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# BELLINGHAM FLOOD DEFENCE BANK BELLINGHAM NORTHUMBERLAND

REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

MARCH 2008

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Prepared for: <i>The Environment Agency</i>
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By: <i>The Archaeological Practice Ltd.</i>
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BELLINGHAM FLOOD DEFENCE BANK  
BELLINGHAM  
NORTHUMBELRAND

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Prepared by:

*The Archaeological Practice Ltd.*

**PROJECT:** Archaeological Watching Brief on the Hareshaw Burn  
**LOCATION:** Bellingham, Northumberland  
**CLIENT:** The Environment Agency  
**SITE GRID REF:** NY 837 832  
**FIELDWORK:** March 2008  
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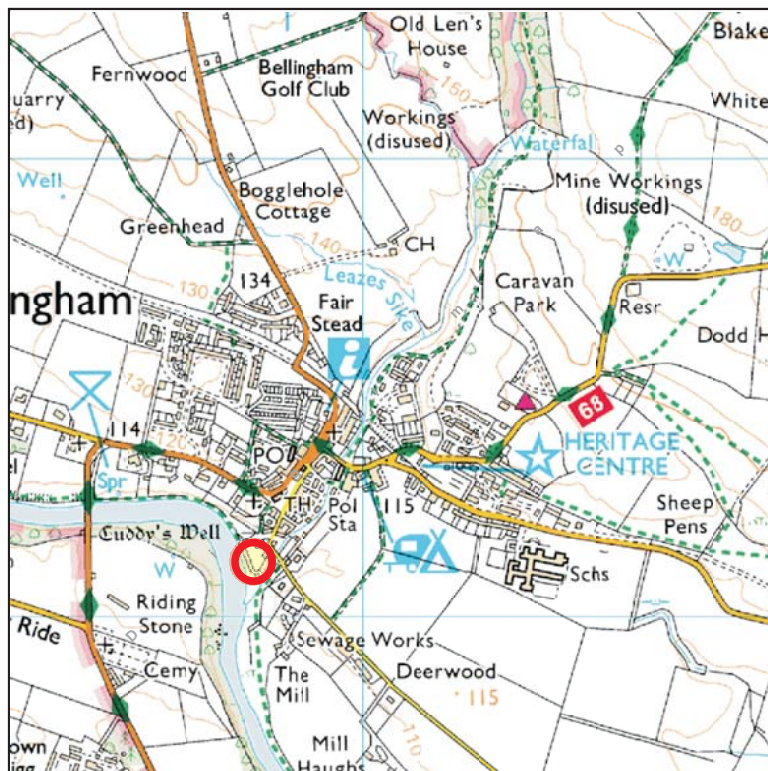
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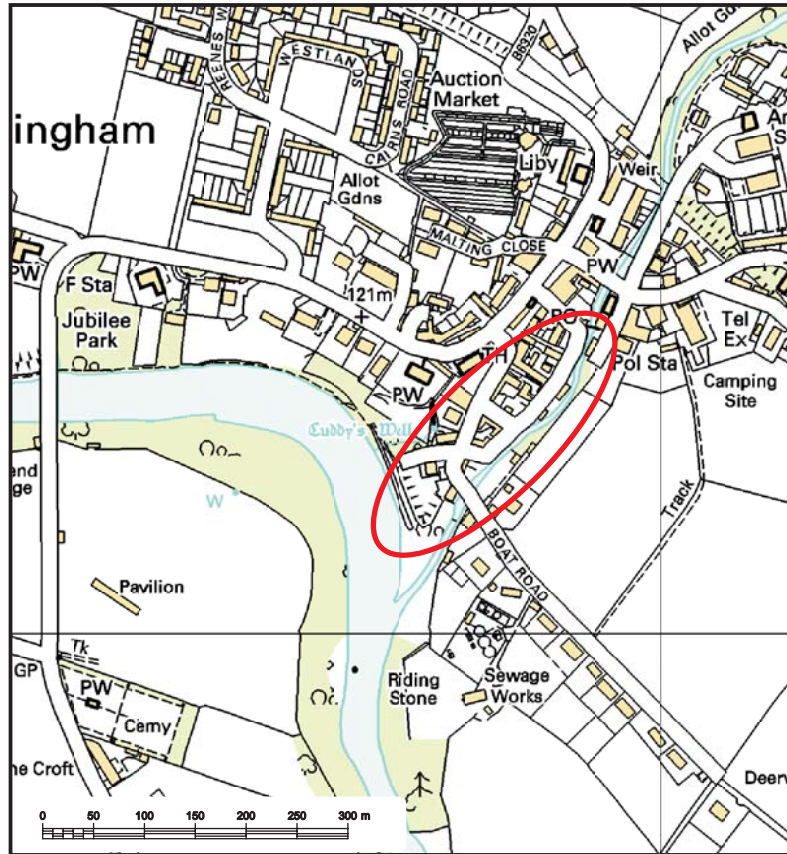
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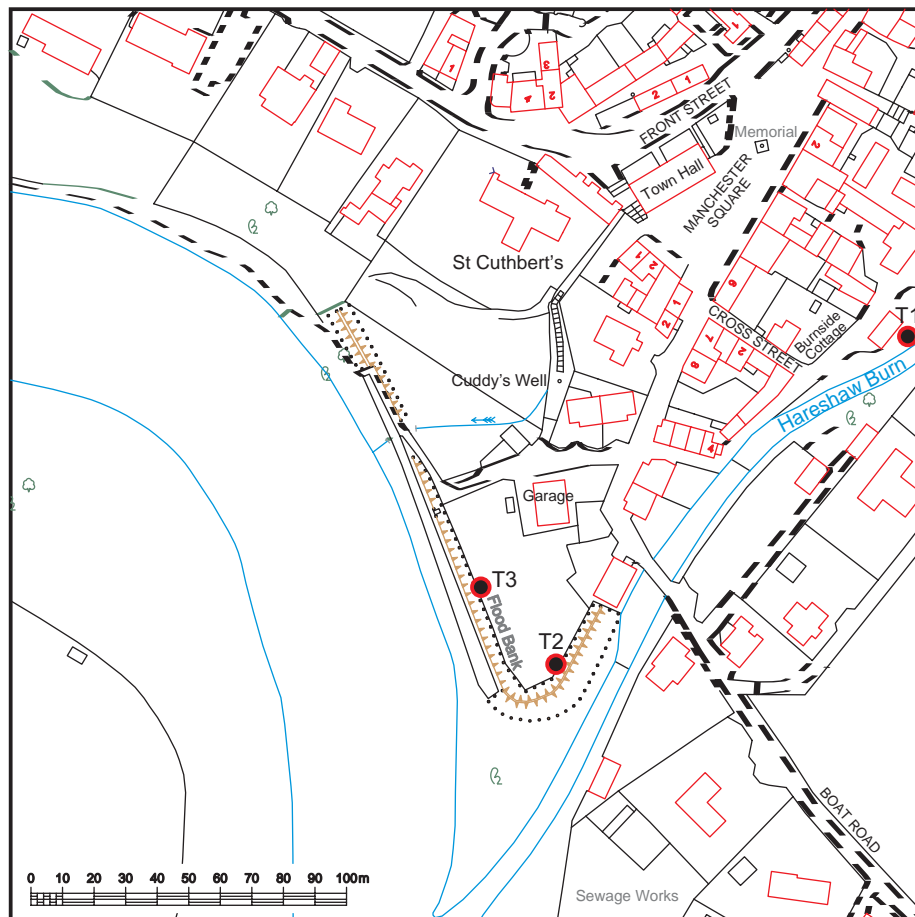
*Illus. 01: Location of Bellingham in Northumberland.*



*Illus. 02: Location  of the watching brief site in Bellingham.*



*Illus. 03: The location of the watching brief at Bellingham, circled in red.*



*Illus. 04: A detailed modern OS plan of Bellingham showing the location of investigation trenches ● examined as part of the archaeological watching brief.*



## 1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the banks of the Hareshaw Burn, Bellingham in order to mitigate the potential impact of ground investigation works being carried out for the Environment Agency. The work was carried out on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 using a mechanical excavator.

## 2. CULTURAL HERITAGE BACKGROUND

Bellingham is a small market town within the deanery of Corbridge, situated 16 miles north northwest of Hexham and 25 miles west of Morpeth. The site of the town, on the north bank of the North Tyne river by the Hareshaw Burn, is said to be a Roman station. Certainly, there are many Roman military and native settlements in the wider vicinity. Little remains of its small medieval castle, but the parish church of St. Cuthbert, consecrated in 1180 - unique because of its arched roof covered in stone, in response to the repeated burnings of its wooden roof by the border raids – survives as an indication of its importance in the medieval period. Trades directories record that in 1801 Bellingham contained 337 people, while in 1821 this number had grown to 404. Later directories show a steady growth in population; in 1851 there are 770 people noted as living in the town. This growth in population is largely due to the establishment of Hareshaw Ironworks (Northumberland HER ref. N7993) in 1838. The works included blast furnaces, 24 calcining kilns to roast the iron ore, a waggonway, 70 coke ovens, a dam, waste heaps, houses, offices, stables and stores. However, it operated for only a brief period and, despite three changes in ownership in ten years, they had gone out of use by 1848. A row of cottages, Upper Hall, or Percy Row (Northumberland HER ref. N8032) were built to accommodate employees of the adjacent ironworks, but has also been demolished. The remains of the ironworks are visible today are earthworks and part of the dam, which stands to about half its original height, but more remains lie buried beneath the landscaped grassland which covers the site. A programme of archaeological evaluation trenching conducted in 2007 to inform a proposal for the construction of a children's play area on the site revealed structural remains at depths between 0.5 and 0.8m below the present ground surface.

## 3. WATCHING BRIEF

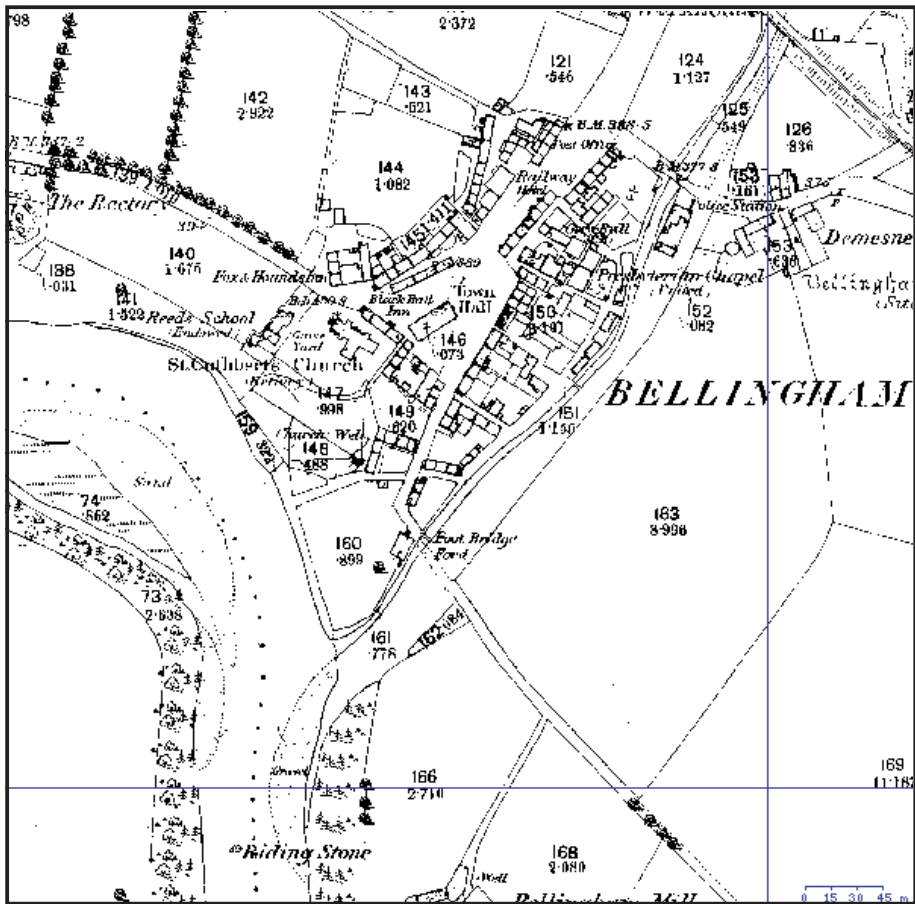
The aims of the watching brief were to determine whether archaeological features or deposits were present during exploratory ground investigation works carried out on behalf of The Environment Agency, and to make an appropriate record of any such finds by photographic and other means.

The work was carried out on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 using a mechanical excavator (mini-digger) under the supervision of ground investigation staff and an archaeologist. Three trenches were examined at points on the west bank of the Hareshaw burn.

## 4. RESULTS

### TRENCH 1 (*Illus. 9-11*)

Trench 1 was excavated in the centre of the town on the north-west bank of the Hareshaw burn some 150 metres north-east of its confluence with the North Tyne. A sandy loam topsoil

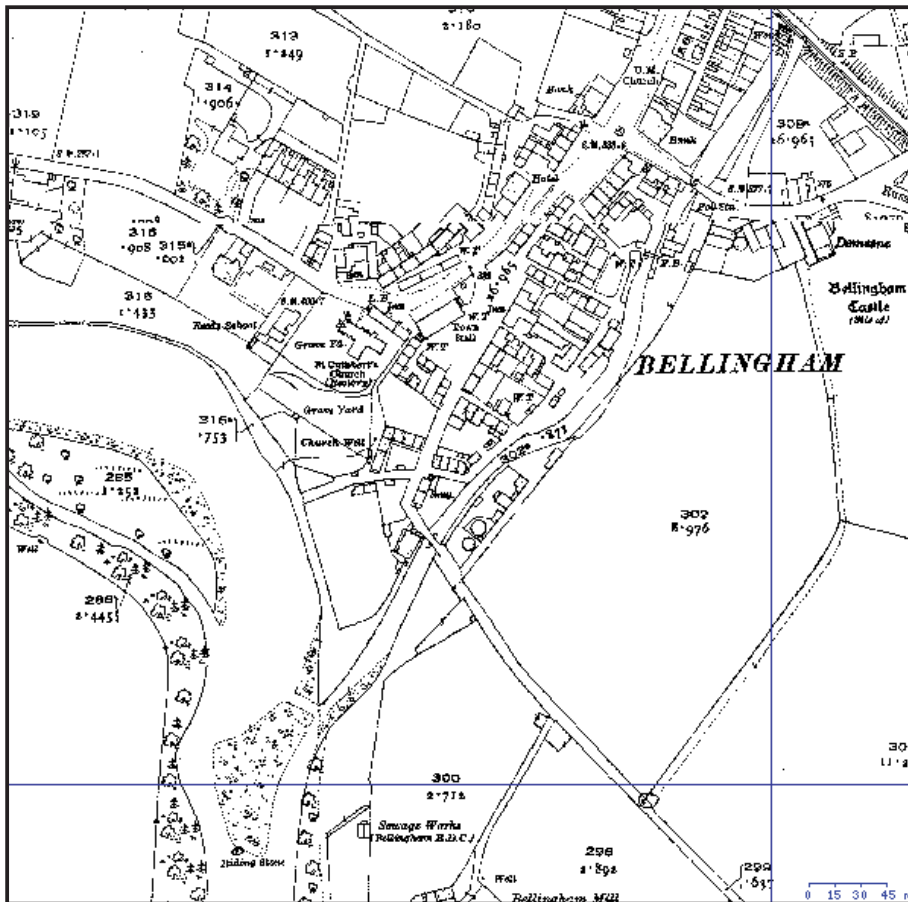


*Illus. 05: Extract from the First Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, c. 1855*



*Illus. 06: Extract from the Third Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, c. 1920*





*Illus. 07: Extract from the Third Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, c. 1920*



*Illus. 08: Extract from the Fourth Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, 1950*

was excavated to a depth of some 0.60 metres until a deposit containing black cinders and lime was encountered, at which point the excavation was suspended. The origin and precise constituents of the black cinders deposit were unknown.

*Interpretation*

The black deposit excavated in this trench could have been derived from domestic or industrial waste activities, perhaps originating from the former Hareshaw ironworks which lies upstream of this point. It may be that the cinders deposit formed part of the riverside bank prior to the construction of the flood prevention bank on top of it; alternatively, it could have been taken from the spoil of the Hareshaw industrial complex or another local concern in order to provide material for use in the flood prevention bank. This question can not presently be answered, but could be resolved by cutting a complete section through the bank.

**TRENCH 2 (Illus. 12 & 13)**

Trench 2 was excavated into the curving south end of the flood defence bank which skirts the north-east bank of the lower course of the Hareshaw Burn and the north-east bank of the North Tyne above its confluence with the Hareshaw. Excavation revealed that the bank was comprised of a gravely sand to a depth of 2.5 metres, the lower part being darker in colour but of similar texture. At about 2.5 metres from the top of the bank, or about 0.10 metres below the current ground level inside the bank, was a deposit of river cobbles. This appears to be the natural sub-soil and flooded when excavated further.

*Interpretation*

The flood defence bank has been constructed from a sandy gravel matrix possibly derived from dredging, apparently dumped upon the existing ground surface. No structures or features of archaeological significance were revealed within, underneath or inside the bank.

**TRENCH 3 (Illus. 14-16)**

Trench 2 was excavated into the western (NNW-SSE) arm of the flood defence bank which skirts the north-east bank of the lower course of the Hareshaw Burn and the north-east bank of the North Tyne above its confluence with the Hareshaw. Excavation was carried out into the foot of the bank to a depth of one metre. This revealed that the bank, as in Trench 2 was comprised of a gravely sand. Excavation east of the bank revealed that this deposit extended underneath and outside the bank to a depth of about 0.9 metres before giving way to a deposit of river cobbles, the natural sub-soil.

*Interpretation*

The flood defence bank has been constructed from a sandy gravel deposit, possibly derived from dredging. The presence inside the bank of a deposit of sandy deposit similar in character to the bank which extended to a depth well below the foot of the bank may perhaps be explained by levelling of the sloping bankside ahead of the construction of the bank. No structures or features of archaeological significance were revealed within, underneath or inside the bank.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Trench 1 revealed a deposit of material derived from domestic or industrial practices of unknown date, but probably fairly recent. Trenches 2 and 3 revealed the structure of the existing flood prevention bank. No features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were observed in any of the trenches, and it appears that no such remains are present in this area; an interpretation backed-up by the available historic map evidence.



**Illus. 09:** The position of Trench 1, viewed from SSW.



**Illus. 10:** Trench 1 following excavation.



**Illus. 11:** Trench 1 following excavation - vertical view showing lime and 'cinder' deposits





***Illus. 12:*** The position of Trench 2, viewed from the south.



***Illus. 13:*** Trench 2 following excavation, viewed from the north.



**Illus. 14:**  
*Trench 2 following excavation*



**Illus. 15:**  
*Trench 3 following excavation,  
viewed from ENE.*



**Illus. 16:**  
*The position of Trench 3 prior to excavation,  
viewed from the south-east.*

It is concluded that the excavations had no impact upon the physical remains of the cultural heritage of Bellingham.