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**AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

at

**BELL'S YARD, MAIN STREET, SEAMER
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

for

**Wilcon Homes Northern
Belasis Business Centre
Coxwold Way
Billingham
Cleveland TS23 4EA**

***John Samuels Archaeological Consultants
January 1994***

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A planning application was submitted for the erection of 25 dwellings at Bell's Yard, Main Street, Seamer.

1.2 As a condition of obtaining planning consent, the Planning Authority requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in advance and Wilcon Homes instructed *John Samuels Archaeological Consultants* to carry out this work.

1.3 A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment (December 1993) advanced proposals for the excavation of trial trenches to determine the nature of buried deposits. The proposals were subsequently agreed.

1.4 The trial trenches as specified were excavated and recorded in January 1994. This report summarises the context of the work and describes the results.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

2.1 The village of Seamer lies in the Vale of Pickering, midway between the Yorkshire Wolds and the North Yorkshire Moors, and three miles inland from the East Coast.

2.2 Local surface deposits are related to the former extensive Lake Pickering, just over a mile south, which formed in the Late Glacial period some 10,000 years ago and drained westward into the River Derwent.

2.3 The district around Seamer is noted for its archaeological remains. Some of the best known early post-glacial sites in Britain have been excavated within three miles to the south of Seamer, notably at Star Carr, Seamer Carr and Flixton Carr; and investigation continues into these important Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age) settlements on the shores of the former lake.

2.4 Later prehistoric finds have been made throughout the Vale of Pickering, and Bronze Age round barrows and linear earthworks cluster on the Moors to the north and the Wolds to the south.

2.5 In the Iron Age, Seamer lay close to the northern boundary of the territory of the Parisi who occupied the area of the East Riding.

2.6 A Roman rural settlement has been excavated at Crossgates, one mile to the east. There were Roman military sites at Scarborough and Filey, where signal stations were established in the late 4th century to warn of Saxon raiders crossing the North Sea.

2.7 There was considerable Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement in the Vale of Pickering, as in East Yorkshire generally. An Anglian inhumation burial with numerous grave goods was discovered at Seamer Quarry, to the north-east, in 1857.

2.8 In Seamer itself, the southern part of the development site (**Area A**) includes the west frontage to Main Street, which is thought to retain its medieval line. To the south it abuts the graveyard of St Martin's Church, which contains some Norman architecture. The northern part (**Area B**) is adjacent to the east side of a medieval manor house site of the Percy family, surviving as conspicuous earthworks in pasture with an upstanding masonry wall fragment and doorway. The latter is a Listed Building, and the site is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. On the east side of Main Street opposite Area B, the Londesborough Arms Hotel is a Listed Building said to have originated in the 12th century, with a stone barn to the rear also probably of medieval date.

3.0 TRIAL EXCAVATIONS

3.1 The development site lies just above the 30m OD contour. Area A is at present part gravelled yard where earthmoving vehicles are kept, and part scrub grassland used for the storage of building materials. Area B is a derelict road haulage yard, much of it heavily disturbed in modern times, some levelled for hardstanding and generally covered in spoil dumps and weed growth.

3.2 Excavation plant was a JCB 3CX hydraulic excavator fitted with a four-in-one 2m bucket, and a 1m bucket on the backactor. Owing to slippery ground conditions, this was augmented for Trench 1 by an International Harvester tracked digger-loader. Features revealed were cleaned by hand, photographed and planned as appropriate.

3.3.1. Trench 1, 5 x 2m, in Area A, was positioned adjacent and at right angles to the Main Street frontage, near the north wall of the churchyard. The topography suggested that cottages had previously stood here, in the corresponding position to an existing terrace on the opposite (east) side of the street, which appeared to be of late 18th to early 19th century date. Enquiry from a householder in this terrace confirmed that cottages west of the street had been demolished in living memory.

3.3.2 The trench revealed topsoil under grass to a depth of 0.3m, overlying an increasing concentration of building debris including 19th century bricks mixed with earth. At a depth of 0.6m a cobble floor was encountered, comprising close-set unmortared limestone blocks and erratics in the order of 0.3m maximum dimension. This provided an irregular but level surface over which lay numerous sherds of 19th century pottery: blue-on-white tableware including willow-pattern, and pancheons. The floor was bounded on the west by a wall foundation of later 19th century brick, and was interpreted as a basement floor within a cottage whose recent demolition is referred to above.

3.3.3 Beneath the cobbles the earth became increasingly sandy, giving way at 0.95m depth to natural subsoil of firm moist yellow sand, which to the west contained some natural small river gravel.

3.3.4 Nothing of antiquity was retrieved from Trench 1.

3.4.1 Trench 2 was positioned at the east end of Area B, set back some 10m from the frontage to Main Street. The original frontage outside the site had apparently been scarped away as there was a drop of 0.7m at the site boundary.

3.4.2 The trench, initially 5 x 2m east to west, revealed ballast makeup for vehicle hardstanding to a depth of 0.2m. Beneath this was dark brown earth, becoming slightly more red-brown with depth until natural gravelly silty sand was reached at a depth of 0.95m.

3.4.3 At a depth of c.0.5m three irregular lumps of tufaceous limestone up to 0.3m maximum dimension were displaced by the excavator bucket. On first sight these were in loose rather than close association, but manual cleaning revealed other pieces in situ in the south side of the trench.

3.4.4 The excavation area was therefore doubled in size by extending it to the south, and the upper deposits were removed by careful machining down to 0.4m at which level manual cleaning was carried out.

3.4.5 By this means the feature was defined, rather than fully excavated, in plan and in section. It comprised a group of stones similar to those first encountered, with smaller pieces in a U-shaped plan. A fine 150mm steel probe was used to confirm that no other substantial stones lay immediately below the exposed surface. Around the periphery of the stones the edge of the pit into which they had been inserted was visible only in places, marked by a darker fill.

3.4.6 The feature was interpreted as a substantial post-setting c. 1.4 x 1.2 x 0.35m deep, which would have held a massive timber upright in the order of 0.3m square. The absence of a recognisable floor level and the shallow depth suggested that the post-setting had been truncated, perhaps when the area was levelled for hardstanding.

3.4.7 In defining the feature, several sherds were retrieved from the dark brown earth among the packing-stones at 0.40m depth. They comprised six medieval fragments and two chips from a willow-pattern plate. The medieval pottery awaits specialist examination, but has been provisionally dated as 14th - 16th century.

3.5 Trench 3 5.1 x 2m, was excavated at the west end of Area B on what appeared to be the least disturbed of the scrub grassland adjacent to the Scheduled manor house site.

3.5.2 The trench revealed modern building debris mixed with topsoil to a depth of 0.4m. Beneath this the earth was less humic and red-brown with few stones, until natural yellow sand with some small gravel was reached at a depth of 1.0m.

3.5.3 In the surface of the sand an east-west linear feature was visible, 0.2m wide x 30mm deep and consisting of light grey sand with fine gravel < 10mm. Owing to its precise form and shallow profile, and the fact that it was aligned on a low-lying pond north of the manor house site, this was interpreted as marking the insertion of a modern field drain.

3.5.4 Nothing of antiquity was retrieved from Trench 3.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Trench 1 revealed part of an 18th-19th century roadside cottage but no earlier occupation. There was an absence of human remains which if present might have suggested previous encroachment upon the graveyard.

4.2 Trench 2 located a stone post-setting from a substantial medieval building of unknown type, which might have been aligned at right-angles or parallel to Main Street. The scale and form of the setting implied that it represented an aisle-post rather than a post within a wall, and there may conceivably be other structural remains surviving in the vicinity although the lack of floor surfaces or any other stratified levels suggest that this would be fragmentary. The possibility of a large medieval aisled building here would not be out of place given the surroundings of the manor house site and the nearby Londesborough Arms.

4.3 Trench 3 located no archaeological features on the west side of the development site.

5.0 CONSULTATION

Discussions have taken place with the County Archaeology Officer for North Yorkshire Ms. L.E. Smith, before the trial excavations, on site while the work was in progress, and subsequently.

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