

Historic Environment Survey for the National Trust Properties on the Northumberland Coast

Buston Links, Alnmouth

Prepared for the



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Introduction

The National Trust landholding at Buston Links, Alnmouth Bay consists of 7.5 hectares of coastline, mainly sand dunes with level ground and an access track on the landward (west) side. The track forms part of the North Northumberland coastal path and is frequently used by dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Parking is restricted to land to the north of the landholding and a gate prevents any visitor vehicular access to the site. The National Trust also lease a further 89.4 hectares from Northumberland Estates which includes the dunes, wetlands and Church Hill between Alnmouth village and Buston Links.



Plate 1. View towards Alnmouth from land now leased by The National Trust c.1920

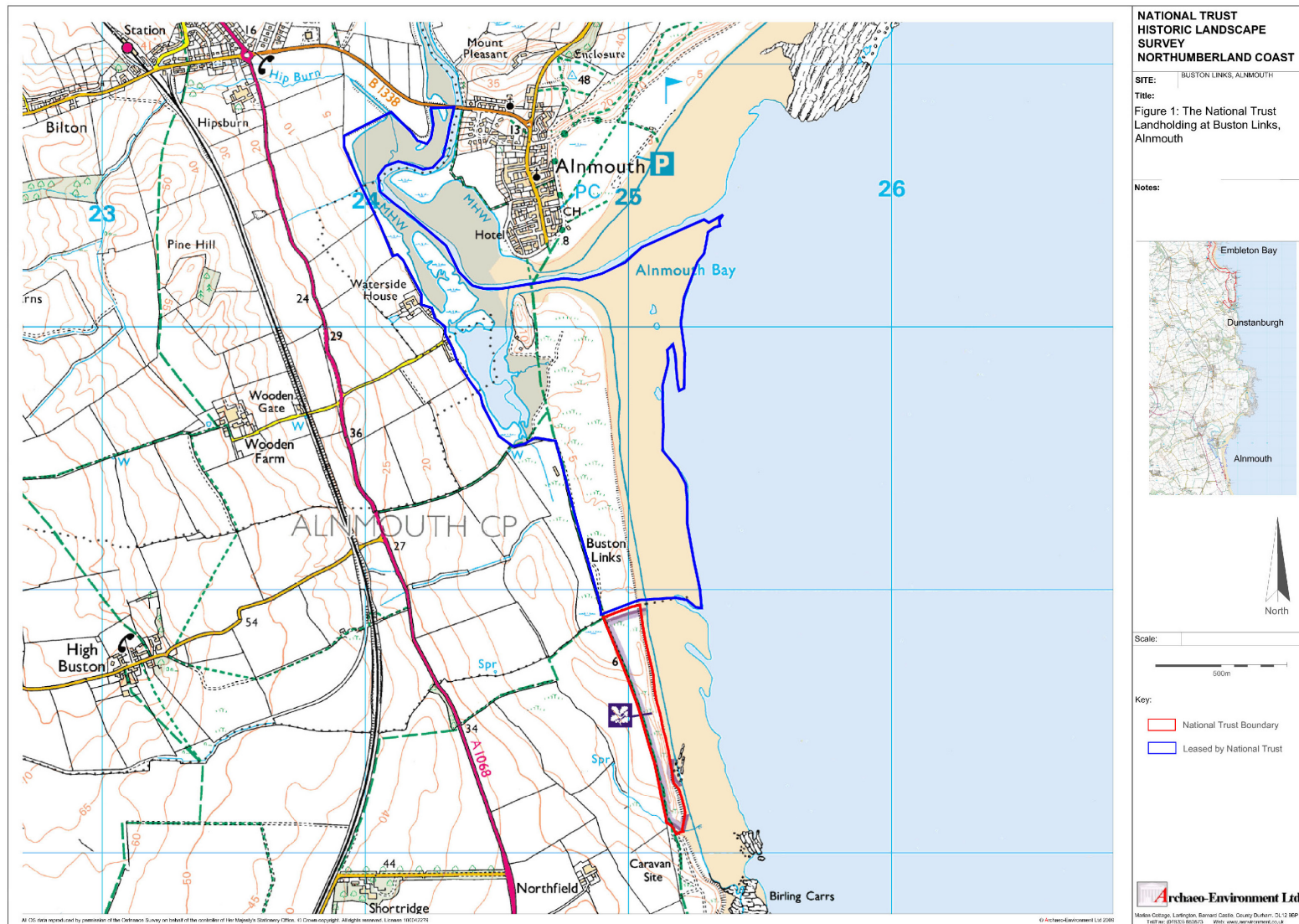


Figure 1. The National Trust landholding at Buston Links, Alnmouth, Northumberland (red is the NT owned land, blue is leasehold)

Aims and Objectives

The survey work commissioned for Buston Links, Alnmouth is to the National Trust's Level Three standard. This is a level of survey which combines field work with documentary research, resulting in a comprehensive survey report of all historic environment features. Recommendations for management and future research for both individual features and the landscape as a whole, are contained within a separate volume.

Statutory and non Statutory Constraints

There are no Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, designated parks and gardens or Conservation Areas within the owned land, but within the leasehold land the mortuary chapel¹ is a listed building grade II. Alnmouth village is a Conservation Area and the guano shed adjacent to the leasehold area is a listed building. It is within the southern end of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the Northumberland Heritage Coast. The primary purpose of the AONB legislation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The term 'natural' beauty is defined as being *'...not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over centuries.'*² Heritage Coast is a non-statutory definition and is designed to cover the most unspoilt areas of undeveloped coastline around England and Wales. The main purpose of the Heritage Coast definition is to conserve the natural beauty of the coastline and, where appropriate, improve accessibility for visitors. In addition Heritage Coasts are designed to maintain the environmental health of inshore waters.

The whole stretch of coastline here is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest making it nationally important for its nature conservation values. On the seaward side the European Marine Site extends from the Scottish border to Alnmouth and therefore is of international importance for marine and bird life. Both designations can have implications for implementing conservation

¹ NT SMR 14649

² Northumberland Coast AONB & Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast EMS Management Plan draft 2009,

works on archaeological sites if they are likely to result in disturbance to dune flora or fauna, even if this impact is only indirect. Likewise, the conservation of the natural environment has the capacity to conflict with the conservation of historic sites, e.g. the expansion of native woodland cover.



Plate 2. The National Trust landholding at Buston Links, looking towards Alnmouth

Landscape Character

The National Trust landholding at Buston Links lies within the North Northumberland Coastal Plain Character Area (JCA 1). This is characterised by an open agricultural landscape with Whin Sill outcrops and the river valleys of the Coquet, Aln, Tweed and Till. Broadleaved woodlands are now largely confined to these river valleys. The area is overlain by glacial till and, more locally, blown sand or peaty deposits. It is this blown sand and single dune ridge which gives Buston Links its key landscape characteristic. This national character area has been further subdivided into smaller character areas including the stretch from Seaton Point to the Coquet Estuary. This area is characterised by long sweeping sand beaches backed by strongly defined

sand dune systems. Views of the coast are generally limited by these high dunes and topography. To the north of Amble, the raised beach provides a fine vantage point from which to view these beaches including Buston Links. The tidal mud and wetland associated with the river Aln to the north form important habitats for flora and fauna as do the dunes themselves.



Figure 2. The North Northumberland Coastal Plain Joint Character Area (JCA 1 Natural England)

Physical Influences

Differential erosion of deposits laid down during the last ice age has resulted in the formation of a headland and bay coastline: low rugged cliffs and reefs alternate with wide sandy bays backed by dunes. South of Alnmouth, the cliffs generally become lower with wide sandy bays e.g. Alnmouth Bay and Druridge Bay, fringed with wind blown dunes up to 15m high. The dune systems, characteristic of the Northumberland coast, have been forming for the last 10, 000 years (English Nature 1998). The dune systems at Buston Links are calcareous due to the high shell content of the substrate, and are relatively young being only 200 to 300 years old (AONB/EMS draft management plan 2008, 30).

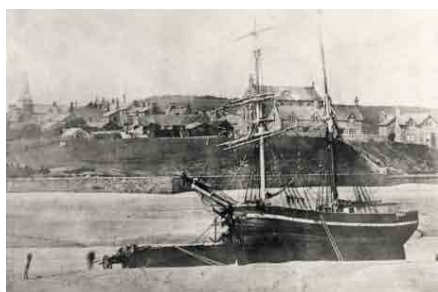


Plate 3. The ship 'Peace' moored at Alnmouth harbour 1875

The north-east is exposed to a very high energy wave climate dominated by north and north-easterly gales, and promoting a net transport of beach sediment southwards assisted by tidal currents. The littoral drift is not large due to the natural groyning effect of the headlands and the near-shore rock platforms.

Wider Historic Landscape and Cultural Influences

The coastal plain was one of the earliest areas in the county to be settled and exploited. The earliest evidence for human activity in the wider area is a number of worked flint tools³ of the Mesolithic period.⁴ These have been found on the high land mass behind Alnmouth which is a raised beach left where the sea level has lowered since the Mesolithic period, leaving what used to be the coast, inland. Flint tools have also been found at Birling Carrs.

At Buston, evidence of a Bronze Age (2100-700BC) cemetery was found during the cutting of the railway line in 1926.⁵ The field at that time was known

³ NCC HER 5712 and 5548

⁴ 8,500-4,000 BC

⁵ NCC HER 5402

as Barrow, which may well be an indicator of a lost field monument. There is very little evidence from later prehistoric and Roman periods in the area. A large enclosure 200m north of Alnmouth has an unknown function and could be prehistoric, however its former name of 'Night Folds' suggests a medieval or post medieval use to hold animals in overnight.⁶ Despite the lack of evidence from the Roman period the River Aln is marked on a map by the geographer Ptolemy, which dates to about AD150, so the area was known to the Romans if not actively exploited.⁷ Indeed in the mid second century, north Northumberland was well within the Roman Empire while the Antonine Wall (roughly between present day Edinburgh and Glasgow) marked the northern frontier.

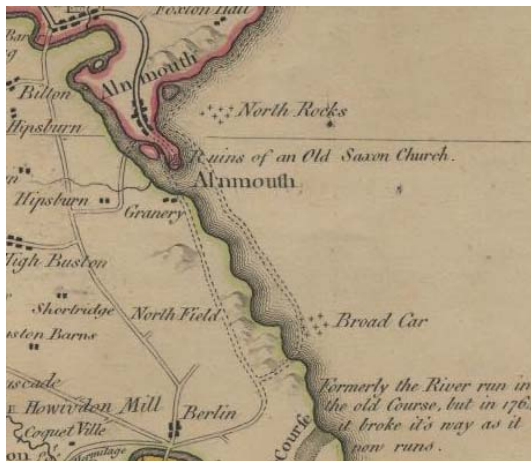


Figure 3. Armstrongs map of 1769 which shows granaries on the south side of the river and suggest that Church Hill was the site of a 'Saxon' church. Interestingly the river Coquet to the south had already altered its route – the river Aln was to do the same in 1806.

Remains from early medieval times are a little more promising. The settlement at Alnmouth may have been known by the name of Twyford. Bede records that in AD 684, a church meeting was held at the place with two fords at the mouth of the river Aln. This may have been Alnmouth and the two fords subsequently lent their names to High Ford Lane and Low Ford Lane (Bulmer 1887, 885). The meeting may have occurred close to Church Hill, where the remains of a 10th century carved

stone cross were found in 1789.⁸

The coastal strip has strong associations with the spread of Christianity in the Anglo-Saxon period with hermitages on Coquet Island and the Farnes, plus an early monastery at Lindisfarne and a later chapel at Beadnell (Hardie and

⁶ NCC HER 5700

⁷ NCC HER 12981

⁸ NCC HER 5705

Rushton 2000, 34). The secular power base at Bamburgh also seems to have played an important role in the legitimization of Christianity and it is therefore no coincidence that the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Bamburgh includes the remains of both pagan and Christian people, including some which may have called Iona or Ireland their home.

Alnmouth was established as a planned seaport in 1152 by William de Vesci. The plan form of the village today is typical of medieval times with a main road and sixteen long linear burgage plots leading off it which have traditionally housed street frontage properties. There is some evidence that there was a

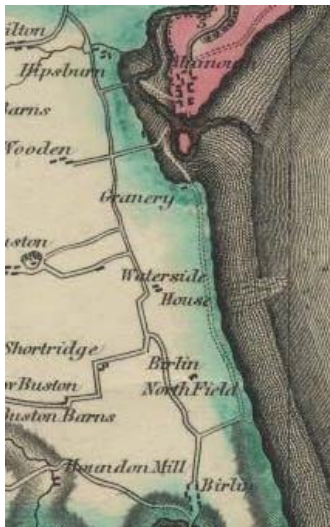


Figure 4. Fryer's map of 1820 showing the granary and Waterside House

monastery in Alnmouth, founded in 1147 by Eustace Fitzjohn who gave some ground in the town of Alnmouth to the monks of Alnwick abbey.

The area was not left to grow in peace. The Black Death in 1348 took its toll and this combined with Scottish invasions in the mid 14th century, left the village almost destroyed. Border reiving was a constant threat and a watch was maintained from the

hill above Alnmouth. The countryside had been largely cleared of woodland by the medieval period, forming a settlement pattern of small scattered farmsteads and villages with complex field systems, a pattern which continued almost unchanged until the 17th century.

By the 17th century some prosperity was possible and the town's early wealth was based on the fishing industry. It became particularly prosperous in the 18th century as an exporter of grain and importer of Peruvian guano via Liverpool, Bristol and London Burgess 2004, 18). Ship

In the troublesome times preceding the union, the burgesses of the town were compelled to "keep, upon their own charge, one good sur watch upon the Wallop-hill, as well by daye as by nighte, and also to have ther two beakens of wood sett upon the said hill, the same to be made for fyer panes to hang therein, for warning of the counrye as opportunity shall serve by land or by sea, over and besides the night and neighborly watche aboute the towne"

Tomlinson 1985 (1888), 406

building was also commenced in 1765 with the first 300 ton vessel being launched on Wednesday 13th March (Bulmer 1887, 887). The grain trade has also left its mark architecturally with 16 granary buildings in the village (once thought to be the largest in the county (Tomlinson 1985, 406)) and former 19th century guano shed at Buston Links, located far enough away from the residents of Alnmouth to shield them from the inevitable undesirable smells. The growth of granaries for crop storage and the need for guano was part of a larger movement of agricultural improvement which also saw a growth in the production of lime to improve the soil. It was also at this time that many of the fields in the surrounding area were reorganised into the regular pattern which we are familiar with today and the settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, many remodelled to meet the new agricultural requirements, was established. As larger farms exploited larger areas with less labour, the old settlement pattern died out and smaller hamlets such as that at Wooden⁹ which had 10 tax payers in 1296 and 4 houses in 1624, were replaced with one working farm. In the Buston area, new farm buildings were constructed at Northfield¹⁰ and Shortridge Hall was built in the 19th century as a country house.¹¹ Buston Barns was an earlier farm however, dating to the 17th or 18th century.¹² The southern part of the NT landholding was part of Warkworth's north field (see figure 5).

⁹ NCC HER 5434

¹⁰ NCC HER 14393

¹¹ NCC HER 14396

¹² NCC HER 14378

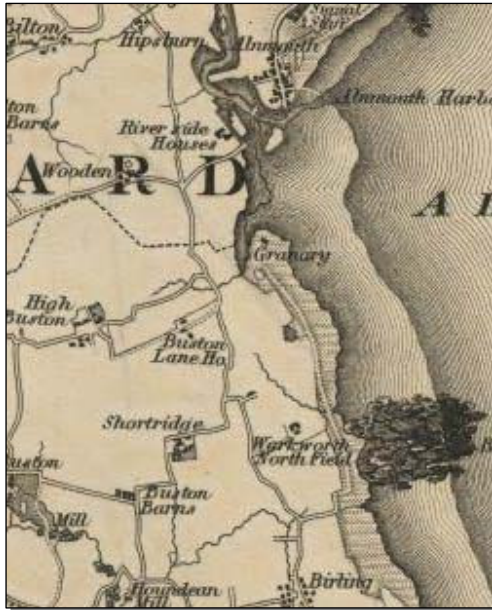


Figure 5. Greenwood's map of 1828

The harbour was busy and was recorded as having 18 vessels berthed there at any one time (Tomlinson 1985, 406). There is also some evidence of salt making by the river Aln.¹³ At its peak as a trade centre Alnmouth was described by John Wesley in 1746 as *'....a small seaport town, famous for all kinds of wickedness'* (Hardie and Rushton 2000, 58). By 1887 the main trades were fishing and the importation of timber and slates from Holland and elsewhere, for which about forty men were employed (Bulmer 1887, 887).

¹³ NCC HER 5766



Figure 6. Tithe map of Almouth dating to 1843 showing Church Hill and the old course of the river. The medieval layout of the village shows up particularly well here.

The river had already started to silt and a particularly bad storm on Christmas Day 1806 made matters worse, cutting off St Waleric's chapel from the town.

By the end of the 19th century commercial exports were no longer possible on the silted river Aln and exports ceased. However the arrival of the railway network helped the town find a new niche as genteel

'On the smooth, firm sands, or the far-stretching breezy links, where golf, cricket, and tennis are played during the summer months, the visitor in search of health will soon realise the benefits of the sea-side.'

Tomlinson 1985 (1888), 405

Victorian seaside resort with new development facing out to sea with typically Victorian detailing such as barge boards and bay windows. It was at this time (1869) that the links adjacent to Alnmouth were used as a golf course and today they are thought to be the second oldest golf links in England. Heated baths were also provided next to the gasworks.



Plate 4. The 'guano shed' at Buston Links (outside NT land)

Much of the Northumberland coast was vulnerable to attack on its long sandy beaches. At Alnmouth in the 19th century, the threat of an attack from

Napoleon was considered very real and an army of Percy volunteers was raised by the Duke of Northumberland. Perhaps the townsfolk remembered the fear caused by the numerous encounters with the French in the 18th century, including the firing on the town by the American Navy Officer John Paul Jones in 1779 (Tomlinson 1985, 406-7). A battery was built on the hill overlooking Alnmouth to protect the town from such an invasion in 1862. For similar reasons, the coast around Alnmouth was fortified with defensive structures such as pillboxes and anti-tank cubes during the Second World War.¹⁴ The ‘guano shed’ at Buston was adapted with gun slits inserted into the walls¹⁵ a pillbox constructed on Church Hill and two rows of anti tank cubes which can still be seen along the estuary at Alnmouth.

Wednesday 9th/Thursday 10th April 1941 night 585

‘During a reconnaissance flight over Newcastle a Junkers Ju 88A was shot down by Spitfires of 72 Squadron and crashed into the sea off Alnmouth at 19.40. The body of one of the crew was recovered from the sea at Amble, the other three are missing.’

Thursday, 10th/Friday, 11th April 1941 Night 586

‘3(F)/122 Junkers Ju 88A-5 (0529). Shot down by Sergeant Casey and Sergeant Prytherch in Spitfires of No 72 Squadron during a reconnaissance of Newcastle. Crashed at Alnmouth, Northumberland at 19.40. Of the enemy aircraft's crew, Lt R. Brose, Uffz E. Helmert and Fw K. Dux were listed as missing. The body of Fw O. Grobke was found at Amble. Aircraft F6+NL lost.

Night 586. All times BST. Blackout begins: 20.29, ends: 05.44’

Wednesday, 13th August 1941 D711

‘11.37.. Northumberland.. Two HEs on the railway line S of Alnmouth railway station [NU236105], dropped from an enemy plane flying at about 100’. Slight damage to railway line. UXB reported on east side of main LNER track. Proved to be the tail fins, from one of the HEs, buried in the ground.’

Ripley and Pears 1994-2007

The erosional processes at work in this area means that the unexpected can come to light at any time, but particularly after inclement weather and high tides. Often the remains are out of context and difficult to date, such as the

¹⁴ NCC HER 19980, 5446

¹⁵ NCC HER 13512

Sunday, 8th June 1941 Day 645

The barrage balloon vessel 'Cor Jesu' while on Admiralty service, was sunk by enemy aircraft off Alnmouth.

Day 645. All times DST. Blackout ends:

04.29, begins: 23.41

Public Alert: 15.47, All-Clear: 16.19

Ripley and Pears 1994-2007

human skeleton exposed near Amble in 1992 or another at Spittal a few years later (Hardie *pers. comm.*), but a rapid response is often required if they are to be recorded before being swept away. While the dune system is dynamic, the wider landscape area

is relatively stable. Indeed within the AONB, three quarters of the landscape has survived unchanged since the mid 19th century (EMS/AONB management plan 2008, 39). The extent of change can be seen in the historic mapping below. Some fields were amalgamated between 1860 and 1926 and additional land appears to have fallen out of productive use along the western boundary of the National Trust landholding. However the most significant change between the two maps is the loss of Northfield Cottage.

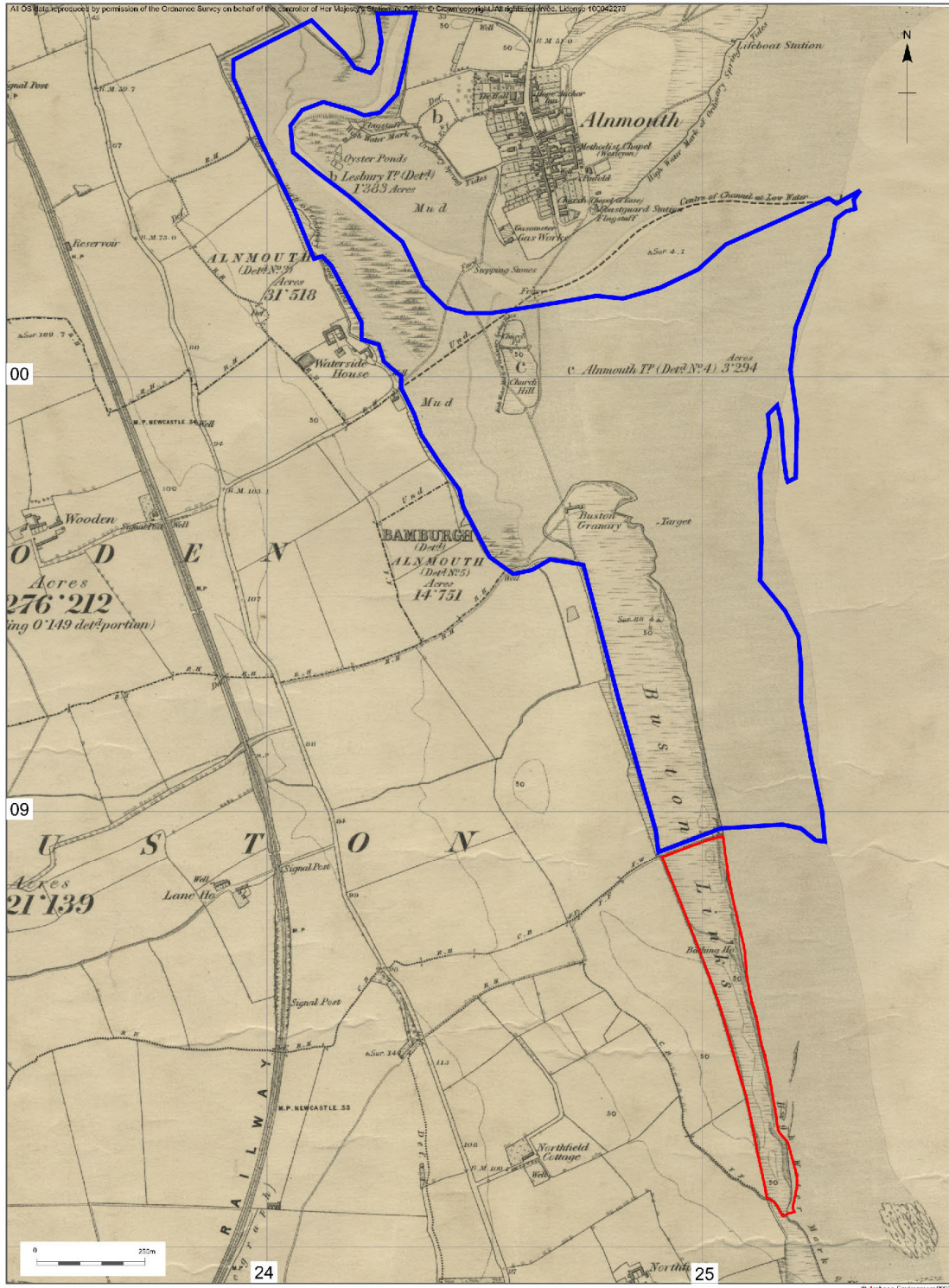


Figure 7. 1st edition OS inch map dating to the 1860s showing the extent of the present day National Trust landholding. Buston granary and the Bathing House is clearly shown. Targets have also been set off coast suggesting some military training activity. Northfield Cottage appears to consist of a house, a well, an associated orchard and fields. Shortridge Hall sits within landscaped grounds.

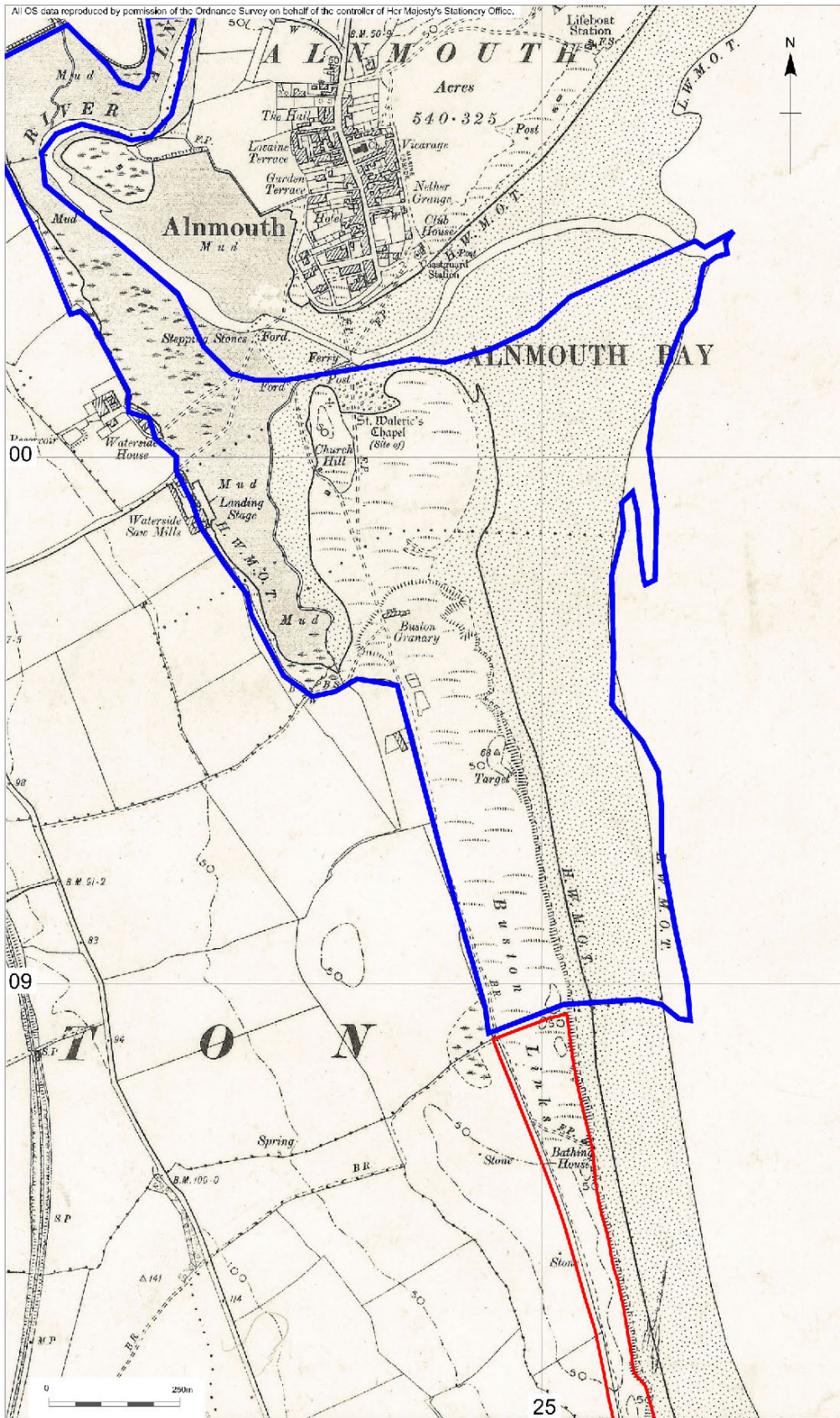


Figure 8. The 2nd edition OS map 25 inch scale showing the leasehold area to the north around Church Hill c.1897. Waterside saw mills with its landing stage have been established importing timber from Holland. The target is now inland amongst the dunes.

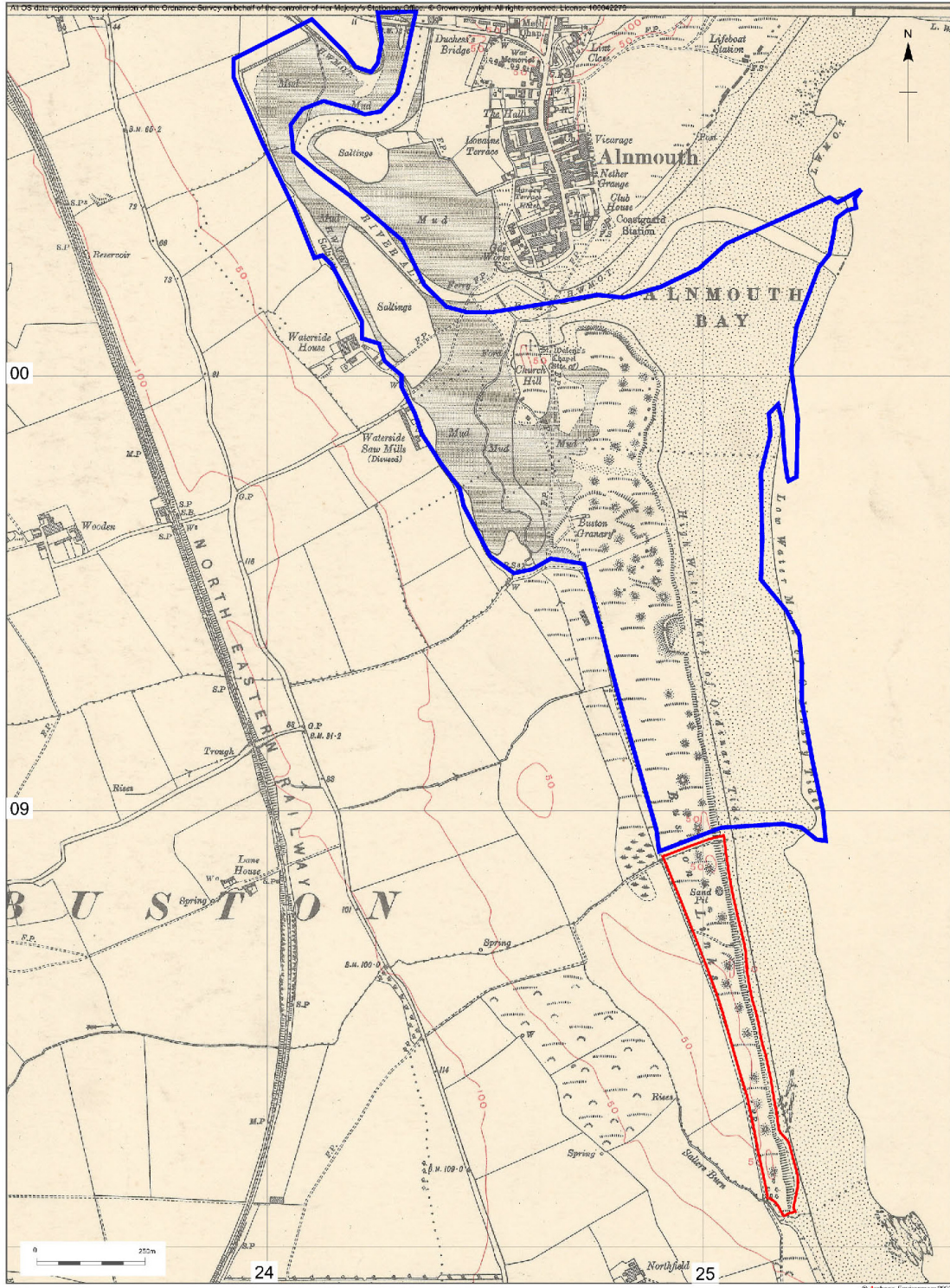


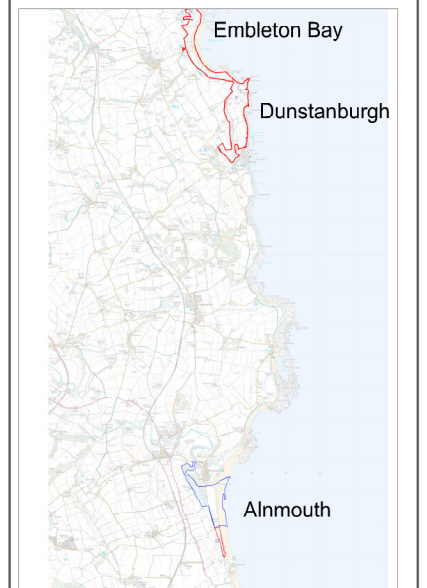
Figure 9. the OS 3rd edition map dating to 1926. Waterside saw mills are now disused and Northfield Cottage has gone. Saltmaking appears to take place at the extreme north of the map.

**NATIONAL TRUST
HISTORIC LANDSCAPE
SURVEY
NORTHUMBERLAND COAST**

SITE: BUSTON LINKS, ALMOUTH

Title:
Figure 10: National Trust HER sites at Buston Links, Alnmouth

Notes:

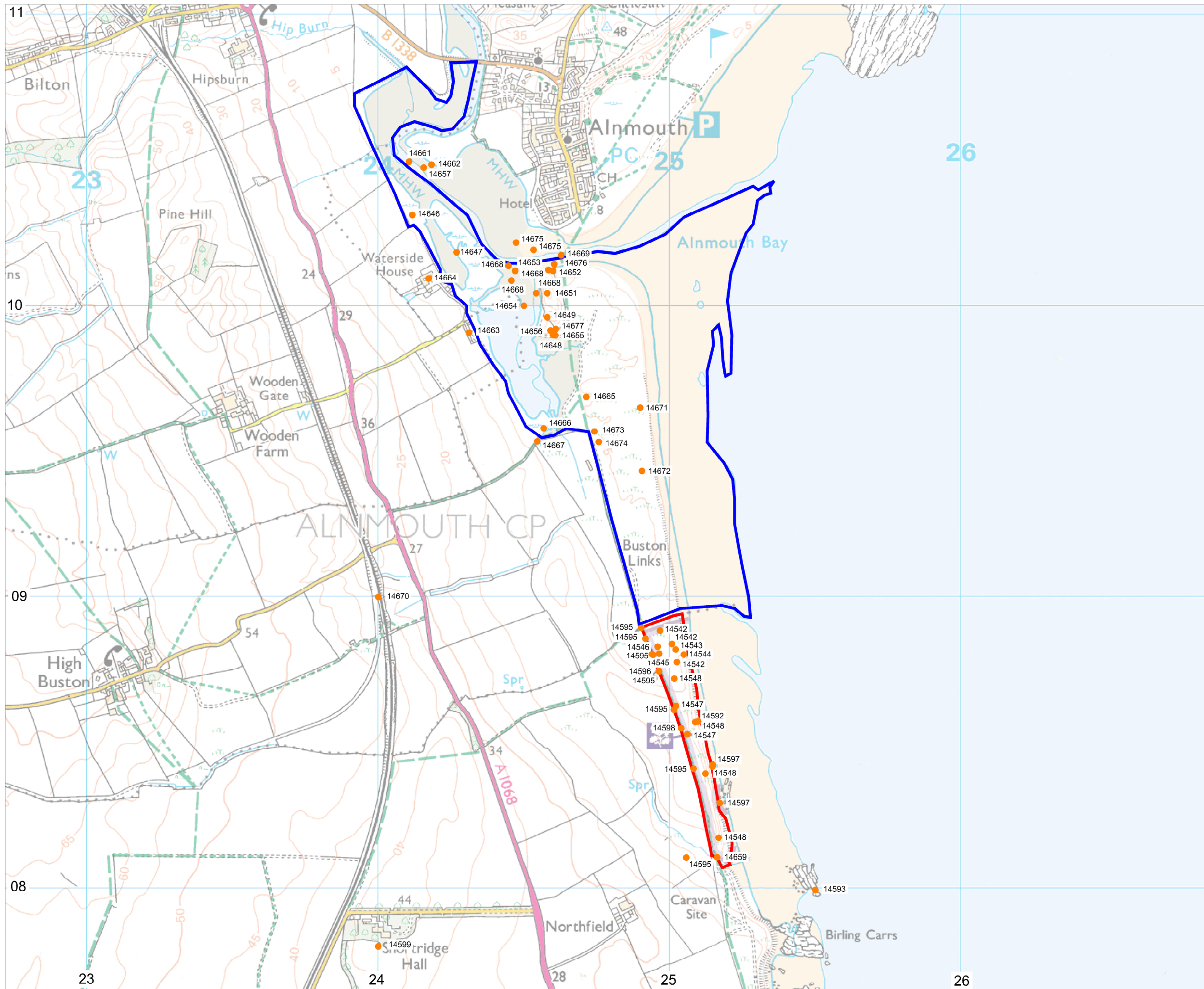


Scale:



Key:

- NT HER Site
- National Trust Boundary
- Leased by National Trust



Nature of the Archaeological Evidence

There are currently no archaeological sites recorded on the National Trust HER for this landholding and seven on the Northumberland County Council Historic Environment Record. However recent research and fieldwork have uncovered some remains of interest, resulting in 40 sites of archaeological interest now on the NT HER.

Prehistoric

Only one record exists within (or near) the landholding – the discovery of prehistoric flint tools at Birling Carrs (NT SMR 14593). The location of this find is rather vague and may have been from outside the National Trust landholding.¹⁶ The areas most likely to produce earlier evidence of settlement will be where watercourses meet the sea. Of course, the original coastline may now be underwater, but nevertheless the area of highest potential to produce further prehistoric discoveries would be around Salters Burn where it joins the sea and around the estuary of the Aln.

Roman

There are no Roman remains recorded within the landholding.

Medieval

Church Hill (NT SMR 14651)

The chapel which once sat on Church Hill (the present day building is a mortuary chapel built in 1870 and left disused once the church was built in the village (NT SMR 14649)) was dedicated to St Waleric. Although Waleric [Walaric or Walericus] was a 7th century saint,

'About twenty years ago a small mortuary chapel was built in the old burial ground, but this has been disused since the erection of the present church in the village; and the little God's Acre, where so many generations of the "rude fathers of the hamlet sleep", will itself, like the church which crowned the summit, be in time buried beneath the wave.'
Bulmer 1887, 887

he was popularised in England during the Norman Conquest when William the Conqueror had the saint's relics exposed for public veneration and to seek his

¹⁶ NCC HER 5548

divine assistance in the 1066 conquest (Farmer 1987, 428). The remains of a 10th century carved stone cross (NT SMR 14652) were found in 1789, suggesting that this site has been spiritually important since Anglian times.¹⁷ However there are references to the church formerly being called Woden's Church which has pre-Christian associations and also ties into the name of the nearby deserted medieval village of Wooden (Bulmer 1887, 887). The fondness that early Christians had for promontory or island locations which could exert a sense of mystery and separateness was ultimately to be the undoing of this particular site. Contemporary accounts show that three priests and a clerk were employed here in 1567 (Hardie and Rushton 2000, 34). According to documentary sources, the church was in some poverty and being plundered for building materials in the 17th century.¹⁸ Drawings of the chapel on Church Hill dating to 1771 show a sizeable 12th century structure, already ruinous and showing considerable erosion around the base. To combat this erosion a wall was constructed around the base in the 19th century. Two 18th century grave slabs can still be seen on Church Hill (NT SMR 14651) as can a hexagonal concrete base (pillbox? NT SMR 14655) and the foundations of a concrete cottage (NT SMR 14656). The cottage consisted of two or three rooms at ground level with a bay window looking north west and a mullioned window looking south west. Both contained fireplaces and the number of flues suggest that there was an upstairs room too (Strutt 1998, 9).

Fords

The two fords (NT SMR 14653 and 14657) shown on the historic maps (including a map dating to 1791) are presumably medieval in date, although they may have had to move with changing river courses. River crossings would have been necessary at all times and if Bede's reference to Twyford does refer to Alnmouth, then their origins certainly extend back at least as far

¹⁷ NCC HER 5705

¹⁸ The record of a bishop's visitation in 1662 mentions "... an office against John Carr, gent., Ralph Carr, gent., and Edmund Shippeard, of the parish of Lesbury, for takeing away Alemouth church lead, the bells and stone from the same ..." and against Mary Moore "... for takeing down all the lead of the Chancell, with other ornaments of the church." (<http://www.alnmouth.org.uk/Church/2.htm>)

as Anglo-Saxon times. Remains of a ford were seen in 1992 when part of a sandbank was eroded during heavy rain exposing a causeway (Bettess 1992, 24-5). At least one of the causeways exposed pre-dated oyster beds depicted on the 1865 maps (OS 1st ed 6 inch) therefore it appears to have been of some antiquity. The 19th century mapping shows additional fords in the form of stepping stones which could be used at low tide (NT SMR 14658).



Plate 5. Church Hill from Google Earth. Photo taken in 2007. The mortuary chapel and cottage are visible on the south west corner of the hill.

Post Medieval

Boundary wall

A fine stone wall (NT SMR 14595) encloses a field which forms the inland or western boundary of the landholding. The wall is constructed of large dressed blocks of sandstone interspersed with smaller stone fills and represents a particularly high quality of construction perhaps only associated with wealthy estates and areas of high agricultural value. The capping consists of square

capstones and a small wrought iron entrance gate (NT SMR 14596) survives at NU 24963 08746. This gate is only suitable for pedestrian access. The wall has been reinforced with hedging (NT SMR 14598) on the east side managed in the traditional laying technique in the past, but no longer managed at all. Its survival is very patchy and limited to only a few areas around NU 25040 08549. The wall has also been reinforced, presumably later when slumping became apparent, with a line of four buttresses at NU 25082 08411.



Plate 6. 18th or 19th century wall with buttresses (NT SMR 14595)

Close to this area there is also a join where two parts of the wall abut on a different alignment. Although the majority of the wall is on good condition, large sections have collapsed or are without their capping stones.



Plate 7. The pedestrian gate (NT SMR 14596) in to the enclosure (NT 14595) and the remnants of a 'laid' hedge (NT SMR 14598)

Quarrying

The natural rock outcrop at Birling Carrs is on the foreshore (therefore just outside the landholding) and has been used for quarrying in the past. Evidence of quarrying can be seen in the regular shapes of the stone outcrops and the drill holes along the cut edge (NT SMR 14597). Some graffiti has also been spotted on the cut edges, possibly masons' marks. Quarrying was not shown on the 1st edition Ordnance survey map of the outcrop, however the 3rd edition OS map suggests that sand was extracted from the dunes nearby (NT SMR 14599). The date of the quarry is therefore not clear and it may pre-date the 1860s when the 1st edition map was published.

Saltmaking

The name of the burn (Saltburn) which forms the southernmost end of the National Trust landholding may hint at earlier activities relating to salt making in medieval or post medieval times (NT SMR 14659). Saltmaking is also apparent from a number of other place names. The 'Saltings' (NT SMR 14660) is marked on the 3rd edition OS map near the mouth of the Aln and a little to the north is Pan Leasehows (NT SMR 14661) another area of possible saltmaking which has exposed burnt material in the past.¹⁹

Oyster Beds (NT SMR 14662)

Oyster beds are shown on the 1st edition OS map dating to the 1860s in roughly the same position as an earlier ford.

¹⁹ The 'Pan' element may refer to salt panning

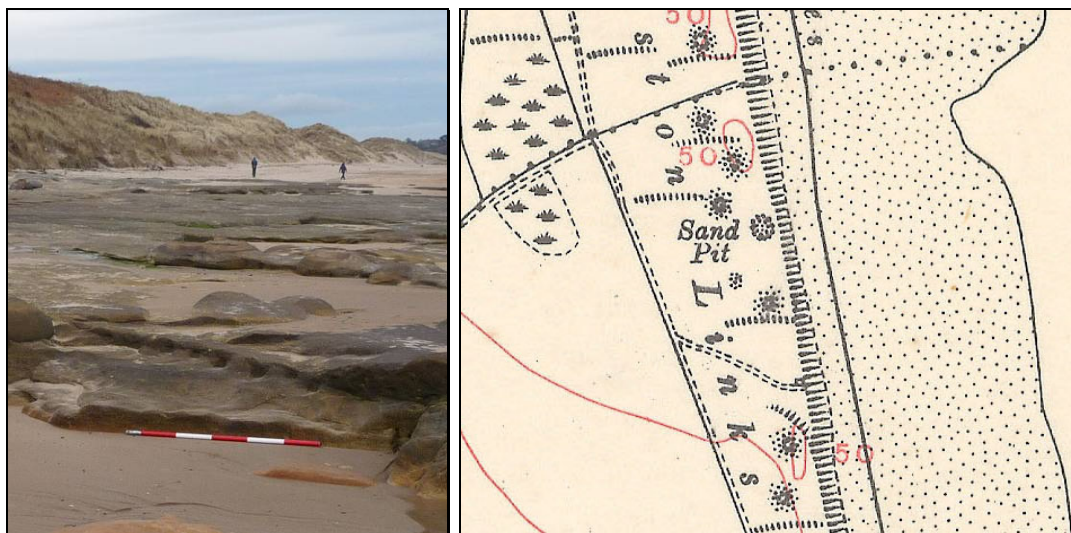


Plate 8. Drill holes visible at Birling Carrs and a detail from the OS 3rd edition map dating to 1926 showing 'sand pit' towards the northern boundary of the landholding

Bathing House

The 1st and 2nd edition OS maps from the mid to late 19th century depict a bathing house (NT SMR 14594) amongst the sand dunes.



Figure 10. The bathing house shown on the 1st edition OS map dating to 1860

In fact the same building and access track can also be seen on the 3rd edition map (see plate 3 (right)), although it is not clear whether it was functioning as a bathing house by 1926 when it was published. This was presumably associated with the sea-side's increasing popularity in

Victorian times and a path shown on the 3rd edition map dating to 1926 (but not on earlier maps) links the bathing house with Shortridge Hall. Presumably such bathing houses were ephemeral structures of timber and no evidence survives today. Its location close to the coastal edge in the 19th and early 20th century means that it has probably been swept away as a result of dune movement.

Saw Mill (NT SMR 14663)



Plate 9. The sawmill today

Waterside Saw Mill is shown for the first time on maps dating to 1897. It consisted of a landing stage and mill buildings and was part of an industry importing timber from Holland and further afield. It was disused by the 1920s presumably because the river was too silted to

bring boats along. It is now known as Waterside Cottages; a single storey stone and wood building converted from the 19th century steam powered sawmill and now three holiday cottages.²⁰



Plate 10. Waterside Cottage (House)
and family.

Waterside House (NT SMR 14664)

Waterside House is shown on maps from 1820 (Fryer's map) but was known as Riverside Houses in 1828 (Greenwood's map). It is not shown on Armstrong's map of 1769. It is a two storeyed stone built cottage originally used to house a farmworker

Buston Granary (NT SMR 14665)

This granary is shown on Armstrong's map of 1769 and later on the 1st edition OS maps dating to the 1860s. It is still shown, but not labelled, on the 3rd edition OS maps dating to 1926. Oral accounts from local residents recollect the barn still being used before the Second World War as seasonal accommodation, but today the building is visible only as an earthwork, having been covered entirely with sand. The same oral accounts also refer to a series of huts beside the granary (Strutt 1998, 10).

Boundary Stone (NT SMR 14666)

A Boundary Stone is marked on the 2nd and 3rd edition OS maps dating to 1897 and 1926 marking the parish boundary just south of the wetland area of the Aln.

Well (NT SMR 14667)

A well is shown on the 1st to 3rd edition OS maps on the road marking the parish boundary on the approach to Buston Granary.

Mooring Posts (NT SMR 14668)

²⁰ <http://www.thewatersidecottages.co.uk/>

A survey of mooring posts was carried out by Bell on 15 July 1863 (Strutt 1998, fig 50). These were located on the north and west sides of Church Hill.

Modern

The recent Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment carried out by English Heritage has identified coastal defence works in 1940-41 on the landholding. The defensive strategy developed for the country during the Second World War was based primarily on the creation of obstacles, particularly along the flat sandy beaches where natural obstacles were few and far between. This line of defences sometimes referred to as 'Sir Edmund Ironside's Crust' consisted of anti-tank ditches, and concrete blocks, set in lines over miles of sandy beach, linking pillboxes, minefields, wire and other defences.

Monday 30th September 1940, day 394

'A Spitfire from 610 Squadron based at Acklington airfield in Northumberland crashed on the beach at Alnmouth due to a flying accident. The aircraft was a write-off, the 21-year-old pilot, Flying Officer C.H. Bacon was killed and was buried in St Mary's Cemetery in Windermere, Westmoreland.'

Ripley and Pears 1994-2007

At Buston Links there is evidence of barbed wire being used from aerial photographs dating to 1941-6 and also an anti tank ditch to the landward side of the dune system.

Anti-tank ditches or traps

Originally, anti-tank ditches were either V-shaped, square sided or asymmetrical, and were designed to immobilise the tank by confronting it with an unclimbable vertical face or (in the case of V-shaped ditches) to trap the vehicle nose down. The recommended dimensions for the V-shaped variant (the most likely shape at Buston given that they were being excavated into sand) were 18ft (5.49m) wide by 11ft (3.35m) deep (CBA 1996, 87). At Buston the sand has since filled all of the anti-tank ditch which once ran along the back of the dunes (NT SMR 14547) and it is no longer visible, however there is a small possible remnant at NU 25022 08626, close to the footpath.



Figure 11. Location of Second World War features from the Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment

There is evidence from elsewhere (see NT land at Druridge Bay) that the ditches were supplemented by scaffolding on the east (seaward) side and the Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment has depicted lines of barbed wire along the dune tops (NT SMR 14542, 14548). No remnants of barbed wire or scaffolding were seen during fieldwork.



Plate 11. The possible surviving stretch of anti-tank trap – the ranging pole points along the base of the ditch

Tuesday, 3rd June 1941 D640

15.00.. Northumberland.. An enemy plane passed over Boulmer [NU2614] dropped bombs and machine-gunned the village. Believed to be a UXB near Boulmer.

15.00.. Northumberland.. One HE at Foxton [NU2511] between Alnmouth/Boulmer.

15.01.. Northumberland.. A plane heading north machine-gunned Hauxley Pit Screens [NU2803]; Amble Coastguard Station [NU2704]; Amble Camp (Lord Mayor's Camp); foot of Queen Street; Brickworks; Station [NU2604]; a train in the station; a signal box; High Street, Amble; then Longhaughton Village [NU2415]. A Spitfire was seen chasing the plane. A corporal in the RAF Marine Section was seriously injured by machine-gun fire at North Side, Amble and was taken to the RAF Station, Acklington. A soldier was slightly hurt in High Street, Alnmouth. A lady of Scotsgap received a slight burn to the face and neck. The guard on the train, was struck on the top of the head by a bullet and taken to Alnwick Infirmary.

*Day 640. All times DST. Blackout ends: 04.33, begins: 23.35
Public Alert: 15.01, All-Clear: 16.18*

Ripley and Pears 1994-2007

Pillboxes

The Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment also identified one pillbox on the National Trust landholding from aerial photographs dating to 1946 (NT SMR

14544). The remains of another hexagonal pillbox (NT SMR 14655) can be seen on Church Hill (Strutt 1998, 17). Just outside the NT leasehold area is the 19th century guano shed which was fitted with gun embrasures to create a disguised pill box. More than 18,000 pillboxes were built during 1940 to defend the coast, stop-lines and nodal points. In June of that year branch FW3 of the War Office Directorate of Fortifications and Works issued designs for about a dozen standard pillboxes which were to act as standard design drawings for contractors. Most examples along the Northumberland coast represent local variations of these standard designs. Despite these variations, there were a number of features common to all designs. The basic structure was a concrete squat heavily constructed building, flat roofed and seldom more than 6ft 6inches (c.1.98m) high. In plan, coastal examples include hexagonal, lozenge and L-shaped pillboxes. Loopholes were designed to provide interlocking fields of fire with other pillboxes. Inside the pillbox a concrete partition limited the danger of ricocheting bullets within. The size of the loophole depended on what weapon it was designed to use. Most pillboxes were designed to take rifles or light machine guns and required a small outer loop of about 150-305mm (CBA 1996, 79). More heavily armed pillboxes with anti-tank guns or six pounder Hotchkiss guns required a larger loophole.



Plate 12. The site of the pillbox seen on 1946 aerial photographs is now on the dune edge overlooking the foreshore and may already have been swept out to sea (left). 200m south on the foreshore are the fragmentary remains of concrete filled sandbags

The base of the pillbox on Church Hill can still be discerned, but the one example recorded within the National Trust landholding is no longer visible

and may have been swept out to sea. The NGR supplied from aerial photographic transcription is on the edge of the dune line overlooking the beach, but there is no building debris in the dunes or on the foreshore below. About 200m south along the foreshore are the partially buried remains of some concrete filled sand bags (NT SMR 14592). These are most likely to have come from a pillbox, either as part of the main construction or as an interior fitting along the gun rest. They *may* have come from the above pillbox as the current of the sea would drag debris southwards over time.

Anti-tank cubes

Anti-tank cubes (other shapes were made in other areas) were made in enormous quantities and are the most plentiful type of defensive structure along the Northumberland coast and in the Alnmouth area. These were usually cast on site in concrete; the shape of the corrugated iron shuttering is still visible on the examples on the links at Alnmouth (timber shuttering was used at Druridge). Tactically, their purpose was to obstruct the progress of the tank and should it manage to cross, then it would expose its vulnerable underside to fire. As with all defensive structures dating to the Second World War, there was a standard template for building anti-tank cubes. As with most structures along the Northumberland coast, there was considerable local variation to these standard forms. Two sizes of cube were most common – 3ft 6 inches (1.07m) wide or 5ft (1.53m) wide (CBA 1996, 85). The smaller size was used near Birling Carrs, but the larger size adjacent to Alnmouth village. Spacing between the cubes was also standardized, in theory at 8ft 6inch from centre to centre, or corner to corner.



Plate 13. Two anti-tank cubes near the caravan park (NT SMR 14549)

Two small groups of anti-tank cubes can be found at the southern end of the landholding near the caravan park and Birling Carrs. The first group of two are set on top of the dunes and partially hidden from view by grass and a backdrop of thorn bushes. The second group consists of four cubes sitting on the high tide line and showing signs of having been shifted by wave action; one in particular is eroded. The vegetation growth on top of three of the cubes suggests that they have been buried beneath the dunes until relatively recently.



Plate 14. Group of four anti-tank cubes on the high tide mark north of the caravan site.

Other defensive structures

The Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment also identified a number of other defensive features. The summits of the dunes were crowned with barbed wire and a Nissen Hut was constructed to support the defensive system (NT SMR 14543). The trackway (NT SMR 14546) which had served the earlier sand pit and bathing house was enhanced and also continued in use as an access track to the pillbox, Nissen hut etc and is still used today as the coastal path. There is no evidence on site for these structures today; however a large flat area with differing vegetation growth may be the site of the 19th century sand pit, later reused as the site for the Nissen hut. However such depressions do occur naturally in dune systems.



Plate 15. Large flat area behind the dune system – this might be the site of the 19th century sand pit, perhaps reused as the site of the Second World War Nissen hut.

Archaeological Potential

The dune system south of Alnmouth is relatively stable, although some erosion has been exacerbated in the past by the quarrying at Birling Carrs. However Church Hill and the Aln estuary are constantly threatened by erosion and flooding²¹ and are also the areas within NT land of the greatest archaeological potential. These should be monitored regularly, but especially after severe weather incidents in order to identify any archaeological remains. Those already identified which are likely to be further exposed are the oyster beds, the site of the fords and mooring posts etc around Church Hill. The retaining wall needs to be inspected regularly around Church Hill as any damage to this could result in exposure of early church and human burials, or damage to the mortuary chapel. The stream which forms the southern boundary of the landholding should also be monitored after severe weather as fresh water courses, or rather the land around them, have been identified as

²¹ CRA2 map Alnmouth

being of high archaeological potential, particularly where the stream meets the sea.

Previous Archaeological and Historical Research

The Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment carried out by English Heritage with Archaeological Research Services has identified a number of features from the 1940s (see above) but these have not been added to the County HER yet. Some recording work on Church Hill and the guano shed at Buston Links has been carried out by Kris Strutt in 1998 as part of a Durham University dissertation. Additional research into Alnmouth village was carried out by the late Gladys Bettess, a local resident and archaeology post graduate student and an extensive urban survey was prepared by Northumberland County Council in 2003 on the village and its origins. There is no record of any other archaeological interventions within the National Trust landholding.

Conclusions and Statement of Significance

The primary significance of Buston Links relates to the Second World War use of the site, however there are other stretches of coastline with better preserved examples and a greater range of defensive site types within one area. In terms of the historic environment, this stretch of coast is therefore not significant. However the leased part of the landholding is of greater significance because it has the capacity to inform us about early Christian times and the growth and decline of industry. The significance of the landholding regarding other periods of human occupation is less well understood and therefore not considered to be significant at this stage. However this may change radically if remains are exposed as a result of shifting sands. The role of the National Trust wardens is important in monitoring this area of coastline so that any new discoveries are rapidly reported and investigated.

Rarity Value

The numbers of Second World War defences have been steadily diminishing since 1945. However they are now recognised as important archaeological

remains. In the past, wartime structures were seen as eyesores and it is still easy for them to be perceived in this way if a lack of interpretation and conservation allow them to become vandalised. In 1968 the National Parks commission stated:

'In the main, the eyesores are pillboxes and other wartime structures, rubbish tips, areas of barbed wire and derelict barges and other abandoned vessels'.

(Hardie 1994, 34)

Two years later the same attitude was espoused by the Countryside Commission:

'...two thirds of the derelict structures...mapped as eyesores by the local planning authorities...are of military origin, most of them dating from 1939-45. They include pillboxes, concrete blocks, gun emplacements and other wartime paraphernalia. The reason why so much of this mess still litters the coast so long after the war is that neither the Service Departments who put it there, nor any other Government department, were made to clear it up before disposing of the sites'. (Hardie 1994, 34)

Many wartime sites were deliberately destroyed after the war; farmers were paid £5 to remove them by the government. As a dwindling resource such defensive structures now have a rarity value, but Buston Links appear to have been sparsely furnished in the first instance and survival is not good. It is therefore not considered to be significant. Nationally, anti-tank traps are largely infilled or destroyed and so carry greater rarity value. Indeed only 206 are recorded in the Defence of Britain database. However the lack of any concentration of features and the poor survival of what little there was means that there are other stretches of coastline with far greater significance.

Church Hill and the historic features around it are rarer and the association with St Waleric is unusual (and Woden even more unusual, although the

association may have nothing to do with the Norse god). The leasehold area is therefore highly significant.

Documentary Evidence

Wartime defences also have the advantage of good documentary support and the potential for oral history accounts which can put flesh on the bare bones of empty concrete structures. The landholding is referred to in wartime diaries, and may also have archives in national collections. This adds to the site's significance.

The map coverage of the area is relatively good and the archives with Northumberland Estates still under-used. The potential overall significance for documentary sources is therefore high.

Associations with other sites and known political events

The features along Buston Links are part of a wider defensive system which is well recorded. They are not structures which sit in isolation, but part of a defensive network. Mostly linked by anti-tank ditches and anti-tank cubes, the entire site has a greater significance than its component parts. Because it can be linked into known wartime events, supplemented with details from national and local archives, it's significance is enhanced by these associations and anything which diminishes our understanding of how these features related to each other would also diminish its significance.

Saturday, 8th/Sunday, 9th November 1941 N798

'19.20.. Northumberland.. Alnmouth.. Two HEs Alnmouth Village [NU2410]. One bomb on a house in Argyle Street, the other in the roadway (a cul-de-sac). People trapped – still digging for four adults and three children believed buried. Later – five missing presumed dead, two died in hospital and twenty were injured. The bodies of a woman identified, also that of a man believed to be a Major Hawkes. Another woman's body recovered later. Three houses demolished, eleven uninhabitable and many others damaged badly. Telephone communication on the south side of the village cut off. Blame attached to two buses at terminus in Argyle Street – their headlights reflecting in the water. Bus company say only one bus was there and suggest that blame lies with occupants of Military billets who are careless with lighting when opening doors. Police note that such rumours are common after a raid. The final death toll was six women and one man.

*Night 798. All times BST. Blackout begins: 17.46, ends: 07.55
Industrial Alarm: 18.18, Release: 18.37'*

Ripley and Pears 1994-2007

The area is also associated with the attack by John Paul Jones in the 18th century, although his target was perhaps the town itself rather than the coastal strip to the south.

Amenity Value




Church Hill is visible for some distance and features in most tourist literature for Alnmouth. It is not always accessible, but that is probably part of its attraction. For the rest of the coastal strip it is remarkably well used and it has a greater potential for amenity than an equivalent defensive system on private or military land. Pillboxes and anti-tank cubes have a particular amenity value as they lend themselves well to the reconstruction of accounts that can be appreciated by all ages, however the only pillboxes known to have existed on the landholding appear to be destroyed and the anti tank cubes protecting the Salters Burn area are small in number. The cubes around the village are far more impressive. The anti-tank trap (if indeed that is what it is) is more difficult to identify without help and may be best interpreted with the aid of a warden (NT SMR 14547).




Statutory Status




The collective number, variety and condition of historic structures do not merit additional designation of nationally important monuments.

Gazetteer

NTSMR	Type	NGR	Date	Source	Condition	Description	Image
14542	Barbed wire obstruction	425016 608720 425025 608776 425008 608839 424967 608884	WW2	RCZA 1469596, 425025, 425008, 424967. RAF 4E/UK650 0022 12-JUN- 1941 Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	Barbed wire obstruction seen on aerial photographs dating to 1941	
14543	Nissen Hut	425021 608820	WW2	RCZA 1469596. RAF 106G/UK/477 3092 06-JUL- 1945 Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	Nissen Hut identified from aerial photographs dating to 1945. No evidence on site, but a level area behind the dunes may have been the location for the Nissen Hut.	
14544	Pillbox	425049 608802	WW2	RCZA 1469596. RAF 106G/SCOT/UK/ 24 4061 17-APR- 1946 Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	Pillbox of unknown type identified from aerial photographs dating to 1945. See also 14550.	
14546	Trackway	424959 608830	19 th centu ry and WW2	Site visit 21.2.09. RCZA 1469596. RAF 4E/UK650 0022 12-JUN- 1941 Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	Trackway visible on historic mapping and later reused to access defensive structures.	

14547	Anti-tank trench	425061 608529 *425022 608626	WW2	Field visit 21.2.09 RCZA 1469631. RAF 4E/UK650 0023 12-JUN- 1941 Site visit 21.2.09	Extant in one place*	Anti-tank ditch identified from aerial photographs dating to 1941. This is mostly filled in and invisible but a linear trench can be seen amongst the thorn bushes and bracken at NU 25022 08626	
14548	Barbed wire obstruction	425168 608174 425088 608570 425123 608394	WW2	RCZA 1469632. RAF 4E/UK650 0023 12-JUN- 1941 Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	Second World War barbed wire obstructions visible as a structures on air photographs. No surface features are visible on the latest 1988-1999 Ordnance Survey vertical photography.	
14549	Anti-tank cubes	425199 608085 425199 608086 425202 608102	WW2	RCZA 1469633. Visible on AP: RAF 106G/SCOT/UK/ 24 3061 17-APR- 1946 Site visit 21.2.09	two groups survive, one of two and one of four	A Second World War tank trap is visible as a structure on air photographs. The feature consists of a line of anti-tank cubes defending the break in dunes at Salters Burn.	
14592	Pillbox remains	425098 608572	WW2	Site visit 21.2.09	Destroyed	A small collection of concrete filled sandbags are partially buried along the foreshore – these may have come from a pillbox, possibly NT SMR 145544	
14593	Flint tools	unknown 425500 607994	prehis toric	NCC HER	stray finds, condition unknown	Flint tools have apparently been found at Birling Carrs	
14594	Bathing House	424700 607080	19 th centu	OS 1 st edition 6 inch	Destroyed	A bathing house is seen on the 1 st edition OS map (1860s) and is still in use when the	

			ry	OS 2 nd edition 6 inch OS 3 rd edition 6 inch Field visit 21.2.09		2 nd edition map is published. By 1920 when the 3 rd edition map is published the structure is still shown, but is no longer labelled as such.	
14595	Enclosure wall	424903 608894 424917 608857 424939 608803 424943 608801 424964 608745 424963 608746 425015 608613 425057 608105 425082 608411 425081 608407	18- 19 th centu ry	Site visit 21.2.09	Good, but repairs required	Enclosure wall forming the westward boundary of the landholding. Mostly in good condition, but repair works required at several places (mainly the NGRs). Large squared blocks of sandstone and smaller stones used for fill. Squared or semi circular capping stones. Four buttresses where wall has slumped in the past. Further slumping possible towards the north.	  

14596	gate	424963 608746	18- 19 th centu ry	Site visit 21.2.09	poor	small pedestrian gate of iron providing access into the enclosure NT SMR 14553	
14597	Quarrying	425172 608293 425148 608424 425147 608418	post medie val	NCC HER Site Visit 21.2.09	Good	Large area of quarrying at Birling Carrs. Drill holes visible and regular pools where rock has been removed. Graffiti on cliff edge.	
14598	hedging	425040 608549	18 th - 19 th c	Site visit 21.2.09	poor	remnant hedging showing signs of traditional laying technique of management	
14599	sandpit	424000 607800	20 th c	OS 3 rd edition 6 inch map	destroyed	sand pit shown on 3 rd edition OS map	
LEASEHOLD LAND							
14649	chapel	424584 609952	19 th c	NCC HER 5445	poor	mortuary chapel	
14651	chapel	424603 609902	12 th c	NCC HER 5433	destroyed	The chapel of St Waleric probably marked the site of a large pre-Conquest church. It was perhaps rebuilt in 1147 when it was given to Alnwick Abbey by Eustace FitzJohn. It has also been referred to as 'Woden's Chapel'. It is mentioned in 1305 and in a survey of 1567 it is stated that the chapel was at one time served by three priests and a clerk, whence it is evident that	

						<p>it was of large size and that it was covered with lead.</p> <p>From views of the chapel made in 1771(a), 1775(b) and 1804(c) we learn that 'the chapel was roofless at these times and much ruined.</p> <p>The last fragments were blown down on December 25th 1806.</p> <p>As the chapel is alleged to be a large building it seems very unlikely that it would have been built on such a steep slope when a near level portion of land occurs only 30 metres to the south. There are no remains of the chapel to be seen in the position shown on OS 6 inch, but at the highest point of the hill at NU 24581006 there is a single course of masonry running north-south. It measures 2m high and 0.2m wide and there is fair amount of rubble and mortar in close proximity to it. This wall may be part of the chapel, but only excavation would prove this; it is in a much superior situation to that at NU 24591009. This probable site of the chapel is somewhat confirmed by the presence of dressed and shaped stones at the foot of the steep slopes of the hill at NU 24541005 and NU 24621008. These stones would fall immediately down the slopes by the most direct route and infer the chapel to have been in the new site as stated previously.</p>	
14652	cross	424601 610117	10 th c	NCC HER N5705	In Museum of Antiquities	Anglo Saxon cross fragment found at the foot of church hill with the inscription 'Myredeh made me' in Old English	
14651	grave slabs	424580 610043	18 th c	Strutt 1998	stable	two 18 th century grave slabs visible on Church Hill. Locations approx as source does not use NGRs	

		424582 610034					
14655	pillbox	424608 609899	modern	NCC HER 5446	poor	concrete base visible on Church Hill	
14654	sea defence wall	424601 610092 424566 610117 424557 609998	19 th c	Strutt 1998 NCC 1994,50	poor?	A 19 th century sea defence wall around the base of Church Hill	
14663	sawmill	424312 609908	19 th c	1 st ed OS map	converted	now a house, was shown on 2 nd edition OS maps but disused by the 3 rd edition	
14664	house	424173 610093	19 th c	Fryers map 1820 Greenwood 1828	unknown	Waterside House has been shown on maps since 1820 although in 1828 it seems to be referred to as Riverside House.	
14658	stepping stones	42442 610232	19 th c	2 nd ed OS map	unknown	stepping stones marked as one route across the river on 2 nd ed OS maps dating to 1897	
14669	ferry crossing point	424628 610173	19 th c	2 nd ed OS map	destroyed	A ferry crossing point is shown across the Aln between Church Hill and Alnmouth on the 2 nd ed OS map dating to 1897	
14657	ford	424156 610474	19 th c medieval	1 st ed OS map	poor	High Ford shown on historic maps and partly exposed after heavy rain in 1992. Possibly one of the two fords of Twyford mentioned by Bede.	
14653	ford	424473 610112	19 th c medieval	1 st ed OS map	poor	Low Ford shown on historic maps and partly exposed after heavy rain in 1992. Possibly one of the two fords of Twyford mentioned by Bede.	
14665	granary	424714 609687	18 th c	Armstrong's map 1769 1 st – 3 rd ed OS map Strutt 1998	poor	Buston granary shown on historic mapping but now only an earthwork. Was apparently used as seasonal occupation before WW2. Armstrong's map shows two buildings and accounts of the site before WW2 suggest that there were other structures there.	
14662	oyster ponds	424183 610484	19 th c	1 st ed OS map	destroyed	Oyster beds shown on mid 19 th c mapping	
14670	event	42400	modern	Strutt 1998		survey and DBA of the guano shed and	

		60900	rn			granaries by Kriss Strutt	
14671	target	424899 609649	19 th c	1 st ed OS map	destroyed	target depicted on OS 1 st ed map out to sea	
14672	target	424905 609432	19 th c	2 nd ed OS map	unknown	target on triangulation point depicted on OS 2 nd ed map 1897. Possibly a replacement for target above	
14661	salt making	424106 610494	19 th c	NCC HER 5766	unknown	Pan Leasows possibly a former salt panning site. Some burnt material has been found here	
14660	salt making	424312 609908	19 th c	3 rd ed OS map 1920s	unknown	Area known as the Saltings on historic mapping	
14666	boundary stone	424568 609579	19 th c	2 nd and 3 rd ed OS map	unknown	a Boundary Stone is shown at the boundary between two parishes	
14667	well	424546 609534	19 th c	2 nd and 3 rd ed OS maps	unknown	A well is shown on historic mapping	
14673	enclosure	424742 609568	19 th c	2 nd ed OS map 1897	unknown	An enclosure shown on historic mapping, presumably now sand covered	
14674	enclosure	424757 609532	19 th c	2 nd ed OS map 1897	unknown	An enclosure shown on historic mapping, presumably now sand covered	
14668	mooring posts	424457 610086 424447 610137 424604 610142 424584 610123 424542 610043	19 th c	Bell MS in Strutt 1998 fig 50	unknown	mooring posts shown in the Bell manuscript of a survey dated 15 July 1863. Locations not accurate as estimated from survey and historic mapping	
14675	mooring posts	424533 610191 424473 610216	19 th c	Strutt 1998 fig 50	unknown	Marked as 'old mooring post' in Bell manuscript of a survey dated 15 July 1863. Locations not accurate as estimated from survey and historic mapping	
14676	buoy	424604	19 th c	Strutt 1998 fig 50	destroyed	Taken from Bell manuscript of a survey	

		610143				dated 15 July 1863. Locations not accurate as estimated from survey and historic mapping	
14677	slab	424609 609920	19 th c medieval	Strutt 1998 fig 50	unknown	Taken from Bell manuscript of a survey dated 15 July 1863. Locations not accurate as estimated from survey and historic mapping	
14656	building	424591 609915	20 th c	Strutt 1998	poor	a concrete cottage ruin at the foot of Church Hill	

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