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Archaeological Watching Brief

The Vivars
SELBY

THE VIVARS - SELBY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

Contents	Page
Figure list	2
1 Introduction	3
2 Historical Summary	4
3 Previous evaluation	5
4 Watching Brief Results	6
5 Conclusions	7
6 Bibliography	9
Appendices	
1 Context listing	10
2 Finds catalogue	11

Figure list

Page

- 1 Site location plan Scale 1 10000
- 2 Area of development Scale 1 2500

3

8

THE VIVARS - SELBY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

1 Introduction

MAP Archaeological Consultancy undertook in October/November 1994, an archaeological watching brief at the site known as the Vivars (Figs 1 & 2). All work has been funded by Record Playground Equipment Ltd.

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 (SE 6185 3205) in the market town of Selby, North Yorkshire.

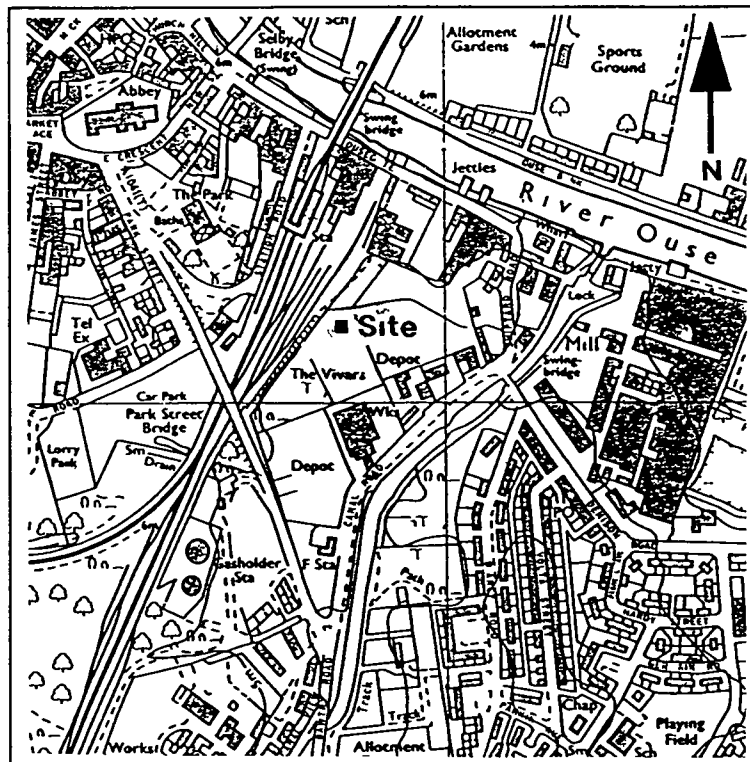


Figure 1

The site name 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 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).

2 Historical Summary

It can be argued that the official history of Selby started with the establishment of the Abbey in 1069AD, although 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.

In 1069AD 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.

The 12th century saw an increase in agricultural activity at the Abbey, documents suggest that land was drained for agricultural use, and the additional bias on the economy resulted in the increase of pressure on the efficiency of the fishery. Fishing rights were issued by Henry II, so that in 1159–60 the monks of Selby were allowed to hold their stew (a pond where fish were kept until needed for the table) 'in peace, and that non shall fish there without licence'. In 1319 a license was given for 'the Abott and Convent of Selby to make a weir across the River Ouse in their fee of Selby at a place called Impegarth'.

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 (Fig 2), indeed a compilation map produced in Hodges History of Selby (Hodges 1893 Fig 3) 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.

3 Previous evaluation

In addition to the desktop evaluation undertaken by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (MAP 1992), an earthwork survey of the site was undertaken in May, 1994 (MAP 1994)

The survey showed that ridge and furrow predominated on the site, over 50% of its 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 is to be the subject of a further evaluation in early 1995.

Further distinctive features on the site are an area disturbed by relatively recent land fill and a second pond which appears to be of a modern date.

The only visible features of a medieval date would appear to be the silted up pond and the ridge and furrow.

4 Results

Prior to redevelopment, the site comprised of a large brick constructed building and two access roads into the site from Canal Road. The majority of the site was under rough grass and scrub. The primary stages of redevelopment consisted of the demolition of the previous factory and office building and the construction of a new access road (Fig 2).

The new road was mechanically stripped of topsoil and subsoil to a depth of 0.8m. This stripping was watched but the only features encountered were the cut and fill of a large drainage pipe which bisects the site on an east-west alignment (MAP 1994, Fig 5) and Feature E of the earthwork survey (MAP 1994, Fig 7), which represented a ditched land boundary of some antiquity. Unfortunately the excavation was too shallow to provide a section through this feature.

A number of artefacts were recovered during the excavation, all from layer 1003 (Appendix 2) providing a date range from the early medieval period through to pottery of this century. The most interesting piece to be recovered was a tile fragment of local Humber ware fabric with green glaze. It would appear that this piece had been fired in a kiln where pots were also being produced. Glaze from a large jug had run onto the tile and as a result the jug had become fused to the tile. The jug had been removed from the tile and as a result the impression of part of the base of the jug was left on the tile. It is likely that the jug was probably ruined by this accident and of no sale value.

Excavations at the moated site of West Cowick (Hayfield 1989) showed that domestic pottery and roofing tiles were being fired together in kilns in the 13-15th centuries.

There is no evidence that a kiln/kilns are located within the Vivars site, as no other material was found suggestive of pottery production, i.e. wasters, kiln furniture etc. The tile may have found its way to the site in the manuring process or as rubbish dumped at the site.

5 Conclusions

The watching brief did not locate any new features within the area initially developed. It was clear that the construction of the previous factory had caused sufficient disturbance to underlying stratigraphy in this area of the site to warrant no further attention. The area of the site stripped for the road fared little better in the sections close to Canal Road where modern disturbance was noted, but as stripping progressed northwards extent ridge and furrow was removed which provided stratified horizons and produced a more interesting finds assemblage. As mentioned above the glazed tile may be an isolated find or it may be of more significance in providing evidence on other uses of the Vivars site in the medieval period.

Forthcoming work on the evaluation of the fishpond and further watching briefs on other sectors of the site as developed should provide further evidence on the history of this part of Selby.

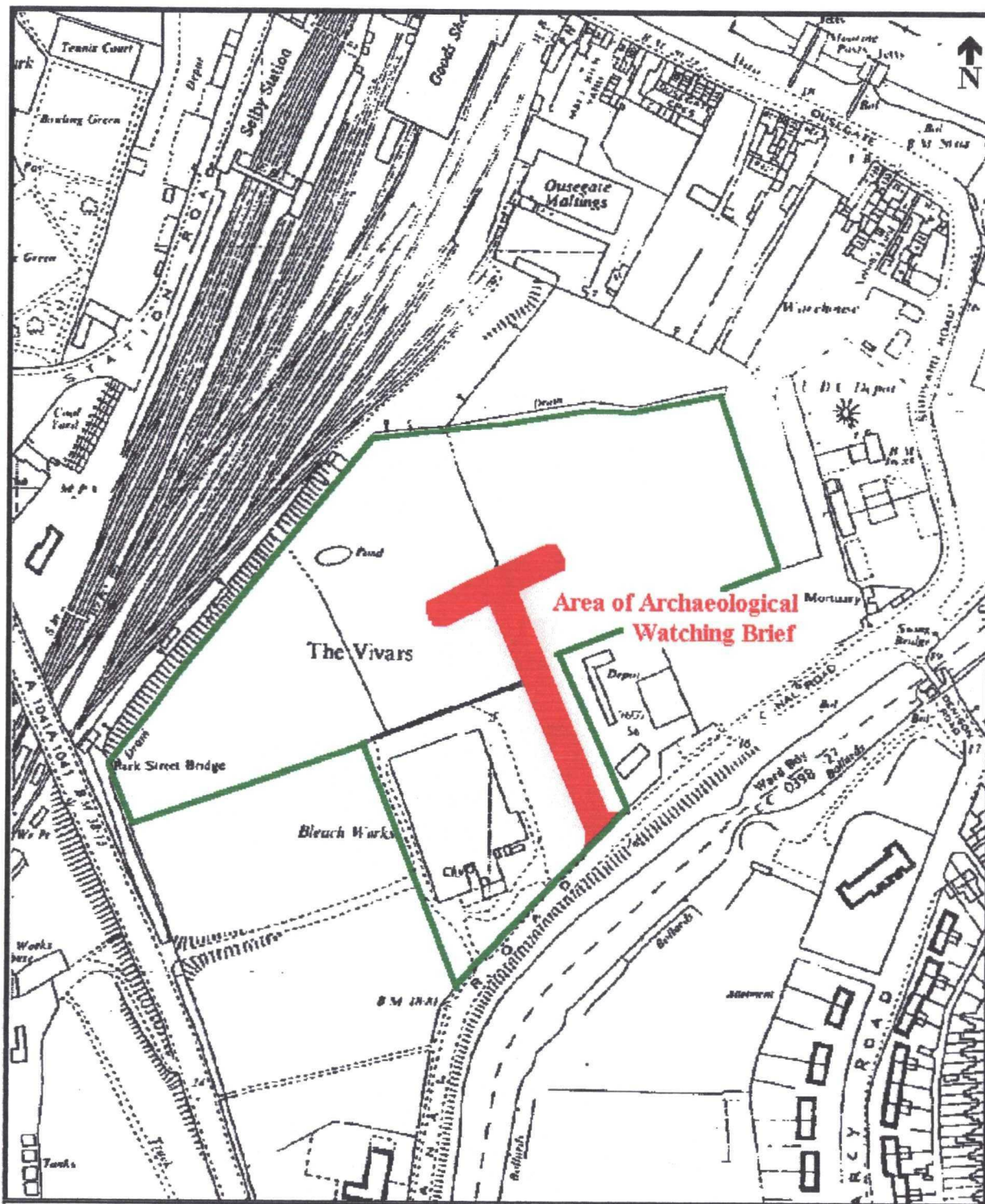


Figure 2.
Area of Development. Scale 1:2500.

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APPENDIX 1

Context listing

1000 – Area of road strip

1001 – Turf

1002 – Topsoil – 10YR 2/1 silty clay

1003 – 10YR 5/2 clay

1004 – 10YR 3/3 clay

APPENDIX 2

Finds Catalogue

All the finds were located within layer 1003

Pottery

1 sherd of lightly gritted Brandsby type ware – 13th century

1 sherd of Cistercian ware – 16th century

2 sherds including 1 black glazed bowl rim – post medieval

1 blue and white transfer ware sherd – modern

2 Tile fragments including 1 pegged roofing tile accidentally splashed with glaze by contact with a glazed vessel in the kiln or during firing

Shell

2 oyster shells

Animal bone

1 sheep jaw bone with teeth