The Vivars
Selby
North Yorkshire

Archaeological Evaluation

MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd

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1. Introduction

MAP Archaeological Consultancy undertook in April, 1995, an archaeological evaluation of an area of the Vivars site specifically identified by Desktop and Earthwork Survey as the most probable location of a large pond. The site name (Vivars) would appear to derive from the Latin word 'vivarium' which means an artificial enclosure, i.e. pond for the keeping or raising of fish.

The Vivars covers an area of approximately 6.2 acres and is situated immediately to the south of Station Road and to the north of Canal Road in the market town of Selby, North Yorkshire (SE 6185 3205 : Fig. 1).

The geology of the site is Bunter sandstone covered by silt and clay of the 25-Foot Drift of the Vale of York, with local developments of alluvium (Geological Survey Map 1:50,000 Series Sheet 71) .

All work has been funded by Record Playground Equipment.

2. Previous evaluation

There are tentative suggestions that Seletun (Anglo-Saxon for willow copse) may be identified with Selby. The 'tun' element denotes a Saxon settlement, but with the advent of Viking settlement this was replaced with 'by' - the Scandinavian term for a town. Evidence for these period relies exclusively on place-name and documentary references. The advent of more extensive archaeological investigations into the urban development of Selby has provided additional information.

In 1993 a Borehole Survey of the development site on land to the rear Gowthorpe and Finkle Street by York Archaeological Trust and followed with excavation by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd, located features of possible Anglian date with associated pottery. The Borehole Survey and excavations also located a background scatter of Roman pottery.

It could be argued that the official history of Selby started with the establishment of the Abbey in 1069AD, In this year a Benedictine Abbey was established in Selby. The present day Abbey church represents numerous phases of development and aggrandisement, what is known of the Abbey's history indicates the importance of this religious centre and serves to illustrate the thriving nature of the town during the height of the Abbey's power.

With specific reference to the Vivars site cartographic evidence shows that in 1800 the site of the Vivars was open land with no signs of development. In 1808 the Enclosure map shows the site as open land. The 1851 First Edition OS map states that the area of land to the south-east of the railway line was called the Vivars; indeed a compilation map produced in Hodges History of Selby (Hodges 1893) provides additional information by citing that the Vivars was the site of the Abbey fishponds. Later Ordnance Survey maps continue to depict this area of Selby as 'The Vivars', but there is no

further mention of a specific area. It is clear from later editions of the Ordnance Survey maps that the area labelled as The Vivars proceeds to migrate further to the east.

In addition to the Desktop Evaluation (MAP 1992), an Earthwork Survey of the site was undertaken in May, 1994 (MAP 1994). The survey showed that ridge and furrow survived over 50% of the total area. Prior to the construction of the northern culvert and the railway embankment ridge and furrow probably covered the whole site. In the extreme south-western corner, a small portion of the ?medieval fishpond which gives the site its name, survives, although in a silted up form. This feature was investigated to determine it's true nature, which is generally accepted to be the site of the fishpond.

3. Excavation methods

The presence of a large culvert to the north of the pond and a substantial main sewer pipe to the south, predetermined the location of the evaluation trench (Fig. 1) . Equally the revetting wall for the road bridge immediately to the west meant that excavation had to be a good distance from the revetment to prevent any subsidence to this structure (Pl. 1).

A single trench was mechanically excavated by a JCB with a toothless bucket. The trench measuring 9.4m by 2m was excavated to a depth of 1.7m. Hand excavation was employed at certain levels to determine the nature of contexts and allow for environmental sampling (Appendix 3).

Context numbers started at 2000 as contexts located during the Watching Brief of development of the site to the east started at 1000 (MAP 1994).

4. Excavation Results

Excavation located nine distinct contexts (2001-2009 : Fig. 2. Pl. 3). The nature of these contexts were such that it was possible to allocate all the contexts into distinctive groups.

The upper most layers within the trench (contexts 2001-2004) represented material which had either accumulated over recent years such as the topsoil (context 2001) and material which had been dumped probably as infill for the ?pond (contexts 2002-2004). Context 2004 is very similar to material seen during a watching brief to the far east of the Vivars site (MAP 1995 forthcoming).

Below context 2004 were a series of deposit 2005-2008 which appear to be gradual accumulation deposits directly associated to the life of the pond. All of these contexts were sampled to provide additional environmental evidence (Appendix 3). The results of the biological analysis show there was no indication that any of these contexts related directly to a fish pond. Instead the results complement the views of the excavators that this feature is more likely to represent a large area which for most of the year was waterlogged.

From context 2008, excavation located a large piece of timber (Pl. 2), which was initially thought to represent some form of structure but further excavation, hand cleaning and observation showed that the timber was in fact a large piece of a broken tree trunk. Excavation was able to locate where the trunk had broken away from the roots and fallen into the waterlogged area. This therefore suggests that trees was rooted within the lower water logged area's sediments.

Finds from the excavation were scarce and confined to a few sherds of modern pottery from contexts 2001 and 2002. Clay pipe stems were recovered from 2005 and two pieces of bog oak from 2007.

5. Conclusions

The excavations and environmental evidence suggests that the Abbey fishpond was not located within the south-western corner of the Vivars site. The environment evidence suggests that the pond gradually silted up for most of its life with little interference from man. Only the upper archaeological horizons showed signs of dumping or deliberate capping. The distinct lack of fish bones from the lower silts does not suggest use of the feature as a fish pond.

The problem arises, why was this particular part of Selby was called The Vivars, if the pond on the site was not a fish pond. It is recorded on Hodges map (1863) that this area of Selby was known as the site of the Abbey fishpond and that it extended into the western corner of the site. Equally the earthwork survey showed how ridge and furrow ran up to the pond and also respected it. It may be that the actual fishpond is situated much further to the west and what survives on the Vivars site is an area which has always been wet and therefore of no use as cultivated land, hence the respect shown to the feature by the earthwork ridge and furrow.

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APPENDIX 1

Context listing

2000 - Machine excavated trench

2001 - 10YR 3/1silty clay

2002 - 10YR 2/1silty clay

2003 - 10YR 4/4 clay

2004 - 10YR 4/3 silty sandy clay

2005 - 10YR 5/6 clay

2006 - 10YR 6/1 silty clay

2007 - 10YR 5/2 silty clay

2008 - 10YR 2/1 silty clay

2009 - 10YR 5/6 silty sandy clay

APPENDIX 2

Finds catalogue

2001	3 sherds of blue and white transfer ware 1 sherd of white earthenware
2002	2 sherds of white earthenware
2005	2 clay pipe stems (18th century)

APPENDIX 3

Evaluation of biological remains

J Carrott, A Hall, M Issitt, H Kenward, F Large, and A Milles

Introduction

Samples of sediment from excavations were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bio-archaeological analysis.

Methods

Four samples of sediments (GBA's sensu Dobney et al. 1992) were submitted. The samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithology recorded using a standard pro forma. Subsamples of

1kg were taken from the samples for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward et al. (1980: 1986). Plant macrofossils were examined from the 'flots', the washover, and from residues resulting from processing. The flots and washover were also examined for invertebrate remains. None of the samples were thought to be examined for the eggs of parasitic nematodes.

Results

The results of the investigations of the sediment samples are presented in context number order. Context information provided and questions posed by the excavator are presented in brackets.

Context 2005 (?post medieval silting or 'build up' in top of pond. Could this deposit represent 'colonisation' of the Abbey pond, or was it deposited in standing water?).

Sample 1

Moist, mid grey-brown with mm-scale orange mottling, crumbly and sticky (worming plastic), silty clay with freshwater molluscs present.

The small washover was mostly plant detritus (abundant roots and monocotyledonous plant rhizome and stem fragments) with some charcoal (to 5mm). Fragments of two unidentified weevils and a few unidentified freshwater molluscs were also noted.

Exceptionally, there was no residue from processing, grain sizes were thus small (less than 300um) and deposition in (still or slow flowing) water appears likely.

It is likely that, because of poor preservational conditions, the robust fragments of weevils and snails are all that remains from a larger invertebrate death-assemblage.

Context 2006 (?uppermost of pond silts. Was this deposit laid down in standing water?. Compare with context 2007).

Sample 2

Moist, mid to dark grey-with mm-scale orange mottling, stiff and slightly crumbly (working plastic), slightly sandy clay.

The tiny flot was mostly roots with some other plant detritus (including the aquatic taxa Ramunculus Subgenus Bartrachium and Alisma sp.).

The tiny residue was mostly roots and rootles and clasts of undisaggregated iron-rich sediment (to 2mm). Again, the particle size range was uniformly below 300um.

Context 2007 (?intermediate pond silt. Was this deposit laid down in standing water? Compare with context 2006).

Sample 3

Moist, mid grey with mm-scale orange mottling, stiff (working plastic) clay.

The small flot was fine plant detritus with fragments of an adult fly and a ?modern beetle (Meligethes sp.).

The tiny residue was very similar in composition to that from Context 2006.(above). There was thus little evidence as to conditions of deposition, although, once more, the particle size range suggests quiet aquatic conditions.

Context 2008 (silting in base of pond. If this is the base of the Abbey fishpond is there any indication of the local environment (?any fish bones)?. Was this deposit laid down in running water?).

Sample 4
Wet, mid grey-brown sticky and slightly crumbly (working plastic), silty clay with some herbaceous detritus, modern roots and charcoal.

The small flot was mostly plant detritus and rootlets. A small assemblage of poorly preserved beetles and other invertebrate remains were present. This was dominated by 'outdoor ' forms with an appreciable component of aquatic species and decomposers typical of natural habitats (e.g moss).

The tiny residue consisted of abundant tiny flakes of bark and other non-woody plant detritus, with no trace of a coarse mineral component.

The tiny residue consisted of abundant tiny flakes of bark and other non-woody plant detritus, with no trace of a coarse mineral component.

The biological remains provide no clear evidence of water consition but, subjectively, are indicative of still or slow-moving water.

Discussion and statement of potential
These aquatic deposits appear to be natural or to represent the natural recolonisation and infilling of an artificial basin. There was some aquatic and marginal vegetation, and growth of roots from vegetation above into the clays; these may indicate reedswamp or carr in the later stages. The insect remains are compatible with such an interpretation, suggesting still or sluggish water with natural vegetation at the margins. If the laboratory description of the sediments as 'clay' with only traces of coarser particles, are correct (no particle size analyses could be made within project constraints), then static or near-static conditions are indicated.

No vertebrate remains were recovered.

Recommendations
No further work is recommended on the material in hand.

Retention and disposal
The samples recovered during this project are not thought worthy of retention.

Archive
All extracted fossils from the test subsamples and the residues, flot and washover, are currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work dewcribed here.

Acknowledgements
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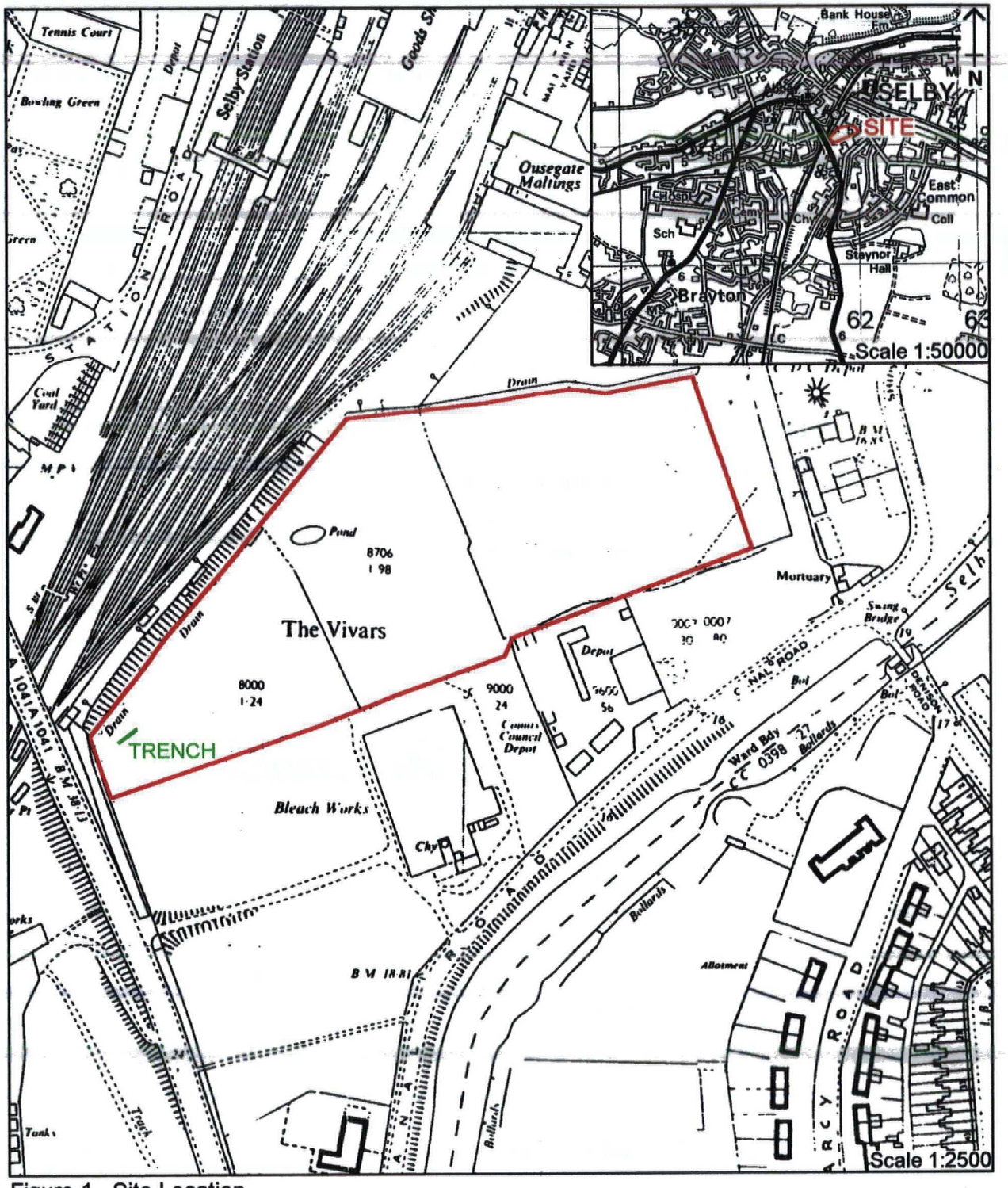

Figure 1. Site Location.

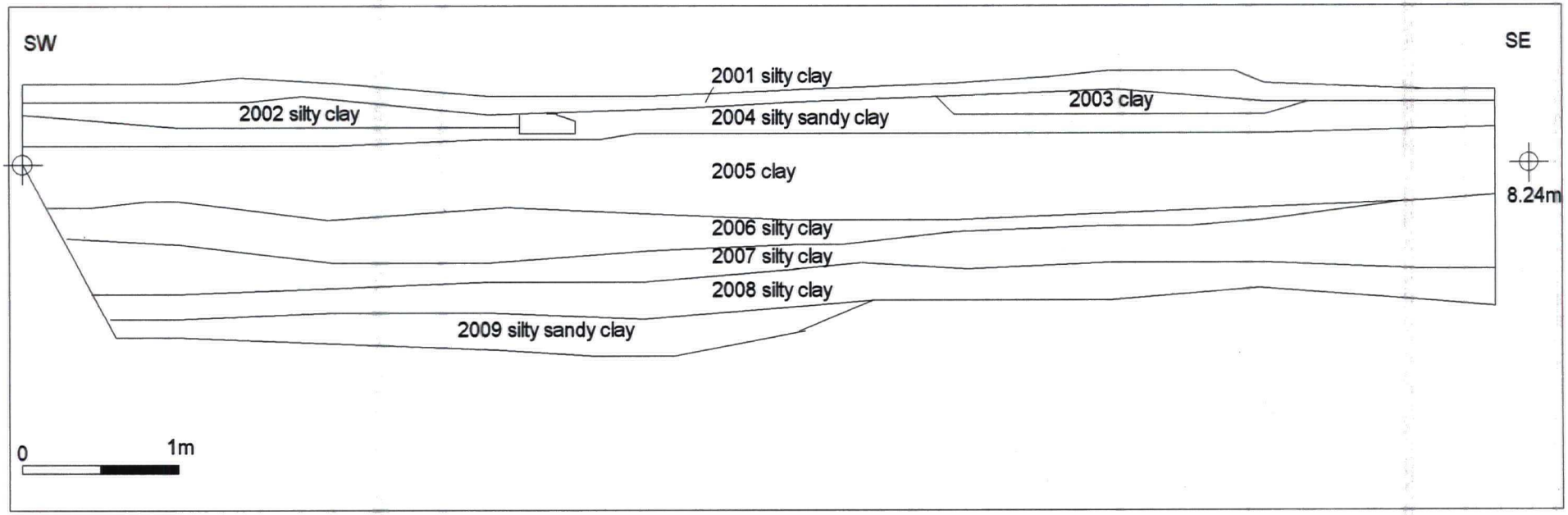

Figure 2. South-east Facing Section.

Plate 1.
View of area prior to excavation, facing west.

Plate 2.
View of context 2008, showing timber in situ, facing east..

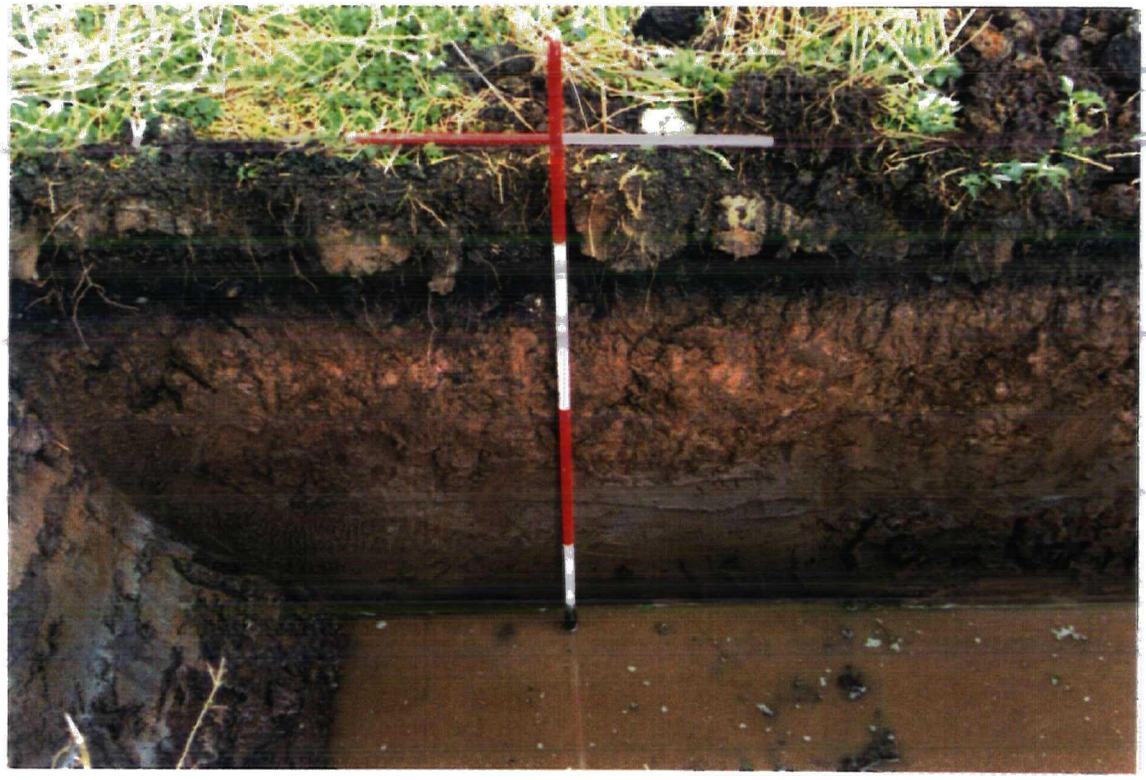

Plate 3.
View of south facing section, facing north.