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THE BRIGANTIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING and RECORDING AT
THE NEW MEDICAL CENTRE,
ALDBROUGH ST. JOHN, NORTH YORKSHIRE.**

(NZ 20551127)

A report to Randall Orchard Construction Ltd

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25th September 2002

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***ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING and RECORDING AT
THE NEW MEDICAL CENTRE,
ALDBROUGH ST. JOHN, NORTH YORKSHIRE.***

(NZ 20551127)

A report to Randall Orchard Construction Ltd

Deborah Walsh

24th September 2002

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING and RECORDING AT
THE NEW MEDICAL CENTRE,
ALDBROUGH ST. JOHN, NORTH YORKSHIRE.**

(NZ 20551127)

1. Instructions were received from Randall Orchard Construction Ltd. to carry out a programme of archaeological recording in the form of a 'watching brief' prior to the construction of a medical centre with associated landscaping and car parking, on the edge of the village of Aldbrough St. John. The archaeological condition imposed by Richmondshire District Council (ref. 1/8/86/FUL) required that any archaeological deposits exposed during construction work be recorded and interpreted and the findings summarised in a report. The fieldwork was carried out between August 21st-25th by Percival Turnbull and Deborah Walsh, both of this Practice.

2. The 0.2ha. development site lies at the eastern edge of the village of Aldbrough St John, opposite the cricket pitch and to the north of Low Green. Prior to development the site was under pasture and is bounded to the west by residential properties at Spenceley Place.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3. The village of Aldbrough St. John is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The village itself is set around two greens (High and Low) bounding Aldbrough Beck; the focus of the village being to the north-west of the development area. An initial inspection of the site prior to turf stripping recorded the presence of remnants of ridge and furrow earthworks, indicating that the land had formerly been under the plough, apparently as part of a system of cultivation during the mediaeval period.

EXCAVATION

4. The initial topsoil strip of the site, using a 360 degree tracked excavator fitted with a ditching bucket, indicated that any archaeological survival was limited to the south west section of the development area. Here further excavation by hand revealed that an earthwork bank, similar in form to a low lynchet, ran roughly parallel to the present line of the road for 7m and had preserved beneath it a section of stone wall. The wall extended for 5m north-west to south-east beneath the bank; beyond this point the bank had largely been eroded away by the creation of an access from the road. On the north-west side the wall turned at an angle of approximately 100 degrees to run a further 7.5m to the north-east.

5. The walling was of a double faced drystone rubble construction of local sandstone. The south-west section stood to three courses in height with a maximum width of 0.8m; while much of the north-eastern section had retained the foundation course and inner face only. It was evident that the wall continued at both ends, but it was not possible to ascertain for how far. The areas adjacent to the walls were excavated down to the natural stiff pale orange to yellow clay through approximately 0.3m of mid-brown clayey loam (topsoil). At the interface were inclusions of small sandstone rubble and small quantities of charcoal.

THE POTTERY

6. A total of thirty one sherds of pottery was recovered from the site, all from topsoil and from the make-up of the lynchet, which included one almost complete bilobed strap handle (including rim); three base sherds; and one rim sherd. As far as can be seen the sherds derive from such domestic vessels as cooking pots, jars jugs and bowls.
7. The largest quantity of pottery in the group is Tees Valley Ware, in both glazed and unglazed varieties. The fabric varies in colour from pale buff to orange, with the cores of some reduced to grey. The size of grits varies, but such variations do not in any case appear to correspond with differences of date or form (Young, 1987). Sixteen of the sherds are glazed, with the yellow and green pitted surfaces which result from the use of galena. The limited size of the fragments prohibits statement of the extent and distribution of glaze.
8. The bilobed strap handle from a large jug and a number of body sherds belong to a category of partly oxidized splash glazed wares. The fabric is hard with a sandy texture and of a buff to pale red colour with traces of galena glaze.
9. At least five further body sherds are of a reduced green glaze ware. These are of a hard and generally fine grained fabric with a green brown glaze. Elsewhere the greatest concentrations of this pottery type occur in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.
10. Of interest also is the base sherd, probably of a cooking pot. The hard red fabric includes fine lenses of a cream coloured clay. The sherd also includes thumbing at the basal edges and retains a residue of galena glaze on its base. On only a single sherd of pottery was any decoration visible. This small fragment of a very pale buff fabric included two tracks of rouletted decoration.
11. Previously, a group of pottery sherds were recovered from the adjacent field to the north west, which has now been converted into a garden (Niall Hammond from notes by Jenny Vaughn. 1998 unpublished report). The assemblage consisted of two hundred sherds largely of Tees Valley Ware with several later mediaeval reduced green ware sherds and some post-mediaeval greenish brown glazed more heavily oxidized fabrics. Whilst some sherds were abraded indicating a likely presence in plough soil, the majority showed little abrasion and it may be presumed that the area of deposition has been largely under pasture since the late mediaeval period.
12. The date range for the pottery as a whole appears to be fairly broad. For some of the gritty fabrics a thirteenth century date is possible, whilst the glazed sherds are no earlier than the fourteenth century and some very probably as late as the sixteenth.

DISCUSSION

13. It seems evident from the general village topography that the development site lies at some distance from the focus of the mediaeval settlement of Aldbrough St. John and has continued in agricultural use since that date. The vestiges of ridge and furrow cultivation indicate that the land has formerly been part of a mediaeval field system with subsequent

post mediaeval enclosure and conversion to pasturage.

14. The lack of any occupation layer coupled with the size and extent of the surviving section of wall indicates that its function was agricultural: there are certainly no grounds for seeing it as the remains of a roofed building. It may have existed as a field wall associated with an early phase of enclosure or possibly as a structure for the containment of animals. However, the limited extent of the remains does not allow for more conclusive comment. The presence of a substantial amount of mediaeval pottery, both here and on the adjacent site (where, again, there was no evidence to indicate settlement) may best be explained as the result of dumping of domestic rubbish on a site which was on the margin of the village. The survival of this section of wall is largely a result of the topography of the site. It lies at the lower reaches of gentle slope from a higher point to the north-east. Soil from higher up the slope, together with rubble from the wall itself, has banked up to create a slight levelling of the ground on the north side, whereas the ground falls away steeply to form the negative lynchet towards the road edge on the south side.



Aldbrough Medical Centre

Fig. 1

Location of development site (shown red) based on 1st Edition O.S.



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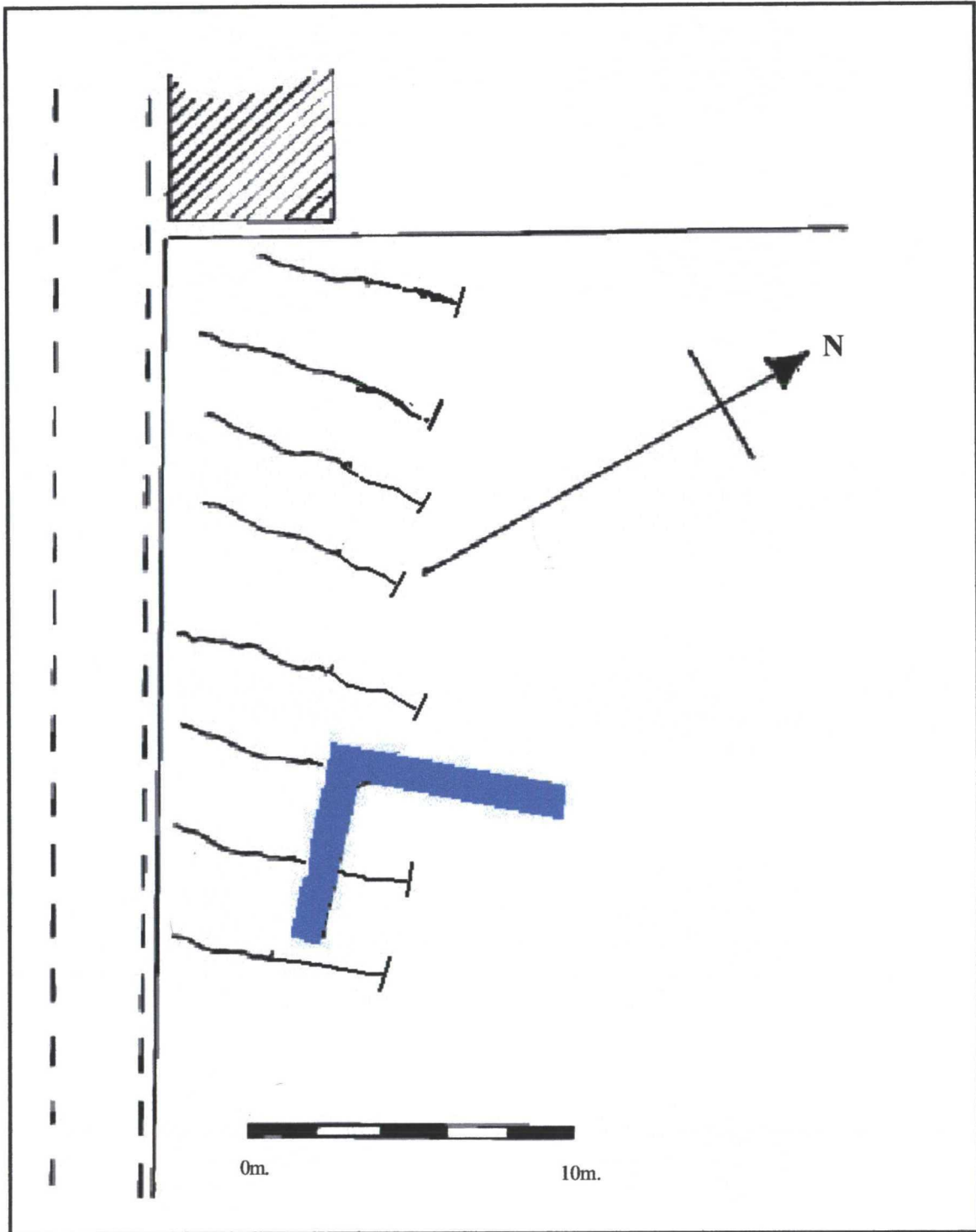


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Fig. 2

Site location

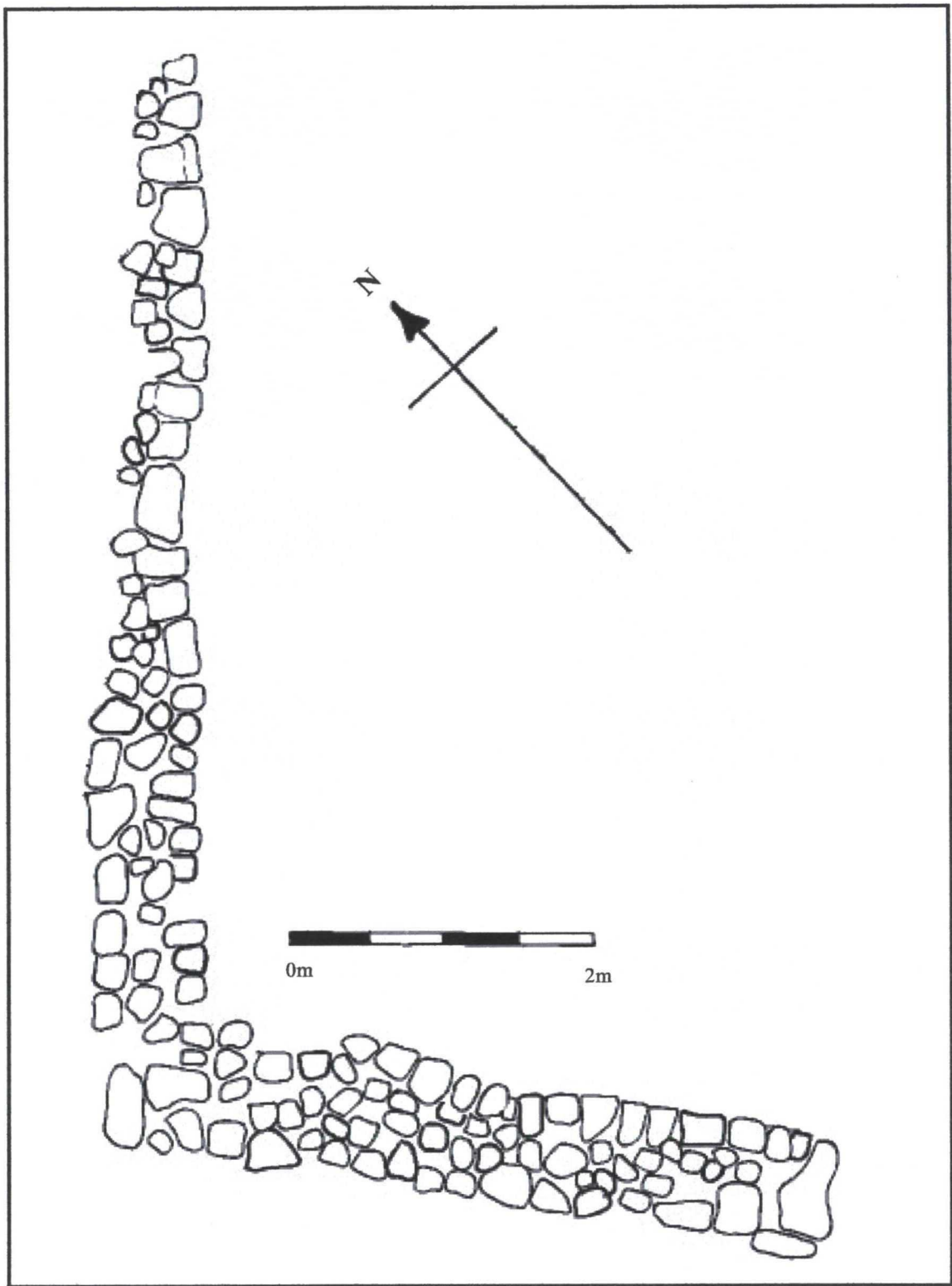


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Fig. 3

Location of walls (shown blue) in
relation to field boundary.



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Fig.4

Plan of stone walls.



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Fig. 5

View of mediaeval walls, looking to south