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Archaeological Watching Brief at 19 Westgate, Tadcaster

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Figure 2: Location of Trenches 1 and 2 within the disused sorting office

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Summary

This is the report of a Watching Brief undertaken by Fern Archaeology, on behalf of Mr and Mrs Foster of 19 Westgate, Tadcaster. It comprised the observation, on the 5th December 2005, of the excavation of two wall-foundation trenches located within the confines of the disused postal sorting office, situated at the rear of the existing post office. A third trench was also dug across the side passageway at the junction of the sorting office and the post office buildings to locate a cable: this encountered only modern rubble and so was not recorded. Both the wall-foundation trenches demonstrated surviving archaeology and produced small amounts of medieval pottery and animal bone. In the northern half of Trench 1 this was found to be within a surviving archaeological deposit of probable late medieval or post-medieval date, into which was cut the shallow foundation trench of a modest limestone wall. The remnants of a second wall and flagstone surface were observed at the southern end of the same trench, for which a probable nineteenth century date is suggested. Trench 2 contained a layer of limestone rubble, together with a surface of redeposited clay, suggestive of earlier leveling and demolition episodes, though of indeterminate date.

Site Location and Interventions

The site is located within the disused postal sorting office at the rear of the current Post Office, at 19 Westgate, Tadcaster, at grid reference SE 4848 4345 (**Figure 1**). This is just to the north of the junction of Westgate and Chapel Street. The purpose of the development is the conversion of the sorting office into three retail units (ref 8/73/263C/PA). This will retain much of the structure of the existing building, aligned on an east-west axis, but required the hand excavation of two wall-foundation trenches for the dividing walls (**Figure 2**). This area lies within the historic core of Tadcaster.

Archaeological and Historical background

Place-name evidence

The modern place-name Tadcaster includes as its second component the Anglo-Saxon element *ceastre* (-caster), denoting a walled Roman town or city. The Tad- component may preserve an Anglo-Saxon name (Ekwall 1960).

Prehistoric and Roman (BC-AD 410)

Tadcaster has been identified with the Roman settlement of *Calcaria*, a name which refers to the limestone rich resources around which a quarry town may have been established. It is probable that the modern Station Street preserves the line of the Roman road, which crossed the River Wharf to the north of the medieval and current bridge. The strategic nature of this crossing may also have been the focus for an early Roman fort. A concentration of Roman finds has been made in the area of this crossing point, around the churchyard and castle (Bulmer 1890). This area is a short distance to the north of the current development.

The existence of prehistoric archaeology in the vicinity has been shown by recent archaeological work in the area of Chapel Street and the High Street (WYAS 1995a & b).

Medieval (AD 410-1603)

Bede records a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon monastery at *Kaelcacaestir*, a modified place-name version of the Roman *Calcaria*, which may indicate some continuity of settlement in the early Anglo-Saxon period (*HE* IV.23). Into the medieval period Tadcaster regained its importance as a strategic river crossing and may have been fortified as early as the Viking period. The surviving eleventh-century motte and bailey

castle is all that now visibly remains of the town's defences. The current development is near the centre of the medieval marketplace. This was originally focused on a stone-cross, which local memory relates was replaced by the war-memorial (Bulmer 1890).

Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries

In 1642 Tadcaster was the site of a civil war battle, focused on the bridge, for control of the Leeds-York routeway. The town's location on this major routeway also insured its prosperity in the period, resulting in it becoming an important staging post for coaches. The major industry of this period, however, was that of brewing (Bulmer 1890).

Archaeological Watching Brief

The Watching Brief concerned the monitoring of two wall-foundation trenches, and a third narrow trench located across the side passageway at the junction of the sorting office and the post office building, which was opened to locate a cable: this last intervention encountered only modern rubble and so was not recorded. All trenches were hand-dug. Both the wall-foundation trenches produced archaeological evidence which was recorded in section and plan. The context records are detailed in the Appendix.

Trench 1 (Figure 3)

The location of Trench 1 within the confines of the disused postal sorting office is shown in **Figure 2**. It measured approximately 7 x 0.7 metres. It was truncated at its southern end by a pipe trench containing the remains of a modern ceramic pipe. Running for the full length of the trench and approximately 0.2 – 0.4 metres in depth was a modern demolition/levelling layer (**context 1**) containing fragments of ceramic brick and tile, and limestone blocks. Within this layer and midway along the trench were the remains of what appeared to be a sequence of horizontal uncemented brick surfaces, most probably the remains of a floor. Within the southern half of this trench, this rubble layer overlay a further floor surface (**context 2**) of laid schist flagstones, together with uncemented bricks and the remains of a limestone wall of worked blocks. Upon removal of the schist slab this was found to be underlain by a layer of crushed clinker and ceramic fragments. This and the inclusion of moulded brick fragments suggest a nineteenth or early twentieth-century date.

Within the northern half of the trench, context 1 sealed a layer of brown silty clay (**context 4**) containing small limestone inclusions, flecks of charcoal, animal bone fragments and sherds of pottery. The sherds include one of medieval *Green-glaze* pot and several of *Cistercian ware* or *Blackware* (**Figure 5.1**). These pieces of pottery suggest that the layer dates to the late medieval or early post-medieval period (Brooks 1987). A small sondage 0.6 x 0.6 metres was cut through this deposit to confirm it as an intact layer. This intervention contacted a further deposit (**context 5**) of brown silty clay containing redeposited natural clay. A further section of brown silty clay appeared to

survive intact at the trench's mid-point. In addition, cut into context 4 at its northern extent was the remains of a limestone wall (**context 3**). The absence of any brick inclusions may suggest a post-medieval date for this feature, although this is unsubstantiated.

Trench 2 (Figure 4)

The location of Trench 2 within the confines of the disused postal sorting office is shown in **Figure 2**. It measured approximately 7 x 0.7 metres. It was truncated at its southern end by a pipe trench containing the remains of a modern ceramic pipe. As in Trench 1, a modern demolition/levelling layer (**context 1**) containing fragments of ceramic brick and tile, and limestone blocks ran for the full length of the trench and was approximately 0.2 – 0.3 metres in depth. In addition, a single sherd of medieval *Green-glaze* pot and one of *Cistercian ware* (**Figure 5.2**) were found within this layer, redeposited due to previous disturbance to underlying archaeological deposits. Underlying context 1 were two deposits of fragmented limestone blocks mixed with redeposited natural clay (**contexts 6 and 7**). No dating evidence was retrieved from these contexts. The southernmost of these two deposits (**context 6**) was cut along its northeast edge by the overlying context 1. During excavation schist floor slabs and limestone blocks were removed from this vicinity, which probably relate to the structure observed in Trench 1 (**context 2**), and hence the transition from modern rubble to limestone deposit may mark the furthest extent of this building. Between the two limestone rubble deposits was one of redeposited natural yellow-brown clay (**context 8**), containing small limestone fragments. It is possible that this may be a floor surface, although this was not datable.

Archaeological Potential

The presence in Trench 1 of intact late medieval or early post-medieval archaeology suggests that there is, given the historical context of the site, good potential for surviving archaeological deposits within the vicinity.

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Appendix: Archaeological Context Descriptions

Context	Trench	Type	Munsell Colour	Soil Type	Inclusions	Finds	Max. Depth	Date
1	1 and 2	Layer	-	-	medium to large limestone angular blocks (frequent), CBM (moderate), clinker (rare), sand (rare)	medieval pottery (rare)	0.4 m	<i>modern, 19th-20th century</i>
2	1	Structure – Wall & Floor	-	-	worked limestone blocks, moulded bricks, schist floor slabs	-	0.2 m	<i>post-medieval, 18th-19th century</i>
3	1	Structure – Wall	-	-	worked limestone blocks	-	0.2 m	<i>post-medieval, 17th – 19th century</i>
4	1	Layer	10YR 3.2	silty clay	small limestone chips (moderate), charcoal (moderate), sub-rounded flint (moderate)	animal bone (rare), medieval pottery (rare)	0.35 m	<i>late medieval or post-medieval, 15th-17th century</i>
5	1	Layer?	10YR 3.2 & 5.6	silty clay and clay (redeposited)	small limestone chips (moderate), charcoal (moderate), sub-rounded flint (moderate)	-	-	<i>medieval ? or post-medieval, 13th-17th century</i>
6	2	Layer?	-	-	small to large angular limestone (frequent)	-	-	<i>post-medieval ?, 16th-19th century</i>
7	2	Layer?	10YR 5.6	clay (redeposited)	small to large angular limestone (frequent)	-	-	<i>post-medieval ?, 16th-19th century</i>
8	2	Layer	10YR 5.6	clay (redeposited)	small limestone chips (moderate)	-	-	<i>late medieval ? or post-medieval ?, 15th-19th century</i>