



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST – WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

SITE ADDRESS	University of York, Heslington East, York		
CLIENT NAME	University of York		
YAT PROJECT #	5112	YAT REPORT #	2007/62
MUSEUM ACCESSION #	YORAT: 2007.6006	GRID REFERENCE	SE 6330 5081
DATE OF VISIT	28/11/07, 29/11/07		

INTRODUCTION

On 28th and 29th November 2007, York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological watching on land to the south-east of Field Lane, Heslington, York. The watching brief was to observe the topsoil stripping along the line of a haul road to provide access for vehicles during the early stages of groundworks and archaeological work associated with the new campus of the University of York. The line of the new road had been surveyed in and marked by Faber Maunsell and the excavation work was carried out by Houseman and Falshaw Ltd. Approximately 75% of the stripping had taken place by the time an archaeologist could be present but since work was being concentrated on the access to and from Field Lane there was plenty of time to walk along the stripped section and do any necessary recording required. The distances quoted in this report are from the centre of the junction between the new haul road and Field Lane and were obtained using a 30m tape in conjunction with the plans supplied by Faber Maunsell and the survey pegs marking the line of the road which were generally at set 20m intervals.

RESULTS

At c.47m from Field Lane the sequence of deposits was as follows; the uppermost layer was a mid brown very slightly clayey silt capped with rough grass and scrub the top of which lay at c.18.6m OD. This overlay a firm, mid brown slightly clayey silt with occasional pebbles. Between 0.3m below modern ground level (BGL) and the base of the strip at 0.4m BGL there was a mid orange very slightly clayey sand with occasional pebbles and this was believed to be natural. (1). At c.70m and 73.5m there were the fragmentary remains of two roughly parallel ceramic field drains (2) aligned approximately east-west. Both were too badly damaged to give precise details but they were probably both circular and possibly c.0.1m in diameter. Another very similar land drain was observed at c.130m (3). At this point the modern ground surface was at c.18.7m OD.

At 155m there was recorded a possible linear feature (4) of uncertain function. It was aligned approximately north-south and had irregular, slightly wavy, sides and it protruded c.1.1 into the strip from the north-east edge of the strip. It was around 0.65m wide at its maximum. It had a roughly semi-circular terminal and was backfilled with a soft, light brown clayey sand. At c.160m the natural began to change to a firm, mid orange-brown slightly clayey sand with moderate rounded pebbles. This point marked the southern limit of Field 5A in which all the above observations were made. The boundary between Field 5A and Field 3, to the south, was marked by a distinct bank with a hedge approximately halfway down its southern side. The main body of the bank was made up of dark greyish-brown silt which was up to 0.6m deep. This overlay a layer of mid brown slightly clayey silt of variable depth, but normally between c.0.1m and 0.3m. This sealed the natural mentioned above which was cut into by the machine to a depth of c.0.7m (5). The top of the bank lay at c.19.5m OD and stood around 0.7m above the modern ground level to the north and immediate south.

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South of the bank all observations were made within Field 3. The first of these, at c.170m, was that the natural changed slightly to become a mixture of mid orange-brown sand and medium gravel (6). At 190m there was a straight-sided linear feature (7), quite possibly a substantial ditch, aligned east-west, traced across the full width of the road strip. It was c.1.8m wide and had a backfill of firm, mid orange-brown slightly clayey silt with occasional pebbles. This was sealed by c.0.3m of topsoil, a mid to dark brown very slightly clayey silt, capped by stubble and weeds, the top of which lay at c.17.9m OD. From around this point the ground to the south began to slope down quite steeply. At c.235m the natural changed again becoming a firm, light to mid orange-brown sand containing only very occasional gravel (8). The sequence of deposits recorded at c.255m was; topsoil, c.0.25m thick, which was a mid brown silt overlying a 0.1m thick deposit of light to mid orange-brown sand which lay above a firm, mid greyish-brown silt with moderate pebbles, also c.0.1m thick (9). This was above a mid orange-brown sand similar to that noted at c.235m. In the vicinity of this observation the modern ground surface lay at c.13.8m OD. At approximately 315m from Field Lane the natural changed to a light yellow slightly clayey sand with moderate amounts of gravel. Here only a single overlying deposit of topsoil could be identified. This was a dark brown very slightly clayey silt capped with stubble and weeds and the top of this lay at c.12.1m OD (10). From this point the slope began to level out although it was still dipping gently down towards the south.

Between c.320m and 430m, the southern end of the strip marked by a recent ditch, there was a relative abundance of features. Lying between c.322.5m and 329m was a series of three parallel slots. They were all 0.2m to 0.3m wide, separated by c.0.3m to 0.4m and had a similar fill of mid brown very slightly clayey sandy silt. The northernmost two seemed to fade out as they crossed the trench but the southern slot was traced across the full width of the strip. Approximately 7m south of the southernmost feature was a very distinct linear feature aligned approximately east-west and crossing the full width of the strip. It was c.1.1m wide to the west narrowing to 0.75m at the east side of the strip and had a fill of mid brown slightly clayey sandy silt with occasional patches of light yellowish-brown slightly clayey sand. Roughly 5m south of this feature was another set of what initially appeared to be parallel slots similar to those between c.322.5m and 329m and aligned roughly east-west. After cleaning it became apparent that these slots disappeared into a mass of nebulous other features some 2m east of the west side of the strip. These features were all c.0.2m to 0.3m wide and there was between 0.1m and 0.2m between them. The central slot was partially excavated and found to be just 0.08m deep. None of the other slots or vague features (12) were excavated but all were seen to have a very similar fill of mid brown very slightly clayey sandy silt. A number of other features were encountered lying between c.390m and 410m (11). The northernmost of these, at c.391m, although clearly visible, was not easily interpreted but was at least 0.85m by 0.7m and may have been the rather damaged remains of cross-cutting plough scars. Approximately 7m south of the possible plough scars was another set of three parallel slots, again aligned approximately east-west, and these were clearly traced across the full width of the strip. All were c.0.25m wide and between 0.2m and 0.3m apart and had a backfill of mid greyish-brown slightly clayey sandy silt with occasional pebbles and very occasional charcoal. Yet another set of three parallel slots, aligned roughly east-west, was located c.1.4m further south of those described above, at

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c.400m, and these were c.0.3m to 0.4m wide with gaps of c.0.1m between them. Part of the southernmost of these was excavated and found to be c.0.1m deep with moderately sloping sides and a flattish irregular base. All had a very similar fill: a mid greyish-brown slightly clayey sandy silt with occasional pebbles. The possible plough scars and the to sets of parallel slots south of them were all cut into a natural composed of fairly loose, light yellowish-brown sand.

Between c.401m and the end of the strip at c.424m no certain features were noted but the sequence of deposits in this area was as follows; the topsoil was a loose, dark brown sandy silt capped with stubble and weeds. It was c.0.25m deep and sealed a layer of firm, mid greyish-brown slightly clayey sandy silt containing small pieces of brick / tile, which appeared to be no more than around 50mm deep. This sandy silt appeared to fill a large number of shallow depressions of uncertain shape and size, cut or worn into the natural which was generally a firm, but sometimes loose, light yellowish sand, slightly brown or orange in places and distinctly more orange between c.400m and 405m. Towards the end of the strip, at c.430m, the existing modern ground level lay at c.11.1m OD.

No finds were recovered during the watching brief and thus no dates can be given with any certainty to the features and many of the deposits recorded. Few features were noted within Field 5A but the linear feature seen at c.155m may be of some archaeological significance since its alignment does not match any of the nearby field boundaries and it was seen to terminate within the strip. The linear feature noted at c.190m may be of interest since its alignment appeared to roughly parallel to the hill contours. Its width of 1.8m may indicate that it was a fairly substantial ditch whose original function was to demarcate the boundary between the roughly level area of Field 5A and the relatively steeply sloping northern part of Field 3. If this is a ditch it is possible that part or more of the area to the north-east known as Kimberlow Hill. In Field 3 the most interesting observations were of the sets of three parallel slots and the linear feature at c.336m. The linear feature may be another ditch and this too ran roughly parallel to the contours of the higher ground to the north. Its true function is uncertain but it seemed to be on the same alignment as the parallel slots and may be associated with them. The slots, although initially resembling filled in field drain trenches, were devoid of ceramic pipes. Where excavated, these slots had an undisturbed backfill and were probably too shallow to have held field drains and their function remains unclear. Perhaps a detailed examination of the results of previous archaeological work in the vicinity, Fields 5A and 3 were amongst a substantial number of fields across the proposed development area subject to an archaeological evaluation in 2003 – 2004, may throw some light on these otherwise enigmatic features.

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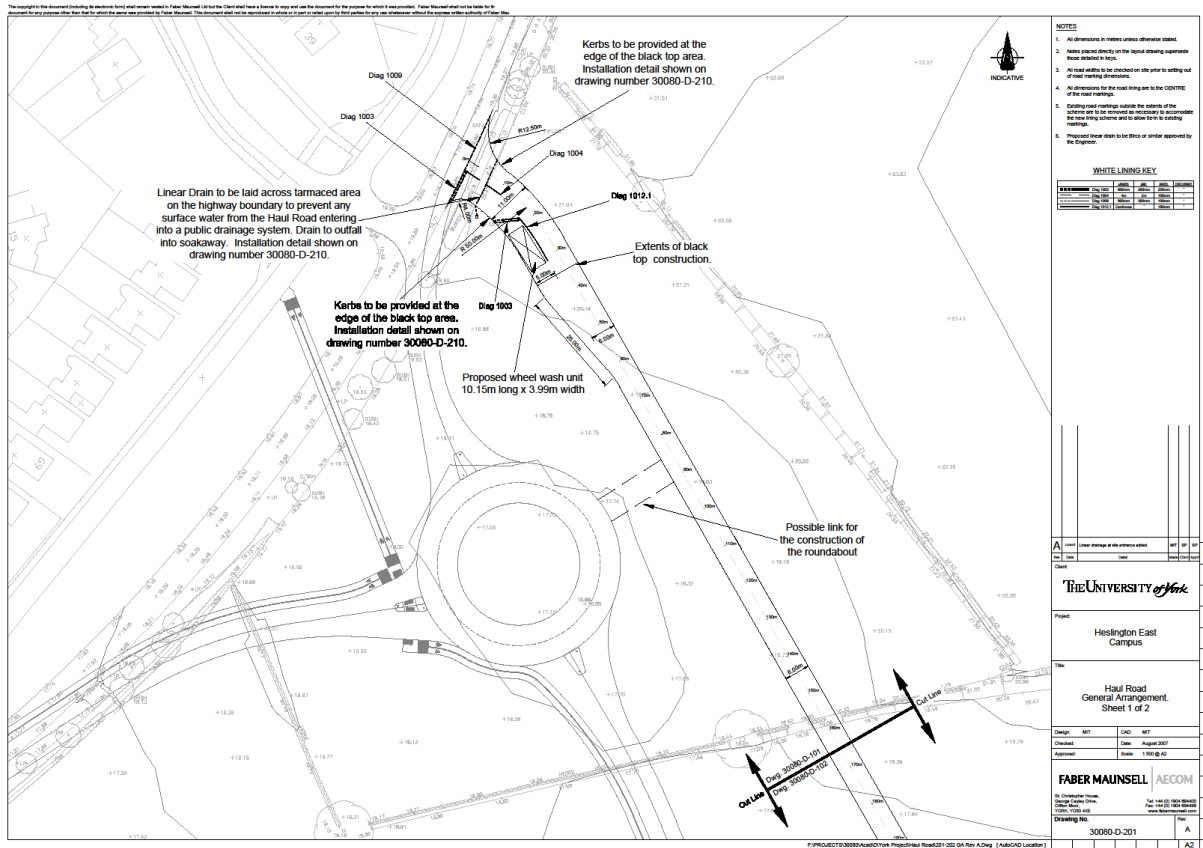


Figure 1 Location plan on the northern portion of the haul road
(developer supplied plan, not to scale)

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*Figure 2 Location plan on the southern portion of the haul road
(developer supplied plan, not to scale)*

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