

SUMMARY REPORT

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS-AT
RAF CATTERICK, NORTH YORKSHIRE
MARCH 14th - MAY 25th 1994**

A PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH CARRIED OUT
ON BEHALF OF

TRAFALGAR HOUSE CONSTRUCTION
MANAGEMENT LIMITED

By

GeoQuest Associates

INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the construction of a large area of hard standing for military vehicles (Area A) and a REME workshop (Area B), within the northern perimeter of the airfield at RAF Catterick, a programme of archaeological investigations were conducted by GeoQuest Associates between the beginning of January and the end of May, 1994

Initially, non intrusive geophysical survey and small scale exploratory archaeological excavations were undertaken in order to assess the presence, nature and preservation of potential underlying archaeological remains

Geomagnetic survey and a subsequent programme of targeted trial trenching appeared to indicate that Area A was devoid of significant archaeological remains. In contrast, however, Area B appeared to contain significant sub surface remains, relating to settlement, and dating from occupation of the site during the Roman period

In the light of these findings further archaeological excavation was considered necessary in order to mitigate the impact of the proposed development project upon the archaeological resource. Following consultation between GeoQuest Associates, the project developers (Trafalgar House) and the County Archaeologist, two areas within Area B the proposed site of the REME workshop were stripped and excavations were undertaken between mid March and the end of May, 1994 (Figure 1)

SUMMARY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

RAF Catterick is located to the east of the A1 dual carriageway and borders the southern edge of the North Yorkshire village of Catterick. As the A1 passes the RAF station it is known that it closely follows the line of Roman road Dere Street

A series of archaeological excavations largely undertaken in advance of road developments around Catterick have established the existence of a Roman roadside village on both sides of Dere Street. This settlement, surrounded by field systems and associated with burial grounds was apparently distinct from the defended Roman town of Cataractonium which stood on the southern bank of the River Swale some 2km to the north (P. Wilson, pers. comm.)

Construction work undertaken in 1939 in the area of the Roman Catholic church at RAF Catterick revealed the presence of a dwelling which had probably been erected in the fourth century AD (Hildyard, 1955). The location of this structure, which was also disturbed during the course of routine maintenance in 1966, lies some two hundred metres to the north of the GeoQuest excavations

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Two areas were stripped for excavation, using a JCB fitted with a toothless 1.80 metre wide ditching bucket

Open Area 1 (OA1) was an irregularly shaped area, up to 60 metres long (N-S) and up to 30 metres wide (E-W). The position and extent of OA1 was determined by the fact that the proposed construction of the REME workshop directly threatened the survival of archaeological remains revealed by initially by geomagnetic survey and subsequently in trial trench I.

Open Area 2 (OA2) was a rectangular extension (40 metres long and 10 metres wide) to trial trench L. This trial trench had revealed rather enigmatic archaeological remains and further investigation, in the form of more extensive open area excavation, was considered appropriate. The results of geomagnetic survey in the area to the north of trial trench L were largely unusable due to the presence of vehicles parked adjacent to the airfield's perimeter fence.

Both areas were machined under the direct instruction of the supervising archaeologist to the top of the natural river gravels or until archaeological features became evident. All subsequent excavation was performed by hand using a team of experienced archaeological excavators.

The GeoQuest modified version of the Museum of London system for the recording of archaeological deposits (Spence 1990) was employed. Discrete stratigraphic entities (e.g. a cut, a fill, a layer) were assigned individual context numbers' and in total over three hundred such numbers were used during the excavations.

Material culture was carefully retrieved from excavated features and the fills of significant features were sampled (10 litres) for macrobotanical evidence.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In total around 150 sherds of pottery were recovered from the open area excavations along with large quantities of animal bone and some industrial waste. In addition, over thirty 'special' artefacts, which require more specialist conservation and analysis, were discovered. These included fragments of two intricately carved bone combs, a penannular brooch, a fragment from the rim of a delicate glass vessel, and numerous small iron tools or implements.

Open Area 1

The primary objective of excavations in OA1 was to examine in close detail, the north eastern extent of a series of ditch defined enclosures which had been clearly revealed

by the initial geomagnetic survey and then subject to small scale investigative excavation during the programme of trial trenching

Excavation of key areas of interest, such as the intersections of ditches, revealed that the complex had apparently been extended in a series of phases, thereby indicating relatively sustained usage of the site. More precise conclusions concerning the possible dating of these phases may be possible following specialist analysis of the ceramics retrieved. The enclosures may well have been utilised as paddocks or stock pens and may well have been associated with the dwelling (whose precise status remains rather unclear) to the north.

Several other cut features (pits and ditches), the majority of which appeared to pre-date the enclosure complex, were also examined in detail. Later truncation had removed any evidence of a stratigraphic relationship between the ditch defined enclosure and what was by far the most enigmatic feature investigated during the excavations. This was a vast sub-circular pit, the form of which was highly suggestive of the sunken featured buildings often found in association with Anglo-Saxon settlement. In addition to numerous pottery sherds and a large quantity of animal bone, the fill of this feature contained the vast majority of the 'special' artefacts retrieved during the excavations. This fact undoubtedly raises the status of the feature above that of an ordinary pit.

Open Area 2

The primary objective of excavations in OA2 was to further examine the archaeological strata which had been subject to small scale investigation in trial trench L.

The most recent features encountered in OA2 were a series of shallow ditches and gullies, generally containing substantial quantities of animal bone but little or no datable artefacts, cutting through an expanse of unsorted cobbles and roughly worked masonry. It is not inconceivable that this spread may have served as the crude surface to a yard or trackway. Revealed beneath this 'cobbling' which appeared to date from the Roman period was a strip of far more regular cobbling, apparently deliberately laid within the base of a narrow cut feature and thereby forming what appeared to be a pathway.

CONCLUSIONS

Substantial evidence of activity relating to settlement during the Roman period came to light during the excavations within the area proposed for the construction of the REME workshop at RAF Catterick. The material recovered is a major contribution towards our record for the Roman period in this part of North Yorkshire.

The site archive which compnses context descnption sheets, scale plans and sections, and a comprehensive set of photographs will initially undergo meticulous checking and cross referencing. Eventually the archaeological sequence will be fully described by stratigraphic phases. It is anticipated that a detailed report upon the findings of the excavations which will include specialist reports upon the ceramics, animal bone, 'special' finds, industnal waste and environmental evidence can be completed before the end of the year.

NOTE The extent of the archaeological remains apparently deriving from the Roman period, revealed dunnig the excavations in OA2, strongly suggest that further such strata may well be encountered dunnig the proposed development. the construction of the REME workshop. Depending upon the penetration of the proposed works some or all of these remains will be destroyed. In light of this it would be strongly advisable that an archaeological presence is maintained throughout the initial stages of the construction programme associated with the REME workshop.

REFERENCES

Hildyard E J W 1955 A Roman and Saxon Site at Cattenck pp 241 245,
Yorkshire Archaeological Journal Part 150 (second part of Volume 38),
Wakefield

Spence, C , 1990 *Archaeological Site Manual*, London Museum of London

R Taylor Wilson
10/6/94

FIGURE 1

Map showing the location of the geophysical surveys, trial trenches and open area excavations at R A F Cattenack, N Yorkshire Scale 1:1250

SNY1527

Location Plan not scanned

Please see Parish File for originals