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ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
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WYAS

**Land at Aldborough Gate  
Boroughbridge  
North Yorkshire**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

*November 2006*

*Report No. 1608*

CLIENT  
Boroughbridge Community Association

**Land at Aldborough Gate**  
**Boroughbridge**  
**North Yorkshire**

**Archaeological Evaluation**

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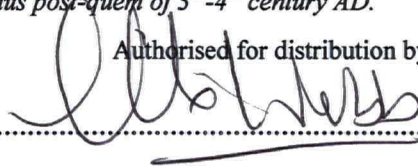
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*Non Technical Summary*

*A scheme of archaeological trial trenching was undertaken on agricultural land adjacent to Chapel Hill Lane, Aldborough. Three parallel ditches and discrete postholes were uncovered during the evaluation corroborating the results of a previous geophysical survey. The ditches appear to form part of a possible enclosure and associated field boundary. Dating evidence was recovered from the primary fill of the enclosure ditch indicating a terminus post-quem of 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century AD.*

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Archaeological Services WYAS (ASWYAS) was commissioned by the Boroughbridge Community Association to undertake an archaeological evaluation via trial trenching, to comply with the archaeological planning condition attached to the permission to develop the site (Harrogate Borough Council refs 6.64.574.RG4: 02/04955/RG4).
- 1.2 The site is located on agricultural land to the south-east of the town of Boroughbridge and to the south-west of the village of Aldborough (site centred NGR SE 4019 6586, Fig. 1). It comprises an irregular shaped area bounded to the north and west by agricultural land and to the south by Thornycroft Farm and Aldborough Forge. Chapel Hill Lane forms the south-east boundary running north-east to south-west. The site has a gradual slope down to the south-west from an approximate height of 30m above Ordnance Datum.
- 1.3 The geology of the area consists of Triassic Sandstone of the Sherwood sandstone group (British Geological Survey 1987) overlaid by unstratified deposits of glaciofluvial till of the Bishhampton 1 association (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).
- 1.4 The archaeological investigation was undertaken between September 12<sup>th</sup> and September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006.

## **2. Archaeological Background**

- 2.1 The site lies within the centre of the Vale of York in a landscape of archaeological and historical importance. Approximately 1km to the north-west is the stone alignment known as the Devil's Arrows. Dating from the Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age this consists of a line of three stones, all over 5.5m in height, and the setting for a fourth. They are considered important not only due to their survival but also due to their size, representing some of the largest standing stones in Britain, and for their rare lowland setting (MAGIC 2006).
- 2.2 Five hundred metres to the north-east is the Roman Town of Aldborough, *Isurium Brigantium*, located at the point where the Roman road known as Dere Street crossed the River Ure. While past archaeological evaluations of the fields around the site have yielded little information there is considered to be potential in the area for the survival of an associated Romano-British settlement as well as possible burial activity along the Roman road (AOC 1998, YAT 1998).
- 2.3 More recently the site itself has been subject to geophysical survey (ASWYAS 2004). Magnetic scanning (unrecorded survey) was undertaken over the whole application area, an area of 6 hectares. This was followed by detailed (recorded) survey of 3 hectares targeted on areas of archaeological potential identified during the scanning. The detailed survey identified a possible rectilinear enclosure defined on three sides by a single ditch but with two parallel ditches on its eastern side (see Fig. 2).

### 3. Method

- 3.1 A written scheme of investigation for this work was provided by North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Section. This document proposed between eight and twelve trial trenches to cover 1200m<sup>2</sup> to evaluate the whole of the proposed development area. However, following consultation with Neil Campling from NYCCHS it was agreed that this evaluation would deal only with the part of the site that will be impacted by the initial groundworks required for the construction of a pavilion, car park and two small sports pitches. Consequently, a proposal for six trial trenches adjacent to Chapel Hill Lane covering 320m<sup>2</sup> was submitted to, and subsequently approved by, NYCCHS (see Fig. 2).
- 3.2 The aim of the sample excavation was to identify any archaeological deposits or features within the proposed area of investigation; to determine the date, nature, depth and stratigraphic complexity of any discovered archaeological remains; and to provide an assessment of the potential and significance of any archaeological remains in a local, regional and if necessary national context.
- 3.3 The rationale for the trench locations is presented in Table 1 below.

Trench	Size	Rationale
1	40m by 2m	To evaluate the area adjacent to Chapel Hill Lane
2	20m by 2m	To evaluate the area of the planned car park
3	40m by 2m	To evaluate the area adjacent to Chapel Hill Lane
4	20m by 2m	To evaluate the area of the proposed pavilion
5	20m by 2m	To evaluate the possible rectilinear enclosure identified by the geophysical survey
6	20m by 2m	To evaluate the possible rectilinear enclosure identified by the geophysical survey

Table 1.

- 3.4 It was necessary to reduce the original size of Trench 3 to 27m by 2m as excavation to the south-west was halted by the presence of a modern iron pipe. To compensate, Trench 4 was extended to the west (to measure 30m by 2m), in order to maintain the percentage of area under investigation.
- 3.5 Excavation was carried out using a JCB-type mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision. The topsoil and subsoil layers were removed in level spits to either the top of the first archaeological horizon or to undisturbed natural deposits. The resulting surfaces and sections were cleaned and inspected for archaeological remains. All features encountered were hand excavated and recorded in accordance with AS WYAS standard methods (ASWYAS 2005).
- 3.6 All excavated trial trenches were surveyed using a Geodimeter Total Station Theodolite and the survey was tied into the Ordnance Survey grid using fixed existing structures and boundaries.



- 3.7 The site archive is summarised in Appendix II. It is currently stored by Archaeological Services WYAS and will be deposited with Harrogate Museums and Gallery Service within an agreed timescale. Appendix III provides a list of the archaeological contexts.

## **4. Results**

### **Summary**

- 4.1 All the trenches were located on agricultural land consisting of grass, potatoes and plough soil with a gradual slope to the south-west. A dark brown sandy silt topsoil and clean mid-brown orange silty sand subsoil were identified in all trenches.

### **Trench 1 (Plate 1)**

- 4.2 Measuring 40m by 2m and orientated on an approximate north-east to south-west alignment, Trench 1 was excavated to an average depth of 0.80m. The upper layer comprised topsoil (101), which measured 0.4m in depth and is a product of modern ploughing. This overlay a substantial layer (0.4m deep) of subsoil (102), which sealed natural deposits. The natural (103) comprised a mixed glacial till of red-brown sand to the north-east and a stone-filled brown-red clay to the south-west.
- 4.3 No archaeological features were observed within Trench 1 and only unstratified modern artefacts were noted in the topsoil. Though termed subsoil, layer (102) may represent colluvial deposits.

### **Trench 2 (Plate 2)**

- 4.4 Trench 2 was orientated on an east to west alignment and measured 20m by 2m. As in Trench 1, the stratigraphy comprised topsoil (201, 0.4m in depth) overlying subsoil (202) that was noted to be 0.32m deep. This sealed natural deposits (203) comprising mixed glacial till of red-brown clay and stone-filled grey-brown sand and silts.
- 4.5 No archaeological features were observed within Trench 2 and only unstratified modern artefacts were noted in the topsoil.

### **Trench 3 (Plates 3 and 4)**

- 4.6 This trench measured 27m by 2m and was excavated to an average depth of 1.1m. It was orientated on an approximate north-east to south-west alignment and as in previous trenches the upper layer encountered consisted of topsoil (301, 0.35m in depth), which overlay subsoil (302, 0.33m in depth). Within Trench 3 two layers of natural deposits were identified below the subsoil. Layer (303) comprised a lightly stoned glacial till of red-brown sand and silts similar to those seen in contexts (103) and (203) and measured 0.5m in depth. Below this was a clean yellow sand (304) of probable glacial origin.
- 4.7 Only a modern iron pipe was observed within Trench 3 with no archaeological features being present. Unstratified modern artefacts were noted in the topsoil.

**Trench 4 (Plate 5 and 6)**

- 4.8 Trench 4 measured 30m by 2m, with an average depth of 1.2m, and was orientated on an approximate east to west alignment. Topsoil (401) was observed to 0.3m in depth, which sealed a deep deposit of subsoil (402, 0.64m in depth). Below this layer a possible palaeosol (403) was identified in the western aspect of the trench. It comprised a dark-grey-brown, sand-silt, 0.4m in depth and visible for a minimum of 7m in length. This layer appeared to still have a high organic component. The natural deposits (404) beneath deposit 403 comprised mixed glacial till of red-brown sand and stone-filled grey-brown sand and silts.

**Trench 5 (Fig. 3; Plates 7, 8 and 9)**

- 4.9 Measuring 20m by 2m, Trench 5 was orientated on an approximate north-west to south-east alignment and was excavated to an average depth of 0.8m. The upper layer encountered consisted of topsoil (501), 0.35m in depth, which overlay subsoil (502), 0.4m in depth. Sealed by deposit 502 were three linear features [505/507, 509 and 517] that corresponded with the linear anomalies identified in the previous magnetometer survey.
- 4.10 Ditch 507 was located approximately 4.5m from the north-western end of the trench and comprised a U-shaped cut with a surviving width of 0.76m. It was filled with a firm, dark-grey-brown, stone-clay (deposit 506). The excavator identified a possible re-cut (505) of this ditch, which cut through deposit 506 and truncated the north-west side of ditch 507. The possible re-cut was identified as U-shape cut and was observed to measure 2m in width by 0.7m in depth. Ditch 505 contained a single brown-yellow, silt sand fill (504).
- 4.11 Situated to the south-east, two parallel linear ditches (509 and 517) were observed on the same alignment. These ditches were much less substantial measuring between 0.7m and 0.9m in width and between 0.2 and 0.45m in depth. They both possessed U-shape profiles and contained single fills of dark grey-brown, stone-clay (508 and 516).
- 4.12 Situated between ditches 509 and 517 three postholes were identified (511, 513 and 515). Postholes 511 and 513 had been bisected by the south-west edge of Trench 5. The post-holes ranged in size between 0.35m and 0.45m in diameter and between 0.15 and 0.4m in depth. All these features possessed U-shaped profiles and contained a single dark grey-brown, stone-clay (510), (512), and (514) fill.

**Trench 6 (Fig 4, Plates 10 and 11)**

- 4.13 Trench 6 measured 24m by 2m, with an average depth of 1.1m, and was orientated on an approximate north-west to south-east alignment.
- 4.14 As in previous trenches topsoil (601, 0.35m in depth) was observed to overlie subsoil (602, 0.5m deep). Removal of the subsoil revealed three linear features with distinct boundaries (609/605, 611 and 613), which correspond to the linear anomalies identified in the magnetometer survey.
- 4.15 Excavation revealed the westernmost ditch (609) had been re-cut by ditch 605. Ditch 609 possessed a U-shape profile and measured 1.8m in width by 0.85m in depth. It contained three fills with the primary fill (608) comprising a



brown-grey stone-sand. Four sherds of pottery dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD were recovered from deposit 608. The secondary and tertiary fills comprised grey brown sandy deposits that only differed in inclusion volume.

- 4.16 A U-shaped re-cut (605) was observed cutting through deposits 606 and 607. It measured 0.65m in depth and 1.4m wide and contained a single dark brown grey silty clay deposit (604).
- 4.17 Approximately 3m south-east of ditch 609 a further two ditches (611 and 613) were located, spaced 0.2m apart. Ditch (611) possessed a U-shape profile and measured 1.2m in width by 0.4m in depth and contained a single brown grey silty sand fill (610). Ditch 613, located to the south-east, was smaller measuring 0.76m in width and 0.25m in depth. It also possessed a U-shaped profile and contained a single dark-brown-grey silt-clay deposit (612).

## **5. *Artefact Record***

### **5.1 *Pottery by Blaise Vyner***

- 5.1.1 A total of four pottery sherds were recovered from deposit 608, Trench 6. These comprised four plainware body sherds from greyware bowls or jars, undiagnostic beyond the presence of a body sherd with a looped handle. The material may date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century and could well be a local product.

## **6. *Discussion and Conclusions***

- 6.1 In archaeological terms, Trenches 1, 2, and 3 were negative and only revealed a sequence through the local drift geology, the subsoil and modern plough soils. Trench 4 revealed a possible palaeosol (403), however no archaeological features were observed. Both Trenches 5 and 6 revealed distinct archaeological linear features corresponding to the anomalies identified by the earlier magnetometer survey.
- 6.2 The westernmost of the ditches identified in Trenches 5 and 6 appear from the geophysical survey to be forming the eastern edge of a possible rectilinear enclosure. Tentative dating evidence for the occupation of the enclosure is provided by the four sherds of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD pottery recovered from the primary fill of this ditch. Evidence of maintenance of the enclosure is demonstrated by the re-cut, seen clearly in Trench 6 and indicates that the enclosure may have been occupied over a number of seasons or years.
- 6.3 To the east of the possible enclosure, the single linear anomaly indicated by the geophysical survey in fact transpired to be two closely adjoining narrow ditches. The function of these features is unclear, although they may form part of a field boundary to which the suggested enclosure was appended or represent a redefinition of the eastern edge of the enclosure. The postholes discovered between these two ditches in Trench 5 may represent part of structure, possibly a fence line.
- 6.4 It is of interest to note that the fills of the features identified in Trench 5 all were similar in composition to the natural. This may explain why the magnetometer survey did not locate the continuation of this ditch that was clearly identifiable as a linear magnetic anomaly in Trench 6.



- 6.5 All features identified in Trenches 5 and 6 were overlain by a substantial depth of subsoil averaging 0.5m in thickness. It has been suggested that this layer may represent a build up of colluvial material as a result of vegetation change further up the slope (N. Campling *pers. comm.*, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006).

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## ***Acknowledgements***

**Project management**      Alistair Webb BA MIFA

**Editing**                      Louise Martin BSc

**Report**                         Iain McIntyre BSc

**Graphics/illustrations**      David Williams BA

**Fieldwork**                     Iain McIntyre