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**ALCOMBE COTTAGE, TOWTON**

**NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**Planning Number 2007/1253/FUL**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**



JB Archaeological Services

On behalf of

Mr & Mrs Cassidy

April 2008



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Cover Picture. Bottle found by client for Morrison & Townend, Castleford Yorks. Showing image of man standing at table with speech bubble "This is the drink for me"

Plate 1. General view of site looking south-east during excavation.

Plate 2. General view of site looking north-east showing footings.

**ALCOMBE COTTAGE, OLD LONDON ROAD, TOWTON  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

*Summary*

*As the construction of a new extension to the side of Alcombe Cottage, Towton (SE 4840 3960) lay close to the site of an historic battle field and known mass graves as well as being within the historic part of the settlement there was considered a potential for associated archaeological remains to survive within the site. As a result of this a condition on the planning application (2007/1253/FULL) for an Archaeological Watching Brief was placed on the ground disturbance works.*

*The ground work for the new extension consisted of a hand digging strip foundations and an associated service trench. The ground works were undertaken on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008.*

*The results of the watching brief were generally negative as it appears that the ground has either been farmland or a domestic garden in the past. The only artifactual material noted were the occasional fragments of pottery dating from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and a small number of animal bone fragments which appear to be as a result of manuring to improve the field or domestic refuse from the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century cottage.*

*No other archaeological finds or features were recorded during the ground works.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief on the ground works for a new extension to the west of Alcombe Cottage, Old London Road, Towton, North Yorkshire (SE 4840 3960). The watching brief was a condition on the planning application (2007/1253/FULL) as the site lay close to the Battle of Towton (1461) and some of its associated mass graves as well as other known archaeological sites and finds.
- 1.2 The watching brief was conducted by JB Archaeological Services (JBAS) for Mr and Mrs Cassidy, and was carried out on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2008.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

### Historic Background

- 2.1 Alcombe Cottage lies approximately on the northern edge of the historic settlement of Towton which is also the northern edge of the battlefield for the Battle of Towton which was fought on a snowy Palm Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup> 1461. The battle is considered to have been the largest and bloodiest ever fought on English soil. Historically, the battle marked a turning point in the Wars of the Roses that confirmed the Yorkist Edward IV's accession to the throne of England. It is thought that 42,000 men fought for the Lancastrians and 36,000 for the Yorkists and that during the battle and ensuing rout of the Lancastrians, an estimated 28,000 men lost their lives. Evidence for the battle and possible execution of prisoners has been excavated at nearby Towton Hall in the form of a mass burial with the skeletal remains showing extensive evidence of both blunt and sharp force trauma (see [www.brad.ac.uk/acad/archsci/depart/resgrp/towton/](http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/archsci/depart/resgrp/towton/) for further details)
- 2.2 As well the battle mentioned above archaeological work on sites to the east of Alcombe Cottage have recorded Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval activity.
- 2.3 The place name for Towton is first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Touetun* with the name being derived from the Old Scandinavian personal name and suffix *tun* meaning 'farmstead or village of a man called Tofi' (Mills, 1998, 352).

### Geology and Soils

- 2.4 The underlying solid geology of the site is of Magnesian limestone (British Geological Survey, 2001) which is overlain by a quaternary geology of lacustrine clays, silts and gravels (British Geological Survey 1977). The soils that have weathered from this are the Aberford association which are well drained, calcareous fine loamy soils over limestone (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).

### **Topography and Land-use**

- 2.5 Alcombe Cottage is situated on the northern side of the Towton adjacent to open farmland and at the end of a short row of dwellings at a height of c.27mOD (SE 4840 3960). To the north and west of the cottage is open arable farmland and to the south lies Towton Hall and the settlement itself.

## **3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 3.1 The objective of the watching brief was to identify and record any features of archaeological interest revealed or damaged during the ground works for the construction of the new extension. The specific aims were to:

- archaeologically record (graphically and photographically) any archaeological features revealed by the ground works
- recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental material exposed by the ground works

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 The strip foundations and service trench were all excavated by hand under direct archaeological supervision (Plate 1).
- 4.2 During all of the ground works the exposed ground surfaces were inspected for archaeological features and the resulting topsoil stockpiles were monitored for archaeological artefacts.

## **5.0 RESULTS**

- 5.1 The watching brief was generally negative due to a combination of possible earlier ploughing, as the area seems to have been farmland up until the construction of Alcombe Cottage and the subsequent use of the area as a domestic garden for the cottage. The area of the extension had been used as gravelled standing for cars and there was a c.0.25m thick layer of compacted gravel and weak mix cement over a similar thickness of topsoil which in turn overlay a sandy clay subsoil (Plate 2).
- 5.2 A very small number of fragments of pottery and animal were recovered from the c.0.20m thick topsoil along the line of the footings. The majority of the fragments were un-abraded body sherds dating from the late c.16<sup>th</sup> century through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Probably the most interesting sherds were three pieces of 17/18<sup>th</sup> century slipware one of which was a small portion of 'pie-crust' rim from a plate. The animal bone assemblage consisted of two horse teeth, a pig tooth and a fragment of sheep rib. As all of the material was recovered from the topsoil it would appear to probably be the result of manuring or domestic refuse.

5.3 No archaeological features were observed during the excavation of the footings and service trench.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

6.1 As can be seen from above, the results of the watching brief were negative due to possible ploughing and use as a domestic garden. No direct evidence for any archaeological features were recorded.

## References

- Mills AD (1998) *Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- 1977 Geological Survey Ten Mile Map South Sheet Quaternary. British Geological Survey
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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr R Cassidy for inviting me to undertake the project, Dale and the rest of the guys doing the ground-works for their help and hard work.

**ALCOME COTTAGE, TOWTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE  
ILLUSTRATIONS**



Plate 1. General view of site looking south-east during excavation.



Plate 2. General view of site looking north-east showing footings.