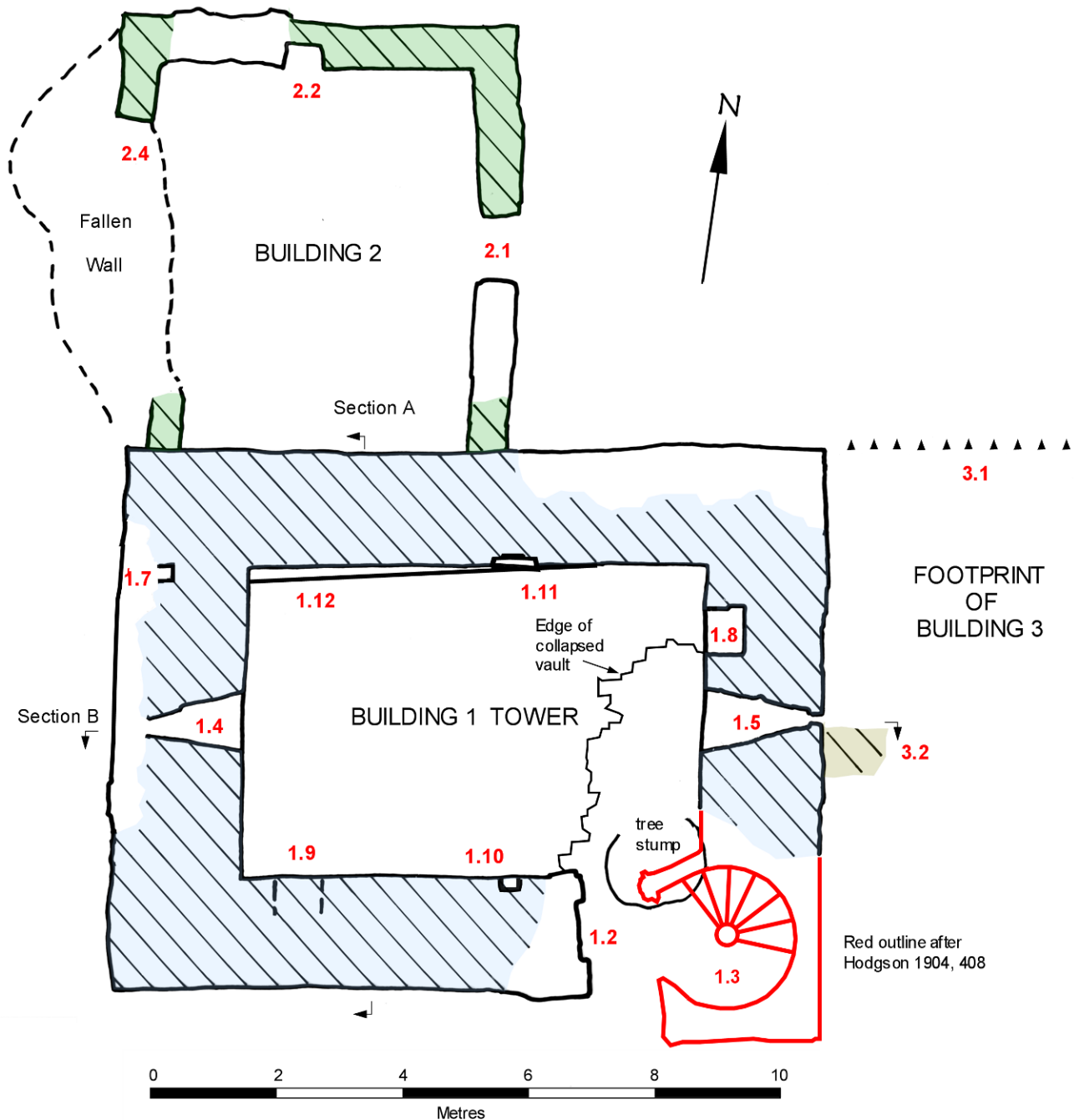


Figure 4: Plan of Overgrass Tower and adjacent remains (1: 100). Sections in this and succeeding drawings are hatched and toned.

4.1.1 Basement (figures 4, 5, 6 and plates 11 and 12) The tunnel-vaulted basement (7.25m by 4.9m) survives almost intact apart from at the south-east corner - the site of the entrance lobby and newel stair - which has fallen away or been demolished. The vault is pointed and is slightly flattened along its north flank, presumably a distortion. There are few features within the room. Splayed loops are set centrally in the west [1.4] and east walls [1.5]. Externally, the appearance of the west loop is uncertain as facing stones have fallen away on this side of the tower, but was presumably similar to that of the eastern loop which is a narrow, vertically-chamfered slit. Although complete, this latter loop is partly obscured externally by the remnants of the south wall of a later building [3] abutting the tower at this point and by the general build up of deposits on this side of the tower. Above the western loop is a small, square light [1.6] set across the apex of the vault. As with the loop below, and for the same reason, the external appearance of this opening is unknown.

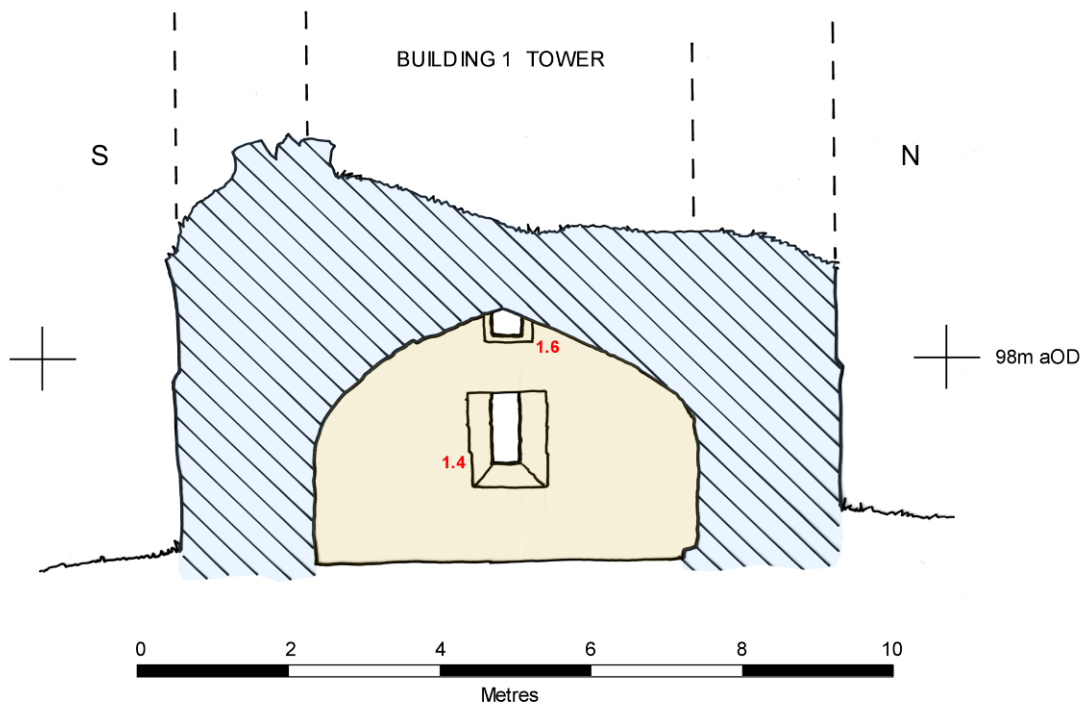


Figure 5: Transverse north-south section through the Tower House. Section A on figure 4 (1:100)

Two cupboards or aumbries are set in the east and south walls of the basement. That to the east [1.8] remains open; that to the south [1.9] is blocked with modern bricks. Two ragged holes ([1.10] and [1.11]), either sockets or where corbel stones have been pulled out, are set at the springing point of the vault and opposite each other a little to the east of centre of the basement. Presumably they held (or supported) a transverse beam, perhaps for shelving, although there is no evidence for further supports. Today, the floor of the basement is formed of earth. The nature of the original floor is not known but it may survive beneath the

current deposit. At the base of the north wall is a single offset course [1.12], skew to the courses above and running back into the wall line about 2m from the east end of the basement. A drawing of the interior in Hodgson (figure 13 in this report) shows two offset courses, the lower one presumably now buried.

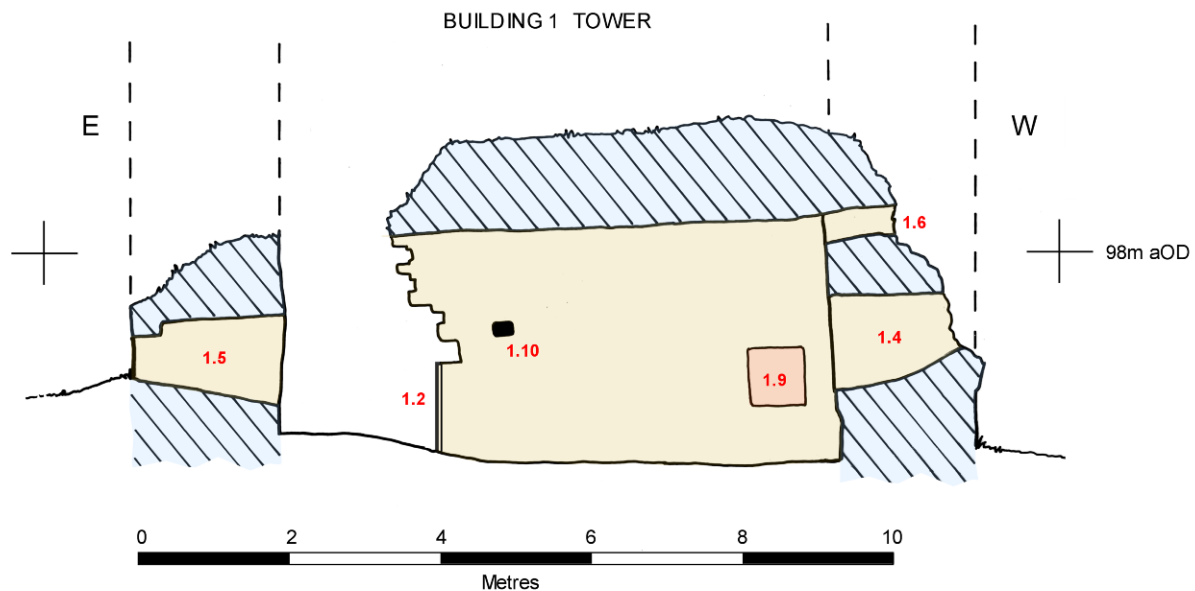


Figure 6: Longitudinal east-west section through the Tower House. Section B on figure 4 (1:100)

4.1.2 Entrance Lobby and Newel Stair (figures 4, 12 to 14 and plates 6 and 7) Today, there is only very limited evidence for the entrance complex at the south-east corner of the tower amounting to the upper portion of the west jamb of the lobby area. Hodgson (1904, 406) describes the complex as it was in 1903, accompanied by a very accurate drawing of the south-east corner of the tower probably from a photograph (figure 12) and by a plan and elevation by W H Knowles prepared in 1898 (figure 14):

The entrance door is at the east end of the south side and was secured by a falling bar. The lower steps of a circular newel staircase leading to the upper floors still exist on the right of the entrance. At the foot of the staircase a door, having a flat-pointed arched head, opens off the lobby and gives access to the basement

The accompanying drawing (figure 12) shows one half of the arched head of the inner lobby door still *in situ*. A drawing of the basement interior (figure 13) shows the other half of the arched head lying on the floor. It should also be noted that the ground level around the west jamb, as shown in the drawing, has risen between the 1900s and today by around 0.3m. No visible evidence remains for the newel stair which lay at the south-east corner of the tower to the east of the lobby entrance. A large sapling shown to the right of the west jamb

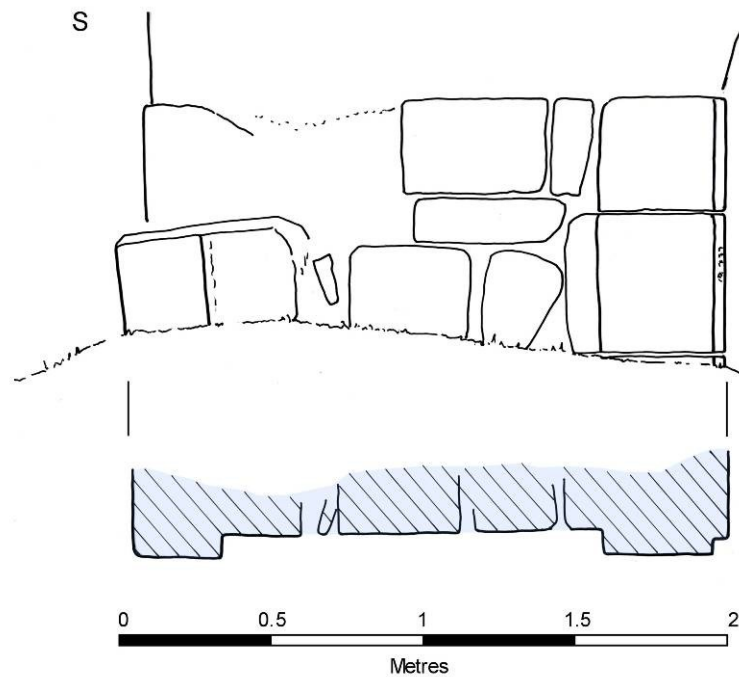


Figure 7: East-facing elevation and horizontal section of the surviving west jambs of the entrance lobby (1:25)

in the drawing (figure 12) is clearly the same tree as the substantial stump which now occupies this location and has encroached on the area of the newel.

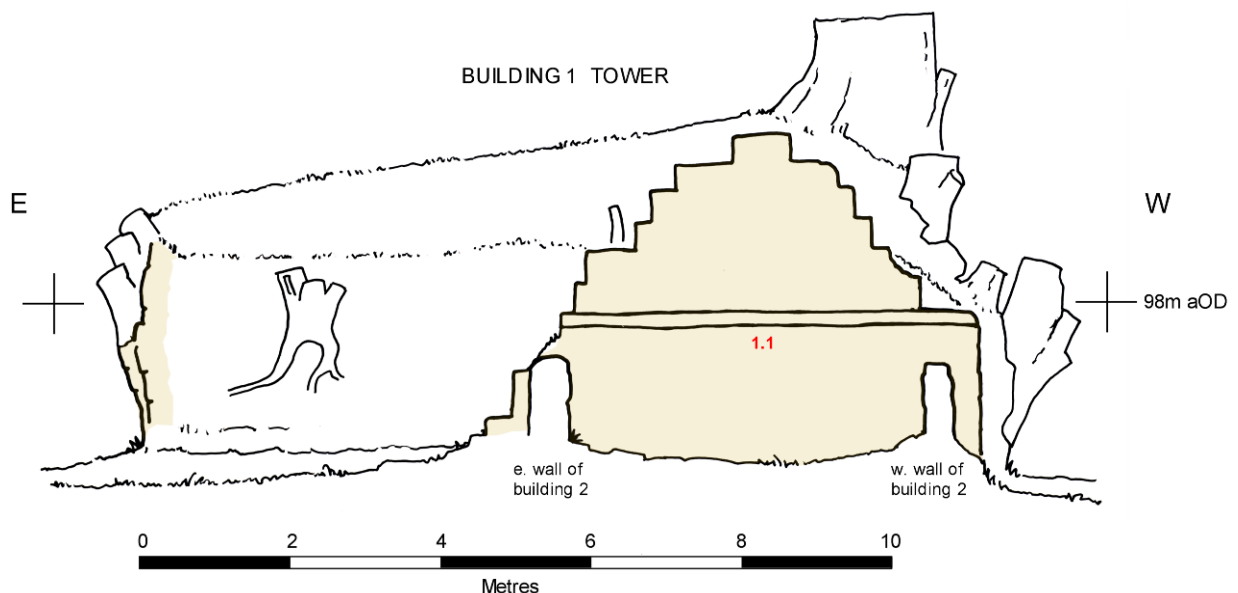


Figure 8: North elevation of the Tower House. Surviving face in buff tone (1:100)

4.1.3 North Face (figure 8, plates 3 and 4) Building [2], now in ruins, is appended to the north side of the tower, taking in the western half of this face. Within the extent of [2], much of the facework of the tower has survived up to a maximum of 12 courses. Beyond [2] all

facework has gone. The 'gable-shaped' survival of the facing stones presumably mimics the outline of building 2. Other than the chamfered plinth, the visible sixth course, there are no features in this face.

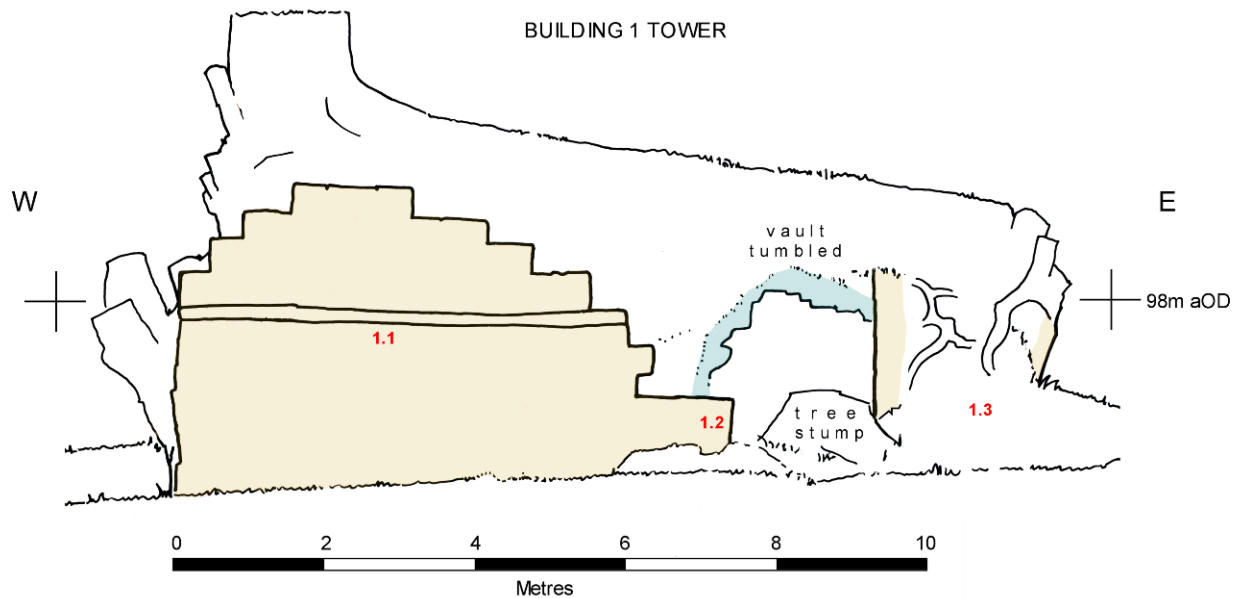


Figure 9: South elevation of the Tower House. Surviving facing stones in buff tone. Edge of tumbled vault in blue tone (1:100)

4.1.4 South Face (figure 9, plates 5 and 6) This is marginally the most substantially surviving face of the tower, although completely tumbled at the east end where all but the partial west jamb of the ground-floor entrance complex [1.2] has been lost and there is no visible evidence for the newel stair at the corner. Twelve visible courses of facework survive, the chamfer forming the eighth course.

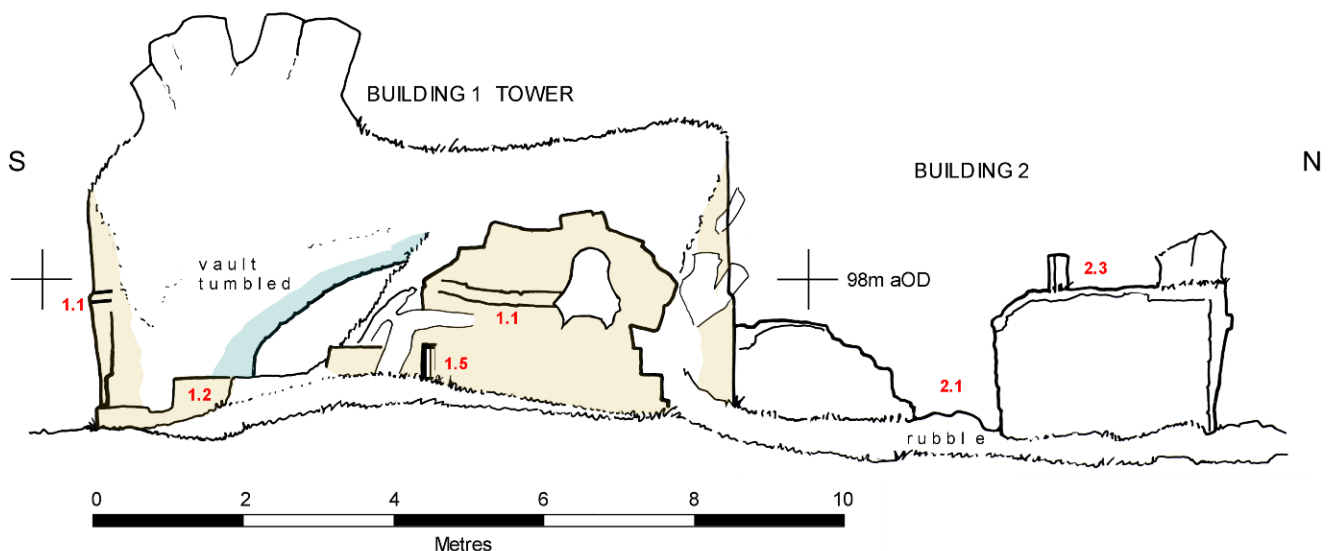


Figure 10: East elevation of Tower House and of Building 2. Surviving facing stones of tower in buff tone. Edge of tumbled vault in blue tone (1:100)

4.1.5 East Face (figure 10, plates 8 and 19) All but a 4m stretch of the face of the east wall, towards the north and centre, has fallen. The surviving blocks, a maximum of nine visible courses, lean out precariously from the vertical and their arrangement has been severely distorted by tree growth. Three blocks of the chamfer course [1.1] survive, in very irregular order, as the visible sixth course. The ground-surface along the face has been raised markedly by the former presence of a building [3] as well as by the fall of masonry. The only feature in the face, apart from the chamfer, is a narrow, vertically chamfered loop [1.5], partially obscured by the remnants of the south wall of [3].

4.1.6 West Face (figure 11, plates 9 and 10) This has been heavily impacted by a number of large trees which have grown within the core and between facing stones. The central area of the wall has been reduced to three courses. To north and south, the face of the wall survives to the eighth (chamfered) course. Two superimposed lights lie centrally ([1.4] and [1.6]). A garderobe chute [1.7], set within the core of the west wall, but now exposed because of the loss of facing stones, lies to the north of the lights. A garderobe chute [1.7], set within the core of the west wall, but now exposed because of the loss of facing stones, lies to the north of the lights.

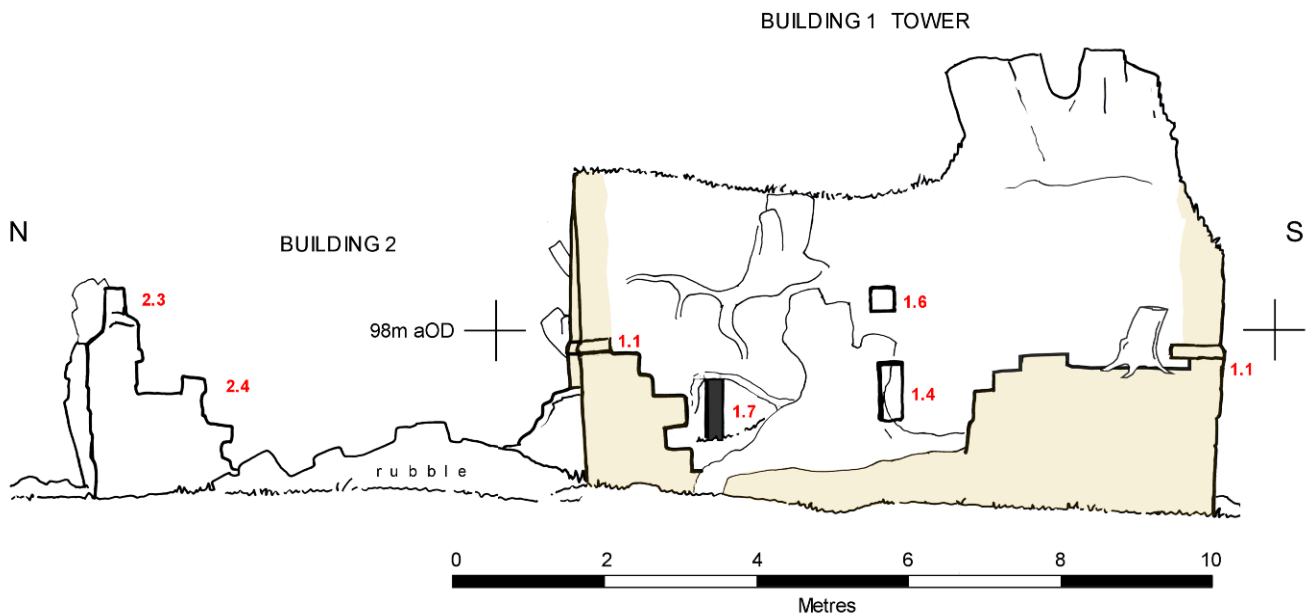


Figure 11: West elevation of Tower House and of Building 2. Surviving facing stones of tower in buff tone (1: 100)

4.2 Building 2 (figures 4, 10, 11 and plates 15-18)

This building lies against the western part of the north face of the tower, utilising this as its fourth wall. It is slightly longer north-south than east-west (6.5m by 6m) and has walls around 0.6m thick. In the few areas where this survives, the wallhead is about 3m high. The building is ruined and in a very fragile state. Its west wall is nearing complete tumble; its north wall contains a very substantial cavity, framed and held together only by a substantial

tree, and with much of the interior skin fallen away; and the east wall is also badly fallen. Surviving features are a doorway in the east wall [2.1], the remnants of a window jamb in the west wall [2.4] and a small niche with monolithic arched head in the north wall [2.2]. (This is described in the listing document as a segment-headed oven recess, formerly at the rear of a hearth with fire hood. Little evidence survives today to confirm this.). A tapering loop which formerly lay to the east of this niche in the north wall (Ryder 1995, 37) would seem to have gone. Three brick piers [2.3] sit on the wallhead. They raised the roof trusses (remnants of which survive on the ground within the building) presumably for ventilation above the wallhead. Ryder notes (1995, 37) that the building was ‘*clearly built of material re-used from the upper parts of the tower*’. Also, it should be noted that the eastern part of the north face of the tower, beyond building 2, has been entirely robbed away.

4.3 Building 3 (figure 4 and plate 19)

The evidence for this is now as much circumstantial as physical. A building is shown appended to the east side of the tower on the first edition Ordnance Survey (figure 18). Today, the area is devoid of any upstanding structure. A platform built up against the east face of the tower steps down beyond the line of its robbed-out north face [3.1] almost certainly marking the north wall of this building, and a short and low stretch of wall (about 0.3m high and 0.6m thick) [3.2] runs at right angles from the east face of the tower adjacent to the loop.

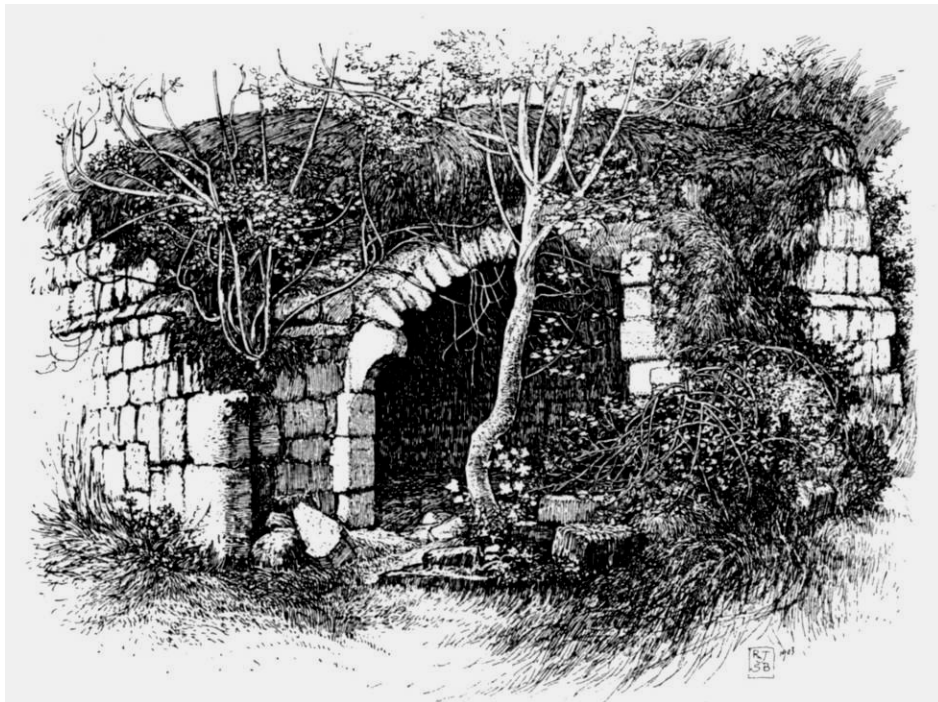


Figure 12: *The south-east angle of Overgrass Tower from Hodgson 1904, 406
Compare this drawing with plates 6 and 7*



Figure 13: Inside the basement of Overgrass Tower, looking west
From Hodgson 1904, 407

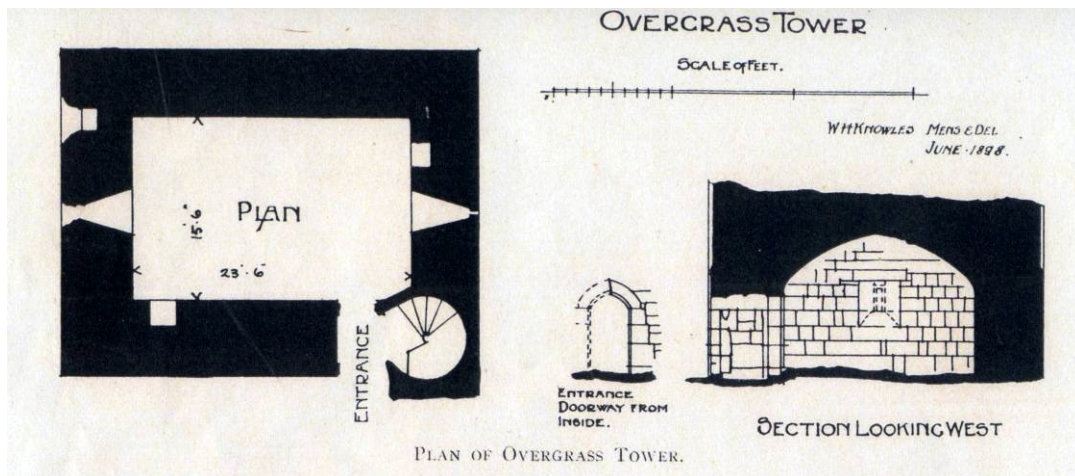


Figure 14: WH Knowles' 1898 plan and sections of Overgrass Tower.
From Hodgson 1904, 408

5. SOURCES

5.1 Published and Documentary Information

The main source for information on Overgrass Tower and its development is Hodgson's *A History of Northumberland* (1904, 404-8). It includes notes on the settlement and history of Overgrass as well as a specific section on the tower. This includes detailed drawings of the tower as it was in 1903 and a plan and sections prepared by WH Knowles in 1898. Ryder includes a detailed description of the remains at Overgrass, including surrounding features, in *Towers and Bastles in Northumberland: Part 1 Alnwick District* (1995, 36-7). This includes a plan and section of the tower based on Knowles as well as a basic plan of features and earthworks around the tower. He also includes general information in *Towers and Bastles in Northumberland: An Introduction* (1995). Overgrass Tower is listed by Hadcock in *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4:16 (168) and by Long in *Castles of Northumberland* (1967, 145). Sources for the tower are collected in the Northumberland County Council's HER 4293. All sources used in the report are listed in section 7.

5.2 Map Evidence

No enclosure or Tithe map has been found which covers the area of Overgrass. The earliest map located showing the settlement is Armstrong's map of the County of Northumberland of 1769 (figure 15). The post-medieval settlements of Overgrass and the Firth are shown to the east of the Manor (later Swarland) Burn. Armstrong also shows 'Ruins' in the area, but whether these refer to Overgrass Tower (which was certainly functional and certainly incorporated into a small-holding at a later date) is uncertain. The position would also seem rather misplaced for the tower.

The county maps of Fryer and Greenwood (1820 and 1828, respectively) show the area in some detail and include local routes. Fryer (figure 16) shows two coalescing at Newmoor House to the west of the Manor (Swarland) Burn. They ford the burn at Overgrass Tower. This route runs to the mill to the south as well as north up the east side of the burn to the settlements of Firth and Overgrass and beyond.

Greenwood (figure 17) shows the same pattern of routes with the Manor Burn negotiated by the ford at Overgrass Tower. The mill to the south of the tower is named Manor Mill. Interestingly, Greenwood shows 'Ruins' to the east of the mill (cf. Armstrong), certainly not the tower.

The sequence of Ordnance Survey maps from the mid 19th century details the development of the site. The first edition Ordnance Survey of 1857 (figure 18) shows Overgrass Tower as one part of a farmstead or smallholding with buildings appended to its north and east faces (buildings **1** and **2**) and with a surrounding vegetable plot or garden. The ford is named and the track to the north is shown winding up the bank from the crossing. The agricultural building to the north **[4]** is present alongside as is the enclosure **[11]** to the east. There is no indication on the map that this enclosure ever extended further to the west around the tower and was possibly constructed at the same time as the mill race, with which it would seem to be physically associated. The race for Overgrass Mill runs from opposite Newmoor Hall, along the east bank of the burn and on to the mill to the south. A track runs from the ford to the mill. A second track branches off along the north flank of enclosure **[11]** and terminates alongside but well upslope of the mill. This possibly ran to a former quarry.

By the time of the second edition Ordnance Survey at the end of the 19th century (figure 19), Overgrass Tower has lost the building to the east (building 2). The ford has also gone, or is at least not named, replaced by a new bridge about 100m to the north of the tower. The mill is still in operation.

The third edition Ordnance Survey (figure 20) of 1912 shows Overgrass Mill out of use. Other than that, little has changed apart from the loss of part of building **[4]** to the north-east of the tower.



Figure 15: Armstrong's Map of Northumberland 1769



Figure 16: Fryer's Map of Northumberland, 1820



Figure 17: Greenwood's Map of Northumberland 1828

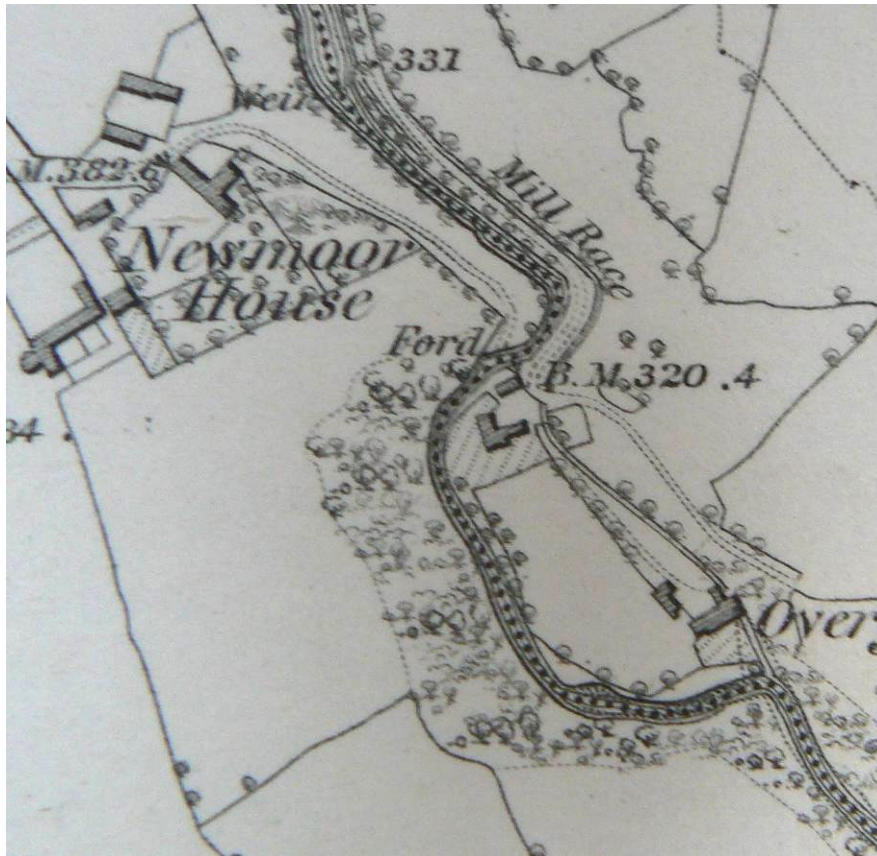


Figure 18: First Edition Six Inches to One Mile Ordnance Survey 1857 (Sheet 45)

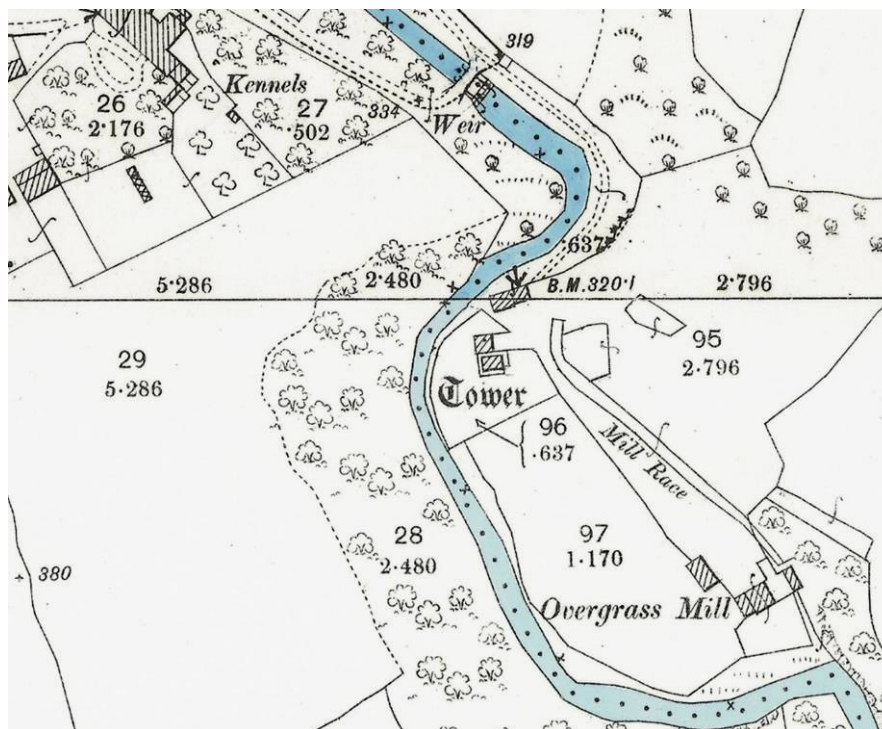


Figure 19: Second Edition Twenty Five Inches to One Mile Ordnance Survey of 1897 (Sheets 45.3 and .7)

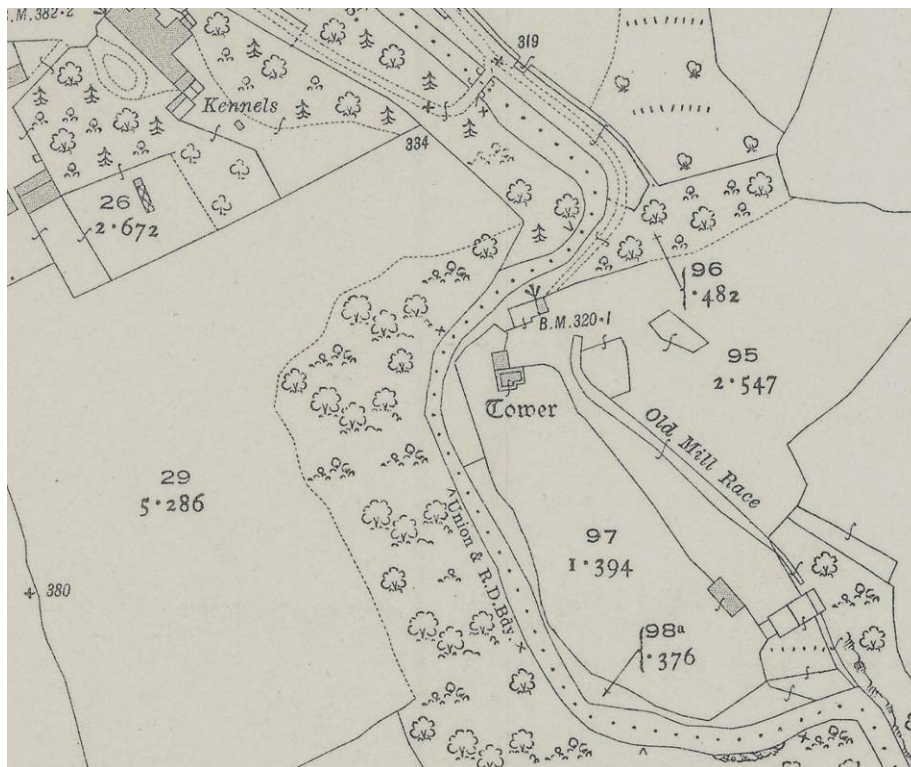


Figure 20: *Third Edition Twenty Five Inches to One Mile Ordnance Survey of 1912 (Sheet 42.12)*

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Overgrass Tower is a scheduled monument and listed building. It is a nationally important survival of a high-status defensible medieval house. Only a proportion of the house survives; one storey of a likely three.

5.2 How the tower related to other parts of the medieval vill of Overgrass is not known. It is possible that subsurface medieval remains, perhaps associated structural components, lie around the tower. However, there is no indication that there are any upstanding remains which are contemporary with the construction or medieval use of the tower.

5.3 Map evidence from the 19th century shows that Overgrass Tower sat next to an important fording point of the Swarland Burn. Whether this ford existed in medieval times, and whether the tower was sited at least in part to watch over and control this crossing, is not known. If it were, it may explain its poor defensive location, overlooked by high ground on three sides.

5.4 There is no evidence to suggest that the enclosure [11] to the east is of medieval date. Mr and Mrs Rogerson consider that it was one of the measures required (the paddocking of additional horses) to pull heavily-laden corn wagons from Overgrass Mill up the steep valley slope beyond the ford.

5.5 By the 19th century, quite possibly for some time before this, the tower was one part of a busy and discrete smallholding or farmstead, with buildings attached to north and east and with vegetable plots around it.

5.6 There is little visible evidence for the entrance complex at the south-east angle of the tower other than the west jamb of the entrance lobby. Although likely to be severely impacted by tree growth, it is possible that elements of the newel stair and east jamb of the outer doors may survive. One of the arch stones for the inner door survives within a pile of tumble at the south-east angle of the tower. It is possible that the other half survives inside the tower as shown on figure 13. Clearance and display of this area would be a valuable addition in understanding and appreciating the nature of the tower and its function.

5.7 Soil deposits and animal manure have built up within the basement. The original level of the floor (or floors) and the nature of this surface, is not known.

5.8 Whether any structural remains; floors or walls, survive below the current tree growth and soil build up at nominal first floor level is not known.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Archaeological Evaluation

Prior to the commencement of repair works a range of archaeological investigations should be carried out to establish the survival and nature of currently obscured features to guide the scope of these works. These investigations should include:

6.1.1 Excavation of a test pit (or pits) on first-floor level A test pit (or pits) should be archaeologically excavated to establish the survival of walls and floor levels in this area to guide subsequent clearance. Pits should be sited to avoid obvious disturbance by tree roots.

6.1.2 Excavation of a test pit (or pits) within the basement A test pit (or pits) should be archaeologically excavated to establish the nature of stratigraphy within the room and establish the depth and nature of early floor levels. This would guide any subsequent clearance.

6.1.3 Excavation of an area around the entrance complex and newel stair

Archaeological excavation of a defined area around the entrance complex and encompassing the buttress or projection containing the newel stair should precede conservation works. This would quickly establish the extent and survival of these structures and the degree of impact by the substantial tree stump within the lobby area and facilitate the preparation of an appropriate strategy for the removal of the stump to limit further impact on fabric. It would also establish the potential for restoration of this area.

6.2 Archaeological Watching Brief

Conservation and repair works on the tower and adjacent structure should be accompanied by archaeological monitoring and recording as fabric is exposed and areas cleared in order to provide a record of features revealed and to enhance understanding of the architectural character, dating and form of the building ranges.

6.3 Archaeological Specification (Written Scheme of Investigation)

The terms of any required archaeological evaluation and watching brief should be set out in a written scheme of investigation (WSI) prepared for the project and approved prior to the commencement of works by English Heritage.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Hodgson, J.C. (1904) *A History of Northumberland* vol 7 405-8

Long, B. (1967) *Castles of Northumberland*

Pevsner, N. et al (1992) *The Buildings of England: Northumberland*

Ryder, P.F. (1995) *Towers and Bastles in Northumberland: Introduction and part 1 Alnwick District*

Watson, G. (1970) *Northumberland Place Names: Goodwife Hot and Others*

Limited circulation Archaeological Report:

AOC (2010) *East Kyle Tower: Archaeological Recording Report*

8. PLATES



Plate 1: Overgrass Tower from the south-east



Plate 2: Overgrass Tower from the north



Plate 3: *The western part of the north face of Overgrass Tower. To the east of this all facing stones have been robbed away. Red colouration on the stones is lichen. Scale used throughout is 2m long.*



Plate 4: *The eastern part of the north wall of Overgrass Tower reduced entirely to corework*



Plate 5: *The western part of the south face of Overgrass Tower. To the east, the area of the entrance, the wall has gone*



Plate 6: *The tumbled south-east angle of Overgrass Tower. The scale stands against the surviving west jamb of the entrance lobby with the tumbled vault to the right*



Plate 7: The west jamb of the entrance lobby



Plate 8: The surviving east face of Overgrass Tower, fallen away to both north and south. The face is leaning precariously and distorted by tree growth. The eastern loop [1.5] can be seen below the elbow in the tree root



Plate 9: *The west face of Overgrass Tower. A large scooped area has gone from the centre exposing the core. The garderobe chute [1.7] can be seen low down, towards the northern block of facing stones and light [1.6] immediately to the right of the central stump.*



Plate 10: *The north-west angle of Overgrass Tower. The remnants of the west wall of building 2 in the foreground.*



Plate 11: *The basement of Overgrass Tower. Looking at the partially tumbled east wall with splayed loop [1.5] and cupboard [1.8]*



Plate12: *The basement of Overgrass Tower. Looking at the west wall with splayed loop [1.4] and light [1.6] above*



Plate 13: The northern edge of the first-floor level of Overgrass Tower



Plate 14: Looking west across the first floor of Overgrass Tower



Plate 15: Looking east at the tumbled west wall of Building 2



Plate 16: looking west at the east wall of Building 2 and the surviving north jamb of the door [2.1]



Plate 17: The extensively tumbled (and holed) inner face of the north wall of Building 2 with arched niche [2.2] surviving



Plate 18: North face of the north wall of Building 2. The facing stones are mostly re-used from the tower



Plate 19: *Looking south-west across the north-east angle of Overgrass Tower
A low platform, the location of Building 3, can be seen to the east (left) of the
tower. The scale lies along the north wall of this building*

Appendix 1: Structural Inventory

Building 1 Tower House

1.1 Chamfered plinth around all walls of the tower. Probable height as constructed c1.8m from ground surface. Steps in by 100mm (4").

1.2 Western jambs of inner and outer doors and intervening lobby wall in south wall of tower. This can be seen on figure 12 and in elevation and plan on figure 14 as it was around the turn of the 19th/20th century. At that time one half of the arched head of the inner door remained in situ. This has now fallen but survives in a pile of rubble just outside the entrance. Soil deposits have accreted in front of the face and the current position is shown on figure 7.

1.3 Location of newel stair in thickness of wall at SE angle of tower. Evidence for this now either lost or obscured. Area badly impacted by tree growth. A plan of the stair made in 1898 by W.H Knowles can be seen as figure 14.

1.4 Splayed loop in west wall of tower. External appearance uncertain through loss of facing stones. Internal width 1.04m.

1.5 Splayed loop in east wall of tower. 0.97m wide internal face. Runs for 1.65m to a flat face where it is narrowed to a slit of 0.13m in width. Vertically chamfered external face is 0.2m wide.

1.6 Square light set at apex of vault in west wall. External appearance uncertain through loss of facing stones.

1.7 Garderobe chute exposed through loss of facing stones from west wall. c. 0.2m wide and similar surviving depth.

1.8 Aumbry or cupboard in east wall.

1.9 Aumbry or cupboard in south wall. Blocked with modern brickwork.

1.10 Socket at springing point of vault in south wall.

1.11 Socket at springing point of vault in north wall.

1.12 Projecting course of masonry at base of north wall. Runs slightly skew to south wall and disappears 2m before the north-east corner.

Building 2

2.1 Doorway in east wall. Only north jamb survives to any height.

2.2 Niche in north wall. Monolithic head cut with segmental arch. Uncertain original function.

2.3 Brick piers above wall heads. Three brick piers to raise trusses above wallheads.

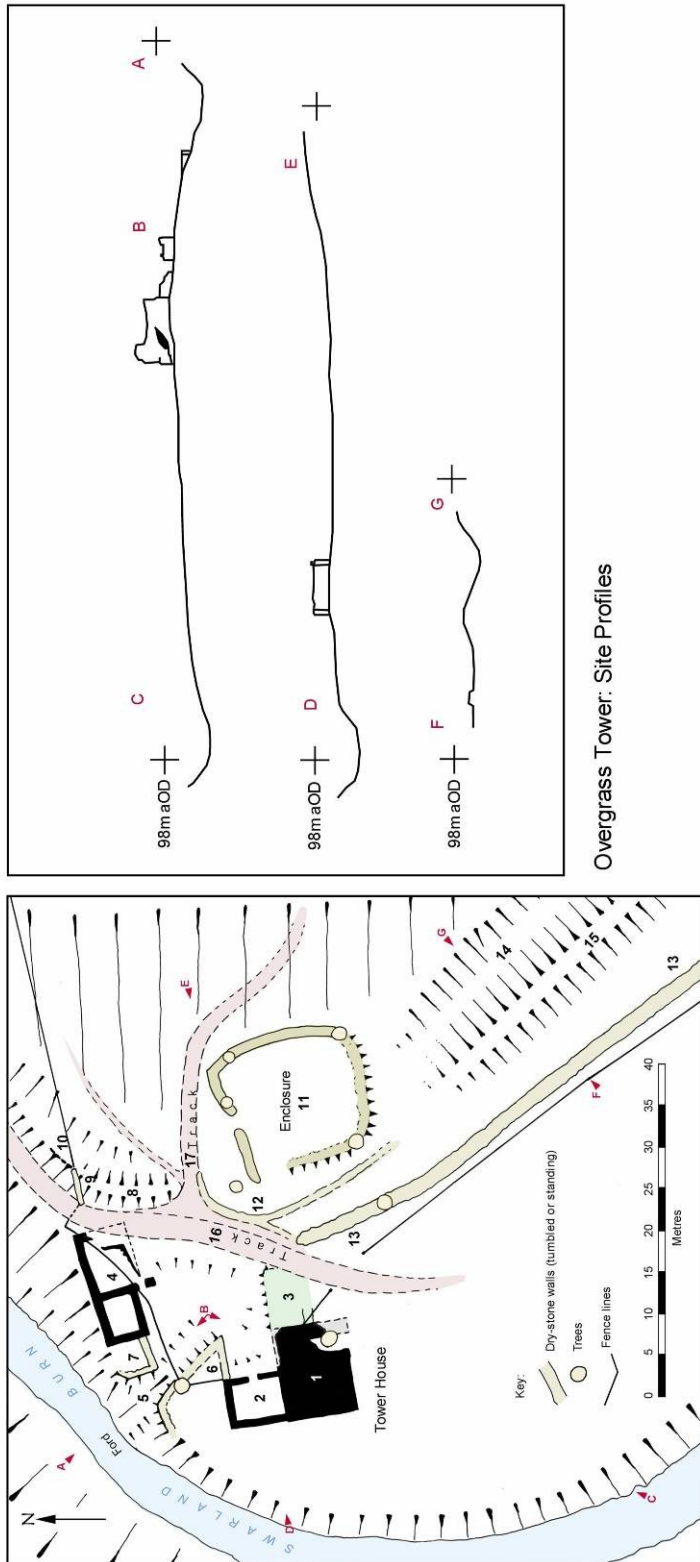
2.4 Remnants of window opening in west wall.

Building 3

3.1 North edge of platform marking extent of building.

3.2 Remnants of south wall. 0.6m wide and of similar surviving length. One or two courses high.

Appendix 2: Site Profiles



The three profiles to the top are located as per letters in red on the plan.
 Plan and profiles are the same scale.

Appendix 3: Specification

Brief for Survey and Analysis of Overgrass Tower House, Northumberland

A programme of measured survey, building recording and analysis is required to inform proposed conservation works at Overgrass Tower House. The work required will take the form of a measured ground plan, rectified photography (supplemented by hand survey) and a written analysis of the development and structure of the Tower. This work is required to facilitate the specification of consolidation works to the standing elevations and vault of Overgrass Tower House and the abutting building to the north.

1. GENERAL DETAILS

Location

Address: Overgrass Tower House, 150m SE of Newmoor Hall. Farm address: Overgrass Farm, Newton on the Moor, Morpeth, Northumberland NE65 9LT

Directions: Overgrass Tower House is at the very end of the minor road to Newmoor Hall, which is off the road running between Longframlington and Newton on the Moor. The Tower is in the corner of a field of permanent pasture, immediately adjacent to the Swarland Burn.

National Grid Reference: NU 1444 0332

Access

Access for both the purposes of estimating and actually undertaking the work must be arranged in advance through Mr J Rogerson on 01665 570357.

Site Visits / Meetings

It is recommended that contractors make a site visit prior to tendering in order to fully understand the scope of the work and the nature of the work.

Site Clearance

There is access to all elevations. Large trees and shrubs have recently been removed. Some strimming or beating down of vegetation immediately on and around the Tower may be required depending on time of survey. The interior of the vault currently has temporary scaffold props, therefore full recording of this section may only be possible once they have been removed as part of the main repair programme, but costings for this element should be included within the tender.

2. STAGE ONE: SURVEY

Area of Survey

A plan at ground-floor level of both buildings and all earthworks attached or adjacent to the structures is required at 1:50 scale.

Rectified photography mosaics at 1:20 scale are required of all elevations of both Tower House and attached building. Full recording is also required of the vaulted ground floor room. The two long elevations are to be presented as sectional elevations to include the vaulted ceiling. The drawing for the vaulted ceiling is also to be presented as a ceiling plan. Hand measured drawing should be completed for any areas where it is not possible to obtain full, accurate photographic cover.

Completeness of Survey

The survey is to be as complete as possible given the above. Hand measured drawing (or an agreed alternative) should be completed for those areas where it is not possible to obtain full, accurate rectified cover.

Notes to be Read in Conjunction with Metric Survey Specifications for Cultural Heritage (English Heritage 2009):

The following section numbers refer to the section numbers in the Metric Survey Specification for Cultural Heritage (EH 2009). The lack of a note to a particular section should not necessarily be taken to mean that the section does not apply.

SECTION 2: SURVEY CONTROL

2.1 CONTROL OF SURVEY

2.1.3 Co-ordinate system (Site Grid)

There is no existing site grid.

2.1.4 Local co-ordinate system (Local Grid)

A site grid is to be established and orientated to approximately National Grid north.

2.1.5 Establishment of permanent survey markers

At least two permanent survey markers are to be inserted. The location and type of marker must be agreed in advance with Sara Rushton.

2.1.7 Vertical Datum

The grid is to be related to the Ordnance Survey Newlyn datum either by means of GPS observation and the OSGM02 transformation or levelling to a nearby Ordnance Survey bench mark.

2.2.3 Use of detail points

Detail points may be used for inaccessible elevations.

2.3 ARCHITECTURAL SURVEYS

2.3.1 Control of survey data

Any of the methods described in this section will be acceptable.

2.3.2 Precision of survey data

The plan is to be controlled to a precision commensurate with plotting at 1:20 scale.

2.3.4 Tolerance of detail measurement

Hand measured detail is to be measured to a precision of 20mm.

SECTION 3: FORMAT, PRESENTATION AND PROVISION OF SURVEY DATA

3.1 DIGITAL DATA

3.1.1 Digital filenames

The standard abbreviation for the site is OVG.

3.1.2 CAD data format

*The drawings are to be supplied as **AutoCad 2004 .DWG files**. The hand survey is to be supplied as an AutoCad 2004.DWG file. The architect engaged to produce the repair specification for the Tower should be contacted to establish whether output in alternative CAD formats is required, and this should be provided where possible.*

3.1.3 Digital image format

Any digital images are to be supplied in .TIF format, however, for ease of opening etc .JPG versions may be supplied attached to the AutoCAD files.

3.1.4 Storage medium

The files are to be supplied on CD-ROM or DVD -R.

3.3 PHOTOGRAMMETRY, ORTHOPHOTOGRAPHY AND ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

3.3.3 Layout

The elevations are to be presented at 1:20 scale. The hand measured detail is to be printed at 1:20 scale. The plans are to be presented at 1:50 scale.

SECTION 4: STANDARD SPECIFICATION FOR IMAGE-BASED METRIC SURVEY

4.7 Rectified Photography

4.7.3 Film-based image criteria

If film is used it is to be monochrome film

4.7.5 Digital image criteria

Digital images are to be monochrome

4.7.6 The use of small-format image platforms

A negative size of less than 60x60mm or a sub 2000x2000 digital camera pixel array will not be acceptable.

4.8 Image Acquisition for Rectified Photography

4.8.1 Accepted scales of imagery

The rectified photography is to be printed at 1:20 scale therefore the required negative scale will be a minimum of 1:100

4.8.3 Use of oblique imagery

For most elevations oblique imagery will not be necessary. Where it is necessary tilts are to be kept to a minimum.

4.8.5 Control of rectified photography

The photography is to be controlled using co-ordinated targets.

4.9 Rectified Processing

4.9.2 Scale of Output

The rectified photography is to be printed at 1:20.

SECTION5: STANDARD SPECIFICATION FOR ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

5.2 SURVEY METHODS

The survey is to be plotted out at 1:20 scale. The method employed is to be at the contractor's discretion.

5.3.1 Survey Product

The following survey products are required:

Plan at ground floor level, of Tower and abutting building.

Ceiling plan of the vault .

Sectional elevations.

Elevations of all interior and exterior walls for tower house and abutting structure

5.3.5 Detail required

The plan is to be presented at 1:50 scale. The elevations are to be presented at 1:20 scale.

2.3 ARCHITECTURAL SURVEYS

2.3.1 Control of survey data

Any of the methods described in this section will be acceptable.

2.3.2 Precision of survey data

The precision of the survey data is to be as specified for a 1:50 output scale.

2.3.4 Tolerance of detail measurement

The accuracy of hand measurement is to be as specified for a 1:50 output scale.

4.5 DRAWING CONTENT

4.5.1 Level of detail

The full level of detail is required.

5.3.5 Detail required

The plan is to be presented at 1:50 scale. The elevations are to be presented at 1:20 scale

3. STAGE 2: ANALYSIS AND REPORT

Aims

The survey results identified above will be supplemented by an analysis of Overgrass Tower House and its setting which will describe its character, dating, form, architectural and archaeological development. The results of this investigation will provide information needed to prepare a programme of repair works and provide supporting documentation for an application for grant under the English Heritage Historic Buildings, Monuments and Designed Landscapes Grant Scheme.

Objectives

The objectives of the survey, research, analysis and archaeological investigation are to provide the following:

An overview of the construction, use and development of Overgrass Tower House, abutting structures and immediately associated earthworks, identifying areas of significance and sensitivity. This should contain analytical drawings and a written report which illustrate and explain architectural and archaeological details and any changes and developments through time with regard to construction techniques, materials, surface treatments, function and use of the structure and setting.

Background historical research to illuminate the construction, use and alteration of the building through time drawing on historic maps, photographs and primary sources (sources for this information should include the County Record Office, County Historic Environment Record, National Monuments Record and any documentation held by the current or former owners and estate);

Inclusion of the metric survey data in a format that is suitable for use by all professionals involved in the project;

A synthesis of the documentary and recording fieldwork that includes an interpretation of the results with comparisons to similar sites

Method and Resource Statement

The tenderer is to provide a costed project design in line with the Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE), English Heritage, 2006. Work will be carried out in accordance with standard guidelines (*Metric Survey Specification for Cultural Heritage; English Heritage Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice; IFA Standard and Guidance for the Architectural Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings and Structures, ALGAO Analysis and Recording for Conservation and control of Works to Historic Buildings*). The tenderer must demonstrate that all staff, including subcontractors, are suitably qualified and experienced and understand the work required of them.

Outputs

PROVISION OF SURVEY MATERIAL

Before the dispatch of any other materials, 1 set of preliminary plots and 1 x set of digital data on CD-ROM should be supplied to David Andrews at:

English Heritage
37 Tanner Row
YORK YO1 6WP

Once the preliminary plots have been approved, the following should be provided (1 set each to the recipients identified below):

- 1 x sets of plots on paper
- 1 x sets of plots on stable polyester film
- 1 x sets of digital data on CD-ROM

All other deliverables as described in sections 3.5.2 and 3.6.3 to 3.6.6

REPORT AND ARCHIVE

The contractor will provide a written, illustrated, A4 bound report detailing the results of the survey and analysis. This will include, as a minimum:

Non-technical summary
Introductory statement
Site description
Aims and objectives
Methodology
Statement of the results
Conclusion
Index and location of archive
References and bibliography

The site archive should be prepared to the standards specified in the Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE), English Heritage, 2006. The archaeological contractor should also complete the online OASIS form at <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/>. Contractors are advised to contact the Northumberland HER prior to completing the form. Once a report has become a public document by submission to or incorporation into the HER, Northumberland HER may place the information on a web-site. Please ensure that you and your client agree to this procedure in writing.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE

The timetable for the survey and report will be confirmed once the grant application has been approved. A full set of plots, digital data and site report, as identified above, are to be provided to each of the following:

1. Mr R Rogerson,
Overgrass Farm
Felton
Morpeth
Northumberland NE65 9LT
2. English Heritage (c/o Kate Wilson)
Bessie Surtees House
41-44 Sandhill
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 3 JF
3. Historic Environment Record
Conservation Team
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland NE61 2EF

The National Monuments Record should be asked if they wish to receive copies of the archive and report.

MONITORING

The project will be monitored by the English Heritage local Inspector of Ancient Monuments who will be given at least two weeks notice, (or shorter period by mutual agreement) in writing of the commencement and timetable of the work.

The contractor will ensure that arrangements are made for a monitoring visit at the beginning of the contract.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The contractor should comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act and subsequent additions and amendments. All fieldwork must be carried out under an agreed Health and Safety Policy. A risk assessment should be carried out prior to the commencement of work and the project should have a nominated Safety Officer.

If the Provisions of Construction, Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2007 are appropriate the employer will appoint a Supervisor who will prepare a Health and Safety Plan which will be made available to the archaeological contractor prior to the commencement of work.