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STILE HOUSE, SHERIFF HUTTON,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Ed Dennison Archaeological Services  
18 Springdale Way  
Beverley  
East Yorkshire  
HU17 8NU

NYE1  
NYS 464

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Ed Dennison Archaeological Services  
18 Springdale Way  
Beverley  
East Yorkshire  
HU17 8NU

On behalf of

Mr K Batten  
Stile House  
The Green  
Sheriff Hutton  
York YO6 1QB

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF, STILE HOUSE, SHERIFF HUTTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken at Stile House, Sheriff Hutton, North Yorkshire by Ed Dennison Archaeological Services (EDAS), on behalf of the occupier, Mr K Batten. The work was carried out during the excavation of limited foundations for a garden greenhouse and the re-positioning of a domestic oil tank. The watching brief took place in two phases, the first on 15 April 1998 and the second on 4 September 1999.

## 2 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 Sheriff Hutton is located some 6km to the north of Strensall and c.15km north-north-east of York (see figure 1). Stile House lies in the approximate centre of the village, on the west side of the village green (Pavement Hill), which itself is on the south side of Main Street (NGR SE65356790; see figure 2).  
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- 2.2 The underlying geology is Lower Lias of the Jurassic period, overlain by boulder clay, while the soils are a typical stagnogley of the Wickham 2 Association. The site lies at about 62m AOD.

## 3 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The aim of the watching brief was to monitor any groundworks associated with the digging of the foundation trenches, and to observe and record any archaeological deposits that might be uncovered or disturbed by the work. As the site lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (County Monument 26), the work was approved by the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport; scheduled monument consent was granted on 28 October 1997 (ref HSD 9/2/3637 Pt 2) and was conditional on a watching brief being carried out.
- 3.2 The Phase 1 works comprised the digging of two small east-west parallel trenches measuring 2.0m long by 0.4m wide and 0.55m deep (Trenches 1 and 2). The Phase 2 works involved the excavation of four 0.3m wide trenches which formed each side of a square measuring 4.0m by 3.5m together with a central service trench leading to a soakaway (Trench 3); these four trenches varied in depth from 0.35m at the south end to 0.50m at the north end while the service trench was 0.25m deep overall. All the trenches were located against the west gable of the house, where the ground slopes down to the north at a gradient of 1 in 12 (see figure 2). The trenches were all excavated by hand, under archaeological supervision, and the sections and bases were cleaned and inspected for any archaeological features and deposits, as far as was practicable.
- 3.3 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 four contexts were recorded, and they are



referenced in the following text as three digit numbers (eg 002). In-house recording and quality control procedures ensured that all recorded information was cross-referenced as appropriate, and detailed plans and sections were drawn as required. A photographic record was also maintained using 35mm colour prints, and some of these are included in this report.

- 3.4 No human bones were uncovered from the excavations. However, a small amount of post-medieval pottery and other material was recovered, together with two notable artefacts, a post-medieval decorated button and a near complete medieval lozenge-shaped mount or plaque (see plates 3 and 4). All the finds have been assessed and specialist reports are presented as Appendices 1 and 2. The two notable artefacts have been cleaned, X-rayed and conserved by staff at the York Archaeological Trust's Laboratories, and have been retained by the landowner. The majority of the other finds were discarded, although some ceramics have been donated to the Humber Archaeology Partnership to augment the regional fabric series.
- 3.5 In accordance with standard archaeological procedure, and with the agreement of the landowner, the two-dimensional project archive has been deposited with the Yorkshire Museum (site code SHS 98; Museum Accession Code YORYM 1999.948). Copyright of the archive has also been transferred to the museum.

#### **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The history and development of Sheriff Hutton village has been briefly examined as part of a recent survey of the stone castle (Dennison 1998a; Dennison 1998b). The following provides a summary to place the watching brief into context.
- 4.2 A motte and bailey castle lies at the east end of the present village, and this is associated with the development of a new and planned settlement, containing a church and green, in the 12th century ("Church End" on figure 2). The motte and bailey castle was probably the centre of the medieval manor which was held by the Lords of Bulmer, but the earthworks suggest that it replaced an earlier Saxon ringwork. The village was later expanded to the west, to incorporate a wide central street ("Main Street"), two parallel back lanes (of which "North Garth Lane" is the sole survivor), and a new triangular green, just to the west of Church End green ("Little Green"). This activity is probably associated with Ranulph Nevill, who was created first Lord Nevill in 1300, or his son Ralph de Nevill, who gained the lordship of the manor and who extended the deer park to the south of the village in 1334-45.
- 4.3 The final phase of village development is dominated by the construction of the stone castle by John de Nevill in the late 14th century. The new Castle Garth was placed into the existing village layout, truncating the southern east-west back lane. The main village green also appears to have been extended south to accommodate a new market granted in 1378, and the properties which formerly occupied this area were moved south and their

plots extended south along the east side of the Castle Garth; the green was called "Pavement Hill", a name which might suggest a paved area for stalls.

- 4.4 Stile House lies in the centre of the west side of the village green, on the edge of the former Castle Garth, and it is shown in this position on a detailed map of the village dating to 1765 (Farrar archives 318, West Yorkshire Record Office, Leeds). A survey of the earthworks around the castle suggest that the original entrance into the Castle Garth lay in this area, possibly in the existing gap between Stile House and Stile Cottage; it is noticeable that both these properties have a similar skewed alignment and a footpath still enters the castle enclosure at this point (Dennison 1998a).

## **5 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS**

- 5.1 As noted above and in figure 3, a total of three trenches were dug adjacent to the west gable of Stile House where the ground slopes away to the north. Trenches 1 and 2 measured 2.0m long by 0.4m wide and 0.55m deep while Trench 3 comprised four 0.3m wide trenches dug to form each side of a square measuring 4.0m north-south by 3.5m east-west (see plate 1). A further, shallower trench was dug through this area to form a drain and soakaway.

### **Trenches 1 and 2**

- 5.2 The upper level of both these trenches was composed of a medium brown clay topsoil (001), underlain by a dark brown/black clay loam (002); precise differentiation between these layers was difficult to identify. A small amount of 19th or early 20th century domestic stoneware and transfer-printed whiteware was found in this lower level, together with large and small stones. At the base of the each trench, there was a layer of consolidated angular and rounded stones with no obvious bonding agent or mortar (003). One large piece of limestone with a squared face lay at the east end of Trench 2 and a small piece of undated post-medieval pantile lay on its surface. The stony layer covered most of the base of the two trenches, but it was only 0.2m thick and it overlay a dark brown and orange clay natural deposit (004).

### **Trench 3**

- 5.3 Only two stratified layers were identified within the depth of ground excavated here. The uppermost layer (001) was a dark brown/black humic loam, 0.30m-0.50m thick, containing a large quantity of domestic rubbish of late 19th and 20th century date together with some 17th and 18th century material. A small copper-alloy button, embossed with a stag's head and thought to be early 19th century in date (see Appendix 2, plate 3 and figure 4), was also recovered from this layer.
- 5.4 This layer was not bottomed in the south-east corner of the square, but over the rest of the area it overlay a gritty, silty clay, containing large amounts of heavy rubble and gravel (003). The rubble consisted mainly of waterworn erratics with a few angular lumps of limestone, and there was no trace of any



mortar. The size, density and level of the stones varied over the area exposed and its irregular surface was consolidated but not compacted. No pottery was recovered from this layer, but a lozenge-shaped, copper-alloy plaque inlaid with enamel in a cruciform decoration and edged with silver was found embedded in its surface (see plates 2 and 4, and figure 4). It is suggested that this important artefact dates to the mid 13th-15th century (see Appendix 2).

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Stile House was originally a row of three small cottages and, before recent boundary changes, the area uncovered by the trenches lay outside these properties and was part of the adjacent Castle Garth (pers somm Mr K Batten). The domestic rubbish encountered in the uppermost layers in all the trenches (001 and 002) was probably dumped over the boundary by previous occupants of the cottages.
- 6.2 After the excavation of the Phase 1 trenches (trenches 1 and 2), it was thought that the consolidated stone and rubble layer (003) might have represented part of a robbed and unmortared wall or boundary which could have defined the edge of the Castle Garth. However, the results from Trench 3 suggests that the rubble layer extended over a greater area and so was probably too wide for a wall. Its surface was too uneven and not compacted enough for a yard or roadway, and it may simply be a pile of stones cleared from the adjacent areas or an abandoned or demolished boundary. The period of its deposition could not be determined, but the presence of some 17th century material in the overlying loam (001/002) suggests that it is earlier than this, and it probably pre-dates the cottages. The consolidation of the gravel into a clear horizon implies that the rubble had gradually turfed over and lay undisturbed for a long period before the late post-medieval domestic rubbish seen in layer 002 and 001 covered it.
- 6.3 Of the two notable finds, the stag's head button is thought to be of 19th century date, and the decoration may be associated with the post-medieval deer park which lies to the south-east of the village (see figure 1). The decorative plaque or mount is a more noteworthy artefact, and it is likely to have been attached to a casket, book or item of furniture or panelling, or was perhaps used as a brooch or badge of livery. No definite provenance was able to be found, but it probably dates to the mid 13th to 15th centuries. It is clearly a high-quality, high-status item which may have been made for someone associated with occupants of the castle. It's discovery next to Stile House might also provide further evidence for their being an entrance into the Castle Garth from the west side of the presumed 14th century village green.

## 7 REFERENCES

Dennison, E 1998a *Archaeological and Architectural Survey, Sheriff Hutton Castle, North Yorkshire* (unpublished EDAS report 1996/10R.01)

Dennison, E 1998b "Recent Work at Sheriff Hutton Castle". *CBA Forum for 1998*, 7-12

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1 EDAS would like to thank the occupier, Mr K Batten, for his co-operation during the watching brief. As developer, Mr Batten commissioned the on-site work and reporting, and EDAS commissioned the specialist finds assessment, recording and conservation work.
- 8.2 The first phase of the watching brief was carried out by Ed Dennison and the second by Rod Mackey; both produced their respective fieldwork records and photographs. The specialist ceramic and other material report (Appendix 1) was produced by Peter Didsbury and the specialist finds report (Appendix 2) was produced by Lisa Wastling. Les Turner prepared the drawings for figure 4 after conservation work was completed at the York Archaeological Trust Laboratories. Plates 3 and 4 were taken by BM Photographics of Hull. Ed Dennison prepared and produced the final report and drawings, and the responsibility for any errors or inconsistencies remains with him.
- 8.3 As noted in Chapter 3 above, the project archive has been deposited with the Yorkshire Museum (site code SHS 98; Museum Accession Code YORYM 1999.948), and a copy of this report has been deposited with the North Yorkshire County Sites and Monuments Record.