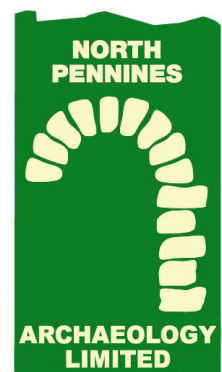


**KENT BECK BRIDGE,
NEASHAM,
Co. DURHAM**



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL BUILDING
RECORDING
CP. No: 1439/11
DATE 08/04/2011**

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Quality Assurance

This report covers works as outlined in the brief for the above-named project as issued by the relevant authority, and as outlined in the agreed programme of works. Any deviation to the programme of works has been agreed by all parties. The works have been carried out according to the guidelines set out in the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) Standards, Policy Statements and Codes of Conduct. The report has been prepared in keeping with the guidance set out by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd on the preparation of reports.

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SUMMARY

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by the Environment Agency to undertake an archaeological building recording project of Kent Beck Bridge, Neasham, Co. Durham (NZ 3235 1015), prior to its demolition and replacement as part of a flood alleviation scheme.

Due to the historic nature of the structure, Durham County Council Archaeology Section requested that a Level 2 Building Survey, as described by English Heritage, be undertaken of the bridge prior to its removal.

A rapid desk-based assessment of readily-available sources at Durham Clayport Library and Durham Record Office has indicated that there appears to have been a settlement at Neasham since at least the medieval period, and as a consequence it is likely that there will have been some form of crossing over the Kent Beck. It is not known, however, if this crossing took the form of a bridge or a ford.

The archaeological building recording has revealed that there appears to have been four main construction phases, as shown by features visible in the underside of the bridge. The earliest phase may be represented by the northern side of the bridge, which still displays some architectural detail in the form of a single band of roll moulding. To the south side of the north elevation, a further section was seemingly added which followed the same profile of the earlier arch. To the south side of the bridge, a later section was added which was set back from the earlier bridge. This section did not contain any architectural detail which may have aided in dating when it was added. At the south side of the bridge, a further construction phase was noted, in this case in recent times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would like to offer thanks to Emma Morrish of the Environment Agency for commissioning the project.

North Pennines Archaeology Ltd would also like to extend their thanks to Clare Henderson, Assistant Archaeology Officer, and Nick Boldrini, Historic Environment Record Officer, Durham County Council, and staff at Durham Clayport Library for their help during this project.

The rapid desk-based assessment and archaeological building recording was undertaken by Fiona Wooler. The report was written by Fiona Wooler. The project was managed by Matt Town, Project Manager for NPA Ltd, who also edited the report.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd were commissioned by the Environment Agency to undertake a programme of archaeological recording of the Kent Beck Bridge, Neasham, Co. Durham (NZ 3235 1015) prior to the removal and replacement of the present bridge as part of a flood alleviation scheme, which involves the decommissioning of a reservoir and construction of a variety of flood defences to reduce the risk of flooding in Neasham from the River Tees.
- 1.2 Prior to the removal of the present bridge as part of the flood alleviation works, Durham County Council Historic Environment Service has requested that a Level 2 Building Survey, as described by English Heritage¹, should be undertaken in order to record the structure.
- 1.3 This report outlines the results of the archaeological building recording. An archaeological watching brief will be undertaken during groundworks associated with the new flood alleviation scheme, the results of which will be outlined in a separate report.

¹ English Heritage, 2006

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN

- 2.1.1 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by the client to undertake a programme of archaeological recording of the Kent Beck Bridge, Neasham, Co. Durham (NGR NZ 3235 1015). All work undertaken was consistent with English Heritage guidelines² and the relevant standards of the Institute for Archaeologists³, and generally accepted best practice.
- 2.1.2 A Project Design was produced by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd prior to works taking place, and was approved by Durham County Council Historic Environment Service (Town 2011).

2.2 BUILDING SURVEY

- 2.2.1 An archaeological building survey was undertaken of the bridge in order to provide a record of the existing structure prior to its removal and replacement. The building survey corresponds to a Level 2 Survey as described by English Heritage⁴.
- 2.2.2 The survey includes:
- a rapid desk-based assessment of readily-available historical sources relating to the village of Neasham, and the bridge itself. This involved the consultation of resources held at Durham Clayport Library, the catalogue of the County Records Office in Durham, and the County Historic Environment Record (HER) in order to provide a historical context to the site. The rapid desk-based assessment was undertaken in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*⁵.
 - a written description of the structure, including a description of the landscape in which the bridge is located and its historic context.
 - a photographic record of the bridge and its landscape using monochrome film and digital formats. A selection of the digital photographs has been included in this report for illustrative purposes.

² English Heritage, 2006

³ IfA, 2008a

⁴ English Heritage, 2006, Page 14

⁵ IfA, 2008b

2.3 THE ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A final bound copy of the report will be deposited with Durham County Council Historic Environment Service, where viewing will be made available on request. The photographs taken as part of this project will be deposited with an appropriate repository.
- 2.3.2 North Pennines Archaeology and Durham County Council Historic Environment Service support the **Online AccesS** to the **Index** of archaeological investigationS (**OASIS**) project. This project aims to provide an online index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature created as a result of developer-funded archaeological fieldwork. As a result, details of the results of this study will be made available by North Pennines Archaeology, as a part of this national project. This project has the unique identifier of **northpen-98499**.

3 SITE LOCATION

- 3.1 The village of Neasham is located approximately 4km to the south-east of the centre of Darlington, and c.2km to the east of Hurworth-on-Tees. The village is situated on the north side of the River Tees at a height of approximately 21m above mean sea level (Figure 1).
- 3.2 The Kent Beck flows into the River Tees to the west side of the village of Neasham, and to the east of the property known as Neasham Abbey. The Kent Beck Bridge is orientated east to west and carries the main road from Neasham to Hurworth-on-Tees.

4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1.1 This background is intended as only a brief account of historical developments around the village of Neasham, in order to set the bridge and its site into its historical context. This information is derived mainly from the County Historic Environment Record (HER), a database of known historical and/or archaeological sites in County Durham which is maintained by Durham County Council.

3.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.2.1 There is some slight evidence of Roman or Romano-British occupation in the area around Neasham, in the form of coins of Roman date which are said to have been found at the confluence of Crec Beck and Neasham Stell (HER Ref: H182; Grid Ref: NZ 323 103), which is located to the north side of Kent Beck Bridge.
- 3.2.2 The first part of the place name '*Neasham*' is believed to have derived from the Middle English word meaning 'nose'; therefore Neasham means '*homestead by the nose shaped bend*' [of the River Tees]. It is first recorded in an early Yorkshire charter of 1158 as '*Nesham*', literally meaning the '*village by the headland*' (HER Ref: H4580).
- 3.2.3 The Priory of St Mary's, Neasham, is often referred to as an Abbey, however its status is unclear from all medieval documents. It was founded c.1150AD by Emma, daughter of Waldef and wife or widow of Ralph de Tees (the family later adopted the name Greystoke). It was founded for eight nuns of the Benedictine order, and had three permanent lay officers. It was exempted from dissolution for a while; however it was surrendered into the King's hands on the 29th December 1540, and granted to the brother of the Prioress. Some fragments of stone effigies exist in Darlington Museum, Bowes Museum and in Hurworth Church. A fragment of the building including a window is reputed to have been rebuilt at Carlbury close to Piercebridge. No structural remains are now visible, though traces could seemingly still be seen in the 19th century (HER Ref: H181; Grid Ref: NZ 322 100).
- 3.2.4 According to Fordyce writing in 1857, fragments of stone sculpture from the priory were located in the area around Neasham, including a '*handsome cross*' in a garden at Low Middleton; a piece of sculpture fixed into the wall

- of the house at Neasham Hill Top, and a monumental effigy of a baron of Greystoke, preserved *'in the late Miss Ward's garden at Hurworth'*⁶.
- 3.2.5 Excavations took place on the site of Neasham Abbey in November 1996 during the construction of river bank flood defences by Northern Archaeological Associates. This scheme of works along the Abbey's southern side revealed evidence of a forge or smithy in use from the 13th /14th century until the dissolution in the mid-16th century (HER Ref: H181).
- 3.2.6 Located close to the site of Kent Beck Bridge, and the site of the Priory of St Mary's, is the possible site of St James' Chapel. The advowson of St James' chapel at Neasham was among the possessions of John de Balliol in 1294. It is mentioned again in 1397 and in the 15th century when Bishop Langley sequestered the chapel. Its exact position and later history is not known, but it has been tentatively sited close to the Kent Beck Bridge at grid reference NZ 32 10 (HER Ref: H302).
- 3.2.7 In the 15th century, the manor of Neasham consisted of 10 messuages; ten cottages; 20 ox-gangs; 20 acres of meadow; 100 acres of pasture; a water mill and passage over with River Tees with a boat⁷. This indicates that there was a settlement in the location of the present village in the medieval period, and it is likely that there would have been a crossing over the Kent Beck at some point to allow access to the chapel, and beyond towards Hurworth.
- 3.2.8 There were 206 inhabitants in the township of Neasham in 1801; in 1811 there were 268; in 1821, 313; in 1831, 331; in 1841, 364 and in 1851 there were 295 people, living in 75 inhabited houses and a further four uninhabited houses. In the middle to the 19th century the village of Neasham was described as being: *'overshadowed with well-wooded rising grounds on the east and north. It is on the verge of the Tees, over which there are a ferry and a broad and safe ford, and which here makes a sudden curve, working the peninsula of Sockburn. The village itself is on the road from Croft Bridge to Middleton-One Row, and contains three public houses, a school, a blacksmiths shop, a post office, and several good and substantial farm buildings; and the ordinary dwelling houses are clean, comfortable and substantially constructed'*⁸.
- 3.2.9 There are several buildings located within close proximity to Kent Beck Bridge which are listed:

⁶ Fordyce, W, 1857, Page 504

⁷ Parson, W and White, W, 1828, Page 308

⁸ Fordyce, W, 1857, Page 504

- *High Holme with coach house/stables*: house and combined coach house/stable, c.1830. Flemish-bond brick with pantiled roof. Grade II listed (HER Ref: H11273);
- *Cliffe Cottage*: house, formerly divided into two dwellings. Early 18th century with 19th and 20th century alterations. Narrow brick in English garden wall bond. Grade II listed (HER Ref: H11386);
- *Neasham Abbey*: house, early 19th century with mid-19th century rear wings. Brick in English garden wall bond. Grade II listed (HER Ref: H11485).

Kent Beck Bridge does *not* appear to be listed or is presently recorded within the county Historic Environment Record.

3.2.10 Kent Beck Bridge is not referred to by Pevsner when he described the notable buildings in the village of Neasham. He did note the following structures (amendments were made in 1985 by Williamson⁹):

- *Neasham Abbey*: a plain early 19th century brick villa adjoining the site of a Benedictine priory founded for nuns before 1156-57. Two storeys, three bays, with canted ground floor bay windows, flanking a Roman Doric door case;
- *Neasham Hall*: south-east of the village, designed by Dobson (1834-37) for Colonel Cookson. Demolished in 1970 and replaced by a smaller house';
- *Shelter (former pump house)*: in the village at the foot of Neasham Hill, 1879, triangular, with a little Gothic column at one angle.

3.2.11 As it is likely that there has been a bridge over the Kent Beck for centuries, it is difficult to assess from historical mapping whether the structure which presently survives is shown, or if it is an earlier version. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of c.1856-1865 clearly annotates '*Kent Br*' over the Kent Beck, to the west side of the village of Neasham, which is shown as being linear in form at this date. At the point where the Kent Beck enters the River Tees, '*High Wath*' is annotated, with the location of '*Neasham Ferry*' and '*Low Wath*' labelled to the east (Figure 2).

3.2.12 A search of the catalogues of Durham Record Office revealed no entries relating specifically to Kent Beck Bridge apart from its presence on historical Ordnance Survey mapping. A search of the database of historical photographs at Durham Clayport Library revealed an image dating to c.1920 which seemingly shows Kent Beck Bridge looking eastwards toward the village of Neasham (Plate 1).

⁹ Pevsner, N and Williamson, E, 1985, Page 367

- 3.2.13 In the early 20th century, Jervoise undertook a survey of 'ancient bridges' in the counties of Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire and Yorkshire, culminating in his publication *'The Ancient Bridges of the North of England'*. The survey entailed visiting every river crossing where a bridge was shown on large scale maps (mostly 1 inch to the mile scale) published towards the end of the 18th century. Primarily the survey was concerned with road bridges, although some packhorse bridges were also visited. When considering the dating of bridges, Jervoise noted that this was difficult as it was rare for the actual building of an existing bridge to be recorded in documents. As he highlights *'it often happens that because a bridge is known to have been built at a certain place and at a definite date it is assumed that the present bridge is the actual structure then built. Most so-called 'Roman' bridges really dated from the 17th century, a time when the semi-circular arch was fashionable'*¹⁰. When discussing the bridges of note along the length of the River Tees, Jervoise does not refer to the bridge over the Kent Beck. The bridges that he discusses nearest to Neasham, are at Blackwell (south of Darlington) which was erected in 1832 in place of a ford; and at Croft-on-Tees where all traffic to Darlington from the south passed over the river prior to the construction of Blackwell Bridge. East of Croft-on-Tees, Jervoise simply noted that *'below Croft, the river Tees follows a very tortuous course before reaching Yarm, and until the last century there were no bridges [over the Tees] since Pounteys Bridge was destroyed at some unknown date. The site of this bridge was about half a mile south-west of the church of Middleton St George'*¹¹. It is clear that Jervoise did not consider Kent Beck Bridge to be of any special note during his survey.
- 3.2.14 Flood defences were built in Neasham after it flooded in 1968, and these were refurbished in 1997 when a structure was installed to prevent the flow of flood water from the River Tees into the Kent Beck. Recent flooding has highlighted that Neasham is still potentially at risk of flooding if both the Tees and the Kent Beck have high water levels¹². Steel piling and strengthening of the bridge parapet was undertaken following a flood event in 2000¹³.
- 3.2.15 In September 2010, Archaeological Services WYAS undertook a geophysical survey in the grounds of Neasham Abbey, located just to the west of Kent Beck Bridge, in advance of proposed flood alleviation works by the Environment Agency. The survey sought to identify anomalies which may have located a 12th century abbey or features or activities

¹⁰ Jervoise, E, 1931, Pages v-vi

¹¹ *ibid*, Pages 56-57

¹² <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/cy/new/119623.aspx?page=2> – Accessed 6/4/2011

¹³ http://www.darlington.gov.uk/dar_public/documents - Accessed 6/4/2011

associated with it. No anomalies of obvious archaeological potential were identified, although several anomalies of uncertain origin were identified¹⁴.



Plate 1: View looking east showing Kent Beck Bridge c.1920

¹⁴ Archaeological Services WYAS, 2010

4 BUILDING SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1.1 The archaeological building recording project was undertaken by Fiona Wooler on the 5th April 2011. At the time of survey the bridge was still in use as a vehicular and pedestrian crossing point over the Kent Beck. It was clear that earlier flood defence works have already taken place to the north and south sides of the line of the Kent Beck, and along the north side of the River Tees (Plates 1 and 2).

4.2 KENT BECK BRIDGE

- 4.2.1 From the road which leads into Neasham from the west, it is clear that there have been recent modifications or alterations undertaken to the bridge as shown by the modern concrete 'brickwork' and capping stones (Plates 4-7). This modern structure may relate to the strengthening of the bridge following the flood event in 2000, as noted in 3.2.13 above. From the road, therefore, it is not possible to fully appreciate the earlier bridge structure. It is also clear that up until the 1920s at least, the road over the bridge had a definite hump as shown on the historical photograph reproduced as Plate 1.
- 4.2.2 The north side of the Kent Beck Bridge clearly displays evidence of an earlier structure as shown by the arched stonework and decorative roll moulding which provides a hint of architectural detail to the bridge, which presently cannot be appreciated, but which suggests that this side of the bridge was clearly 'on show' at some point (Plate 8). The roll moulding itself, which runs around the top of the voussiors, is a single band which measures 0.10m wide (Plate 9). The voussoirs, the stones which make up the arch, spring from piers to either side of the opening (Plate 10). Structurally, the function of an arch such as this one at Kent Beck Bridge, is to support the downward loads which come upon it, and turn this into lateral thrust which runs around the ring of the arch and pushes the voussoirs against each other. The voussoirs then push against the abutments or springings of the arch¹⁵.
- 4.2.3 The arch opening in this elevation measures approximately 2.25m in height at its apex from the bottom of the beck. To either side of the arch, the stonework consists of coursed, well-dressed blocks of masonry, which has been tooled to create a herring-bone effect (Plate 11). There are the remains

¹⁵ Gordon, J.E, 1978, Page 188

of some iron fittings in the north elevation, possibly suggesting that there was a plaque or some form of signage fixed to this masonry at some point (Plate 11).

- 4.2.4 There is some evidence for rebuilding of the north elevation, prior to the modern reconstruction, as shown by changes in the masonry to either side of the archway (Plates 12 and 13). There is a slight projection of masonry to the west side of the archway, possibly the remains of a buttress (Plate 14).
- 4.2.5 Set above the coursed masonry of the earlier bridge, there are 18 courses of concrete 'bricks' above a concrete string course, which separates the two, which measures 0.19m in height (Plate 9). This concrete 'brickwork' is surmounted by concrete capping stones. To the east side of the north elevation, steel piling has been installed which leads off the end of the bridge parapet in a northerly direction (Plate 15).
- 4.2.6 The underside of the bridge displays evidence for having been widened or altered at three different times as shown by vertical breaks in the masonry and the addition of modern brickwork. The earliest structure of the bridge may be the north side, which has the decorative roll moulding; this section measures approximately 1.94m in width, and has a slight plinth to its western side (Plate 16). To the south side of this, there is another section of masonry (which follows the same profile of the archway) which measures c.3.35m in width. The tooling on this stonework does not display the same herring bone pattern noted to the north, which may be further evidence that the two sections are not contemporary (Plates 17 and 18).
- 4.2.7 To the south side of this, the masonry of the underside of the bridge is set back by 0.70m to show a further addition to the structure which measures c.3.50m in width (Plates 17, 19 and 20). The tooling on this masonry, as seen from the underside of the bridge, is not the same as the herring bone style noted on the stonework of the northernmost section (Plate 21).
- 4.2.8 The southern end of the bridge displays the most recent modifications in the form of 'brickwork' abutting the set back section of masonry (Plate 20). This modern addition measures approximately 1.60m in width, and has a square headed concrete lintel, quite different from the arched opening of the north elevation (Plates 22 and 23). It is just possible to note the arched profile of the masonry structure within the bridge from the south, but due to the addition of the recent modifications it was not possible to note any architectural features on this stonework.



Plate 2: View looking north showing flood defences along the Kent Beck



Plate 3: View looking east showing the flood bank along the north side of the River Tees at Neasham



Plate 4: View looking west showing Kent Beck Bridge as being of modern construction



Plate 5: View looking east showing the modern north wall of Kent Beck Bridge



Plate 6: View looking east showing the modern north parapet of Kent Beck Bridge (Scale = 1m)



Plate 7: View looking east showing the modern south parapet of Kent Beck Bridge (Scale = 1m)



*Plate 8: View looking south showing the north elevation of Kent Beck Bridge
(Scale = 2m)*



*Plate 9: North elevation of Kent Beck Bridge showing the masonry of the
archway with modern 'brickwork' above (Scale = 2m)*



Plate 10: Detail of the roll moulding, north elevation of Kent Beck Bridge



Plate 11: Detail of tooled masonry and remains of iron fittings, north elevation of bridge



Plate 12: East side of archway showing change in the masonry, north elevation



Plate 13: Change in the masonry to the west side of the archway (left of the ranging pole), north elevation



Plate 14: Possible remains of a buttress, north elevation



Plate 15: View looking east showing the steel piling to the north of the parapet, north elevation of bridge



Plate 16: North side of bridge, west elevation, showing slight plinth and vertical break in masonry to left of ranging pole (Scale = 1m)



Plate 17: View looking south showing the underside of the bridge. A break in the masonry of the arch can clearly be seen (Scale = 1m)



Plate 18: Detail of vertical break in masonry, underside of bridge (Scale = 1m)



Plate 19: Detail of south side of bridge showing addition which is set back from earlier structure (Scale = 1m)



Plate 20: View looking south showing the set back addition to the south side of the earlier bridge



Plate 21: Detail of tooled masonry of south side of bridge underside (Scale = 1m)



Plate 22: View looking west showing the modern addition to the bridge, with the arch of the later phase of masonry just visible to the right



Plate 23: View looking north showing the south elevation of Kent Beck Bridge

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 A rapid desk-based assessment of readily-available sources at Durham Clayport Library and Durham Record Office has indicated that there appears to have been a settlement at Neasham since at least the medieval period, and as a consequence it is likely that there will have been some form of crossing over the Kent Beck. It is not known, however, if this crossing took the form of a bridge or a ford, as was noted to have been the case at Blackwell, south of Darlington.
- 5.2 There were no specific references to the bridge at Neasham in the indexes and catalogues which were consulted; this is not unusual, as historical documentary sources are often lacking.
- 5.3 The archaeological building recording has revealed that there appears to have been four main construction phases, as shown by features in the existing structure. The earliest phase may be represented by the northern side of the bridge, which still displays some architectural detail in the form of a single band of roll moulding set over the voussoirs of an arched opening. Dating such an architectural feature is difficult; a similar single band of roll moulding set over voussoirs is present on Greta Bridge, also on the River Tees, which Jervoise dates to the second half of the 18th century¹⁶, although this bridge is of a much wider span.
- 5.4 To the south side of the north elevation, a further section was seemingly added which followed the same profile of the earlier arch. It is possible, however, that the northern section was actually added to an existing structure although this was not possible to ascertain from the visible stonework; such evidence may come to light during the demolition of the bridge.
- 5.5 To the south side of the bridge, a further section was added which was set back from the earlier bridge. This section did not contain any architectural detail which may have aided in dating when it was added. At the south side of the bridge, a further construction phase was noted, in this case in recent times, presumably relating to earlier flood defence works.

¹⁶ Jervoise, E, 1931, Page 51

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APPENDIX: FIGURES
