



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



EVALUATION TRENCHES 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6

HESLINGTON EAST, YORK

INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Between 14th–16th January 2008 York Archaeological Trust excavated several archaeological evaluation trenches within the Heslington East development site. These trenches, known as Trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5, formed part of a multi-trench archaeological evaluation of the Heslington 'B' areas. Trench 2 was located in the north central part of the site just south of Field Lane with Trench 3 positioned around 100m south of this. Trench 4 was located in the south central part of the site around 130m west of the major excavation area of A2, with Trench 5 being positioned to the south of Trench 4. It had been intended to excavate a further trench, Trench 6, to the south of, and at right angles, to Trench 8. Owing to severe standing water problems it was not possible to excavate this latter trench.

The trenches were mechanically excavated by a 360° excavator equipped with a toothless bucket and operated under direct archaeological supervision. The trenches were stripped of topsoil down to natural deposits.

Figure 1 shows the positions of trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5.

2. RESULTS

2.1 TRENCH 2

Trench 2 measured 22m x 2.5m, was aligned north-east – south-west and followed a gentle ground-fall of similar direction. Natural deposits of plastic, mid reddish brown clay containing cobbles and pebbles, context 12005, were encountered at the base of the trench at depths of between 0.40m – 0.58m BGL (typically between 22.55m – 23.54m OD).

Only a single linear feature aligned approximately east – west, 12003, was seen to cut into natural deposits and this towards the north-eastern end of the trench. This feature displayed moderately steep sides with a flattish base and measured up to 1.15m across though barely 0.26m deep. A single fill, 12004, occupied the cut. This was a mid orangish brown clayey silt containing very large amounts of pebbles and cobbles as well as occasional flecks of charcoal. No finds or other datable material was observed within this fill. This feature can be interpreted as a ditch and it is noteworthy that its alignment is similar to that of the principal east –west aligned elements of the ditch systems encountered in Areas A1 and A2.

The ditch was sealed by a deposit of mid reddish brown, silty sandy clay, context 12002. This material occurred as a band generally around 0.20m deep that extended fully across the trench. Although interpreted as a sub-soil it is worthy of note that 12002 appeared to seal

(rather than be cut by) ditch 12003. The uppermost deposit encountered in Trench 2 the extant topsoil of slightly plastic, mid greyish brown, clayey silt, context 12001.



Plate 1 *Trench 2, looking NE*



Plate 2 *Trench 2, ditch 12004, looking SW*

2.2 TRENCH 3

Trench 2 measured 32m x 2.5m, was aligned approximately north– south and followed a gentle ground-fall of broadly similar direction. Natural deposits of compact, slightly plastic, orangish brown slightly sandy clay containing frequent pebbles, context 13004, were encountered at the base of the trench at depths of between 0.30m – 0.43m BGL (typically between 18.16m – 17.54m OD). The veracity of identification of this material as natural was determined by additional machining at the base of the trench.

A single probable archaeological feature was tentatively identified in section – though not seen during stripping. This was cut 13003, which was located in the central part of the trench and appears to have been aligned approximately east – west. A single fill of plastic orangish brown slightly sandy clay (with a slight grayish hue) containing one or two flecks of charcoal, 13002, occupied the putative cut. The profile of this feature in section was one of variable, but generally moderately steep, sides and a flattish, slightly concave base, with width and depth dimensions of around 1.60m and around 0.20m respectively. Whilst a definitive interpretation of this feature cannot be made, it may represent part of a ditch, or possibly even part of a natural feature such as a tree bole.

The uppermost deposit in Trench 3 was the extant topsoil, context 13001, composed of slightly plastic, mid greyish brown, clayey silt that was generally in the region of 0.30m deep.



Plate 3 *Trench 3, looking N*

2.3 TRENCH 4

Trench 4 measured 49.5m x 2.2m-2.5m, was aligned north–south and lay on ground that was generally flat and level. Natural deposits were encountered at the base of the trench at depths of between 0.30m – 0.43m BGL (typically between 10.46m – 10.55m OD). These were seen to be of variable character, the northern three-quarters being composed of firm mid yellow sand containing occasional pebbles and the southern quarter of plastic, light reddish brown clay containing cobbles and pebbles. These were collectively numbered as context 14002.

A thin deposit of sub-soil, 14001, generally around 0.10m thick sealed natural 14002. This was also seen to be of variable composition, these variations coinciding with the changes in underlying natural. In the northern areas this material was a pale greyish yellow silty sand, whilst in the southern areas it was a yellowish brown clayey silt.

A single linear feature aligned approximately east – west, 12003, was seen to cut into the sub-soil deposits and this towards the north-eastern end of the trench. Upon investigation this proved to be a post-medieval land-drain. This feature represents the only 'archaeological' remains observed within the trench.

The uppermost deposit in Trench 4 was the extant topsoil, context 14000, composed of a firm, mid greyish brown, clayey silt that was typically in the region of 0.30m deep.



Plate 4 *Trench 4, looking N*

2.4 TRENCH 5

Trench 5 measured 50m long by 2.2m wide, was aligned north– south and lay on level, flat ground. Natural deposits, 15012, were encountered at the base of the trench at depths of between 0.35m – 0.42m BGL (typically between 10.44m – 10.65m OD). These were seen to be composed of firm, mid brownish yellow sand that contained occasional patches of light brown clay and occasional small pebbles.

A total of five features, all aligned approximately east – west cut into 15012. All extended the entire width of the trench and proved to be shallow, surviving for depths of 0.08m – 0.22m only. The distribution of these was fully along the length of the trench and they are described below from north to south. The first of these, 15003, was some 0.70m wide, 0.08m deep and displayed gently sloping sides with a concave base. The single fill, 15002, was a light brownish grey, clayey silt. Some 17m south of 15003 lay cut 15007. This measured just in excess of 1.70m wide, had a depth of 0.22m and again possessed gently sloping sides and a concave base. 15007 was backfilled with 15006, a mid grayish brown clayey silt containing occasional charcoal flecks and small pebbles. Occupying the central part of the trench was a 0.18m deep cut 15005. This was again gentle sided and had a concave base though a slight step in the northern side of the profile may relate to a re-cutting/alignment which may account for the width of around 2.44m. A fill of light greyish brown sandy silt, 15004, containing occasional flecks of charcoal and a number of very small fragments of brick/tile fragments of probable Roman date occupied cut 15005. Some 5.50m south of this point lay cut 15009. This measured some 2.20m wide, had a depth of up to 0.14m and again displayed gentle sides and a concave base. The single fill of this feature was a mid brownish grey clayey sand, 15008, that contained occasional pebbles. The most southerly of the cuts, 15011, was some 0.75m wide, 0.10m deep and resembled little more than a shallow linear scoop. A backfill of light greyish brown sandy silt containing flecks of charcoal and brick/tile, 15010 occupied cut 15011.

The series of parallel aligned shallow cuts may represent the basal parts of severely truncated ditches. However, whilst all features in the nearby A2 area of excavation are truncated the ditches in that area have seldom been truncated to such a degree. An alternative to this interpretation would be to view these shallow cuts as the remnants of a medieval ridge and furrow field system; it being noted that the ridge and furrow in the eastern side of A2 is of broadly similar alignment.

An overall layer of yellowish brown sandy silt between 0.07m – 0.16m thick, 15001, sealed the linear cuts. This is interpreted as sub-soil type material. The uppermost deposit, 15000,

was a dark brown, slightly clayey sandy silt typically around 0.30m deep and represents the extant topsoil.



Plate 5 *Trench 5, looking N*

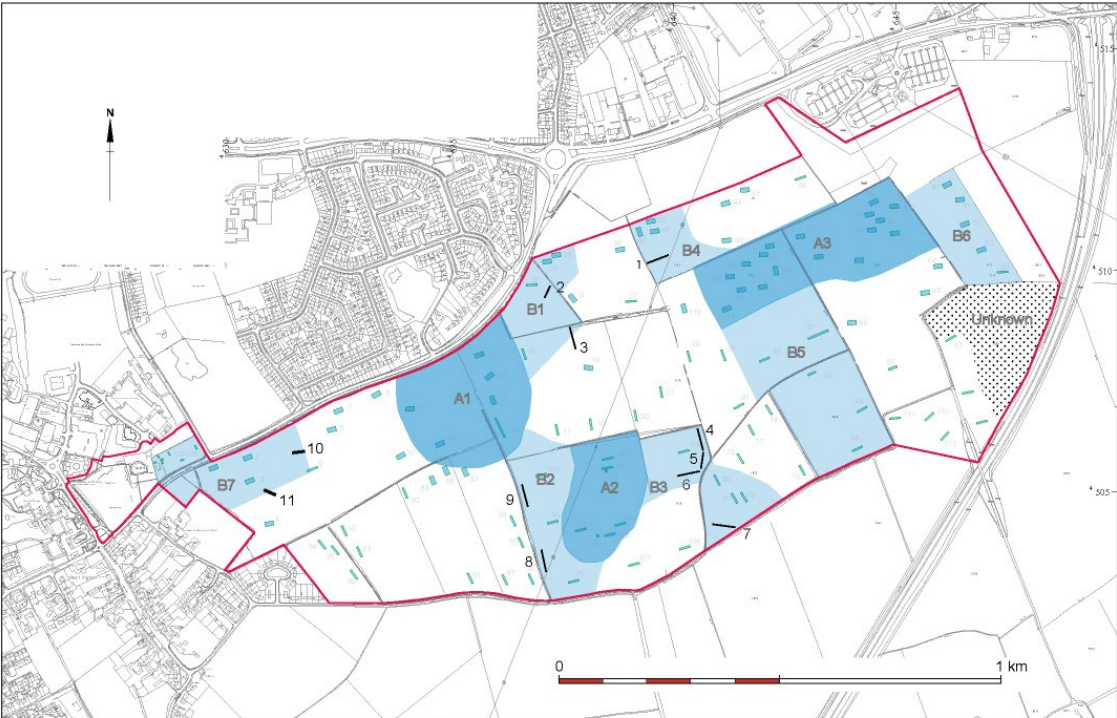


Figure 1 Plan showing the location of Evaluation Trenches (black) 2-6