

4 Cathedral Close, Ripon

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Archaeological Watching Brief

for

Mrs Jean Harvey

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* figures reversed in text

4 Cathedral Close Ripon

Archaeological Watching Brief.

- 1) Background
 - 1.1) The property known as 4 Cathedral Close Ripon (SE315 712) is situated approximately 500m north-east of The Cathedral of St Peter and St Wilfrid at Ripon (the Minster), on the west side of Cathedral Close (Fig 1). This was previously the site of The Deanery, which was built in the 18th century to replace The Old Deanery on Minster Road (now a hotel). The 18th century building was demolished in the 1950s or 1960s (*Roger Trees pers. comm.*) and a number of mid-twentieth century brick-built detached houses constructed on the site.
 - 1.2) In addition, the site has been supposed to contain the remains of the medieval Rectory, though no evidence to support this has been located during this project.
 - 1.3) The site lies in close proximity to two Scheduled Ancient Monuments, the Minster and its precincts, and Ailey Hill, a 10 metre high conical mound of uncertain date and function which lies approximately 600m to the south-east. St Marys Gate, which runs immediately to the west of the property, is believed to be of Anglo-Saxon origin.
 - 1.4) Excavations at Deanery Gardens, St Marys Gate in 1977/1978, approximately 150 metres to the west of the present site, located traces of medieval occupation including timber buildings, and three inhumation burials believed to be of early medieval date. (*Information from North Yorkshire County Council's Historic Environment Record.*)
 - 1.5) Because of the proximity of the property to the archaeologically sensitive areas briefly described above, planning consent for the erection of an extension to the rear (west) of 4 Cathedral Close, Ripon was granted subject to the carrying out of an archaeological watching brief during ground works associated with the new construction. This was under taken for the client, Mrs J Harvey, by Vivienne Metcalf and John Buglass of ArcheType Archaeological Associates during the week beginning Monday April 7 2008.

2) Site and Situation

- 2.1) The existing house is situated approximately 85m to the west of St Marys Gate. The ground slopes from west to east, the house being located just less than half-way between St Marys Gate and Cathedral Close to the east (Figs 1 and 2).
- 2.2) The natural subsoil is a pinkish gravel probably of glacial outwash origin, sloping from north-west to south-east, overlain at the south end of the trench by a brown loamy subsoil; the whole in turn overlain by a dark humic garden topsoil to a uniform depth of approximately 30cm. The topsoil lies very cleanly and distinctly above the underlying layers and may have been imported when the present house was constructed.

3) Methodology

- 3.1) A flagged path up to 1.8m wide (widest at the south end) ran along the level ground at the rear of the building. The site was cleared to this level with the aid of a small mechanical excavator, to a width of approximately 1.80m at the south end, widening from a point approximately 5m along the north-south axis of the trench to a maximum width of approximately 3.50m at the north. From this level foundation trenches approximately 300mm by 300mm were excavated mechanically, through very loose and unstable material.
- 3.2) Archaeological evidence was noted along the south part of the trench, covering approximately 7.25m. Beyond this to the north the clearance and foundation trenches revealed only the undisturbed pinkish gravel subsoil. This was recorded photographically only, and will not be further discussed in this report.
- 3.3) Archaeological remains noted in the southern part of the trench were cleaned by hand as far as possible, photographed on 35mm colour film and digitally, and the plans and section draw at a scale of 1:20.

4) Results

- 4.1) Removal of the topsoil at the southern part of the trench revealed the presence of very loose demolition material, including stone and brick fragments, roofing material including both stone slate and pantile fragments, and quantities of mortar and plaster (Fig 4). This layer butted up to and partially overlay, at a distance of about 5m from the south of the trench, what at first appeared to be a solid block of mortared stone and brick, approximately 2.20m wide, possibly overlying and incorporating what appeared at first to be a wall approximately 850mm wide (Fig 5). Beyond this feature to the north lay undisturbed natural gravel.

- 4.2) Further excavation revealed the mortared feature to be a block or 'floor' of poorly-mortared re-used building stone and 19th century brick (up to 3 bricks thick), possibly forming the base of a garden feature. Large re-used stones set to the south of this feature may have been garden steps.
- 4.3) The re-used material overlay/incorporated part of a structure consisting of two coursed brick walls, each one brick thick and cemented, 900mm high, running east-west and, at the west end, north-south. This right-angle formed part of a crude structure, the original function of which could not be determined, containing an infill of stone blocks and cobbles, loosely packed and with some modern cement. The brick walls may have been constructed simply to make a 'form' for the cemented stone and cobble infill (Fig 6 and section, Fig 3).
- 4.4) Similarly, to the south of the brick feature, an area 1.15m north-south by a minimum of 1.95m east-west had the same deliberate fill of cobbles, stones and cement (Fig 7). Together, the two formed a solid block of cemented cobbles and stone approximately 2.20m wide (N-S) and a maximum of 500mm deep, which extended at least 2.20m west and continued beyond the trench.
- 4.5) This block formed a solid base for a brick and stone floor (shown on Fig 5) which was flanked at the south by the large stones which appeared to form steps. The whole structure may have been the base for a garden feature as suggested at 4.2) above.
- 4.6) The east-west single thickness brick wall of the possible garden feature construction was built on top of a wall, 250mm thick, of good quality stone blocks with lime mortar, which extended 750mm eastwards across the cleared area before forming a corner. The stone wall then appeared to continue south in the direction of the remnants of a poor stone wall visible in the north-facing section at the south of the trench. This could not be confirmed, as the excavations for the new footings did not extend across this part of the trench.
- 4.7) The south and east sides of the east-west wall and its return (Wall 1), both stone and brick, were covered in a layer of fairly modern 2-coat plaster, indicating both that they were internal to a building, and that they were contemporary. On the south side a channel for services (electric wiring) had been cut into the plaster (Fig 8). There were indications that this 'room' within a larger building had originally had a cobbled floor.
- 4.8) Further traces of the building were indicated by the stubs of two east-west walls, one brick, one stone, each 2 courses thick, which were cut by the new foundation trench but which did not survive very far into the cleared area. The first of these (Wall 2) lay approximately 2.65m south of the exterior wall of the building. It was constructed of a double

thickness of bricks and was approximately 250mm wide; plaster survived on its southern side, though none was apparent on its north side.

- 4.9) Between Walls 1 and 2, internal to the building, a small area of (probably modern) stratification had survived (Fig 9). The lawn and modern topsoil cleanly overlay the brick wall and a layer of demolition material, including fragments and patches of plaster close to the wall. This merged into a layer of clean sand which at the north end was interleaved with a lens of black ashy sand. Below this layer the black ashy sand was continuous between the two walls to a depth of 350-400mm.
 - 4.10) From the south side of Wall 2, and across the area to the east, was a layer of random demolition rubble. This layer, which presumably came from the demolition of the 18th century Deanery, had probably been further disturbed by the construction of the present house.
 - 4.11) The second wall (Wall 3) was constructed of stone and was approximately 250mm thick. It was situated approximately 2.40m south of Wall 2. On its south side there was a layer of mid-brown loamy soil which could be a natural subsoil overlying the gravel, or was possibly a dump or fill. The building appeared to continue beyond this point and beyond the cleared area.
 - 4.12) Very few finds were recovered from the excavation. These included the building materials noted above, together with some thin, probably 20th century window glass. The only pottery recovered was a few sherds of blackware and transfer-printed blue-and-white earthenware, dating to the mid- to late-19th century. None of these was *in situ*; all were recovered from the demolition rubble.
- 5) Discussion
- 5.1) The watching brief at 4 Cathedral Close Ripon revealed a number of walls of brick and stone forming part of a building at least 5m wide. These formed parts of 3 rooms. The room to the north (Room 1) was approximately 2.65m wide; the middle room (Room 2) was approximately 2.40m wide; only approximately 450mm of the third, southernmost room (Room 3) was visible in the trench.
 - 5.2) The north wall of Room 1 must originally have been the external wall of the building, as the natural gravel beyond this was completely undisturbed. However, in its form as excavated, one brick thick on a wider stone base, it could not have functioned as a main structural wall. If the supposed garden feature is contemporary with the later occupation of the original building, this would require a modification of that building during its lifetime. This could also account for the differences in the 'fills' and demolition material associated with rooms 1

and 2 (see 4.9 and 4.10 above). Alternatively, the garden feature could be contemporary with the first occupation of the present house.

- 5.3) The modern clearance work and construction trenches exposed and cut through the demolition debris associated with a building, of which only about 1.80m lay within the trench. The building materials and finds associated with this layer indicate that it was a brick and stone building, with both stone and pantiled roofs, dating no earlier than the 18th century.
- 5.4) The general lack of finds and flooring materials other than cobbles, together with the presence of black ashy material, suggests that the rooms identified were service-type rooms, possibly even a basement or half-basement, lying to the rear of a building fronting on to St Marys Gate to the west.
- 6) Conclusions
 - 6.1) The watching brief on the works for the construction of a domestic extension at 4, Cathedral Close, Ripon identified the demolition layer and some foundations probably associated with the 18th century Deanery known to have existed on the site until the mid-20th century.
 - 6.2) A solid brick and stone construction at the north of this building may have been the base of a garden feature, associated either with a late modification of the Deanery, or with the first occupation of the present house.
 - 6.3) The remains of the suggested Deanery building, at least at this part of the site, have been disturbed not only by its demolition but also by the construction of the present house.