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ENY	3202
CNY	5085
Parish	6031
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**36, LOW SKELLGATE, RIPON**

**NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

JB Archaeological Services

On behalf of

Graham House Ltd.

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**36, LOW SKELLGATE, RIPON  
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

*Summary*

*As a result of a planning application (Reference Number 6.31.1970.B.FUL) for the re-development of buildings at 36, Low Skellgate in Ripon (SE 3110 7110,) the condition of an archaeological watching brief was placed on all the ground disturbance works for the scheme. The structure is a Grade II Listed Building (reference number 330121). The ground works included foundations/footings and the insertion of new service trenches both in and around the current standing building. The initial site visit for the watching brief was carried out on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2006 and a series of visits up to the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006 completed the watching brief.*

*The results of the watching brief showed that there were at least two phases of archaeological remains on the site. The first phase of activity was located at the rear of the plot and was associated with the construction of what was latterly regarded as a cellar under this part of the building. The substantial remains of what appeared to have been a largely intact medieval structure was recorded with several architectural details present in the surviving walls viz doorways and windows. The dating for the structure was derived from the presence of 13-14<sup>th</sup> century pottery found within the sedimentary layers which had built up against the outside of the wall of the structure. The structure had been built from a combination of roughly dressed stone blocks and water rolled cobbles forming walls c.0.4m wide; the remains were 7.7m long and up to 2.3m high.*

*The building had very simple foundations formed from a combination of water rolled cobbles and rough stone blocks edge-set directly onto riverine deposit. The original floor appeared to have been beaten earth with a later quarry tile one laid over it. Two entrances and a window survived in the two remaining walls although it was not possible to determine if these were part of the original construction.*

*The second phase of activity recorded on the site was under the remains of the concrete floor at the front of the building running towards the rear of the plot. Here the remains of a complex of cellars and passageways were visible in the top of the later cellar backfill. Due to the nature of the re-development it was not possible to record these in detail but from the types of brick present there appeared to be no reason to assume that they were not contemporary with the 18<sup>th</sup> century building above.*

*No other archaeological finds or features were recorded on the development site.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on the ground works for the re-development of 36, Low Skellgate, Ripon, North Yorkshire (SE 3110 7110) in order to fulfil the requirements under planning application number 6.31.1970.B.FUL. The structure is a Grade II Listed Building (number 330121) and a full copy of its listing details can be found in Appendix I.

1.2 The watching brief was conducted by JB Archaeological Services (JBAS) for the Graham Developments Ltd. and was carried between 31<sup>st</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

### Location

2.1 The site is located on the southern edge of the historic core of the medieval settlement of Ripon (centred on SE 3110 7110) and lies within Ripon Conservation Area. The site is on the junction of Low Skellgate and Water Skellgate in Ripon Civil Parish, Harrogate District. Ripon itself lies between Harrogate (c.14km to the south-west) and Northallerton (c.22km to the north-east) in North Yorkshire.

### Historic Background

2.2 The settlement of Ripon has a long history with the name being first recorded in c.715 as *Hrypis* and then in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Ripum*. The origin and meaning of the name are obscure but is thought to mean '(place in the territory of) the tribe called *Hrype*' (Mills, 1998, 288). However, the first recorded archaeological evidence for human activity in the town is of spot finds of Roman-British material, notably pottery from the Deanery Gardens (YAT 2000, 7).

2.3 The historic origins of Ripon can be traced to the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries with accounts of the foundation of the monastery in c. AD 709/10. The monastery is again referred to in c. AD 730 (Evans 2003, 6). The importance of the settlement increases during the medieval period, notably from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, with the expansion of the town and ecclesiastical areas. The town was probably granted the royal charters for a fair and market around this time.

2.4 Various excavations to the east of the site (e.g. Bedern Bank and Skellgarths) have demonstrated that there is good survival of archaeological features dating from the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of them containing waterlogged material. These early activities were in the form of the revetting of the River Skell, reclamation of the land and water management associated with mills and industry along Water Skellgate.

2.5 The post-medieval development of this area of the town is quite well recorded cartographically (e.g. the 1744 Enclosure Map for Ripon, Jeffrey's map of Ripon of 1772 and Langdale's Plan of Ripon in 1818). These all show

evidence for mills and associated features along the southern side of the town, these then give way over time to a general spread of the settlement (e.g. Ordnance Survey 1856) with increasing numbers of domestic buildings.

### Geology and soils

2.6. The underlying geology of Ripon and the surrounding area is Magnesian Limestone and Permian mudstone. Overlying this the quaternary geology is predominantly one of glacial sands and gravels. The area where the site is located is close to the River Skell and will have seen extensive modification of the drift geology due to the flooding of the river and variations in its course over time. This will have led to a series of erosion and deposition events depending upon the speed of flow and course of the river. The soils, which have developed from these deposits, have not been classified by the Soil Association Survey of Great Britain (Jarvis *et al* 1984, 194) due to its urban location.

### Topography and Land-use

2.7. The site is situated on the southern side of Low Skellgate adjacent the junction with Water Skellgate at a height of c.30mOD. The land to the rear (south) of the plot slopes gently down towards the River Skell. The majority of the site is occupied by the current standing building and the surrounding area is predominantly used for residential housing of various construction dates.

## 3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. The objective of the watching brief was to identify and record any features of archaeological interest revealed or damaged during the ground works for the re-development of the site and during the insertion of any associated service trenches. The specific aims were to:

- Archaeologically record (graphically and photographically) any archaeological features revealed or disturbed by the ground works
- Recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental material exposed by the ground works

## 4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The initial site visit for the watching brief was undertaken after a certain amount of ground work had already been undertaken. This meant that it was not possible to record archaeological features as they were encountered but only once they had already been disturbed. This was not problematic for the front part of the building where the remains of the cellars were encountered as there had been little or no disturbance. However, in the area of the earlier building (now a cellar) at the rear both the northern and southern walls had already been removed along with the various floor surfaces. Here it was only possible to record the surviving remains and unfortunately many of the stratigraphic relationships had already been compromised.

4.2 Subsequent site visits were carried out by arrangement with the contractors and all of the drainage works were monitored as they were carried out. The drains were all hand dug.

4.3 All of the exposed areas disturbed by the ground works were inspected for archaeological features and the resulting topsoil stockpiles were monitored for archaeological artefacts and environmental material.

4.4 Drawings were produced of the archaeological features encountered at a scale of 1:10 for the sections and at a scale of 1:100 for the plan of the cellarage due to the size of the site and relative simplicity of the features. The feature was also recorded photographically, on 35mm colour slide and black and white print film and digitally at 5m pixel resolution. 1m and 2m bi-coloured poles were used as scales and a north pointer for orientation. For more detailed photography a 0.5m bi-coloured scale was used. In addition to this a written record was made of the features using a series of pre-printed pro formas. The site was levelled using a height of 30.63mOD from information supplied by the architect.

## 5.0 RESULTS

5.1 The results of the watching brief are described below and in the text the context numbers for each archaeological deposit or feature is given in [] brackets. All heights are given as metres above Ordnance Datum (mOD) using the OS spot height described above. The site has been divided into two parts relating to the two different phases of activity. The first to be considered is the medieval material and feature recorded to the rear of the property and secondly the remaining cellarage at the front of the 18<sup>th</sup> century building.

*Medieval (possibly 12-14<sup>th</sup> centuries) Figures 1-3, Plates 1-7.*

5.2 The first phase of activity was located at the rear of the plot and was associated with the construction of what was currently regarded as a cellar under this part of the building (Plate 1). The substantial remains of what appeared to have been a largely intact medieval structure [01] was recorded with several architectural details present in the surviving walls – doorways and windows.

5.3 The surviving structure had been built from a combination of roughly dressed stone blocks of various sizes and water rolled cobbles. These formed walls which were c.0.4m thick and survived to a height of c.2.3m (28.78mOD). The original building before the removal of the northern and southern walls was approximately 7.7m (Figures 1 and 2; Plates 2, 3 and 4).

5.4 This structure had very simple footings formed from a combination of water rolled cobbles and rough stone blocks edge-set directly onto riverine deposit [06] of coarse sand and gravel mixed with patches of sandy clay (Plate 5) at a height of 27.48mOD. Above this, the building was constructed using roughly squared stone blocks which appear to survive to the original height of the room with rows of rebates to take the ends of the floor joists clearly visible.

5.5 There were a number of features still visible in the two remaining walls. In the eastern wall there were two brick blocked openings a window and doorway. The northern one of the two appeared to have been a window (Figure 2, Plate 2) which could relate either to a 1.3m lower ground level than the current one. Alternatively it could have provided light/communication into a passageway running alongside the building if there was a light-well there.

5.6 To the south of the window lay the bricked up doorway (Figure 2, Plate 3) which would seem to imply that there was access to a side passage/light-well, a flight of steps up to the current ground level or access to the adjacent building at cellar level.

5.7 Both of these features had brickwork around their edges which may indicate that they were possibly not contemporary with the construction of the stone cellar, though with the covering of plaster it was not possible to determine any further sequence of construction.

5.8 Immediately below the removed ceramic floor tiles [04] traces of the earlier, possibly original, compacted earth floor [05] could be seen at c.27.70mOD). The floor layer had been laid directly over the riverine sand and gravel [06] and contained small amounts of crushed brick/mortar. Unfortunately no datable artifactual material could be recovered from this layer.

5.9 The western wall contained a single feature – a flight of stone steps (Figure 1, Plate 4). These appeared to have been altered a number of times since they were originally built and, at the time of recording, had been lined with brick work and blocked off with re-used stonework.

5.10 As with the features on the opposite wall, it was not possible to determine if they were original to the building or later insertions due to the presence of plaster and numerous alterations. All of the features had re-used timber lintels which could be taken to indicate a later addition.

5.11 Both the northern and southern walls for the cellar had already been removed prior to recording. However their original presence could be confirmed from the visible remains of their returns on both the eastern and western walls (Figures 1 - 3). Unfortunately due to their removal it is not known if they contained any structural features.

5.12 To the south of the southern end of the building where the new light-well was being excavated a clear sequence of deposits could be seen. There was a very simple sequence of deposits butting up against what would have been the end wall (Figure 3, Plate 6). The base of the sequence was the naturally occurring riverine sands and gravels [06] into which the footings for the building had been cut [07]. Overlying this and butting up against the building was a 0.3m thick layer of greenish sandy/clay with medieval ceramics and a few bone fragments [03]. On top of this there was a 0.95m thick layer of ground make up which contained amounts of post-medieval ceramics and animal bone up to the current ground level [02]. The fact that the layer potentially containing

medieval pottery butted up against the building wall shows that it was a later event and, as the pottery was 12-14<sup>th</sup> century in date, the building is either contemporary or earlier than this material.

*Post-medieval (18<sup>th</sup> century onwards) Figures 4 and 5, Plates 7 - 13.*

- 5.13 The rear wall of the main part of the building was built from two laid courses of roughly dressed stone blocks on top of water rolled cobbles/boulders which in turn were straight on to the sand/gravel natural of riverine origin (Figure 4, Plate 7). This manner of construction was similar to the cellar area of the building but was better executed.
- 5.14 The majority of the post-medieval features recorded in the main part of the building were under the remains of the concrete floor at the front of the building. Here the remains of a complex of cellars and passageways were visible in the top of the later backfill where it had been partially excavated to insert the new drainage. Due to the nature of the re-development it was only possible to record the tops of the surviving walls where they were visible (Figure 5, Plates 8-13).
- 5.15 The visible remains appear to show at least one vaulted cellar in the south-western corner of the building (Plate 11) with a dividing wall running approximately east-west which ends at a passageway running north-south. This passageway, however, had been blocked (Plate 12) at about halfway along its length.
- 5.16 In addition to the cellars, the remains of the bottom of a stone built staircase were recorded in the south-eastern corner of the main room of the building (Figure 5, Plate 13).
- 5.17 Although they could not be examined in detail, due to the type of bricks used in construction being very similar to the remaining standing building, there appears to be no reason to assume that the cellarage and base of the stairs were not contemporary with the 18<sup>th</sup> century building above.
- 5.18 No other archaeological finds or features were recorded on the development site.

## 6.0 Finds

- 6.1 Unfortunately due to a certain amount of ground work having been carried out prior to the initial site visit, no properly stratified material could be recovered. However, a small amount of material was retrieved from the exposed faces of the area of the new light-well at the rear of the building. Due to this area being machine excavated it is possible that this material had been pushed into the excavation face and was therefore not strictly *in situ*. This material consisted of pottery fragments and animal bone.

- 6.2 Seven fragments of pottery were recorded as coming from the layer deposited up against the southern end of the building [03]. The fragments were identified as follows by Peter Didsbury:
- One sherd of Scarborough 2 ware probably C13<sup>th</sup>.
  - One sherd of Hambleton type ware typically C14/15<sup>th</sup>.
  - One fragment of a collard jug rim with a pulled spout, lightly gritted with a pinkish white fabric, C13/14<sup>th</sup>.
  - Four sherds of lightly gritted pinkish white fabric, C13/14<sup>th</sup>. Of these sherds one was part of a base of an externally sooted (i.e. cooking pot) vessel with internal and external splashed glaze.
- 6.3 The ceramic assemblage was not particularly diagnostic but was representative of typical North Yorkshire medieval pottery of a 13-14<sup>th</sup> century date.
- 6.4 A very small amount of animal bone was encountered and all of it was from domestic species including cattle, sheep, pig and dog. None of the material could be considered as being unusual in any way and was typical of domestic refuse.
- 6.5 The artifactual material recovered from the later levelling layers was all typically 19<sup>th</sup> century in date and appeared to be the remains of dumped and levelled domestic ash with small amounts of refuse.
- 6.6 A small number of hand-made bricks were collected from the demolition debris removed from the top of the cellarage during the insertion of the new drains. Consultation with a buildings material specialist showed that they were probably of 15-16<sup>th</sup> century in date (Sophie Tibbles pers comm.).
- 6.7 An unusual octagonal ceramic structure was encountered by the contractors during the ground reduction process (Plate 14). The object appears to have been made by applying clay to a stone and concrete 'shape' and then decorating it with short inscribed lines. One face also appears to have the impression of some form of moulded plaster of an ornate floral pattern. The function of this is uncertain though suggestions are that it was either part of a decorative column or a garden feature, most probably of late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century date.
- 6.8 None of the artifactual material was retained due to its potentially unstratified nature.
- 7.0 DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS**
- 7.1 From the results described above it can be seen that the remains of potentially 12-14<sup>th</sup> century structure were present on the site and were probably built on an earlier ground level. It is possible that this structure had two doors and a window though it is equally possible that these may have been inserted later.

- 7.2 As the earlier building was built on riverine deposits, it is quite possible that the site was prone to flooding and as a result the ground level was raised prior to the construction of the later building.
- 7.3 The current building on the site appears to be the one that superseded the medieval building. However due to numerous alterations and an extensive covering of plaster it is not possible to be certain about this, as many structural relationships appear to have been lost or obscured.
- 7.4 The floor level of the current building has been lowered at some point in the past, probably with the insertion of the concrete floor when it was used as a car showroom. This event caused the truncation of the tops of the walls for the cellarge of the 18<sup>th</sup> century building, though the majority of the walls are probably still present below the new floor level.

### References

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- Evans D T (2003) *Renault Site, Water Skellgate, Ripon, North Yorkshire*. YAT report number **2003/44**
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- Mills A D (1998) *Dictionary of English Place Names*. Oxford University Press
- YAT (2000) *Skellgarths, Ripon, North Yorkshire*. YAT report number **2000/56**

### Maps

- 1856 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6" series
- 1977 Institute of Geological Sciences: Geological Survey Ten-Mile Map, South Sheet, Quaternary
- 1979 Institute of Geological Sciences: Geological Survey Ten-Mile Map, South Sheet, Drift
- 1993 Soil Survey of England and Wales *Soils of England and Wales: 1 Northern England*

**APPENDIX I**

**LISTED BUILDING DESCRIPTION**

**IoE number:**  
330121

**Location:**  
36 LOW SKELLGATE (south east side)

**RIPON, HARROGATE, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**Photographer:**  
N/A

**Date Photographed:**  
N/A

**Date listed:**  
12 October 1977

**Date of last amendment:**  
12 October 1977

**Grade**  
II

SE 3171 RIPON  
1/180  
12.10.77  
No 36

LOW SKELLGATE  
(south-east side)

SE 3171 RIPON LOW SKELLGATE 1/180 (south-east side) 12.10.77 No 36 GV II Early of mid C18. Colour-washed brick. Slate roof. One coped gable. Two (tall) storeys. C19 bracketed eaves cornice. C18 band. Five bays: tall sashes with glazing bars on first floor. Ground floor modern shopfront.

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## APPENDIX II

### CONTEXT CATALOGUE

<i>Context Number</i>	<i>Description</i>
01	?medieval building.
02	C18/19 <sup>th</sup> dumping and levelling.
03	?medieval sediment layer.
04	Ceramic floor tiles.
05	Compacted earth floor.
06	Riverine deposits.
07	Construction cut for footing of [01].