

NYCC HER	
SNY	10012
ENY	2945
CNY	4115
Parish	3068
Rec'd	23/12/05

MUSLEY BANK HOUSE, MUSLEY BANK,
MALTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION
AND RECORDING

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Report no:	2005/266.R01
Version:	Final
Date:	December 2005
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On behalf of

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING (WATCHING BRIEF),
MUSLEY BANK HOUSE, MUSLEY BANK, MALTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2005, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by Mr Ian Brisby to undertake a programme of archaeological observation and recording (a watching brief) during limited groundworks associated with the erection of a storage building and attached greenhouse at Musley Bank House, Musley Bank, Malton, North Yorkshire (NGR SE76407036). The archaeological recording was made a condition of planning permission (application 04/01457/FUL) granted by Ryedale District Council on 1st April 2005.

Although limited in extent, the watching brief revealed no evidence for a Roman mosaic which was apparently uncovered at Musley Bank in 1817 and c.1838, nor for any villa or other Roman structures that might have been associated with it. A limestone rubble surface was identified beneath the topsoil and subsoil, but this is unlikely to be the "Roman pavement" described in the early 19th century, although in the absence of any dating evidence its age remains uncertain. The limestone rubble surface sat directly on a natural deposit of sand, overlying weathered mudstone, and it was partially disturbed by hardcore deposits associated with 20th century terracing and a tarmac track.

It is concluded that any Roman mosaic and associated structures which might have been present in the early 19th century lie under the stables and other former farm buildings located to the west and north-west of the main house at Musley Bank. However, it is equally possible that all remains were heavily disturbed or even destroyed when these buildings were originally constructed, presumably in the 1830s and before 1854 when they are depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" map.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In April 2005, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) were commissioned by Mr Ian Brisby to undertake a programme of archaeological observation and recording (a watching brief) during limited groundworks associated with the erection of a storage building and attached greenhouse at Musley Bank House, Musley Bank, Malton, North Yorkshire (NGR SE76407036).
- 1.2 The archaeological recording work was made a condition (number 3) of planning permission (application 04/01457/FUL) granted by Ryedale District Council on 1st April 2005. The scale and scope of the archaeological work was defined by a standard Written Scheme of Investigation produced by the local archaeological curators, the Heritage Section at North Yorkshire County Council (see Appendix 2).

2 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 Musley Bank House lies in an elevated position on the north side of the valley of the River Derwent, some 3km south-west of the centre of the town of Malton (at NGR SE76407036) (see figure 1).
- 2.2 The house stands on an extensive artificial terrace, with farm buildings, now converted to residential and stabling use, to the west; almost all these buildings had assumed their overall existing plans by 1854. There are further artificial terraces to the north of the house, rising in three broad steps, which form gardens and patios. These make extensive use of stone paving and revetment walls, and were largely created by the house's current owners.
- 2.3 To the north of a brick wall on the south side of the uppermost terrace, there is a tarmac access track which formerly led to the rear gateway of another property located immediately to the east. Beyond the track, the ground rises steeply as a grass field. The watching brief took place in the area adjacent to the north side of the tarmac track, close to the former entrance of the adjacent property (see figure 3 and below).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Although located close to the important Roman centre of Malton (*Derwentio*), the first indication that there may have been any Roman activity in the immediate area of Musley Bank came in 1817, when the Ordnance Survey Name Book notes that a Roman pavement was discovered there (Corder & Kirk 1928, 78). Further details of this discovery were provided by Hinderwell, who stated in 1825 that:

"At Mosley Bank, a farm about a mile from Malton, in the direction of Castle Howard, a Roman pavement was discovered, part of which is yet underground, behind the horse-wheel of a Threshing Machine, within some strong foundation walls. The owner, on the discovery of the pavement and walls, directed them to be covered with earth again, intending to have them laid open and examined at some future time, which his death prevented." (Hinderwell 1825 vol 1, 103; quoted in Neal & Cosh 2002, 3 and Clark 1935, 111).

- 3.2 Some 13 years later, in 1838, Walker could only note that "At Mosley Bank only 1 mile from Malton, a Roman Pavement, Urns and Coins have been discovered"; the accompanying map names the site as Mossey Bank (Walker 1838, 404). However, Whelan, writing in 1857-9, says:

"About twenty years ago, a handsome Roman tessellated pavement, exhibiting an urn and other figures, was discovered on this estate; and about 2 years ago, near the same place but on the adjoining farm called Roughborough, now in the occupation of Mr William Monkton, another Roman pavement was found, whilst cutting for a drain" (Whellan 1859 vol 2, 618; quoted in Clark 1935, 111).

- 3.3 Taken together, these accounts suggest that a mosaic, rather than just a plain tessellated floor, was discovered in 1817 at Musley Bank, and that the same feature or part of the same feature was exposed again in c.1838 (sometimes given as 1842 (NYCC HER 3017)), with associated finds; Whellan may have mistakenly taken Walker's reference to a ceramic urn to mean an urn shown on a mosaic (Neal & Cosh 2002, 3). The adjoining farm at Roughborough is located some 450m to the south of Musley Bank.
- 3.4 The discovery of mosaic fragments with associated finds indicate the possible presence of a Roman villa in the area of Musley Bank. However, in common with many early 19th century finds, the sites were never located accurately and so some doubt exists as to their exact placement, although the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" map of 1854 (sheet 124) marks "Roman Pavement found here" along the north edge of Musley Bank. Late 19th century sources are no better, merely repeating early to mid 19th century information but adding little to it. *Bulmer's Directory* for 1890 notes that in 1889 Mr James Snarry had spent "£1,200 in draining, building stables and fitting the place for the accommodation of his racing stock" at Musley Hill but it makes no mention of any Roman finds, although the discovery of a "tessellated pavement" at the adjoining Ricborough is noted (www.genuki.org.uk). The 1911 Ordnance Survey 25" map (sheet 124/9) marks a cross to the north of a T-shaped building at Musley Bank, accompanied by the annotation "Roman Pavement found A.D. 1817-42" (see figure 2). This cross can be approximately located to the area between an existing modern electricity pole and present stable block (see figure 3).
- 3.5 The site at Musley Bank has been included in early 20th century local and regional surveys of Roman remains (e.g. Corder & Kirk 1928, 78; Clark 1935, 111; Neal & Cosh 2002, 3), and one of these sources also states that a Roman mill or quern was found at Musley Bank before 1935 (Clark 1935, 111). It is believed that an air-raid shelter was built on or close to the site during the Second World War (NYCC HER 3017). The current owner of Musley Bank House has built up the ground on the north side of the house over the past 25 years to facilitate the construction of a number of terraces, and a stable has recently been erected immediately to the east of the site on the adjoining property. There was also once a sheep-dip in the vicinity of the proposed development (Mr Ian Brisby, *pers. comm.*). Despite all this activity, no further information regarding the Roman remains on the site has come to light.

4 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor the limited groundworks associated with the new development and to record and recover any information relating to any archaeological features or deposits which might be uncovered or disturbed by the works.
- 4.2 The groundworks were continuously monitored, on 12th September 2005. As there was no permanent benchmark on the site, a temporary benchmark was established on the top of an adjacent wall that will remain in place (see figure 3) and given a nominal value of 100m AD.

- 4.3 All groundworks were undertaken using a wheeled JCB excavator with either a 0.50m or 0.80m toothed bucket. Initially, an area of turf and topsoil c.13m long (east/west) by c.7m wide (north/south) was removed. A new level building platform was then created for the proposed domestic store by terracing into the adjacent slope; an area c.12m in length (east/west) and c.5.5m in width (north/south) was excavated, leaving a south-facing section along the northern edge standing to a maximum height of between 1.10m to 1.50m (see plate 4). The reduced ground level across the platform was c.98.77m AD.
- 4.4 Finally, in order to establish the nature of the deposits underlying the tarmac track, the eastern footing trench of the new domestic store was dug out across the levelled building platform. The trench was c.6m long and 0.80m wide, and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.875m below ground level (BGL) or 97.89m AD. The proposed greenhouse attached to the south-east corner of the domestic store did not require any deep footings. Given the largely negative results obtained from the site clearance and the north-south aligned footing trench (see below), it was decided to discontinue the watching brief before the rest of the foundations were excavated.
- 4.5 Following standard archaeological procedures, each discrete stratigraphic entity (eg. a cut, fill, or layer) was assigned an individual context number and detailed information was recorded on *pro forma* context sheets. A total of five archaeological contexts were recorded, and these are described in the following text as three digit numbers (e.g. 005) (see also Appendix 1). In-house recording and quality control procedures ensured that all recorded information was cross-referenced as appropriate. The positions of all the monitored groundworks were marked on a general site plan at 1:200 scale, and a sketch section through the site was made. A photographic record was also maintained using 35mm colour prints.
- 4.6 In accordance with the EDAS procedures, and with the agreement of the site owner, the project archive, comprising written and photographic elements, has been deposited with Malton Museum (site code BM 05).

5 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

- 5.1 Prior to the groundworks being carried out, the majority of the site was formed by a steeply sloping grass bank, rising slightly to meet the former line of a conifer hedge which had been established in c.1967 (Mr Ian Brisby, *pers. comm.*). The site then fell away to a level track with a tarmac surface forming the southern edge of the site (see plate 1); the total fall in height across the area of groundworks averaged 1.60m.
- 5.2 Following the removal of the turf and a loose black silt loam topsoil (001) on average 0.1m thick, an orange sandy silt subsoil with frequent inclusions of small angular limestone pieces (003) was exposed. This latter deposit was very shallow at the north end of the cleared platform, but it increased in depth towards the south and west sides, reaching a maximum depth of 0.60m (or 0.70m BGL) at the west end of the northern south-facing section.
- 5.3 The sandy slit subsoil (003) overlay a surface 0.10m thick made of compacted pieces of angular limestone (002), all less than 0.05m across (see plate 2). A narrow strip of topsoil and subsoil was cleared on the north side of the excavated building platform, confirming that this compacted surface (002) continued further to the north. The surface sloped quite steeply downwards from north to south, and appeared to become lost or disturbed c.0.5m north of the northern gatepost in the wall adjacent to the east end of the site. The slope of the surface was not even and it may have contained one very shallow step. In plan, after the removal of the topsoil

and subsoil, the surface appeared to extend no further than 7.10m to the west from the east end of the building platform, but it was visible again at the west end of the northern section once the building platform had been fully excavated. The surface dipped to c.0.70m BGL at the west end, and appeared to maintain an even depth of c.0.10m. Neither the surface nor any of the deposits above it yielded any finds or dating evidence.

- 5.4 The limestone surface overlay a clean firm orange sand (004) containing occasional pieces of soft angular grey-green mudstone rubble up to 0.40m long. The sand was visible at c.0.80m BGL at the west end of the northern section, rising to c.0.40m BGL at the east end. The mudstone inclusions could be seen to become far more dense in plan in the north-east corner of the building platform.
- 5.5 Following the excavation of the north-south aligned footing trench through the east end of the building platform (see plate 3), the orange sand (004) with the increased proportion of mudstone inclusions was visible for almost the entire length of the trench and continued below the level of excavation. Approximately 0.50m from the south end of the trench, beneath the tarmac track, the sand was disturbed by a very densely packed deposit of mudstone and limestone rubble pieces (005), up to 0.50m in length and possibly set within a poorly defined cut. These also continued below the base of the trench, and represented a hardcore deposit put down to support the tarmac and associated terracing here. Both the sand (004) and the mudstone / limestone rubble (005) contained no finds or other dating evidence.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Although limited in extent, the watching brief revealed no evidence for the Roman mosaic apparently uncovered here in 1817 and c.1838, nor for any villa or other Roman structure that it might have been associated with. It is unlikely that the limestone rubble surface (002) exposed during the groundworks is the "Roman pavement" described in the early 19th century, although in the absence of any dating evidence, its age remains uncertain. It could quite possibly be a post-medieval feature, perhaps associated with access to a limestone quarry which is marked to the north-east of Musley Bank on the Ordnance Survey map of 1854 (Mr Ian Brisby, *pers. comm.*), or it could be related to the 19th century or any earlier farm buildings. The limestone rubble surface sat directly on a natural deposit of sand (004), overlying weathered mudstone, and it was disturbed along the south side of the new building platform by hardcore deposits associated with 20th century terracing and the tarmac track.
- 6.2 No further information regarding the presence of the Roman mosaic at Musley Bank was noted by the watching brief. It is concluded that it, and any other associated structures which might be present in the early 19th century, lie under the stables and other former farm buildings located to the west and north-west of the main house. However, it is equally possible that all remains were heavily disturbed or even destroyed when these buildings were originally constructed, presumably in the 1830s and before 1854 when they are depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" map.

7 REFERENCES

Primary sources

- 1854 Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map sheet 124
- 1911 Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile map sheet 124/8

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8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 The archaeological watching brief was commissioned by Mr Ian Brisby, and EDAS would like to thank him and his agent, Roy Edwardson of Edwardson Associates, for their co-operation in carrying out the work.
- 8.2 The watching brief was undertaken by Shaun Richardson of EDAS, and he produced a draft archive and took the site photographs. The final report and other drawings were produced by Ed Dennison, who retains responsibility for any errors or inconsistencies.