

THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION at ARDEN COURT, NORTHALLERTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE (SE 36802 94258)

A report to the Walton Horsfall Partnership

NYCC HER	
SNY	10971
ENY	3143
CNY	4953
Parish	2110
Rec'd	18/04/2006



Unidentified plant growing at Arden Court

12th April 2006

Rec 15/4/06

2110 Parish

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***ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION at
ARDEN COURT, NORTHALLERTON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE
(SE 36802 94258)***

A report to the Walton Horsfall Partnership

Fieldwork: Percival Turnbull & Deborah Walsh

Report : Percival Turnbull

12th April 2006

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION at
ARDEN COURT, HIGH STREET, NORTHALLERTON
NORTH YORKSHIRE
(SE 36802 94258)**

INTRODUCTION

1. On instructions from the Walton Horsfall Partnership, an archaeological evaluation was carried out on a piece of land to the east of the northern end of High Street, Northallerton. This followed advice from the office of the County Archaeologist, in response to a pre-application enquiry in connection with proposals for the construction of a sheltered housing scheme on the site.

2. A Written Scheme of Investigation for the work was produced by the office of the County Archaeologist, and dated 13th December 2005.

THE SITE

3. The site comprises an approximately square area to the rear (*i.e.*, to the east of) nos 65-67, High Street. The recent development of Arden Court is to the east: walled gardens belonging to the properties on the High Street are to the west, and further former gardens and areas of hard standing, apparently associated with nos 68-70 High Street, are to the south.

4. The site has last been in use as an orchard and gardens: several over-mature fruit trees and various other plants survive. The surface is of thick grass, resembling a neglected lawn. There are no surface traces of archaeological interest, apart from a few fragments of freestone jambs built into adjacent boundary walls: all surviving houses in the area are of brick, and the stone may come from the Parish Church, to the west, or from the totally destroyed Carmelite monastery which once lay to the south-east of the site.

5. Properties on the frontage include Porch House (71, High Street), said to date from the late 16th century, and looking as if it might include earlier fabric. It has clearly been a property of considerable status, and seems to have had a more complex plan than the normal late mediaeval town house; there is evidence, at least as local tradition, that Charles I stayed there, which tends to support the idea that this was a 'gentry' residence rather than a normal town house.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

6. The town of Northallerton is known, from historical sources, to have had pre-Conquest Anglian origins, though the concrete archaeological evidence for this is so far limited to a few sculptural fragments in All Saints' church; the church itself has some late Romanesque/ 'Transitional' work which belongs to the 12th century. After devastation during the 'Harrying of the North' the town recovered in fortune and, surviving further damage in Scotch raids, became an important mediaeval market and service centre.

7. Recent archaeological interventions along High Street have indicated the presence of early Romano-British activity near the southern end of the street, and a pattern of mediaeval occupation and craft activity within the pattern of burgage plots which is still evident in the town's layout. The 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey, dated 1857, clearly shows this pattern before it was significantly disrupted by modern development: it is possible from it to argue that the regular system of burgage strips does not continue north of the northern end of the market place, or north of the Parish Church, but gave way to a series of larger, more rectangular properties which include the church garth on the west and a series of residential properties, arguably of 'gentry' houses, on the east in the vicinity of the site under discussion.

THE EVALUATION

8. Three trenches were excavated (Fig. 1), each measuring 5 metres by 3 metres, arranged to give a representative sample of the front (west), middle and rear of the site.

METHODS

9. Turf and topsoil were removed from each of the three trenches by a back-acting JCB excavator fitted with an edentate ditching bucket. Surfaces and sections were then cleaned with hand tools for identification and recording of features. Trenches 2 and 3 were trowel-cleaned; Trench 1 was rapidly shovel-cleaned because of the danger of collapsing sections.

10. Excavated surfaces and spoil heaps were constantly scanned for the presence of loose finds.

11. Levels were established to Ordnance Datum by the benchmark on the north side of All Saints' Parish Church.

12. TRENCH 1

This was the westernmost of the three trenches, and measured 5m x 3m, aligned approximately north-south (Fig. 2).

[101] 0-15 Turf

[102] 15-70 Rich, loose black topsoil, evidently long cultivated. No inclusions apart from the very occasional large pebble. No finds of any type.

[103] 70-100 Black-dark grey, fine silty gravel with some small boulders and cobble-sized stones. No other inclusions, and no finds of any type

[104] 100-130 Mid- dark grey, sandy clay with some small pockets of gravel. No finds of any type. The colour grew progressively less dark with depth, giving way after to a yellow-brown colour.

Excavation was stopped at 130 cms below the surface, as the very loose deposits in section (especially [103]) were collapsing. It was decided that the clay deposit [104] was in fact the natural clay subsoil prevailing across the site, heavily stained by percolation of water down from the dark silt of [103]. The limit of excavation came at a height of 39.17 metres above Ordnance Datum: on the basis that [104] was the natural subsoil, this would give a height at the surface of natural of 39.47 m.a.O.D.

13. TRENCH 2

This was the central of the three trenches, and measured 5m x 3m, aligned approximately north-south (Fig. 3).

[201] 0-15 Turf

[202] 15-88 Loose, crumbly black topsoil identical to [102]. There were no finds of any type.

The natural surface, a rather crumbly yellow-brown sandy clay with occasional pockets of fine gravel, occurred at a height of 39.60 m.a.O.D.

14. TRENCH 3

This was the easternmost of the three trenches, and measured 5m x 3m, aligned approximately north-south (Figs. 4&5).

[301] 0-15 Turf

[302] 15-60 Topsoil as [102] and [202]

[303] (Under [302]) The lower part of a broken and truncated drain crossing the extreme south-west corner of the trench. Constructed of small boulders and ?19th century brick; the feature was plainly of relatively late date. This feature had been badly damaged by horticultural activity, and the north-eastern part of it had been entirely destroyed.

A single sherd of pre-modern pottery was recovered from [302]. It is a small body sherd from a thin-walled vessel in a rather soft, orange fabric entirely covered on the outer surface by a shiny, apple-green glaze. It is difficult to date with precision, but a late mediaeval or possibly 16th century context seems appropriate.

DISCUSSION

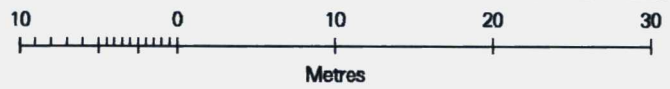
15. The thick, fine cultivated topsoil found in each of the trenches is typical of those produced over a long period in gardens and orchards; the map of 1857 (Fig. 6) shows the site much as it is today, and its horticultural use is plainly of very long standing. The almost total dearth of pre-modern pottery (or, indeed, of artefacts of any date) was something of a surprise; it is possible that this is itself a reflection of careful cultivation and of the systematic removal of stones and rubbish.

16. The deposits in Trench 1 are of interest: the silty layer [103] resembles a water-laid deposit and the underlying dark clay [104] is the same natural clay found at the bottom of Trenches 2 and 3, stained by the overlying silt. Local residents told of a water-course at this point, which is mentioned in the deeds of 65, High Street, and this would certainly account for the nature of the deposits found. At a couple of points within the site are piles of rounded cobbles and small boulders similar to those found in [103], and the same kind of stones are built into walls around the site: a dried-up watercourse may well be the origin of these stones, otherwise absent from the natural clay.

17. The evaluation revealed no trace of any of the activities which normally may be expected in the rear parts of mediaeval burgage plots, and which are known to exist elsewhere in central Northallerton- typically, pits, hearths, building remains and rubbish deposits. Cultivation in all parts of the site has clearly penetrated to a considerable depth, but this seems insufficient to have entirely removed such evidence; had it ever existed, it is overwhelmingly probable that at least truncated remains would have survived. Similarly, the almost complete absence of pottery, metal, bone or other rubbish seems to indicate that there has been little activity on the site.

18. It seems likely that this site has always been occupied by gardens and orchards associated with a high-status residence situated at the extreme northern end of the High Street, directly opposite the Parish Church and close to the monastery. This would mean that its history is likely to have differed from those of most of the historic properties along the High street, which followed a more usual pattern of burgage occupation with a house (often also serving as a shop or workshop) built on a uniform frontage and with a variety of craft or industrial activities, as well as horticultural cultivation, in the long, narrow strip to the rear.

19. It is recommended that no further archaeological intervention in this case is necessary. It is also suggested that future opportunities to examine other parts of this area at the northern end of the historic town might be of value.



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Fig. 1

Location of trenches



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Fig. 2

Trench 1



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Fig. 3

Trench 2



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Fig. 4 (above) and 5

Trench 3, and detail of drain



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Fig. 6

1st Edition, Ordnance Survey



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