

Northumbria Research Link

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Landscape Futures

As climate change imposes irrefutable consequences upon the Northumbrian landscape, the practices through which it is designed, structured, and managed will need to change. Over the coming decades this landscape must adapt to incorporate cleaner industries, enable more sustainable modes of agriculture, facilitate the production of greener forms of energy, and provide ecosystems with increased biodiversity. Furthermore, we must find innovative ways of creatively re-using our existing rural building stock rather than building anew. To avoid the deleterious and irreversible effects of past ‘revolutions’ on the landscape; this ‘green revolution’, whilst urgently necessary, requires a more compassionate, holistic attitude. This landscape still evidences the indelible consequences of historical, fleeting wholesale transformation. Such rapid domination often occurs from a single, technological standpoint; a position devoid of the specific physical and cultural qualities of place.

This required new ‘revolution’ need not mean the destruction of our regional landscape, but rather demonstrate a sensitivity to it by knowingly harnessing the latent potential of its existing structures and infrastructures in a way that helps us sustain a meaningful future. This emerging design research project considers the global ecological crisis, and the various ways in which it might be addressed, through a regional lens. We ask, what if forgotten, abandoned, and overlooked historical buildings and infrastructures, extant in the Northumbrian landscape, can be re-appropriated in ways which not only mitigate the effects of climate change, but retain, and even intensify, the specific character of our region?

To date, our research has been concerned with identifying, surveying, and making speculative design proposals for the re-appropriation of a variety of existing structures and infrastructures in the Northumbrian landscape. These seek to address the ecological crisis in a considered place-specific manner at a variety of different scales. One project re-imagines the ‘Wannie Line’, the route of the former Wansbeck Railway that ran from Morpeth to Reedsmouth and Rothbury (figure 1), as a new type of linear landscape condition or ‘corridor’ connecting a range of new ecosystems, increasing biodiversity and contributing to carbon offset. These potential ‘ecological corridors’ also become a prototype for a new model polity, where currently disparate local rural communities become reconnected. A second project explores options for the creative re-use of a series of abandoned water towers on the outskirts of Morpeth (figure 2). Alternative uses of these structures in their extant form are being explored alongside options for their de-construction and subsequent re-assembly in new locations to serve new purposes. A further project explores the potential re-appropriation of ruined lime kilns and their associated infrastructures in the surrounding countryside (figure 3). This project explores the viability of the kilns as future sites for the production of environmentally responsible, locally sourced building materials, and the potential of the quarries associated with the kilns to be used as locations for new, biodiverse habitats.

These emerging propositions are not absolutes; they exist as provocative models, methods and scenarios evidencing future possibilities; new forms of harmonious occupation alongside an understanding of a moderated human demand. These, carefully executed, will add to the human continuum of making place in an ancient landscape, recording its stories, and generating new meanings.

Mr Stephen Roberts

Assistant Professor
BA (Hons) Arch, Prof Dip, FHEA, ARB
Department Architecture & the Built Environment

Dr Shaun Young

Assistant Professor
BA(Hons), Grad. Dip. Arch., Ph.D, FHEA
Department Architecture & the Built Environment

Mr William Campbell

Assistant Professor
BA(Hons), Prof Dip (Dist), MA, FHEA, PGCert, ARB
Department Architecture & the Built Environment

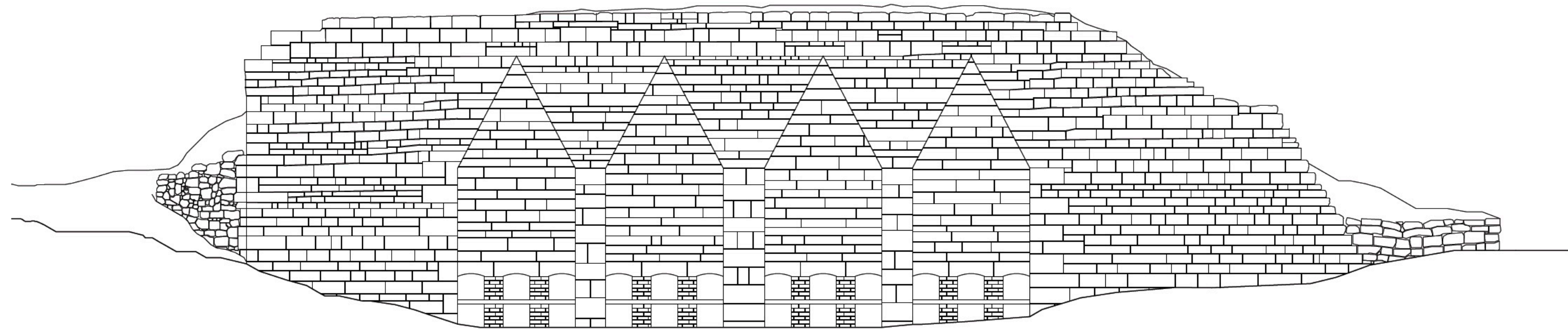
Figure One
The 'Wannie Line', Scots Gap, nr Morpeth

Figure Two:
Point cloud capture of redundant water tower, Tranwell, near Morpeth.

Figure Three:
Survey drawing of redundant lime kiln, Hartington, Tuthill, Wallington.







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