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**REAR OF 18 WATER SKELLGATE, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE****ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT***Summary*

*The current site of Ripon Amateur Opera Society is being put forward for outline planning permission for residential development. The site lies to the rear of 18 Water Skellgate (SE 3125 7111) within the Ripon Conservation Area. Part of the application process is to assess the archaeological potential of the site. Discussions with the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council indicated that a synthesis of the existing documentation for adjacent sites to produce a desk-based assessment would allow for an understanding of the site prior to the determination of the next stage of evaluation. This document represents that desk-based assessment.*

*Ripon is an historic town with recorded origins from at least the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The spread of the pre-Conquest ecclesiastical precinct and associated settlement based around the current Minster possibly reach the area of the Opera Hall around the 11<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of a mill at the southern end of Duck Hill. The mill appears to be have been at, or near, the junction of Duck Hill, Water Skellgate and Skellgarths with the associated water-course running along what is now the carriageway of the latter two roads. The earlier presence of the river in this area is attested to by a natural watercourse and terraces recorded during the excavation at Bedern Bank and the linear feature on Skellgarths. The establishing and development of the mill and its race would have acted as a focus for activity in the area, possibly in the form of timber buildings and craft/small-scale industry.*

*Evidence for activity during the post-medieval period shows the survival of a mill and millrace to the north-east of the Opera Hall site along with development of its northern edge, along the roadside. The most significant building identified during this period is the Charity School shown on Jeffrey's map of 1772, part of which may have occupied the site. The southern part of the site remained as open land until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Opera Hall was built.*

*There is a potential for the survival of archaeological features within the site. The earliest would be expected to relate to the hydrology of the earlier course of the River Skell. The possibility of survival of remains from the medieval period onwards is moderate, particularly along the street frontage and may be related to the water-management of the earlier course of the River Skell and the 18<sup>th</sup> century Charity School.*

*Development on the site may impact upon buried archaeological remains depending upon depth and nature of foundations and service trenches. Currently there are no specific plans available for the development of the site hence it is not possible to determine what the nature and extent of the impact, if any, would be. Therefore a programme of further archaeological works should be undertaken once the nature and extent of the proposals are known.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of the potential for future development of the site outline planning permission (application 6.31.1666B.OUT) is being sought for the current location of Ripon Amateur Operatic Society, to the rear of 18 Water Skellgate, Ripon (SE 3125 7111). In order to be able to proceed with the application an assessment of the archaeological potential has been requested by the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire County Council. This document forms the desk-based assessment part of the overall assessment.
- 1.2 Discussions with the Heritage Unit indicated that as extensive desk-based assessments had been carried out on sites to both the east and west of the Opera Hall a full consultation of the North Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record would not be required. Instead a synthesis based on the existing documentation for these two sites would allow for an understanding of the site prior to the determination of the next stage of evaluation.
- 1.3 A walkover survey of the site was undertaken to establish the nature of the buildings currently occupying the site and to assess the possibility of the survival of archaeological remains within the site. It was also aimed to determine the feasibility of further archaeological evaluation prior to any redevelopment work.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Location

- 2.1 The Opera Hall is located on the southern edge of the historic core of the medieval settlement of Ripon (centred on SE 3125 7111) and lies within Ripon Conservation Area. The site is to the rear of 18 Water Skellgate c.20m to the west of the junction of Duck Hill, Skellgarths and Water Skellgate and is in Ripon civil parish of Harrogate District. Ripon itself lies between Harrogate (c.14km to the south-west) and Northallerton (c.22km to the north-east) in North Yorkshire (Figures 1 and 2).

### Geology and soils

- 2.2 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 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).

### Topography and land-use

- 2.3 The site is at an approximate height of 26mOD with a slight drop in height of c.1m from north to south. The western portion of the site adjacent to 18 Water Skellgate and the extant Opera Hall is covered with tarmac and forms both the

access to the building and car parking. The parking area to the west of the Opera Hall contains a storm water drain along the western side and there is a manhole towards the southern end. The current building occupying the site was built c. 1940 and is a single story construction built from asbestos sheeting and occupies the south-eastern part of the site.

- 2.4 To the west of the site the ground is level with the adjacent footpath and the parking area for the Renault garage. To the east there is a drop of 1-2m to the next property.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY AND INFORMATION SOURCES**

- 3.1 The principal aims of the desk-based assessment were to:

- identify known archaeological sites within or immediately adjacent to the site
- identify areas with the potential to contain any unrecorded archaeological remains
- assess the effects of any proposed development upon archaeological sites
- propose archaeological measures which could be built into the development proposals to avoid, reduce or remedy any potential adverse effects identified

- 3.2 This report is based primarily upon a review of two previous desk-based studies undertaken on sites within 40m of either side of the Opera Hall. These studies were undertaken by York Archaeological Trust (YAT, 2000 and Evans, 2003). In order to produce these reports research was undertaken at the North Yorkshire Heritage Unit, North Yorkshire Archives and English Heritage National Monuments Record

- 3.3 The following data sources were researched for the assessments:

- North Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record
- published and unpublished historical and archaeological studies
- cartographic sources (including historic Ordnance Survey maps)
- National Monuments Record: Archaeology
- National Monuments Record: Listed Buildings

- 3.4 A site inspection of the site was carried out on 28 December 2003. The inspection was carried out with two objectives; firstly to confirm the nature and extent of the buildings currently occupying the site and secondly to identify possible areas for the survival of archaeological remains.

### **4.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Archaeological and historic sites recorded within the 250m radius study area of the site are summarised in Table 1 below. The sites are identified by a site number, which is correlated with the North Yorkshire SMR (NY and NYM). A

central grid reference, suggested classification and date are provided for each site, which are graded in archaeological significance as of 1 (national), 2 (regional) and 3 (local) importance, this is based upon professional judgement and the criteria in Annex 6 of PPG16. The location of the sites is shown on Figure 2.

**Table 1: Archaeological sites within a c.250m radius of the site**

Site Number	Reference Number	Grid Reference	Description	Period/Date	Grade
1	--	SE 3128 7113 to SE 3132 7103	Millrace	Medieval	3
2	--	SE 3121 7113	Culvert	Medieval	3
3	--	SE 3123 7113	Charity School	Post-medieval	3
4	--	SE 3127 7113	Mill	Medieval	3
5	NY 336	SE 3130 7110	Excavation	Medieval	3
6	NYM 19798	SE 3133 7108	Excavation	Medieval	3

- 4.2 A total of six archaeological and historic sites were recorded within the study area.

#### **Prehistoric**

- 4.3 Although there is extensive evidence for prehistoric activity in the landscape around Ripon no archaeological material of this period has been recovered from within the city.

#### **Roman**

- 4.4 As with the prehistoric period the area around Ripon contains evidence of extensive Romano-British activity but little evidence for this activity within the confines of the settlement has been recorded. The material that has been discovered consists of find spots of Roman material, notably pottery from the Deanery Gardens (YAT 2000, 7) and NAA ref.

#### **Anglo-Scandinavian and Medieval**

- 4.5 Much has been written on the settlement and development of pre-Conquest and medieval Ripon (e.g. Hall and Whyman 1996 and Mackay 1980) and it is not intended to reproduce this information in detail here, merely a brief summary.
- 4.6 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 location and layout of the monastery and its holdings is uncertain but are commonly believed to lie to the east in the area now occupied by the cathedral and to the north of Residence Lane. The earliest archaeological evidence for a settlement associated with the monastery was recorded during excavations at the Deanery Garden Hotel which recorded a small, two cell church and associated graveyard (*ibid*).
- 4.7 Evidence for a secular settlement predating the development of the monastery has been excavated in the area around Ailcy Hill to the east of the Opera Hall site (*ibid*) and as such the proposed site probably lies to the west of the earlier monastic precinct. This demonstrates that although there may have been little

activity in Ripon during the Roman period the area was developing from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards and with the foundation of the monastery in the 8<sup>th</sup> century the area was becoming an important settlement.

- 4.8 The importance of the settlement can be seen during the medieval period, notably from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, with the expansion of the town and ecclesiastical areas. The historical and archaeological evidence indicate that the settlement is in the area between what is now Low St Agnesgate in the east across to the Market Place in the west (*ibid* 7-8). The town was probably granted the royal charters for a fair and market around this time.
- 4.9 Excavations at Bedern Bank (Site 6) c.80m to the east 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. The earliest activity was in the form of the revetting of a meander of the River Skell. These features showed that along with the revetting of the meander extensive dumping had taken place across the site in order to reclaim the land. On top of the reclaimed area evidence was recovered for industrial activity (e.g. tanning) using the water supply from the river along with domestic occupation (*ibid* 8).
- 4.10 A further evaluation at Skellgarths (Site 5) in 2001 c.40m to the east of the Opera Hall recorded a range of features possibly associated with a mill (discussed below) along with other medieval features.
- 4.11 There are various references to a mill (Site 4) being located at or near the junction of Duck Hill, Water Skellgate and Skellgarths from Domesday onwards (*ibid* 8). The mill appears to have variously been called *Bymylne*, *Byemill* and *Bye Mill* and was finally partially demolished in 1988 for road widening. During the site visit the building called Mill House was examined and at the northern end of the new building there is what appears to be the remains of a substantial, undressed stone wall which may represent the partial remains of the last phase of the mill. The wall has been partially rebuilt and altered so its veracity as part of the mill is subject to debate. The existence of the mill is further attested to with a documentary reference from the 1340's to Skellgarths being called Walkmill Bank. This is possibly a reference to fulling being carried out at least during one stage during the buildings' existence (*ibid* 8).
- 4.12 The water-course recorded during the Bedern Bank excavation would appear to form an early phase of the water management of the River Skell with the linear feature encountered at the Skellgarths site probably being part of this activity. This would appear to be supported by the remains of part of the mill race observed in the gardens to the rear of St Agnes Lodge and the ability to follow its course on various 18<sup>th</sup> century maps (YAT 2000, 10).
- 4.13 With the establishing of a mill and water management it would be expected that the area around the mill and mill race would see further development, both industrial and domestic in nature.

### Post-medieval

- 4.14 Post-medieval cartographic evidence shows a millrace (Site 1) drawing water from the River Laver and running along Water Skellgate (hence its name) and Skellgarths before joining the River Skell at Bondgate to the east of the Opera Hall site. Work within the last 10 years on the boiler room for the Renault garage c.40m to the west of the Opera Hall revealed the remains of part of a stone culvert (Site 2), probably part of the mill-race or associated water management along Water Skellgarths (Evans 2003, 9).
- 4.15 The presence of the mill is further supported by the 1744 Enclosure Map for Ripon and Jeffrey's map of Ripon of 1772. Both of these documents show the mill-race and mill at or near the bottom of Duck Hill. The 1772 map shows a series of bridges across the mill-race. Langdale's Plan of Ripon (1818) continues to record the mill-race but in 1880 the watercourse had been covered over and become a roadway. Various road works along Water Skellgate have revealed a cobbled surface at c.0.6m below current ground level (*ibid* 9).
- 4.16 Jeffrey's map of 1772 appears to show of the northern part of the Opera Hall site (the driveway) occupied by the eastern end of the Charity School (Site 3). By the 1818 Plan of Ripon the Charity School has been replaced by buildings along the southern edge of the Water Skellgate with the site of the Opera Hall (at the rear of the plot) undeveloped. The 6" edition of the Ordnance Survey in 1856 shows that buildings have spread all the way along Water Skellgate and have started to encroach along the southern edge of Skellgarths, though the rear (southern) part of the Opera Hall plot still appears to be undeveloped.
- 4.17 The site visit showed that the present layout of buildings on the site date from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ground level of the site slopes gently to the south, with a drop of c.1m along the length of the plot. To the west of the site the ground surface is approximately level with the surrounding properties notably the upper level car park of the Renault garage site. A brief examination of the Renault site showed that geo-technical investigations had been undertaken and although the bore-holes had been partially back-filled an examination of the remaining upcast only produced a single fragment of modern brick with the rest of the material being mixed gravels and silts. Along the base of the southern side of the perimeter wall facing on to Water Skellgate the earlier stone thresholds for the previous buildings on the site could be seen. This shows that there has been no significant change in ground level along the street frontage since these buildings were demolished. The plot to the east (the rear of the old library) of the site is c.1-2m lower than the Opera Hall. It could not be determined if this meant that the Opera Hall had been built on make ground or if the rear of the library had been subject to ground reduction. However, as the Opera Hall is approximately level with the sites to the west it would appear that ground reduction has taken place.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

- 5.1 It can be seen from the various investigations in the area that the spread of the pre-Conquest ecclesiastical precinct and associated settlement probably reach

the area to the east of the Opera Hall around c.11<sup>th</sup> with the establishment of a mill at the southern end of Duck Hill. However, it is open to debate if this mill is the same one, or on the same site as the mill referred to in later sources.

- 5.2 The location of the mill appears to be at, or near, the junction of Duck Hill, Water Skellgate and Skellgarths with the associated water-course running along what is now the carriageway of these roads. The reason for the location of the mill is that it was on one of the earlier meanders of the River Skell, which now runs some 140m to the south. The earlier presence of the river in this area is attested to by the recording of a natural water-course and terraces during the excavation at Bedern Bank and the linear feature on Skellgarths. This means that there is likelihood that the earliest features that would be expected to be contained within the Opera Hall site would be related to the hydrography of the river.
- 5.3 The establishing and development of the mill and its race would act as a focus for activity in the area. If the pattern seen at Bedern Bank were to be repeated it would be expected to see widespread dumping of material in order to provide flood free land to build on. The activity in the area would then probably be in the form of timber buildings and possibly craft/ small-scale industry.
- 5.4 Examination of the post-medieval cartographic evidence locates the mill to the north-east of the Opera Hall site. Probably where the undressed stone wall remains to the north of Mill House on Skellgarths. This means that the area of the proposed development would have lain closer to the river and would therefore have been less favourable to occupy. In turn this would mean that any activity on the site would be later than that seen at Bedern Bank, probably from the c.14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards.
- 5.5 The post-medieval activity in the area of the Opera Hall site is primarily in the form of the development of its northern edge, along the roadside. The most significant building identifiable during this period is the Charity School shown on Jeffrey's map of 1772. The southern (rear) part remaining as open land until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Opera Hall was built.
- 5.6 Observations at the site of the Renault garage to the west of the Opera Hall and at the results of the Bedern Bank excavation have shown that there may a significant amount of modern made ground over lying any archaeological deposits in this area (*ibid* 9). The site visit confirmed the variations in ground level around the area of the proposed development with the Opera Hall standing on a ground level, which would appear not to have undergone any reduction. The implication for this is that if there are archaeological remains on the site they are likely to be well preserved.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPACTS

- 6.1 It can be seen from the above discussion that there is a potential for the survival of archaeological remains from the medieval period onwards, mainly along the street frontage. These remains would probably be associated with activity related

to the water-management of the earlier course of the River Skell as well as possibly with the mill located to the north-east. The post-medieval development of the site is mainly along its northern edge and apart from the Charity School recorded around 1772 there is no specific activity apparent.

- 6.2 From observations at the site of the Renault garage to the west of the Opera Hall and at the Bedern Bank excavation there may be a significant amount of modern made ground over lying any archaeological deposits. This may also have an effect on the degree of preservation of archaeological features.
- 6.3 Development on the site may impact upon buried archaeological remains depending upon depth and nature of foundations and service trenches. Currently there are no specific plans available for the development of the site therefore it is not possible to determine what the nature and extent of the impact, if any, would be.

## **7.0 MITIGATION**

- 7.1 As development may impact upon buried archaeological remains to an unknown extent a programme of further archaeological works should be undertaken once the nature and extent of the proposals are known.
- 7.2 The following works are recommended:
- evaluation of the potential for the survival of archaeological remains by trial trenching
  - production of a report on the results of the evaluation including recommendations as to the potential for further disturbance to archaeological remains on the site in the light of the detailed development proposals

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## Maps

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