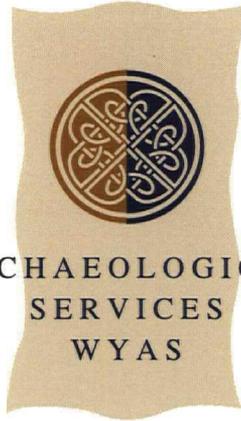


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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES
WYAS

Tadcaster Castle Motte

Tadcaster

North Yorkshire

Archaeological Recording

December 1997

Report No. 544

CLIENT
North Yorkshire Heritage Unit

Tadcaster Castle Motte

Tadcaster

North Yorkshire

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Tadcaster Castle Motte

Tadcaster

North Yorkshire

*A mighty great hille, dikes, and garth of this castelle on Warfe
be yet seene a litle above the bridge; it semith by the plot that it
was a right stately thing.*

Leland

Summary

A recording exercise on an exposed section at the base of the medieval castle motte has established that it is composed of a number of horizontal stratified layers, some of which contained Roman pottery. The deposits offer the first archaeological evidence for the physical nature and possible phasing of motte's construction.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Archaeological Services WYAS were commissioned by North Yorkshire Heritage Unit to carry out archaeological recording of an exposed and denuded section of the medieval castle motte and a pit dug close to it, the latter apparently the result of recent deliberate damage.
- 1.2 The castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1198) and lies on the northern edge of the town, on the western bank of the River Wharfe (SE48564355). The castle grounds presently form the garden to the rear of 32 Westgate, with a small area at the south-eastern corner, falling within the ownership of North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC). The reported work was carried out in the latter area, to the north of the NYCC garage (Fig. 1).

2. Historical Background

- 2.1 The castle earthworks occupy a series of terraces, the motte forming the highest at the eastern side of the castle. The castle, an early stronghold of the Percy family, seems to have been constructed on the site of an earlier Roman site, perhaps a fort or fortlet protecting the river crossing. Large amounts of Roman material have been recovered from the vicinity of the castle in the past (Ramm 1966, Roberts 1996). In 1965 erosion of the motte yielded Roman building material and 2nd-3rd century pottery, as well as Norman pimply ware, from the body of the mound (Ramm 1966).

- 2.2 No documented investigations have been made of the castle interior, although an excavation is alleged to have been carried out through the ditch between the motte and bailey by the late C.V. Bellamy in the 1960s. This work apparently showed the castle ditch to be cut entirely into deep dark deposits containing Roman material (*pers comm*, landowner). The castle ditch to the west of the bailey has been the subject of recent excavations in 1994-5, resulting in the recovery of both Roman and medieval pottery (Roberts 1996).
- 2.3 The earthworks themselves are suggestive of a late 11th century motte and bailey castle. There is no extant evidence to suggest that the castle ever had a stone phase, though the possibility of a shell keep, posed by Clark (1889), and Leland's assertion that the town bridge was constructed using stone from the castle (Camden 1607, Toulmin Smith 1964), alludes to something more than a mere earth and timber structure.
- 2.4 No mention is made of the castle in the Domesday account and there is no known licence to crenellate. However, it is thought likely that the Percy family would have had a substantial stronghold here, at least by 1209 when King John is supposed to have visited the castle (Speight 1905).
- 2.5 An exposed section at the base of the motte, on the south-eastern side, was observed in 1961 (Ramm 1966). It is possible that this could have been the beginnings of the exposure and erosions seen today to the rear of the present NYCC buildings, initially noted in 1993 prior to the excavation of the castle ditch (WYAS field notes). There was no observation made of any other disturbances in 1993 and it seems likely that the rectangular pit, about 4m to the south of the section face, has been created since that time.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 A south-eastern facing section of the motte, 3m wide and 2.6m high (maximum dimensions) was visible from the outset. The section face was curved, both to the vertical and horizontal planes, and was undercut at the base to a distance of about 1m. A fire had been lit on at least one occasion in the undercut hollow.
- 3.2 The section had been exposed for some time and, having been deprived of the protection of dense foliage (mainly ivy), the face was very dry, with cracks and fissures revealing a strong likelihood of the face exfoliating. Consequently, for safety reasons, no attempt at rigorous cleaning was attempted. As the section face was essentially clean and weed free, clearer definition was achieved by spraying the section face with water prior to recording.
- 3.3 Cleaning and inspection of the sides and base of the rectangular pit, down slope from the motte section, revealed that no archaeological deposits had been disturbed in its creation. The pit was *c.* 1.5m by 1m in plan and up to 0.3m deep. It was subsequently back filled using the loose soil and ash from the base of the motte section face.

- 3.4 All archaeological recording was carried out in accordance with Archaeological Services WYAS's recording manual. A temporary bench mark was established by traversing from the bench mark on the south-west corner of the church. The locations of the motte section and the rectangular pit were established with respect to the garage adjacent to the NYCC offices.

4. Results

- 4.1 Fifteen distinct stratified layers were identified in the motte make up that was exposed and recorded in section. The deposits are tabulated in stratigraphic sequence order below and shown graphically in Fig. 2 and Plate 1.
- 4.2 Make-up deposits of the motte in stratigraphic sequence:

Context	Description
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111	Light brown sandy silt with limestone inclusions
110	Light brown sandy silt with limestone inclusions
109	Buried soil horizon; a thin layer of black organic soil
101	Dark brown sandy silt with occasional stones containing a lens of yellow sand
112	Reddish brown sandy silt with abundant limestone fragments
102	Brown sandy silt with abundant limestone fragments
103	Dark brown sandy silt with frequent inclusions
104	Dark brown sandy silt with frequent limestone inclusions
105	Dark brown sandy silt with frequent limestone inclusions. Possible buried turf line
106	Brown sandy silt with abundant limestone inclusions
107	Dark brown sandy silt with frequent limestone inclusions Possible buried turf line
108	Brown sandy silt with abundant limestone inclusions
116	Context that includes 104 - 108
113	Dark reddish brown silty clay with frequent limestone fragments
114	Brown sandy silt with abundant limestone inclusions
115	Pinkish sandy silt with little or no inclusions

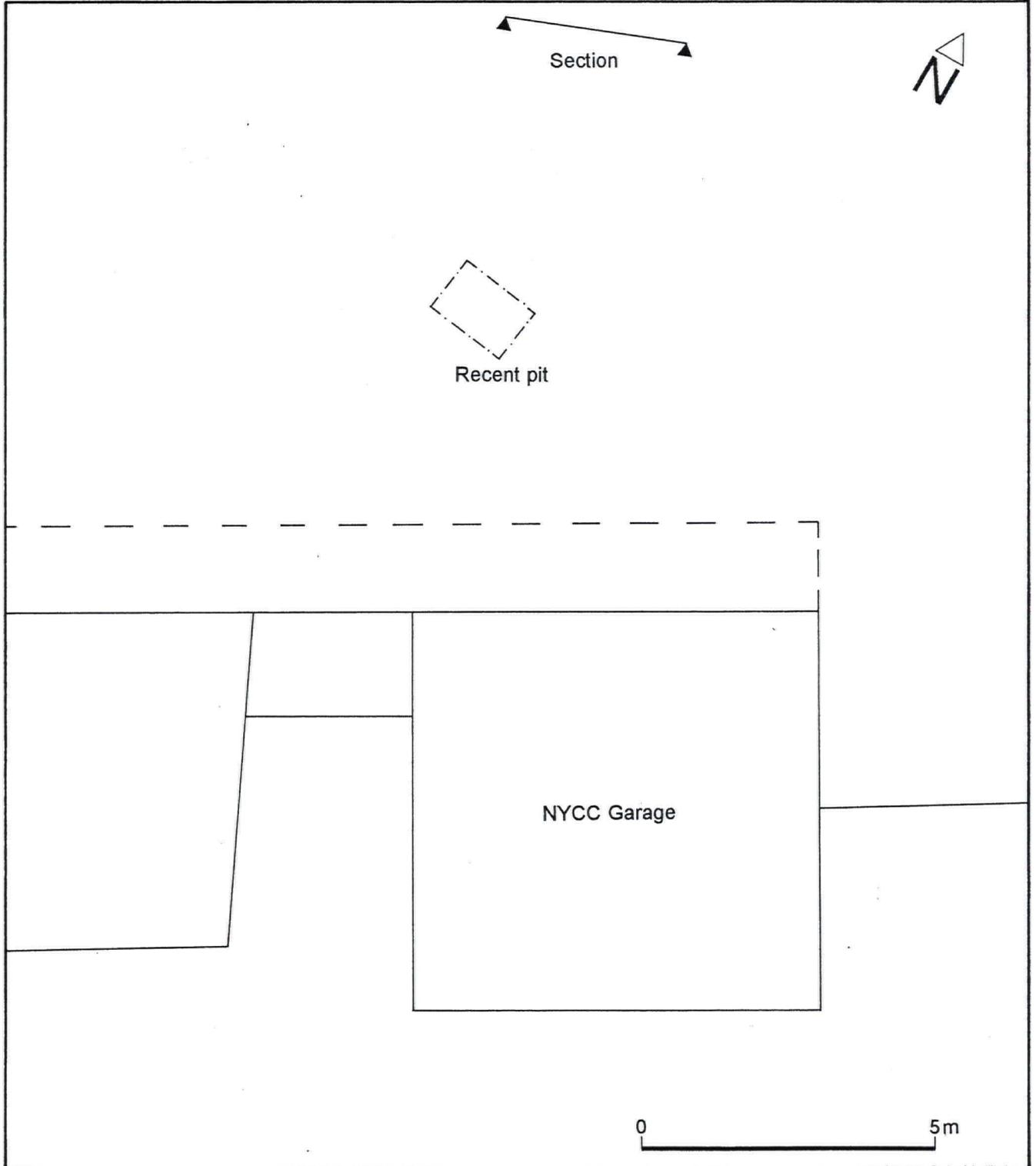
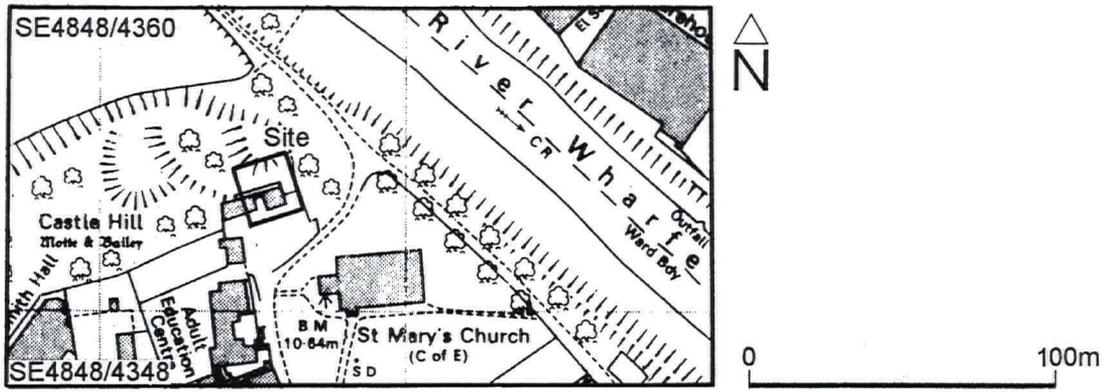


Fig. 1 Location of section and pit at Tadcaster Castle

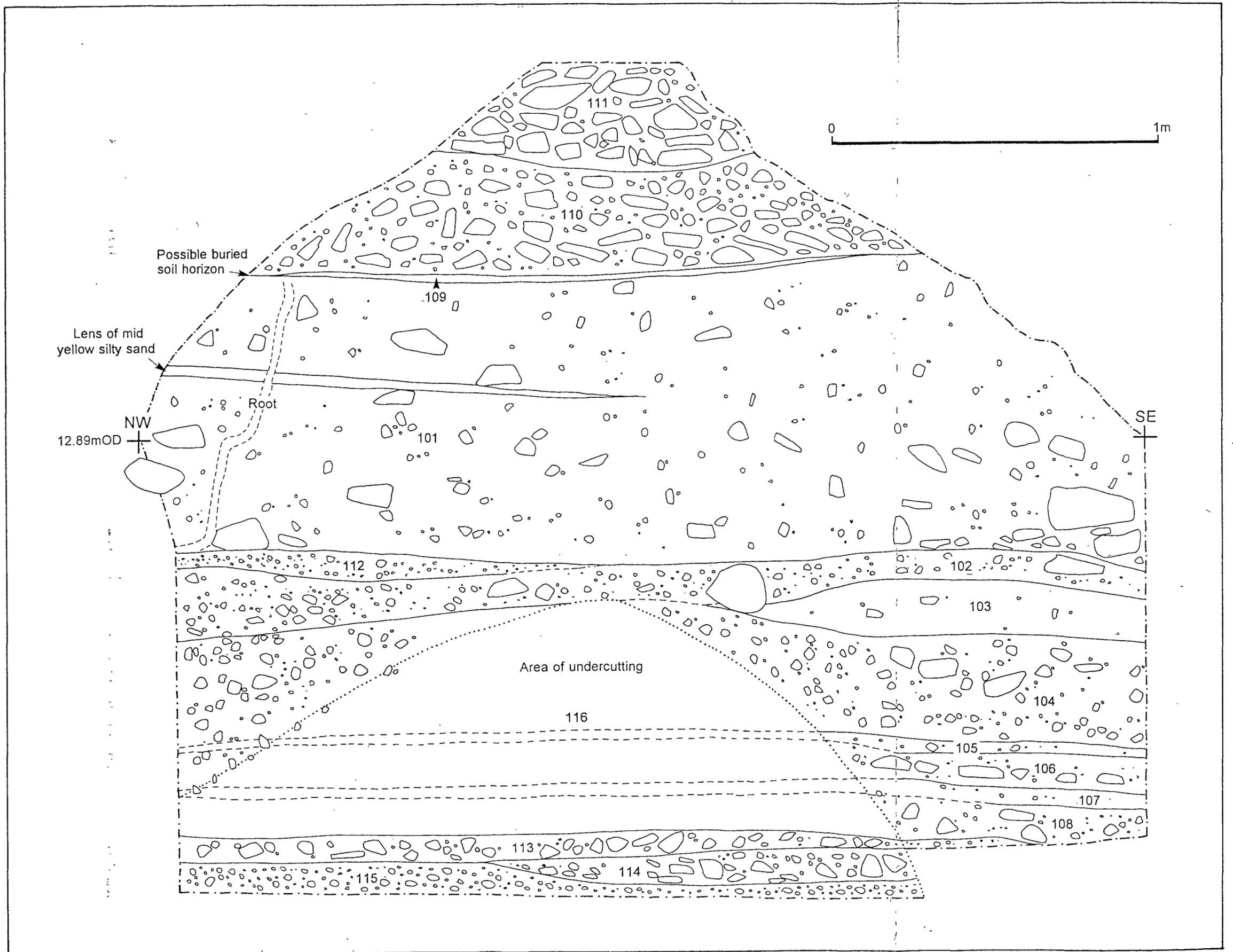


Fig. 2 Detail of the section through part of the Tadcaster Castle Motte

Fig. 2

5. **Pottery Report** by Jeremy Evans with Brenda Dickinson

5.1 The collection is too small to say anything with confidence about it. Elsewhere in Tadcaster collections of Roman pottery have different date distributions (Evans 1995), ranging perhaps overall from the Flavian period to the mid 4th century, although much more material is required for confidence in this range and for the identification of lacunae within it.

3.2 This small collection from the castle motte appears to open in the Flavian period and nothing is likely to date later than the 2nd century. Details of the five sherds recovered are provided below.

3.2 **Roman pottery catalogue**

Context	Description
101	A Dr 30 Central Gaulish decorated bodysherd. Panelled decoration, with a leaping hare to left (apparently unrecorded). The borders of squarish or rhomboidal beads suggest the work of Paternus V or one of his associates, such as Laxtucissa; <i>c.</i> AD 160 - 195
108	Two joining sherds from the shoulder and the rim of a greyware jar in a hard-fired, 'crisp' fracturing fabric with some-common moderate sand temper <i>c.</i> 0.3mm. The form would seem to be a Hadrianic - Antonine BB copy and the fabric matches Catterick, Thornborough Farm and Binchester fabric R13 and is probably of north-eastern origin.
Base of motte	An oxidised jar rimsherd, in an orange oxidised fabric with common fairly fine sand temper; <i>c.</i> 0.2mm. Exterior and top of rim sooted, with a clear demarcation line on top of rim where sooting has been prevented by the presence of a lid. The form and fabric both would suggest a later first to early second century date.
Recent pit	An oxidised bodysherd, in a well-fired fabric with some fairly fine sand <i>c.</i> 0.2mm. Interior and exterior burnished and interior marbled painted in red paint. The fabric matches Shiptonthorpe fabric F50 and perhaps is from the Brough-on-Humber region. Later first to early second century.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 The portion of the motte exposed would appear to be entirely man-made, consisting of horizontal bands of material, presumably up-cast from the surrounding ditch. This construction method, of horizontal or domed layers, is depicted most famously in the construction of the Hastings castle motte on the Bayeux Tapestry.
- 6.2 Archaeological evidence for this layered type of motte construction has been found at Castle Hill, Bakewell and Great Driffield, East Yorkshire (Kenyon 1990), amongst others. However, perhaps the nearest parallel for Tadcaster is at York, where excavations at the base of the Baile Hill motte identified several horizontal layers of clay which had bands of material resembling rotted down turf (Addyman and Priestley 1977). This possible use of turves to stabilise the base of the mound may perhaps be reflected by the darker bands 105 and 107 (and perhaps 103) at Tadcaster.
- 6.3 If the sequence of layers 102 - 114 provided a laminated foundation for the motte, then the upper part of the mound appears to be made up of thicker more homogeneous layers. Layer 101 is nearly 1m thick and appears to have a possible overlying turf /soil horizon, 109. This horizon may reflect further attempts at stabilising the motte, though equally it might indicate the height of an early phase of motte construction. At the very least it would seem to represent a hiatus in the overall construction, perhaps a seasonal break, but clearly the phase before which the natural bedrock was being upcast in the further construction of the mound, as perhaps is represented by layers 110 and 111.
- 6.4 There is no direct evidence for a stone phase to the castle, though one may postulate that the apparent heightening of the motte with stone rubble could, in part, reflect the need for a more substantial platform for a construction in stone.
- 6.5 There seems to be little doubt that the castle is constructed on the site of earlier Roman activity, perhaps even upon the very core of what was Roman *Calcaria*, focused upon the point where the Roman road crossed the river. The nature of the Roman presence here remains unclear, though from what piecemeal evidence there is, the Roman site would appear to have been a deeply stratified site of some longevity, perhaps with subsequent Saxon occupation (Whyman 1989).
- 6.6 So scant is the archaeological record for Tadcaster castle, that what small information can be derived or hypothesised from section through the motte assumes considerable significance. Coupled with the work carried out on the castle ditch, it is now possible to make a more informed statement about the physical nature of the castle, its level of preservation, its possible method of construction and phasing, as well the impact it is likely to have had on earlier archaeological deposits.

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Appendix

Inventory of Primary Archive

Item	Details/Quantity
Inventory	One sheet
Context register	One sheet
Context records	Sixteen sheets
Survey information	One sheet
Section drawing	One sheet at Scale 1:10
Photographic catalogue	One sheet
Black/white photographic record	One film, WYAS 4349 (17 exposures)
Colour photographic record	One film, WYAS 4414 (10 exposures)
Pottery	Five sherds of Roman pottery (two joining)
Pottery report	One sheet



*Pl. 1. Exposed section at the base of Tadcaster castle motte, looking north-west
(photograph P. Gwilliam)*