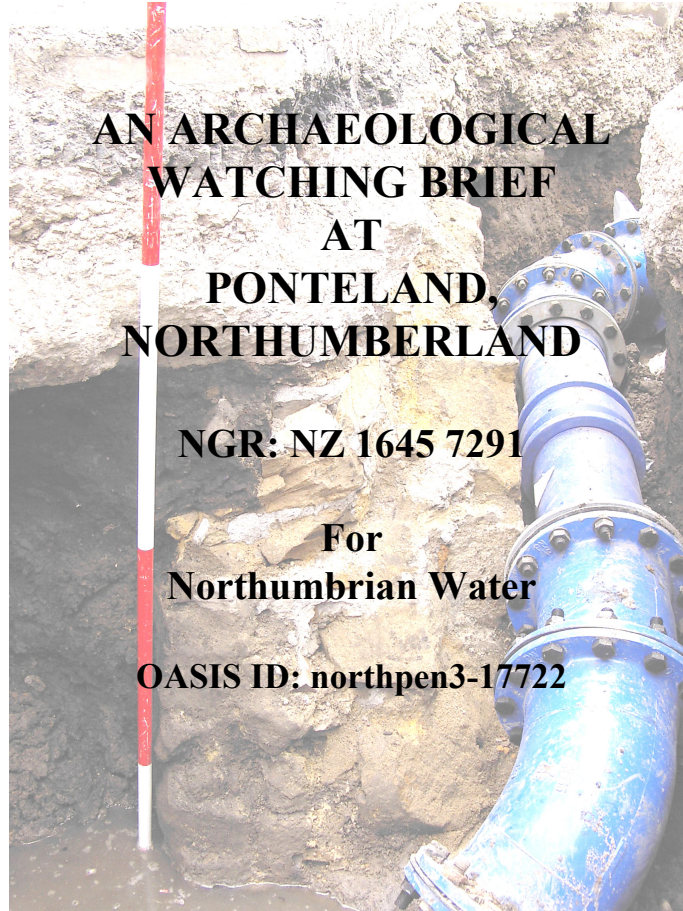


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# NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

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Client Report No. CP/369/06



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## CONTENTS

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| <b>Chapter</b>  | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Summary</i>  | 2           |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | 3           |
| <b>2. Methodology</b>   | 4           |
| <b>3. Background</b>  | 5           |
| <b>4. Watching Brief Results</b>  | 7           |
| <b>5. Conclusion</b>  | 12          |
|   |             |
| <b>Figures</b>  | <b>Page</b> |
| <i>Figure 1</i> Location maps and plan of the Watching Brief at Ponteland, Northumberland | 13          |
| <i>Figure 2</i> Location of Area A, with associated Plan and Section.                     | 14          |
|   |             |
| <b>Plates</b>   | <b>Page</b> |
| <i>Plate 1</i> Looking east towards St. Mary's.   | 5           |
| <i>Plate 2</i> Wall section by new water pipe, looking south-east.                        | 8           |
| <i>Plate 3</i> Wall section by new water pipe, looking north-west.                        | 8           |
| <i>Plate 4</i> View of the buried wall, showing its southern face.                        | 8           |
| <i>Plate 5</i> Trenches 1 and 2 looking west.   | 9           |
| <i>Plate 6</i> Area B. Trench 3, looking west.  | 9           |
| <i>Plate 7</i> Area B. Trench 4, looking west.  | 10          |
| <i>Plate 8</i> Area B. Trench 5, looking west.  | 10          |
| <i>Plate 9</i> Area B. Trench 7, looking west.  | 10          |
| <i>Plate 10</i> Area B. Trench 8, looking east.   | 10          |
| <i>Plate 11</i> One of the cuts in Area C, showing modern services.                       | 11          |
|   |             |
| <b>Tables</b>   | <b>Page</b> |
| <i>Table 1</i> Stratified Contexts in Area A  | 7           |

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## SUMMARY

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In August 2006, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook a watching brief in Ponteland, Northumberland, on behalf of Northumbrian Water. The area of the watching brief lay within an area of Ponteland demarcated as of potential medieval and post-medieval archaeological interest. There was a strong possibility that the groundworks associated with the mains refurbishment scheme would intrude on areas of the early Ponteland settlement.

A project design was submitted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in response to a request by Northumbrian Water for an archaeological watching brief in accordance with a brief prepared by Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist at Northumberland County Council. Following acceptance of the project design, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake the work.

No archaeological deposits or structures were uncovered during the watching brief along the areas of Main Street and Thornhill Road, but on the south-east corner of Ponteland Bridge a wall was observed beneath the modern ground makeup, identified by Assistant County Archaeologist Karen Derham as a medieval wall.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Circumstances of the Project

- 1.1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd on behalf of Northumbrian Water at Ponteland, Northumberland (NZ 1645 7291). The aim of the watching brief was to record any significant deposits uncovered during the proposed groundworks which involved the excavation of a series of defined trenches during a scheme of mains refurbishment. The area of the groundworks lies in the area defined as being of medieval or post-medieval archaeological interest.
- 1.1.2 This report sets out the results of the work in the form of a short document outlining the results of the archaeological recording undertaken during the watching brief.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 Project Design

- 2.1.1 A project design was submitted by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd in response to a request by Northumbrian Water for an archaeological watching brief in accordance with a brief prepared by Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist at Northumberland County Council. Following acceptance of the project design, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake the work.
- 2.1.2 The project design was adhered to in full, and the work was consistent with the relevant standards and procedures of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), and generally accepted best practice.

### 2.2 Project Archive

- 2.2.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project design, and in accordance with current English Heritage guidelines (1991). The unique site identifier is NPA 06 PON-A.

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## 3. BACKGROUND

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### 3.1 Location

- 3.1.1 Ponteland is located 7 miles northwest of Newcastle, in the parish of Ponteland (deanery of Corbridge). The river Pont passes through the town, with a stone bridge crossing over it. The watching brief area can be seen on *Figure 1c*, with the main areas in question being the Main Street, Ponteland Bridge and Thornhill Road.

### 3.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 3.2.1 The nature and extent of the early settlement at Ponteland is not known, although the concentration of buildings in the centre of the town, which incorporate parts of medieval structures, indicate that there has been a settlement here from at least the medieval period onwards. The Vicar's Pele was first referred to in a list of castles and fortalices dated 1415 and has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument due to its national importance. The Blackbird Inn incorporates parts of a 14<sup>th</sup> century or earlier Pele Tower, the remains of which are known to extend to the west of the present public house and the earliest parts of St Mary's Church date to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Maps dating back to 1769 show a small settlement to the west of the river with properties fronting Main Street and North Road.
- 3.2.2 Based on the location of known medieval buildings and later settlement layout, it is possible archaeological remains of medieval and later date may survive in the core of the modern settlement.
- 3.2.3 There are two origins of the name *Ponteland*. One is that it originates from the regularity of the river flooding, leaving the village as an island. The other is that the Romans named the town, meaning *Bridge over the Swamp*.
- 3.2.4 Hadrian's Wall lies close to Ponteland, with evidence of Roman occupation in close proximity to the town.
- 3.2.5 Ponteland's Anglican Church, St. Mary the Virgin (at the east end of Watching Brief Area B) was consecrated in 1150AD. It was restored in the thirteenth century, then again in the fifteenth and then again several times since.



*Plate 1. Looking east towards St. Mary's*

- 3.2.6 The Blackbird Inn was once a manor house belonging to the Errington family, and includes part of a Pele Tower. There is a vaulted chamber attached to the building that formed part of Ponteland Castle, thought to have been destroyed by Douglas during the border wars in the 1300s.

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## 4. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

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### 4.1 Area A: South-western corner of Main Street and Eland Lane Junction

- 4.1.1 The trench on the south-west corner of Main Street and Eland Lane, directly opposite the Diamond Public House and on the eastern extent of Ponteland Bridge had already been excavated before North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were commissioned to undertake the watching brief.
- 4.1.2 A wall was identified within the trench, and when examined the wall [103] was found to be c.0.75m thick and curving from the south east through to the north-west, aligning with the current bridge. A plan and section of the trench can be found on *Figure 2*.
- 4.1.3 The wall has had a large section (just over a metre wide) removed during the excavation of the water pipe trench. Upon questioning the excavators, they described the wall as extremely well built and sturdy.
- 4.1.4 Interpretation of the wall seems to indicate that the wall is part of an earlier bridge across the Pont, and as suggested by Assistant County Archaeologist Karen Derham, could quite possibly be of medieval date. However, no dateable artefactual evidence was present in the trench when it was examined.
- 4.1.5 The following Stratified Contexts were identified (see *Figure 2*):

| Context Number | Type      | Description                            |
|----------------|-----------|--|
| 100            | Deposit   | Modern path surface.                   |
| 101            | Deposit   | Modern packing for path surface.       |
| 102            | Deposit   | Modern degraded concrete and hardcore. |
| 103            | Structure | Sandstone Wall. Medieval?              |
| 104            | Deposit   | Brown clay-loam.                       |

**Table 1.** *Stratified Contexts in Area A*





*Plate 2. Wall section by new water pipe, looking south-east.*



*Plate 3. Wall section by new water pipe, looking north-west.*



*Plate 4. View of the buried wall, showing its southern face.*

## 4.2 Area B: Thornhill Road

- 4.2.1 **Area B** (see *Figure 1*) runs along the south side of Thornhill Road, Ponteland. A series of eight trenches were cut and cleaned, evenly spaced down the area of the Watching Brief shown in *Figure 1*.
- 4.2.2 All trenches were cut with a mechanical excavator down to the level where modern services were in evidence. They were then hand-cleaned to the required depth (exposing the water main).
- 4.2.3 All eight trenches remained within modern service cuts and showed no archaeological features or deposits.
- 4.2.4 All finds were of recent modern origin, such as crisp packets and cigarette cartons.
- 4.2.5 The dimensions of the trenches are outlined below (length x width x depth below surface). All length orientations are east-west:

*Trench #1: 2.50m x 0.90m x 1.00m*

*Trench #2: 1.85m x 0.92m x 0.80m*

*Trench #3: 2.00m x 1.60m x 0.90m*

*Trench #4: 1.25m x 0.90m x 1.00m*

*Trench #5: 1.25m x 0.90m x 1.00m*

*Trench #6: 1.10m x 1.25m x 1.00m*

*Trench #7: 1.20m x 0.80m x 0.90m*

*Trench #8: 1.80m x 0.90m x 0.75m*



**Plate 5.** Area B.  
*Trenches 1 and 2 looking west.*



**Plate 6.** Area B. Trench 3, looking west.



*Plate 7. Area B. Trench 4, looking west.*



*Plate 8. Area B. Trench 5, looking west.*



*Plate 9. Area B. Trench 7, looking west.*



*Plate 10. Area B. Trench 8, looking east.*

### 4.3 Area C: Main Street

- 4.3.1 **Area C** (see *Figure 1*) runs along the south side of Main Street, Ponteland.
- 4.3.2 Though the area was within the specified area of the Watching Brief, the trenches had been excavated and in most cases re-constituted before North Pennines Archaeology Limited was commissioned to undertake the archaeological work.
- 4.3.3 At the request of Karen Derham, Assistant County Archaeologist, trenches still open on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 2006 were examined. No archaeological features were found within the open trenches, as the excavated areas were within previous service cuts.



*Plate 11. One of the cuts in Area C, showing modern services.*

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## 5. CONCLUSION

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### 5.1 Conclusion

- 5.1.1 Area A, on the south-east corner of Ponteland Bridge revealed a structure identified by Assistant County Archaeologist Karen Derham as a medieval wall. This feature seems to indicate the well preserved presence of an early bridge footing.
- 5.1.2 The watching brief in designated areas B and C encountered no features of an archaeological nature within the confines of the trenches cut to expose the water main. However, as these trenches did not expose stratigraphy outside present service cuts, the possibility of archaeological potential in the area still remains high.

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## **APPENDIX 1: FIGURES**

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