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THE VIVARS - SELBY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

SE 6185 3205

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

MAP ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY LTD

THE VIVARS - SELBY

Contents

Figure List

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Historical Background**
- 3. Documentary Evidence**
- 4. Medieval Fishponds**
- 5. Archaeological Evidence**
 - a. site appraisal**
 - b. soil mechanics**
- 6. Conclusions**
- 7. Work Programme**
- 8. Bibliography**

The Vivars - Selby

Figure List

1. Site Plan - Areas 1-4 with related archaeological features, excluding earthworks.

THE VIVARS - SELBY

1. Introduction

MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd was approached by Selby District Council to undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site known as The Vivars.

The Vivars covers an area of approximately 6.2 acres and is situated immediately to the south of Station Road and to the north of Canal Road (SE 6185 3205). The site name would appear to derive from the latin word 'vivarium' which means an arteficial enclosure, i.e. pond for the keeping or raising of fish.

2. Historical Summary

It can be argued that the official history of Selby only starts with the establishment of the Abbey in 1069AD, although there are tentative suggestions that Seletun (Anglo-Saxon for willow copse) may be identified with Selby. The 'tun' element denoting a Saxon settlement, but with the advent of Viking settlement this was replaced with 'by' - the Scandinavian term for a town, as Selby developed into a Nordic community. Evidence for these period relies exclusively on placename and documentary references, perhaps the advent of more extensive archaeological investigations into the urban development of Selby may provide additional information.

In 1069AD a Benedictine Abbey was established in Selby. The present day Abbey church represents numerous phases of development and agrandisation. Even so what is known of the Abbey's history indicates the importance of this religious center and serves to illustrate the thriving nature of the town during the height of the Abbey's power.

3. Documentary Evidence

Research into the historical documentation which could verify that The Vivars is the site of the Abbey fishponds as illustrated on Hodges 19th century map of Selby proved frustrating from the onset.

Selby Abbey is not as rich in records as many other abbeys in England; the few surviving records cover a period of five centuries from the 11th through to the 16th, and of the records consulted and cited within this report it is clear that the specific information required to evaluate the Vivars is minimal.

During the establishment of the Abbey William I granted the Abbey at Selby a number of gifts, one of which was a fishery at Whitgift (Farrar 1987).

The 12th century saw an increase in agricultural activity at the Abbey, documents suggest that land was drained for agricultural use, and the additional bias on the economy resulted in the increase of pressure on the efficiency of the fishery. Fishing rights were issued by Henry II, so that in 1159-60 the monks of Selby were allowed to hold their stew (a pond where fish were kept until needed for the table) 'in peace, and that non shall fish there without licence'. In 1319 a license was given for 'the Abott and Convent of Selby to make a weir across the River Ouse in their fee of Selby at a place called Impegarth'.

Account Roll Documentation

As mentioned above documents from Selby Abbey are restrictive in the nature of information, only six account rolls have survived for consultation. Perhaps the most useful to this report is one by the Abbey Kitchener dated to 1416-17.

The roll describes the types of purchases made during a one year period, with the following sections relevant to this report:

"And paid to John Babthorpe for his share of 8 salmon from the Selby fishery from the festival of Easter to the festival of Pentecost this year 12s.

"And for 8 slamon and 1 sprent from the Selby fishery purchased from the same person from the festival of Penticost to the festival of the Nativity of St John the Baptist this year 19s 8d".

"And for 15 slamon of the said fishery purchased from the same person from the festival of the Nativity of John the Baptist to the festival of St Peter Advincula this year 30s".

"And for one net called a Tramail (the trammel is a long narrow fishing net set vertically with floats and sinkers. The fish pass through the outer coarse net to be held by an inner finer net).

and also maintainence of the fishery: i.e. the felling of saplings, the removal of old timbers, the creating of new piles and the cost of employing 3 men for 4 days at a cost of 2d per day to repair the new fishery (Tillotson 1988).

It is unclear as to the exact location of the fishery as mentioned in the Kitcheners Roll, Abbey documents of 1438-9 locate the fishery at Rosscarrs, which was situated approximately 2.5km down the river from Selby (Haslop 1976).

The account rolls also detail the purchase of stockfish:

"120 bought at Hull from Robert Percy by John Barlay at 3d each, 60 fish bought at York from William Muston at 23/4d for 120 from York from robert Hayn at 23/4d, 360 fish from William Muston at 3d, 20 from William Benygholme, 120 bought at York from William Muston and 54 from Thomas Freman at 21/2d (Haslop, 1976)

It is logical to assume that these purchases of stockfish were to replenish the Abbey ponds, but there is no reference to exact locations.

The 1792 Crescent Plan

This map of Selby states quite clearly that the/or one of the Abbey ponds was situated to the south-west of the Abbey and in the vicinity of the old site of the Cattle Market. This piece of documentary evidence appears to have been verified by limited archaeological investigations (see SMR section, section 1 below).

The 1800 Plan of Selby

This plan refers to the improved layout of roads after the toll bridge was opened. The site of the Vivars is shown as open land with no signs of development.

The 1808 Enclosure Map

The 1808 Enclosure Award map for the central Selby clearly indicates that the area of the Vivars as open pastoral land.

The OS maps and compilation documents

The 1851 First Edition OS map states that the area of land to the south-east of the railway line was called the Vivars; a compilation map produced in Hodges History of Selby (Hodges 1893) provides additional information by citing that the Vivars were the site of the Abbey fishponds. Later OS maps continue to depict this area of Selby as The Vivars, but there is no further mention of a specific area, and it is clear that as later editions of the OS maps are produced then the area of The Vivars proceeds to migrate further to the east.

SMR

The SMR at NYCC provides 3 references to fishponds in Selby:

1. SE 61540 32270 - ?Fishpond - ecclesiastical structure. Sludge deposit full of bedris and a large number of fish skeletons (very boney - possibly carp). Many of the buildings in the immediate area show signs of subsidence. Since the subsidence appears to be in a lineazr serpentine arrangement there may have been a complex here.
2. SE 61850 32050 - Fishponds - The Vivars - Ecclesiastical structure. The placename suggests either that this is the correct location of the Abbey fishponds or that they stretched to here and beyond.
3. SE 61750 31920 - Fishponds - Ecclesiastical structure. Shown on Hodges plan as the location of the Abbey fishponds.

4. Medieval Fishponds

Lake and riverine fish have been regarded as a good source of food from the early prehistoric times. Observation and experience allowed permanent riverside settlements to crop not only non migratory species such as bream, perch, barbel, and pike but also trout and salmon. However such practises were still to a greater extent seasonal. The evolutionary step of constructing stews where netted stock could be stored for later consumption were predominantly utilised by the wealthier sections of society, i.e. the Crown, lay magnates and the major religious houses. With more resources large multiple ponds became the norm.

Before purpose built ponds finally appear in the last quarter of the 12th century, there are numerous examples of an intermediate stage between natural meres and artificial ponds. This entailed a modest adaptation of existing features, the ducting of water to old river channels and ox-bow lakes, for example, or the blocking of outlets to marshy areas, so raising the water level to provide a pool in which fish could thrive.

The consistent siting of the vivaries within sight of the castle, manor house or abbey, and the speed by which the construction of the pond was followed by the construction of a fence or wall around the

1) Running (detached)
2) Am. etc.
3) Se. etc. - suit

pond (Cal Liberate Rolls) suggests that it was difficult to persuade commoners of the legal distinction between common and several fisheries.

Construction Techniques

As mentioned above it is unusual to find a single fishpond in isolation, equally of known examples these fishponds are usually closely associated with complex water management schemes.

The siting of the ponds depended primarily on access to water supplies and the nature of the subsoil; of course the ideal medium would be clay.

The use of dams in the construction of the ponds relied on earthen structures usually in the form of shallow batters on both sides. Under a surface of turves, the main structure was reinforced against collapse and seepage with a variety of materials; rubble stone, clay sand and sometimes faggots. There is also evidence of the use of timber where rubble stone cores were not only held in place with timber piling but three-dimensional timber framing (Faul & Moorhouse 1981).

It is clear from the evidence of the Selby Abbey Kitcheners Roll that repairs were relatively common practice at the Selby fishery and that the use of timber in the repairs was common.

It was impossible in the medieval period to provide the earthen dams with sluices in the present day context, but it would appear that spill-ways sited at any one shoulder of the dam, were all that was needed in a fishpond.

Associated Features

As mentioned above it would appear that many of the fishponds were surrounded by a wall or fence to protect the livestock from poachers. In addition there is also evidence of associated buildings.

Excavations at Oldstead Grange located deposits of fishing equipment such as lead weights from the site of the fishery hut. Further excavation located a hearth which led to the conclusion that this building may have been used for curing fish.

5. Archaeological Evidence

a. Site Appraisal

For the purpose of this section the site has been divided into four separate areas, Areas 1-3 equate to The Vivars site (Fig. 1) and Area 4 relates to the access site.

Areas 1-3

Areas 1 and 3 display well preserved earthworks of rigg and furrow. The width of the rigg suggests that the earthworks were definitely pre-enclosure; and possibly substantially earlier in origin. The melting of a significant snow fall had resulted in standing water within the confines of the furrows; and it was also apparent that deposits of modern rubbish had sunk into the furrows.

The area between Areas 1 and 3 (Area 2) also displayed traces of earthworks, although in this area the earthworks were less pronounced. Area 2 would also appear to be of a slightly higher ground level.

The site showed no sign of development other than areas of the site where modern rubbish had been deposited and disturbance due to testhole surveys.

The majority of the site is established scrubland, although there is a distinctive change in the type of vegetation in the extreme west of Area 1. If documentary sources are correct then this is the area where one would expect to find traces of the fishpond. The change in the type of vegetation in this area may indicate a change in the underlying strata, possibly indicating that pond deposits still exist in this area of the site. During the course of the 1983 soil survey of the site it was noted that this area of the site experienced an area of standing water.

Area 4

Area 4 is located to the south of Areas 1-3, and has been developed in relatively modern times. It is clear from the 19th century maps that this area was also part of the open field system around Selby until relatively recently. Therefore one must conclude that much of the archaeological deposits would have been damaged by development.

b. Soil Mechanics

Two soil surveys of the site have been commissioned involving a total of 17 testholes. The results of which provide an interesting comparison with archaeological factors.

Of the 1983 survey Testholes 2-4, and 12 merit comment; and with A and E meriting comment from the 1990 survey.

Testhole 2: survey located a deposit of 0.8m of silty clay with occasional peat inclusions, sealing a 0.2m deposit of amorphous clayey peat which in turn sealed a 0.5m deposit of peaty silty clay with fragments of decaying vegetation. These deposits are not indicative of natural geological factors and suggest an archaeological origin.

Testhole 3: survey located three deposits with peat inclusions. These deposits varied in depth from 0.25m to 0.5m. Again it is likely that this stratigraphy represents archaeological rather than geological deposits.

Testhole 4: the stratigraphy in this testhole is markedly different to the others tested. Excavation located a 1.5m deposit of bricks, wood, cobbles, boulders, tin, polythene and topsoil., sealing a 1m deposit of very soft peaty clay. It is obvious that the primary layer in this testhole represents modern infill and may well have been deposited into an extant pond or similar feature. Testhole 4 is to the north of the revised boundaries of the site; and this area immediately north of the drain has recently been developed.

Testhole 12: was located in the area where one would expect to find evidence for the fishponds if they were still extant on the site. The stratigraphy of Testhole 12 produced varying deposits of silty clays and a 0.35m deposit of clay with peaty inclusions.

Testhole A: sited close to the pond as shown on OS map produced evidence of a 0.2m deposit of 80% clay with 20% peat. The firm consistency of the deposit suggests that this testhole was not excavated into the pond.

Testhole E: the stratigraphy of Testhole E again provides evidence of deliberate infilling. A 3m deposit of "tipped debris" capped by a further 3m deposit of clays suggests that there was once quite a substantial sized feature in this area of the site. It is unclear whether this feature represents a medieval archaeological feature or modern infill.

It is clear from the soil mechanics report that areas of the site have been disturbed in modern times by the laying of drainage pipe and the construction of manholes. It is likely that any in situ archaeology will have been removed or seriously disturbed by this modern construction.

6. Conclusions

As mentioned above the documentary evidence for the Vivars as the location of the Selby Abbey fishpond is far from conclusive. The 1792 design plan for the Crescent (Farrar 1987, 75) clearly locates the Abbey fishpond to the south of the Market Place, almost exactly where excavation located a "sludgy deposit with fish bones". The acceptance that The Vivars is the site of the Abbey fishpond, or rather another of the Abbeys fishponds would appear to rely solely on the continual use of the name. It is equally possible that Hodges map where he uses the First Edition OS map as a base for applying his own additional information was based on purely the placename as opposed to any other information. Within the body of his lengthy article on Selby Abbey, there is no reference to the fishponds.

It is clear from the 19th century maps and plans of Selby that the area of land known presently as the Vivars along with the access site remained undeveloped until relatively recently, and in the case of the Vivars has not been disturbed in modern times apart from limited drainage work, infilling of possible archaeological features and the archaeologically unsupervised excavation of testholes for the soil mechanics report. There are well preserved earthworks on the site, the possibility of infilled ponds or other archaeological features of unknown classification and probably remnants of the medieval fishpond complex.

Despite the uncertain nature of the reasons for why this area of Selby was and is still called the Vivars, it is clear that the site which is likely to be developed for light industrial purposes is of archaeological significance. Development of any kind would cause damage to the upstanding earthworks and any drainage work conducted on the site would alter the present level of the water table which would cause damage to waterlogged archaeological strata, especially in situ pond deposits.

7. Work Programme

As shown on Figure 4 specific areas of the site have been damaged by previous limited development, even so most of the site remains undisturbed with the exception of the access area, which dependant on the nature of development in this area would probably only warrant a watching brief during the course of development.

With reference to Areas 1-3 which form the Vivars site the following on site work is recommended:

1. An earthwork survey of the site.

consult with Co. Archaeologist.

2. Mechanically excavated trench across the suggested location of the fishpond in the west of the site. Due to the water rich deposits hand excavation may prove costly in terms of shoring and pumping facilities. The trial trench would allow the assessment of the validity of interpretation and provide access to environmental samples.

3. Mechanically excavated trench across the pond located in the north of the site which is depicted on OS maps and mentioned in the SMR ; to provide information on form, date and associated environmental deposits.

4. A series of small boreholes dug into the site to provide additional environmental information. The early history of Selby is vague. The sampling of buried soils in this area of Selby which is known to have escaped major disturbance for many centuries would provide an ideal opportunity to collect pollen evidence to substantiate or invalidate previous historical assumptions; e.g. was early Selby a clearing in willow copse or was the area a marshland.

5. Dependant on the results of 1-4, further work may be required in archaeological and environmental sampling, otherwise a watching brief could be applied during the development of the site.

environmental analysis of soil cores.

Mineral composition

unial + plant matter - macro & microscopic?

IF there are features like they should be hand excavated?

8. Bibliography

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