
RIVER PONT FLOOD DEFENCE BANK PONTELAND NORTHUMBERLAND

REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

MARCH 2008



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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
ON THE RIVER PONT FLOOD PREVENTION BARRIER AT
PONTELAND, SOUTH NORTHUMBERLAND

Prepared by:

The Archaeological Practice Ltd.

PROJECT:	Archaeological watching brief during ground investigation works
LOCATION:	Ponteland
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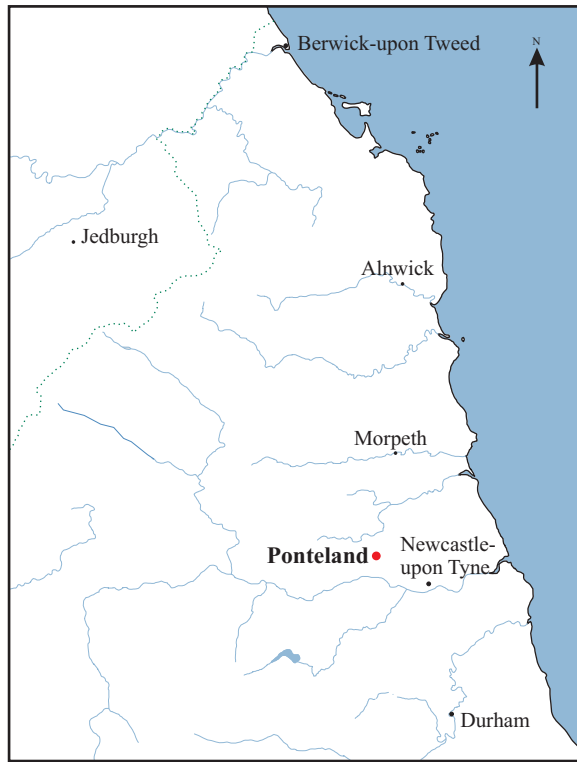
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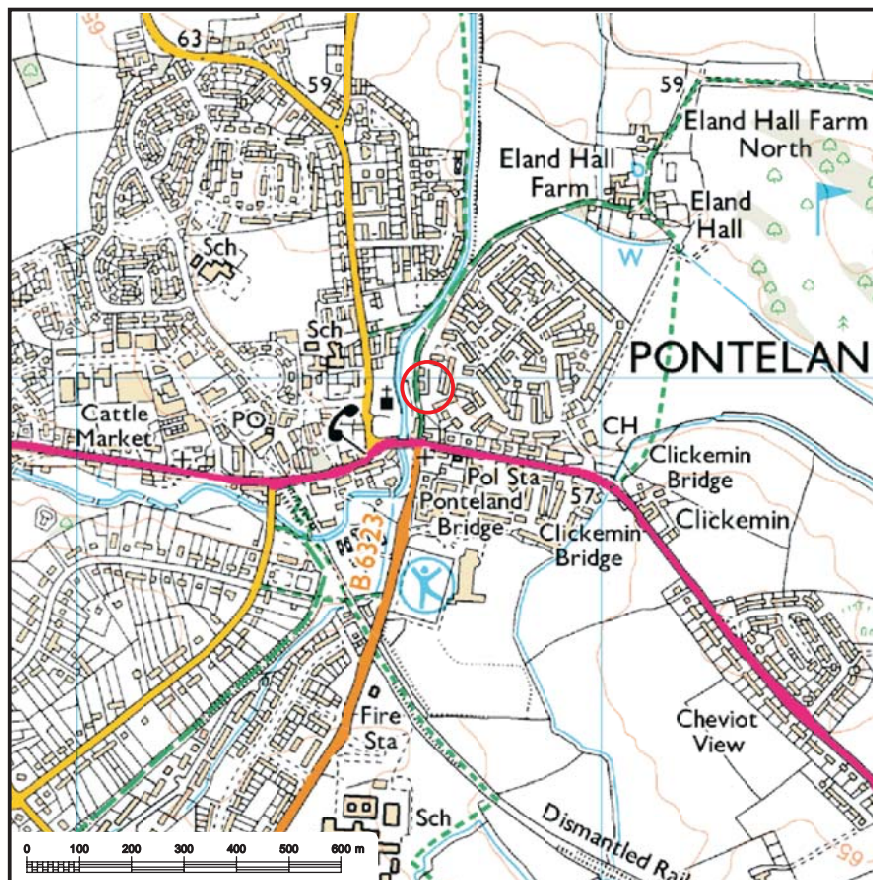
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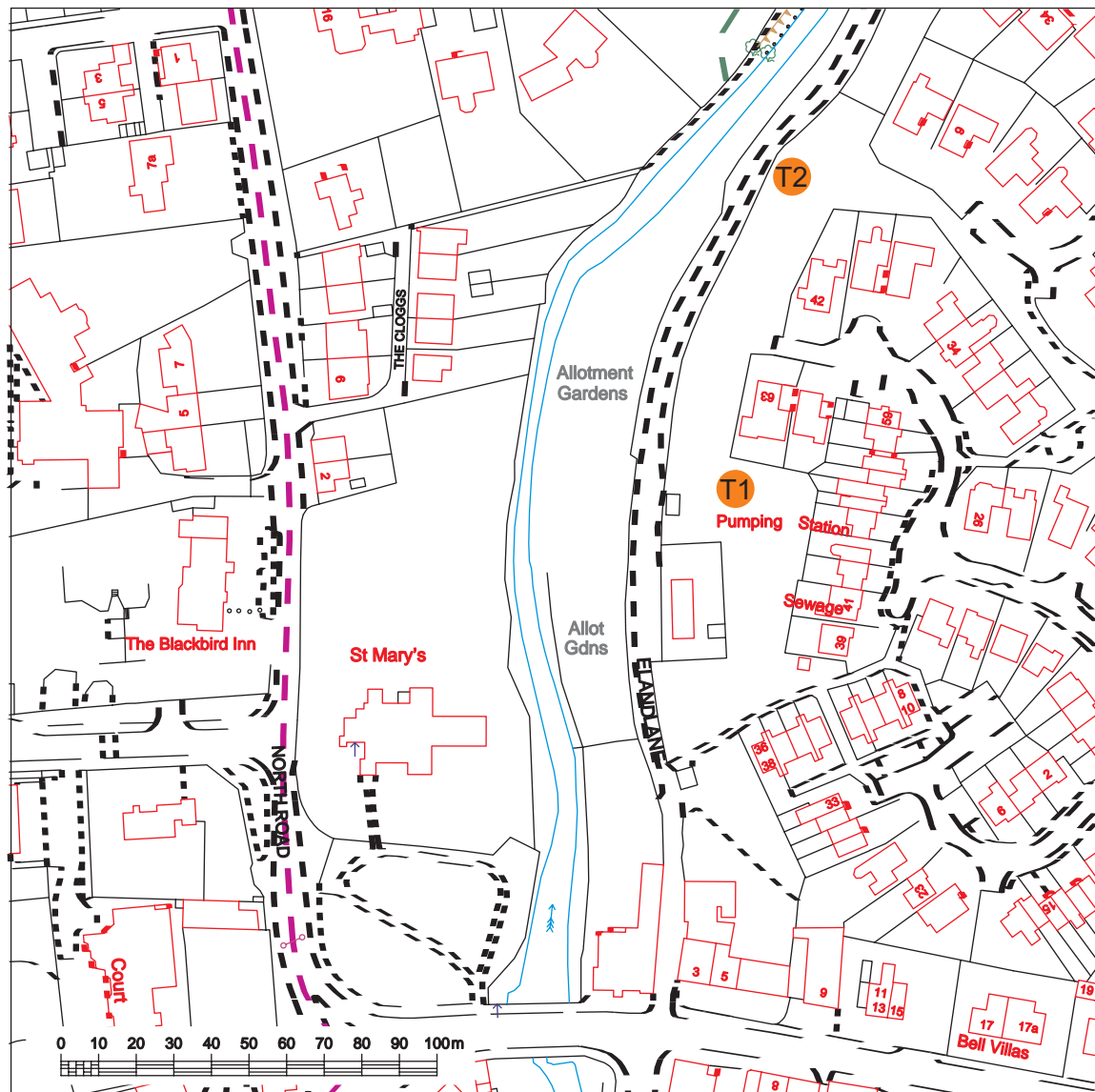
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Illus. 01: The location of Ponteland, County of Northumberland



Illus. 02: Location of the watching brief in Ponteland, circled in red.



Illus. 03: The location of the two trenches at Ponteland on a detailed modern ordnance survey plan, circled in blue.

1. PURPOSE OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

An archaeological watching brief was requested by The Environment Agency in liaison with Northumberland County Council conservation Team, in order to mitigate the potential impact of invasive investigations into the make-up of an existing, modern flood prevention bank. The investigation work was carried out on two sites north of the Diamond Inn, north east of the parish church on the east bank of the River Pont, Ponteland.

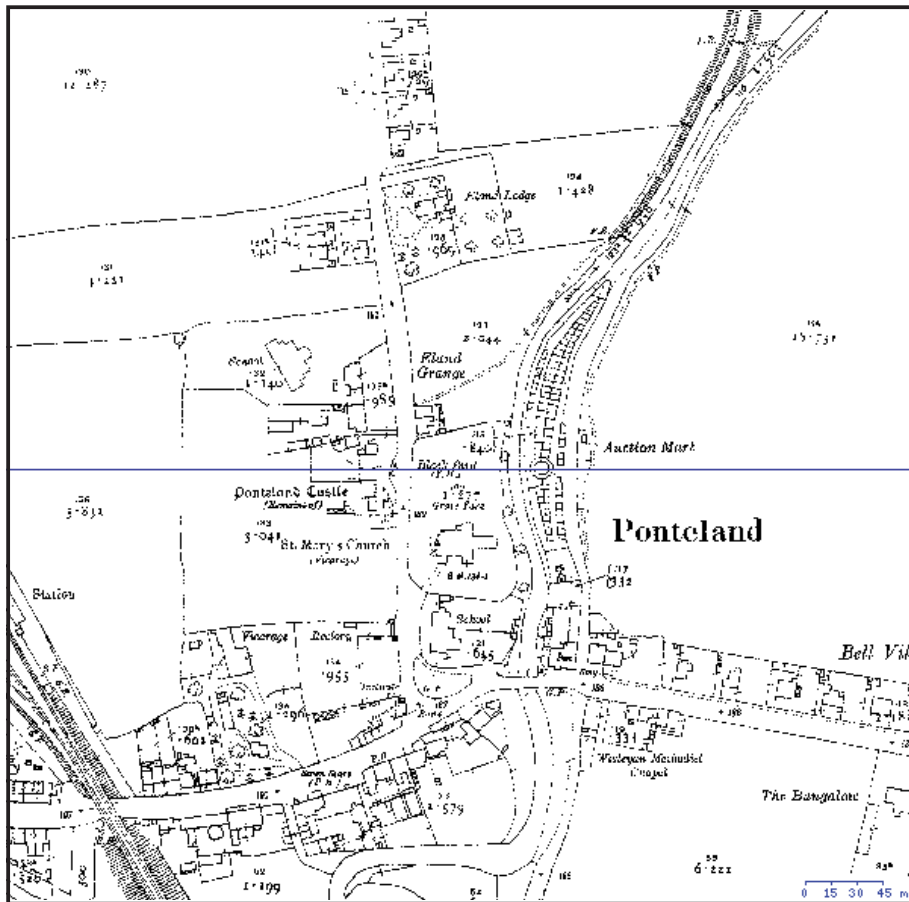
2. Background

The village of Ponteland lies 10km north-west of Newcastle upon Tyne in the valley of the Pont, a tributary of the Blyth. The development of the village of Ponteland since medieval times has been conditioned by its position at a river crossing in a rich agricultural zone close to Newcastle. The medieval core of the village is set on an island of raised ground and includes two towers, or fortified houses, a church and (until 1924) a bridge (since replaced). The Anglican church of St. Mary the Virgin at Ponteland, now part of the rural deanery of Corbridge appears to have been consecrated around the year 1150. Some surviving remains of Norman date survive, including part of the tower, but it has been much altered in the thirteenth fifteenth and later centuries. The Blackbird Inn, once the manor house of the Errington family, includes part of a tower where England and Scotland may have negotiated a peace in 1244. The vaulted chamber attached to this building formed part of the ancient Ponteland castle, parts of which are still intact although it was destroyed during the border wars in the late 1300s. The evidence of medieval structures and early map evidence indicates that the settlement was clustered around the church, with some ribbon development along the present A696 (particularly to the west) and along the road heading north from the A696 past the current Blackbird Inn, site of one of the fortified houses mentioned above. In the 19th century the village was linked to Newcastle by rail, which partly explains its expansion as a dormitory settlement for the city. Although the railway has closed, the village has continued to expand using good road links, more recently benefiting from the proximity of Newcastle international airport.

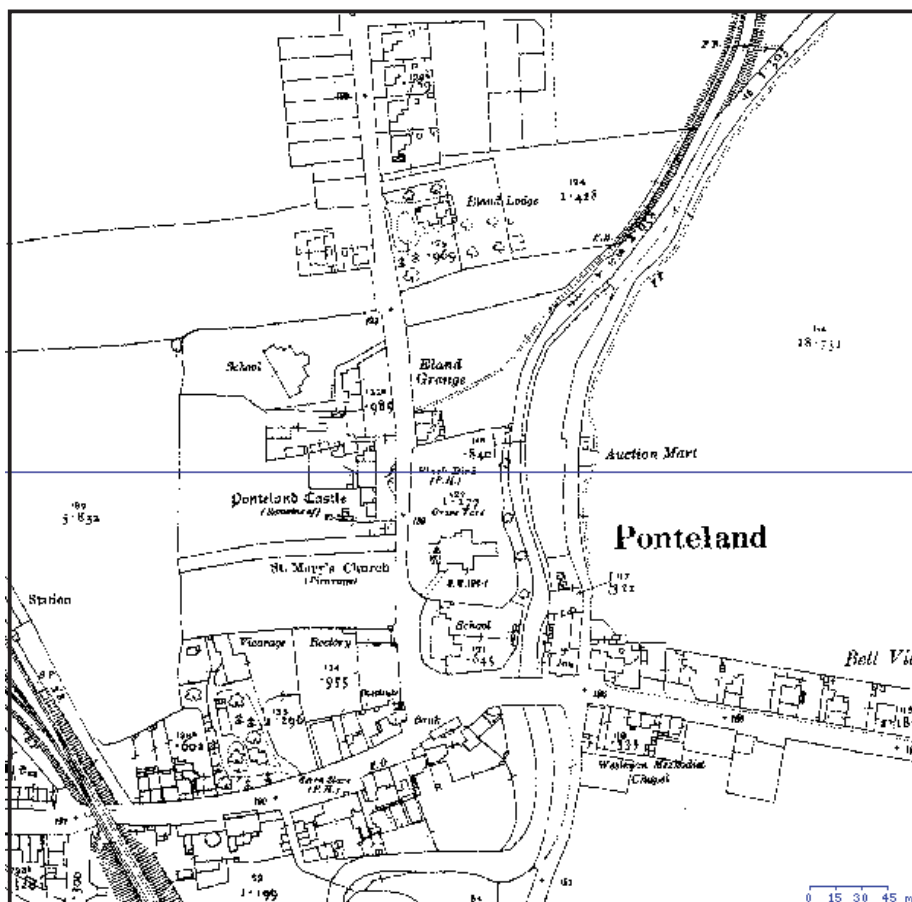
3. WATCHING BRIEF

The aims of the watching brief were to determine whether archaeological features or deposits were present in the trenches excavated for geotechnical investigation, and to make an appropriate record of any such finds by photographic and other means. Attendance by an archaeologist was requested by The Environment Agency in liaison with Northumberland County Council Conservation Team.

The trenches were excavated using a mini-excavator under the supervision of the investigators and an archaeologist. The work was carried out on March 18th 2008. The two trenches monitored as part of the archaeological watching brief were excavated on the east bank of the Pont north-east of the church. The first (Trench 1) was on the bankside almost adjacent to the Blackbird Inn (a former fortified late medieval house); the second (Trench 2) was cut on the bankside further upstream – i.e. further from the known medieval core of the village. A number of other trenches were cut further upstream in positions which it was considered were unlikely to threaten potential archaeological remains, therefore were not monitored.



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



Illus. 07: Extract from the Fourth Edition Ordnance Survey Plan, 1932

4. RESULTS

TRENCH 1:

Trench 1 was excavated next to the eastern edge of the existing flood prevention bank on the east bank of the river Pont upstream of the bridged crossing on the A696. Excavation revealed a reddish sandy silt to a depth of about 0.7 metres with a darker, silty deposit containing organic material below it to a depth of 1.7 metres, at which point the excavation was terminated.

Interpretation

The reddish sandy silt was a modern deposit laid down when the flood prevention bank was created. It appears to have been laid directly upon the existing riverbank, a silty deposit formed from the flood deposits of the river.

TRENCH 2:

Trench 2 was excavated next to the western edge of the existing flood prevention bank on the east bank of the river Pont upstream of the bridged crossing on the A696. Excavation revealed a reddish silty sand, containing abundant sandstone fragments to a depth of 2.15 metres, at which depth the deposit became firmer and redder.

Interpretation

It appeared that the modern flood prevention bank had been created in this area from excavated material taken from the existing sub-soil in the same vicinity, making it difficult to distinguish between natural and deposited materials.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No features, deposits or finds of archaeological significance were observed in either of the trenches, both of which were cut upon the line of an existing, modern flood prevention bank.

No finds were made to support the suggestion that the medieval or later village had extended into the area north-east of the church on the east bank of the Pont. However, the absence of evidence in this case does not necessarily prove the absence of remains elsewhere in the vicinity.

The excavations had no impact upon the material cultural heritage of Ponteland.



Illus. 08: Trench 1 viewed from the west



Illus. 09: Trench 1 viewed following excavation, viewed from the south-west



Illus. 10: Vertical view of Trench 1 following excavation.



Illus. 11: Trench 2 viewed from the north



Illus. 12: Vertical view of Trench 2 following excavation



Illus. 13:
Trench 2 viewed from the east following excavation