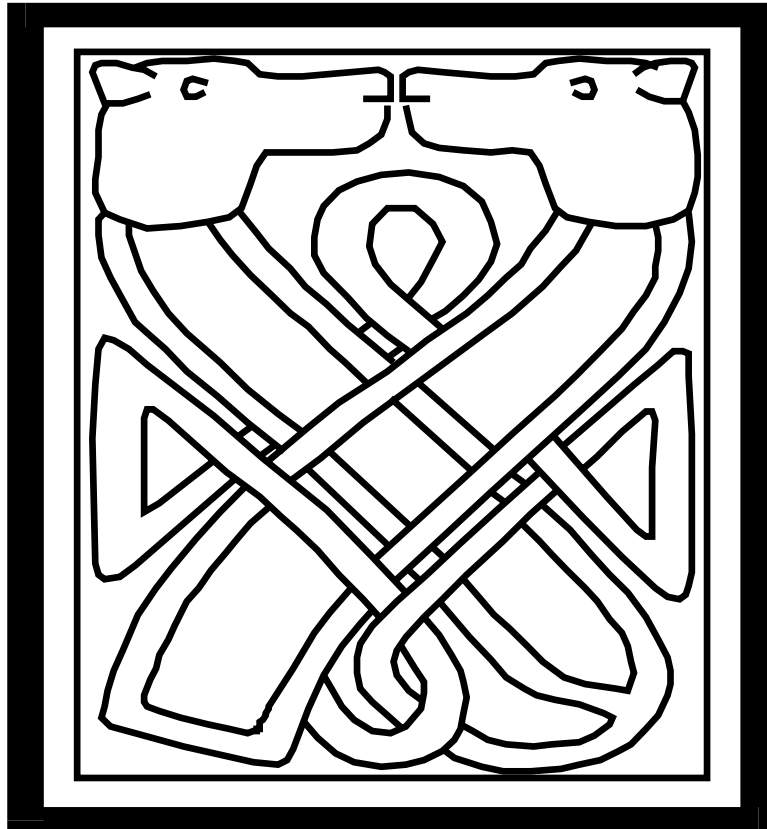


BAMBURGH RESEARCH PROJECT



Report on the Archaeological Monitoring at 5 & 6
Rothill Cottages, Whittingham, Northumberland

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1. Abstract

- 1.1 *The site at 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages was subject to an archaeological monitoring programme imposed by the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team because of its situation in a region that is regarded as likely to afford remains from the Medieval period given the nearness of the deserted Medieval village of Rothill. Between 8 – 11 July, 2009 the demolition of nineteenth century farm buildings was observed, followed by the excavation of footing trenches for the construction of an house. The long axes of the house measured 30 metres, and these trenches were joined by seven smaller trenches. A large area was therefore revealed during the course of the work.*
- 1.2 *Notwithstanding this exposure of ground, no archaeological features nor finds were identified. This seemed puzzling at the outset, inasmuch that the region has afforded copious quantities of finds and sites from the Neolithic period and onward into the twentieth century. The Historic Environment Register has ten entries of Bronze Age sites and finds, being mortuary features or votive hoards; ten sites from the Iron Age are known. Immediately outside the area of development lies the deserted Medieval village of Rothill. Once the excavations had begun in earnest, it became apparent that the entire promontory on which the cottages are situated consists of thick deposits of poorly drained clay. It is likely this clay that dissuaded people from building their settlements here, as the ground is sticky and wet through much of the year.*
- 1.3 *The soils are fertile, but they could easily be exploited from settlements located elsewhere in the region. This probably explains the situation of the Medieval village of Rothill at the foot of this promontory rather than atop this feature. This report outlines the geological, archaeological and historical background to the region and describes the excavation and the negative results of the work. As no finds were made and the stratigraphic succession was straightforward and represents a fluvial-glacial processes, an involved discussion and description of the sediments is not undertaken, nor is an Harris Matrix included.*

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This report describes the archaeological monitoring programme that was undertaken at 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages, near Whittingham, in the county of Northumberland between 8 – 11 July, 2009. The archaeological work was carried out by the commercial division of the Bamburgh Research Project on behalf of Mrs. Rachel Wood, the owner of the property, to fulfil the planning condition imposed by the Northumberland County Council Conservation Team (henceforth abbreviated to NCCCT). The NCCCT reference number is: A451/1: 8353, and the Planning Reference number is A/2007/0320.
- 2.2 This site lies on land that was formerly occupied by farm buildings at 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages, in the hamlet of Rothill (NU 0706 1263), roughly one kilometre to the north of the village of Whittingham. The development of the site consisted of an initial phase which required the demolition of the farm buildings, followed by the excavation of footing trenches for the construction of another structure. This resulted in an archaeological assessment of the undisturbed land that was sealed beneath the nineteenth century buildings which were removed, as well as an investigation of the footing trenches. The extent of the excavation work was therefore substantial, amounting to over 250 square metres. Nonetheless, the work did not result in the identification of any archaeological features; this was curious as the site occupied a salient position in the landscape and was situated near the Medieval village of Rothill. A provisional explanation of this might be the presence of a thick and poorly drained layer of clay throughout the site, which would have rendered settlement here largely unpleasant until modern amenities and drainage facilities were available. The surrounding landscape afforded far more propitious soils for settlement insofar that there are many locations with well-drained sands and gravels.
- 2.3 All the archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the methods and protocols suggested and championed by the *Institute of Field Archaeologists*. This report was disseminated to the client and the NCCCT, but has also been made available to a wider audience by its publication online through the OASIS service hosted by the Archaeological Data Service at the University of York. The archive, consisting merely of photographs, drawings and the sheets recording the layers in the stratigraphic succession, have been deposited with the Great North Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; this institution is regarded as the appropriate repository for archaeological material and studies pertaining to Northumberland. No sedimentary samples were taken, nor was it considered apposite to retain any of the material from the small lenses of organic material intercalated with the clay for chronometric dating assays.

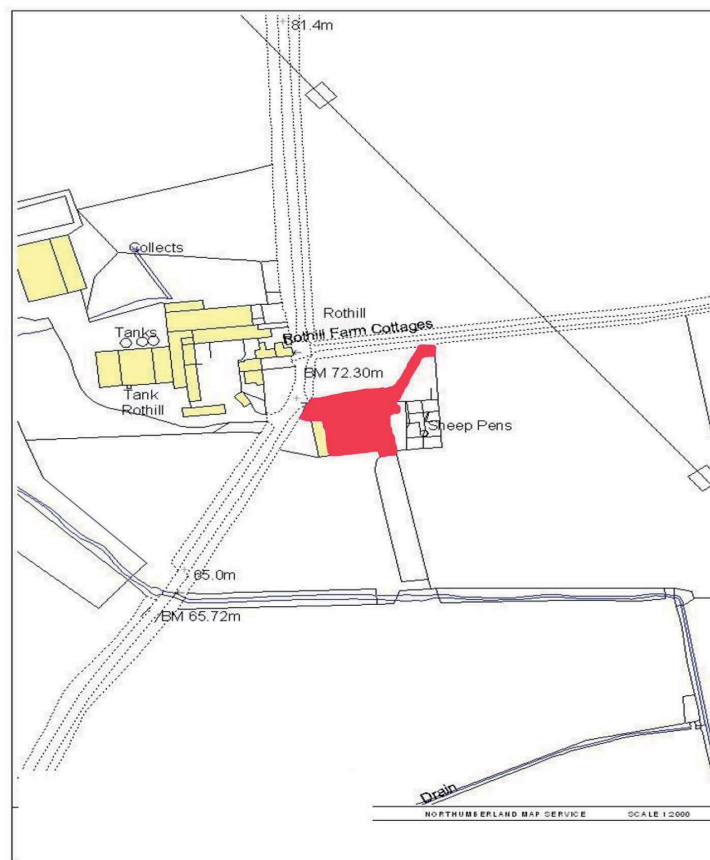


Illustration 1: The location of Rothill Cottages

3. Method Statement

- 3.1 The archaeological monitoring programme at 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages was undertaken in accordance with the methods and procedures recommended by the *Institute of Field Archaeologists* in their most recent guidance document (2008, 2 - 7). All the excavation was overseen by an archaeologist that had familiarity with the nature of the historic and prehistoric record of the immediate district, and the trenches inspected for any features that presented themselves. A photographic record of the work was compiled and a site plan was produced at a scale of 1:20; furthermore, a representative section was recorded through photographs and drawings at a scale of 1:10, followed by a description of the stratigraphic succession .
- 3.2 The excavation consisted of the demolition of extant structures and their clearance, followed by the definition of the footing trenches and their subsequent excavation. As the buildings had not disturbed the ground throughout the site, it was possible to investigate some larger areas for the existence of features. Unfortunately, there was no evidence of this in the underlying clay deposits and the footing trenches ultimately revealed nothing of any significance. The conditions on the site during excavation were propitious for the identification of features in the clay inasmuch that there had been episodes of rain that left the surface relatively damp; this would have resulted in a contrast between the mineragenic clay particles and any ditches, pits or trenches with an organic content.
- 3.3 A full statement concerning the sampling strategy in place should anything have been encountered is afforded in the appendix, which reproduces the 'Written Scheme of Investigation' submitted to the NCCCT in advance of the work being carried out. The excavation was also recorded in photographs, from the onset of work on the site through the digging of the trenches to the final recording of the representative section. All these photographs and the discussion of the section will be presented below in the section of this report pertaining to the discussion of the site.

4. Geological Formations and Soils

- 4.1 The solid geological formations of Whittingham Vale are relatively well understood, at least in their broad lineaments, as a result of wide range of studies undertaken here since the nineteenth century. It is inapposite to offer more than a superficial overview of these studies in this report, but it is nonetheless relevant to mention the main rock types and their affect on soil development and vegetation. Rocks belonging the 'Ballagan Formation' underlie the hamlet of Rothill and the immediately surrounding territories; these are distinguished by layered cementstones that rarely exceed 0.30 metres in thickness and

are interbedded with calcareous mudstones which are rarely more than a few metres in thickness (Lawrence *et al.* 2007, 26). In some locations both sandstones and siltstones occur in the sequences. In the current British nomenclature pertaining to the Lower Carboniferous, the Ballagan Formation belongs to the Courceyan and Chadian Stages (Cossey *et al.* 2004, 5).

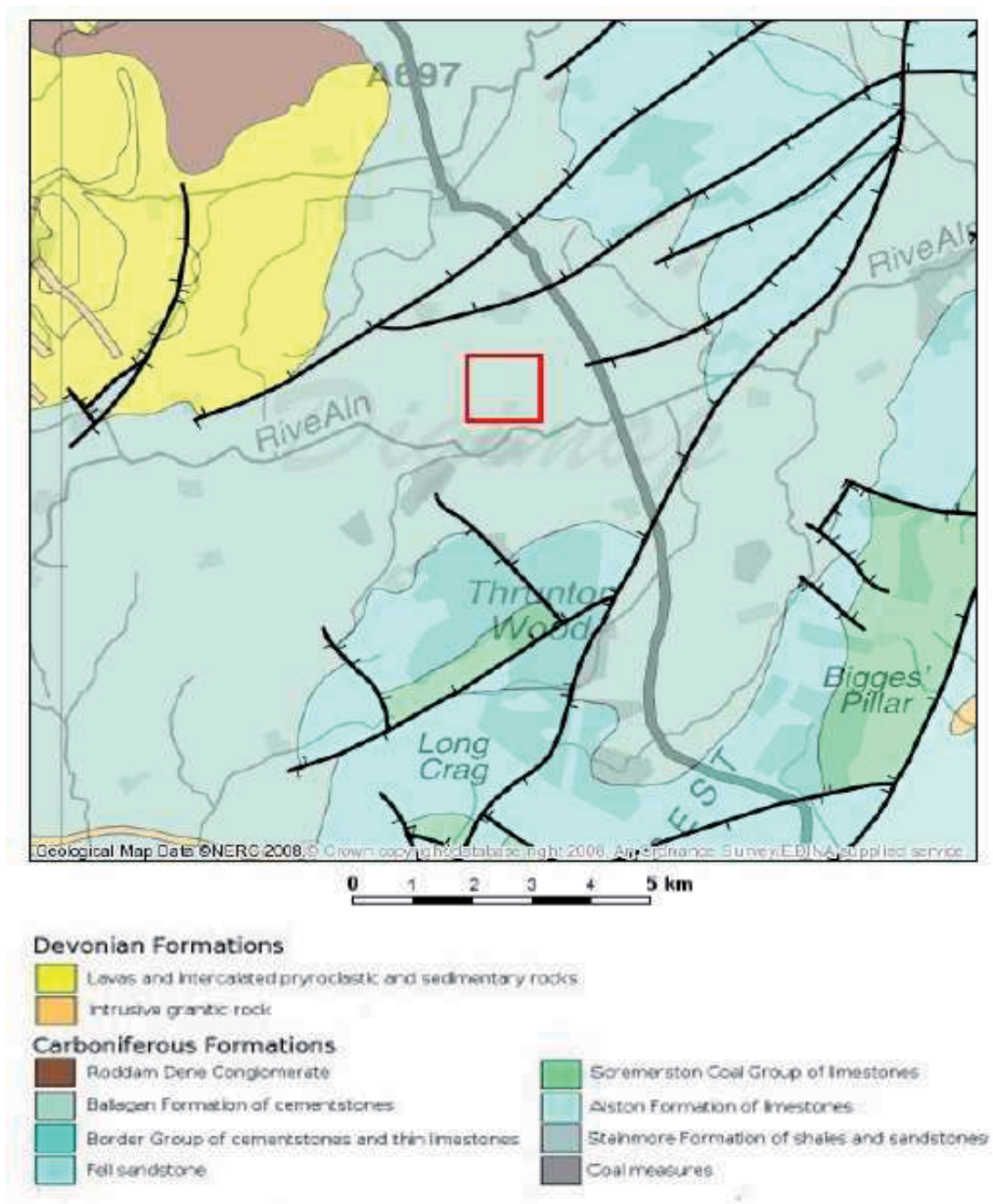


Illustration 2: The solid geological formations of Whittingham Vale and the surrounding districts

- 4.2 The solid formations are relatively soft and thus more susceptible to rapid erosion than the igneous material which dominates the Cheviot Hills to the north and the linear dykes of whinstone that occur to both the south and to the east. It is the erosion of the last glacial sequence of advance and recession that has left the most salient impress on the landscape; this wrought such profound changes that there is little evidence of the preceding glacial cycles in Coquetdale (Fowler 1936, 128). The entire region has been immured beneath thick ice-sheets on at least seven occasions in the Pleistocene (Jones & Keen 1993, 2). In the later Devensian, the ice advanced into Northumberland from three directions: firstly, from the Firth of Forth and the Lammermuir Hills, which turned and flowed southward along the coast; secondly, a local ice-sheet situated over the Cheviot Hills; thirdly, a massive ice stream whose origins lay in the Southern Uplands of Scotland and encroached on Coquetdale from the north and west (Taylor *et al.* 1971, 85).
- 4.3 The landscape of the region lay, for much of the Devensian glacial episode, under thick glacial ice-sheets. Such sheets advanced into the region from two principal directions: firstly, from the Southern Uplands of Scotland to the west and north-west; secondly, from an ice-sheet that was situated over the Cheviot massif. A basic distinction has been made between 'cold-based' and 'warm-based' glaciers, the latter being dynamic and flowing at a faster rate which resulted in considerable erosion, whereas the former were frozen to their bed and thus advanced little and indeed even protected the landscape from erosion (Benn & Evans 1998, 162 – 164). The ice-sheet situated over the Cheviot massif was 'cold-based'; its advance was slow and there was a solidity in the structure. Conversely, that emanating from the Southern Uplands was 'warm-based' and advanced quickly. At the confluence of the two ice-streams, the solidity of the Cheviot sheet tended to deflect the flow of the Southern Upland ice-sheet around its margins (Lawrence *et al.* 2007, 57).
- 4.4 Although the glacial ice-sheet regime of Whittingham Vale was principally governed by the vicissitudes of the glacier based on the Cheviot Hills, rapidly flowing ice emanating from the west and the north swept over the southern portions of the region. These ice-sheets ultimately had a common point of dispersal in the uplands of the Cairnsmore of Carsphairn in Galloway (Grieg 1971, 98); thence they flowed to the south and east, but their course into Northumberland was deflected by the ice-sheet situated on the Cheviot Hills and also by a small ice-sheet on Carter Fell (Taylor *et al.* 1971, 87). It is possible to determine the direction of ice advance along the course of the River Coquet from Alnwinton to Rothbury through the study of the occasional striæ observed on Fell Sandstone (Fowler 1936, 134) and this is corroborated by the streamlining of the bedrock between Thropton and Whittingham which indicates that the ice-sheet advanced here in a west-south-west to east-north-east direction (Lawrence *et al.*

2007, 65).

- 4.5 The best soils in the wider region are those that occur on rocks of the Ballagan formation. Although these are also thin and are usually boggy on higher ground, they occur primarily on lower-lying ground and are covered by thicker layers of sediment deposited in the last glacial cycle. It is because that the soils here formed mainly on these alluvial and colluvial sediments rather than on the parent rock material that they are better drained and more fertile than those occurring elsewhere in the district (Payton & Palmer 1990, 56). Most of these have been ploughed in the modern era and thus they afford good opportunities for fieldwalking, and have furthermore produced many finds such as cist burials and other features. On the higher ground, where the cottages under investigation are situated, the sediment consists of thick glacial clay which impedes drainage. This is largely fertile soil, but perhaps not actively sought out and exploited intensively until heavy agricultural equipment became available.

5. Archaeological Sites and Finds

- 5.0.1 A total of fifty-four sites and monuments are recorded in the Historic Environment Register within a five kilometre radius of the site at Rothill Cottages.* Some of the sites record evidence from two or more episodes; the histograms offered in this section have counted these entries according to the number of periods represented rather than individually as in the table below, thus raising the total to sixty (Figure 3). The justification for this lies in the desire to quantify settlement from each period, rather than merely considering a multi-component site as representing the material most prevalent in the collections. It must, however, be acknowledged at the outset that there are many biases in the record and that the entries represent a very coarse tool of analysis. In common with most parts of the British Isles, the majority of sites are salient and represent buildings, earthworks and other features that are obvious or can easily be discerned from aerial survey.
- 5.0.2 It is nevertheless noteworthy that a third of all the sites in this region are prehistoric, and that the Bronze Age is best represented of all these periods. An explanation for this must be sought in the extremely valuable research carried out by David 'Dippie' Dixon through the latter decades of the nineteenth century (1895). Even if he was not directly responsible for the identification of many of these prehistoric sites, his signal service in collating the literature and anecdotal traditions concerning the prehistoric settlement of Whittingham Vale has been invaluable.

* A search on the Archaeology Data Service site (ads.ahds.ac.uk) elicits over eighty entries, but many of these are duplicates. Once the duplicates have been removed, only fifty-four remain.

- 5.0.3 The most prevalent features in the Historic Environment Register are buildings and other constructions, which mainly derive from the Post-Medieval period, which are immediately obvious as they continue to serve the local community in some capacity. This is most likely the reason that Post-Medieval entries are so well represented; to a lesser degree, this also obtains for Medieval features as churches, bridges, and other structures have been subject to modification and still remain important to the fabric of the built environment. It is quite surprising, however, that the category containing the second highest entries are archaeological finds—this must reflect the antiquarian interest in the region, but also the remarkable richness of some of the Bronze Age finds and the solidity of the cist burials which renders them obvious to farmers whilst ploughing. The category described here as 'Upstanding Features' refers to those that are either evidence from the field surface as undulations or banks, or those that have been identified through aerial photographic surveys. Finally, there is a group of finds whose location is inferred through documentary sources.
- 5.0.4 The buildings and other constructions—such as bridges, mills, and so forth—generally record the more grandiose structures in the landscape rather than the modest dwellings and facilities. This is an inherent bias in the collection of data that is ultimately committed to the Historic Environment Register and must be borne in mind when using this resource for research purposes. The archaeological finds and features are fascinating insofar that they have afforded such a large quantity of Bronze Age hoards and cist burials; this will be discussed in more detail below, but notwithstanding the biases in the collection of data that obtains, this must represent an actual trend in settlement. Conversely, the paucity of Neolithic finds and a complete absence of Mesolithic material is puzzling and requires further consideration. Finally, the Iron Age is well represented through hillforts; the lack of finds and identification of domestic dwellings is nevertheless commonplace throughout the British Isles and reflects the absence of excavation. The ordinary homesteads of the region tend to be difficult to identify and are often overlooked in favour of the more obvious and substantial hillforts. Few ordinary settlements have been investigated, whereas the hillforts have been subject to significant study.

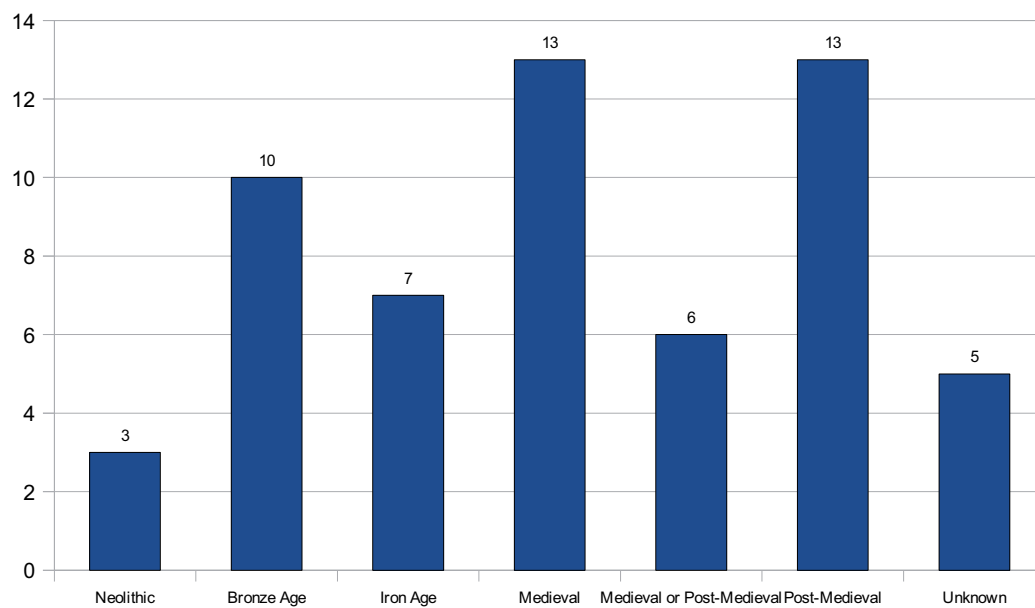


Illustration 3: Number of sites from different periods entered in the Historic Environment Register for an area within a five kilometre radius of Rothill

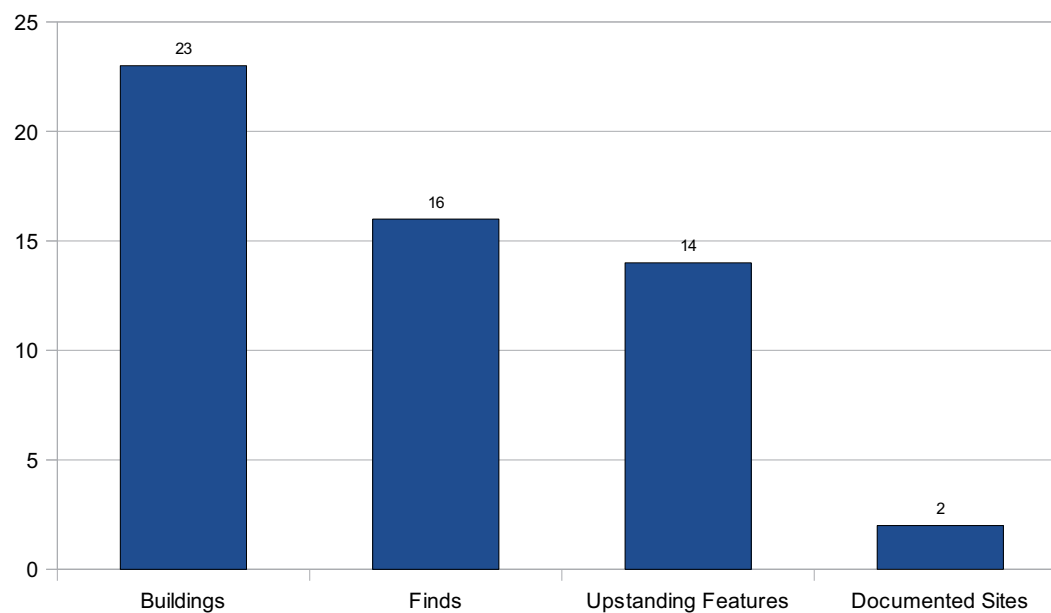


Illustration 4: Sites in the Historic Environment Register arranged according to their overall type

5.1 Neolithic

- 5.1.1 Only three sites are known from the Neolithic . Only the find of the Beaker vessel, made by workmen in 1814, permits an opportunity to assign the find to a more restricted segment of this episode. All the other finds, such as the axe at Callaly and the worked lithics with their content of barbed-and-tanged armatures , can at best be ascribed to the 'later Neolithic'. The axe at Callaly was found near the mill and was described as being of 'felstone'; the dimensions of the specimen suggest that it belongs to the latter half of the Neolithic, but this must be a provisional hypothesis as the find has not been directly studied as it is in the collections of the British Museum. The finds of worked flint around Mountain and Mile farms also appear to belong to the latter half of the Neolithic by dint of the projectile points (Dixon 1895, 8).
- 5.1.2 A large quantity of late Neolithic material has been recovered in Coquetdale and this may reflect that an expansion of settlement, or the clearance of the landscape, was afoot at this time. This supposition is nonetheless impossible to corroborate as we lack pollen records from this part of Northumberland. The nearest site which has been subject to such analyses is Steng Moss (NY 965 913) and it may be apposite to draw some inferences concerning the scale and timing of the onset of major land clearance based on the pollen values here. The pollen record at Steng Moss extends into the later Neolithic; this renders comparison with processes of clearance in earlier episodes impossible. Nonetheless, there appears to be two protracted episodes of land clearance; this was interpreted by the authors of the report as being indicative of shifting cultivation on a small scale in the later Neolithic (Davies & Turner 1979, 792). A more profound impact occurred at roughly 1,000 BC and agrees with the patterns of land clearance seen throughout the uplands in Northumberland.

5.2 Bronze Age

- 5.2.1 A large quantity of finds from the Bronze Age occur in the vicinity of Rothill Cottages. At least ten finds have been made, of which three are hoards; the remainder are principally cist burials and other mortuary features such as cremations. It is tempting to regard this pattern as suggesting that the region affords a ritual landscape; this is indeed true at a certain level of resolution, but it must also be recalled that settlements from this period are elusive and that the mortuary features are salient and thus more likely to be identified and recorded by amateurs and agricultural workers than the ephemeral domestic features. As mentioned above, the contribution by David 'Dippie' Dixon in carrying out analyses of the region and collating the available evidence has contributed substantially to understanding the distribution of archaeological evidence throughout Whittingham Vale and Coquetdale. His influence also presumably excited the interest of

many locals that reported finds to him and accompanied him on surveys and excavations, thus leading to many more sites and finds being reported.

5.2.2 The most common type of Bronze Age find recorded in the Historic Environment Register are cist burials, most often accompanied by cremation urns. In the older literature, these urns are usually called 'cinerary urns' and they denote a specific type of Bronze Age mortuary vessel. Such finds, although of intrinsic interest, are relatively common and thus their occurrence in this region should not be a surprise. The cremation vessels in the region are often associated with cist burials, but there are also simple cist burials which are accompanied by ceramic vessels which contain no human remains. Only a single cremation is recorded in the Historic Environment Register. The cist burial at Mountain Farm is worth mentioning for it had incorporated rock-art into the capstone and thus represents one of the few examples known in the region where the motifs were used anew in the Bronze Age.

5.2.3 The hoards are particularly fascinating insofar that they are quite unusual both from both a regional and national perspective. Most of the hoards are associated with the latter half of the Bronze Age, when metal becomes more widespread and there is a trend towards the ostentatious destruction of wealth, usually in wetland deposits. Three hoards are known in the region: the Cragside weapon find, the spear hoard at Thrunton and the Merchant's Hoard, again lying near Thrunton and being recovered from boggy ground. This report does not afford sufficient space, nor occasion, to discuss these hoards in any further detail nor to consider their potential significance in territorial demarcation or the rise of chiefdoms. Nonetheless, it should be underscored that the quantity of such finds in the region should compel further research into Bronze Age settlement and this ought to be incorporated into the research framework pertaining to Northumberland.

5.3 Iron Age

5.3.1 The Iron Age is well-represented in Northumberland and there are numerous sites from the immediate region of analysis, but also throughout the surrounding landscape. An approach to the uplands of the Cheviot Hills and those defining Coquetdale afford many examples of fortified settlements or fortresses. Moreover, the course of the Roman road of Dere Street and the secondary artery of the Devil's Causeway run very near to the area of investigation. Indeed, Rothill overlooked the former and would have provided an excellent location for sentries or observation positions. No clear evidence of Roman occupation is forthcoming from the region and thus the remains from the period of Roman occupation in the British Isles is subsumed into

the category of 'Iron Age' for the purposes of this study.

- 5.3.2. None of the features assigned to the Iron Age in the vicinity of Rothill have been subject to excavation, and thus this tentative dating is based exclusively on their morphological characteristics. This is not to imply that the attribution of these features is erroneous, but it should be recalled that the paucity of investigation renders most of our statements concerning the sites from this period supposition based on the results of old excavations or those undertaken elsewhere in the British Isles. An example of this is the controversy that surrounds the origins of the hillforts and the uncertainty regarding the transition from unenclosed to enclosed settlements, if this did indeed occur in Northumberland at all. The kernel of the hillforts may extend into the Bronze Age, but until more of these are thoroughly investigated, a definitive answer cannot be attained.
- 5.3.3 Although there are only eight sites from the Iron Age recorded in the region, five of these are concentrated near the course of Dere Street (No. 21, 22, 30, 39, 46) and thus implies that these are relatively late—namely, that they derive from the Romano-British period. The hillforts (No. 1, 9) are displaced from the course of the road and it is possible that these were largely abandoned by the time of Roman presence at the River Tyne. As with the origins of the hillforts, there is uncertainty regarding the period in which they became a local desuetude. The sites near the road may have benefited from supplying the Roman forces; there also remains the possibility that the road was formalised by the Romans, but has a much greater antiquity and served as a route well before their arrival in the British Isles.

5.4 Medieval

- 5.4.1 The Medieval period affords us with the earliest documentary evidence, but the earliest phases are nonetheless shrouded in obscurity. All the villages and hamlets in the vicinity of Rothill bear Germanic names—the suffixes of '-ham' and '-ton' are derived from the language of the Germanic colonists. It has been suggested that '-ham' reflects an older dialect than '-ton' and that therefore Whittingham is likely the oldest settlement in the district, those of Glanton and Thrunton having developed later. The village of Callaly also derives from Old English: *calwa(n)leaga*, which means 'bare clearing' (Mawer 1920, 37). This does not imply any meaningful settlement, whereas both '-ham' and '-ton' mean 'enclosure' or 'homestead' and implies a domestic site. No archaeological remains from the Early Medieval period, that is to say, the period when the Germanic colonists first entered Northumberland, are known in this part of the county and the earlier documentary evidence unfortunately does not make mention of this region.

- 5.4.2 The historic record becomes more substantial after the Norman conquest, perhaps reflecting the importance attached to bureaucratic procedures as the Norman aristocracy imposed its power on the lands which they had recently acquired. Although Rothill is not explicitly named, the villages surrounding Whittingham were mentioned in the *Pipe Rolls* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Mawer 1920, 12, 37, 77, 94, 136, 170, 175, 197, 214). Architectural elements from this period appear in the Church of St. Bartholomew's in Whittingham, although it is supposed that the origins of the church lie in the Anglo-Saxon period. A gold coin from the reign of Edward I, and thus also deriving from the thirteenth century, was found on a field near Hedgeley.
- 5.4.3 Otherwise, most of the Medieval sites consist of deserted villages and architectural features such as chapels, defensive towers, and market crosses. An enclosure ditch has been identified in Glanton, probably representing the Medieval boundaries of the village and there is mention of 'Lady's Well' which probably refers to Butterwell. Finally, there are tracts of ridge-and-furrow plough vestiges in the region; not all of these have been entered into the Historic Environment Register. The cumulative impression of the sites and finds, and their diverse nature, suggests that settlement was widespread through the Medieval period despite the constant challenges to domestic life occasioned by the Anglo-Scottish Wars and also the raiding of the Border Reivers. A circumspect analysis of the economic, social and political occurrences that unfolded in the district through the Medieval period is not possible here, but there have been excellent studies presented in several nineteenth century publications (Dodds 1935, 86 – 123). The collation and transcription of many of the relevant documents was undertaken by Reverend John Hodgson in his books on the history of the country (1832).

5.5 Post-Medieval

- 5.5.1 Much of the Post-Medieval evidence from the district concerns stately homes and parks, as well as bridges and the infrastructure associated with the creation of the railway and the expansion of commerce. The most salient Post-Medieval features are the large homes and estates: Whickham House, Callaly Deer Park, the features of Callaly Castle, Shawdon Park, and Shawdon Hall. This reflects the wealth of some of the merchants and aristocracy in the region, benefiting from the rising demand for food, wool, coal and other commodities as the Industrial Revolution created a massive demand for these to feed and clothe the waxing urban population or to supply energy and material to the industries. This process, moreover, occasioned the improvement of roads and ultimately resulted in the construction of the railway.
- 5.5.2 The civic infrastructure was improved, but it is possible that some of the old bridges and roads were replaced with more modern and sturdy

structures rather than these constructions having first arisen in the Post-Medieval period. At least two bridges were erected in the Post-Medieval period: that of Lady's Bridge and that over the River Aln. An interesting feature from the early twentieth century is electrical station at Callaly Castle which was intended to provide power to the sawmill and other commercial facilities. This should be regarded along with the aforementioned features at Callaly Castle, such as the gateway and walls.

- 5.5.3 Dovecotes are recorded in the Historic Environment Register, as are fountains and the presumed site of a pillory. The railway station in Whittingham is also recorded, as is a Royal Monitoring Corps observation position constructed in the Cold War to collect data on radiation levels and toxins should a nuclear or chemical strike have occurred in the north-east of England. It is probable that many more sites associated with defence and the training of soldiers in the wars of the twentieth century will become evident if landscape surveys are undertaken.

6. Excavations

- 6.1 The excavations at the site were undertaken between 8 – 11 July, 2009. Before the footing trenches were dug, farm buildings from the latter half of the nineteenth century were demolished; this exposed large stretches of clay that had not been disturbed by the construction of these buildings. An investigation of the surface revealed no features (Illustration 9). The footing trenches were then laid out; these reached an extent of over thirty metres, joined by at six shorter trenches. A toothless digging bucket was used to excavate these trenches; the sediment was scraped back at roughly a depth of thirty centimetres on each occasion. This permitted the observation of changes in the colour and texture of the sediment and the identification of any archaeological features.
- 6.2 The site is dominated by a thick and poorly drained clay layer, whose depth is uncertain as none of the footing trenches reached a depth of more than 600 mm below a layer of plough soil and made-up ground upon which the farm buildings stood. This is certainly a glacial feature; the laminations within the clay suggests that it was deposited by fluvial-glacial action, rather than being a till. These laminations can be seen in the foreground of Illustration 11. It is possible to acquire a date on these from the organic lenses, but there is little point to this unless the objective were to date the glacial recession occurring within this part of Northumberland. Insofar that the site is at a relatively high altitude (*ca.* 80 metres OD), the clay could only have been deposited at an earlier stage of the glacial recession when copious quantities of meltwater was discharged through the Whittingham Vale and the depth of the glacial rivers was significant.

- 6.3 No features or finds were made during the course of excavation. A discussion of the possible reasons for the absence of archaeological evidence shall be presented in the following section. It is appropriate here, however, to consider the stratigraphic succession and the possibility that some traces of occupation had been effaced by previous developments. The plough soil was filled with d bris from the nineteenth century and large quantities of gravel and other material that could not have occurred naturally at this elevation. This suggests that the ground was made-up—that is to say, material was brought in upon which the buildings were constructed. This was perhaps undertaken because of the clay and the poor drainage that it affords. The nineteenth century buildings, therefore, were unlikely to have damaged existing features and the absence of evidence here must be regarded as real rather than illusory.



Illustration 5: The excavator removing the topsoil after demolition of the farm buildings



Illustration 6: The land surface after the demolition of the farm structures



Illustration 7: A section through the clay at the site of Rothill Cottages



Illustration 8: The clay underlying the plough soil and made-up ground upon which the farm buildings stood

7. Discussion

- 7.1 The principal matter to consider is why there was no evidence of Medieval or prehistoric occupation at the site of 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages at Rothill, Whittingham. A significant quantity of sites occur within the immediate vicinity of the site; the most obvious being the deserted Medieval village of Rothill (No. 26). The most compelling explanation is that the thick and poorly drained clay deposits discouraged settlement. It is on the lower lying ground that the Medieval village was situated, perhaps so that the occupants could benefit from the better drained soils at the foot of the promontory on which the site Rothill Cottages lie and still till the thick and fertile clay soils. The Medieval village was, furthermore, nucleated as is customary at this period (Beresford 1989, 36; Platt 1979, 22) and therefore it was unlikely that settlement spread outwith the core unless significant population rises occurred.
- 7.2 The rise in population, when it did occur after the thirteenth century, coincided with the enclosure movement in England and the nascent Industrial Revolution. Instead of the small rural villages growing, many declined and vanished altogether with the population moving into the larger villages and towns for work or on to large estates. This perhaps signalled the end of the hamlet of Rothill, but many that were here possibly chose to move into Whittingham and Glanton. In earlier periods, the poor drainage of the clays would likely also have been unappealing when there were so many stretches of sand and gravel in the immediate region. This may thus explain the absence of prehistoric sites; however, the excellent view over the course of Dere Street might presumably have attracted some sort of military or commercial facilities in the Romano-British period.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The site at Rothill Cottages afforded no evidence of prehistoric or historic occupation before the nineteenth century despite being situated in a landscape replete with sites and finds from the prehistoric and Medieval period. Although this was initially perplexing, the thick and poorly drained clay revealed that occupation here would have been difficult and uncomfortable whenever there was rainfall. The rich and fertile clay soils could easily have been exploited from numerous sites at lower elevation where the soils were better drained. This seems the most obvious explanation for the avoidance of a site that offers an excellent view of the surrounding landscape and lies within the easy reach of villages such as Whittingham and Glanton.
- 8.2 As there is no evidence of any occupation, this report recommends that no further archaeological intervention is imposed by the Northumberland County Council. Nevertheless, it does suggest that the

district of Whittingham should be monitored closely given the large quantity of prehistoric remains of especial interest and the copious quantities of deserted Medieval villages. Such a concentration of sites, especially those from the Bronze Age, implies that there is significant settlement from this period somewhere in the immediate region.

9. Acknowledgements

- 9.1 This work benefited from the goodwill and assistance provided by Mrs. Rachel Wood. We also wish to thank Nick Best of the NCCCT for his assistance in sending documentation through at short notice and for kindly approving the Written Scheme of Investigation as quickly as his schedule permitted. Without the kindly intervention, the work would have experienced many more delays than necessary. All errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

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11. Appendix: Written Scheme of Investigation

11.1 INTRODUCTION

11.1.1 This Written Schedule of Investigation has been compiled by the Bamburgh Research Project, in July 2009 for Mrs. Rachel Wood regarding the demolition of old farm buildings and the construction of a new house on land at 5 & 6 Rothill Cottages, Whittingham, Northumberland. The document sets out the project design for an archaeological watching brief to be conducted during groundworks associated with the scheme.

11.1.2 The Written Schedule of Investigation details the proposed scheme of works for the watching brief and has been prepared in order to fulfil a requirement for the planning application, as laid out in the brief issued by The Northumberland County Council Conservation Team. The NCCCT reference number is: A451/1: 8353 and the Planning Reference number is A/2007/0320.

11.2. THE SITE

11.2.1 Location

11.2.1 The site is in the hamlet of Rothill, lying near the village of Whittingham and occupies the current farm steading (NU 0706 1263) (Figures 1 and 2). It lies to the west of the Roman road of Dere Street, which runs north-south on the opposite side of the A697.

11.2.2 Archaeological background to the site

11.2.2.1 Based on the limited information available, there appears to be a strong possibility that the modern settlement is located on the site of the earlier settlement and as such, the proposed development does have the potential to impact on medieval and later settlement remains. Archaeological investigations on other comparable historic settlements across Northumberland show that the settlements usually comprise buildings along the street frontage with parcels of land or “tofts” to the rear which would have been used for a range of domestic, craft and/or industrial activities. Information derived from these deposits can inform our understanding of local medieval diets and may also testify to various craft or commercial practices formerly undertaken on the site. Where such deposits do survive, they can provide a valuable insight into the social and economic history of a settlement. In the case of Rothill, this is particularly important, since despite its potential medieval origin, little is known of that early village.

11.2.3 As the precise layout of the early settlement at Rothill is not known, the proposed development has the potential to impact on a wide range of structural or land-use remains. Groundworks associated with the proposed development therefore have

the potential to impact or destroy any such archaeological remains within their footprint. Northumberland County Council Conservation Team has advised Alnwick District Council that, should permission be granted, a condition should be attached to the permission requiring an archaeological watching brief.

11.2.3 Impact of the development

11.2.3 The development involves the clearance of old farm buildings, presumably first erected in the nineteenth century, followed by the excavation of footing trenches for the new construction and service trenches. This development is extensive across the old buildings, measuring over thirty metres with shorter trenches joining the long axes; there is therefore considerable scope for the work to impinge upon remains from the Medieval period.

11.2.4 The groundworks will cause disturbance up to 0.6m below the present ground level within an area likely to have been the site of Medieval settlement associated with the deserted village of Rothill. These remains may represent domestic structures or, alternatively, buildings with an industrial function. Herein lies the justification for the archaeological monitoring programme.

11.3.0 OBJECTIVES

3.0.1 In the light of the potential for the construction work to impact, in places, upon preserved archaeological remains it is proposed that a continuous watching brief be conducted during the ground work associated with the construction of the new building in accordance with the specification laid out in the brief issued by the County Council Conservation Team.

11.4.0 METHODS

4.1 Watching brief during excavation

1.1.1 During the groundworks associated with construction activity a suitably experienced archaeologist, familiar with the archaeological background to the site, will be present to record any items of interest that are revealed. Where appropriate all excavation and will be carried out by a machine using a toothless ditching bucket. All work will be carried out in compliance with the codes of practice of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) and should follow the IFA Standards for Watching Briefs. This watching brief will conform to the following methodology.

11.4.2 Contingency

4.2.1 In the event of the discovery of unexpected archaeological remains over and above those predicted by previous archaeological work on the adjoining site,

work will cease and the County Archaeological Officer/representative of the developer will be notified in order that an assessment of the importance of the remains and any provision for their recording may be made.

- 4.2.2 A contingency for excavation comprising up to 5 person days can be invoked following consultation with the County Archaeologist.

11.4.3 General standards

- 4.3.1 All archaeological features identified during the monitoring, or following the implementation of the contingency will be sample excavated according to their type and form:

50% of all discrete features.
50% of waterlogged deposits.
25% of stratified deposits.
25% of the area of linear/curvilinear features with a
non-uniform fill
10% of the area of linear/curvilinear features with a
uniform fill

- 4.3.2 A 40 litre bulk palaeoenvironmental sample will be taken from all features recognised as suitable for the preservation of palaeoenvironmental remains.
- 4.3.3 Secure contexts will be sampled for dating where appropriate, whether on site or as sub samples of bulk samples. Any concentrations of charcoal or other carbonised material recovered on site will usually be retained.
- 4.3.4 Pottery and Animal Bone will be collected as bulk samples whilst significant artefacts will be three-dimensionally recorded prior to processing. All finds will be recorded and processed according to the BRP system and submitted for post-excavation assessment. Finds recovery and storage strategies will be in accordance with published guidelines (English Heritage 1995 and IFA Guidelines for Finds Work). Should artefacts of gold or silver covered by the 1996 Treasure Act be recovered, appropriate procedures will be followed.
- 4.3.5 In the event of Human burials being revealed they will be left *in situ* and treated in an appropriate manner if possible. Any burial requiring excavation will be exposed, recorded and lifted in total. After consultation with the County Archaeological Officer, if excavation is required, work will comply with the relevant home Office regulations.
- 4.3.6 Any archaeological features encountered will be hand-cleaned, excavated and recorded:
1. A photographic record of the site will be taken using black and white print, colour slide film at 35mm format. In addition a digital

photographic record will be compiled.

2. A written description of features will be recorded using the BRP *pro forma* context recording system.
3. All features will be drawn at an appropriate scale using pre-printed permatrace. Plans will normally be drawn at a scale of 1:20 and sections at a scale of 1:10.

- 4.3.7 All archaeological features and horizons will be accurately tied into the Ordnance Survey grid. All levels will be tied in to Ordnance Datum.
- 4.3.8 Arrangements will be made with the appropriate museum for the deposition of the site archive within 6 month of the completion of the post-excavation report.

11.5.0 MONITORING

- 5.0.1 Access will be made available at all reasonable times to the archaeological representatives of the Northumberland County council Conservation Team to inspect the excavation site.
- 5.0.2 Access to the site will be on the basis of prior notification and subject to any relevant health and safety considerations.

11.6.0 POST-EXCAVATION WORK, ARCHIVE AND REPORT COMPILATION

- 6.0.1 On completion of the excavation an assessment of the site records and finds will be undertaken in accordance with English Heritage (1991) guidelines. This will include:
 - collation of all site records
 - compilation of a report
 - production of context, photographic, finds and illustration databases
 - analysis of the finds assemblage by relevant specialists
 - environmental assessment of selected bulk samples
- 6.0.2 The assessment report, with each page and paragraph numbered and with cross referenced illustrations, will include:
 - summary of the project background
 - site location
 - methodology
 - results of the watching brief

- site location plans and illustrations of results at appropriate scales
- interpretation of the results in an appropriate context
- post-excavation assessment of the site archive
- catalogue and assessment of the artefactual archive
- catalogue and assessment of the faunal remains
- catalogue and assessment of the palaeoenvironmental samples recovered
- appendix containing a list and summary of each recorded context

6.0.3 A copy of the report should be submitted by the archaeologist to the commissioning client, and two copies, one bound and one unbound, to the County SMR within 2 months of completion of the work. A summary will be prepared for 'Archaeology in Northumberland' and an article will be submitted to a local or national journal if appropriate.

6.0.4 The site archive will be prepared to the standard specified in the Management of Archaeological Projects, appendix 3 (HBMC 1991) and in accordance with the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage (UKIC 1990). A summary account of the context record will be included and written by the supervising archaeologist. The archive will be deposited at the specified museum within 6 months of completion of the work on site.

6.0.4 An online OASIS form will be completed for the project as part of the post-excavation assessment process.

11.7.0 PERSONNEL

7.0.1 The designated project manager Graeme Young, is one of the five directors of the Bamburgh Research Project. A graduate of Newcastle University, with 21 years of experience in field archaeology including directing a number of excavations of urban medieval sites in Newcastle and Durham. He is an Associate Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

7.0.2 Additional field staff, with appropriate archaeological experience, will be engaged as required.

11.8.0 SUB-CONTRACTED SPECIALISTS

2.2.1 Although it is not possible to predict the range of artefacts that may be recovered provision has been made for the analysis of the most common artefacts.

Material	Specialist
Medieval pottery	Jenny Vaughan
Post-medieval pottery	Jenny Vaughan
Prehistoric pottery	Blaise Vyner

Roman Pottery
Animal bone
Palaeoenvironmental
Conservation

Blaise Vyner
Durham University Archaeological Services
Durham University Archaeological Services
Karen Barker

11.9.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 9.0.1 The Bamburgh Research Project complies with the 1974 Health and Safety Act and its subsequent amendments in all its operations. The SCAUM manual and the Bamburgh Research Project Health and Safety Policy Document is followed for all site works. A designated and appropriately trained first aider is present at all times during working hours. A First Aid kit, Accident Book and telephone are provided for each project. Safety footwear is mandatory on all excavation sites. Where required safety helmets and reflective jackets are provided. It is policy for a vehicle to be present at an excavation and staff must be appropriately equipped for bad weather.
- 9.0.2 All staff undergo a safety induction prior to commencing work on site. A written risk assessment is undertaken specific for each site. The safety assessment is reviewed on a daily basis and changes to the working conditions monitored continually during adverse weather conditions.

11.10 REFERENCES

Published and unpublished sources

- | | |
|------------------|---|
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| IFA 2000 | Code of Conduct |
| IFA 2001 | Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs. |