



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT

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| SITE ADDRESS | Electric Substation, Front Street, Aldborough, North Yorkshire | | |
| CLIENT NAME | Bethell Power Services Ltd. / NEDL | | |
| YAT PROJECT # | 5279 | YAT REPORT # | 2009/87 |
| MUSEUM ACCESSION # | n/a | GRID REFERENCE | SE 4052 6627 |
| PLANNING REFERENCE # | n/a | MONUMENT # | 436 |

INTRODUCTION

On 28th September, 8th-9th October and 14th December 2009 an archaeological watching brief was maintained during the excavation of foundations for a new electricity substation, and related cable trenches, in Aldborough, North Yorkshire. The site lies within Aldborough Scheduled Ancient Monument and the watching brief was carried out in accordance with a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent.

LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The village of Aldborough lies approximately 15 miles north-west of York, near the town of Boroughbridge (Figure 1). The site of the sub-station is located in a former barn a short distance behind the frontage of the western side of Front Street and is accessed via a short private driveway. The immediate locale of the site is residential, whilst a grassed field containing some of the remains of the Roman town lies a short distance to the west.

Much of the village occupies the environs of *Isurium Brigantium*, the *civitas* capital associated with the Brigantian people during the Roman period (Ottaway, 129) and now a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Discoveries of Roman buildings with *in-situ* mosaic floors have been made since the 19th century, and are on public display in the field neighbouring the site. Local residents report frequent finds of Roman pottery in their gardens, and any excavation in proximity to known Roman buildings clearly holds the potential for further discoveries of this nature.

Archaeological excavations in the 20th century focussed on the town's defences, which are thought to be 2nd century in origin, consisting of a ditch and earth rampart that was augmented with a stone wall in the 3rd century and with towers in the 4th century (Ottaway, p132). The gradual bolstering of the defensive system may reflect the instability thought to characterise the end of the Roman period in this region, with towns such as *Isurium* holding good potential for evidence of the transitional period after the end of Roman governance in the early 5th century (Loveluck, 153-4).

METHODOLOGY AND NATURE OF THE WORKS

The excavation of the pit for the sub-station within the former barn was conducted by hand, with the additional use of a pneumatic breaker with flat blade attachment. This pit measured some 3m x 1.4m and was up to 1.1m deep below original floor level. The 0.10m thick concrete floor itself was removed and the ground within the former barn reduced a further 0.30m below this. The cable trenches were excavated by a mechanical mini-digger. These measured a nominal 0.70m wide by 0.90m deep.

All excavation, both manual and mechanical, was conducted under archaeological observation. All archaeological recording was carried out in accordance with YAT standard practices, with scaled sections and detailed context descriptions being made and a series of photographs taken.

SUB-STATION

A former agricultural building of brick and the local sandstone was chosen to house the new substation (Figures 3, 4, Plates 1-6). A 0.10m thick concrete floor had already been removed and the entire interior space was to be reduced by a further 0.30m, with a rectangular pit measuring 1.4m x 3m excavated in the centre to a depth of 1.1m below the level of the original floor. Additionally, the original doorway was to be walled-up, requiring a 0.50m wide foundation trench across the front of

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the main pit, dug to the same depth (Figure 4, Plate 6).

The earliest observed deposit was a compact, dark red-brown sand with occasional patches of degraded yellow sandstone. This was exposed at 0.55m-0.70m below the level of the original floor, sloped gradually from west to east, and was interpreted as natural. Above this was a 0.40m thick layer of very compact, dark grey with red streaks, very slightly sandy clay with occasional cobbles and small fragments of sandstone. A very few fragments of brick and post-medieval pottery were observed in this deposit, which was interpreted as a soil or truncated former ground surface. Cut into this were the wall footings of the barn, which were seen in section in the foundation trench across the doorway (plate 6). The doorway had clearly been re-built, with the footings set in concrete at a depth of 0.30m below the former floor level. Finally, the interior of the barn had been in-filled with a 0.30m thick layer of loose sandy silt with frequent fragments of brick, which formed the make-up deposit for the original concrete floor (plate 5). This floor was probably laid at the same time as the re-building of the doorway, which was also when the interior barn walls were re-clad, reducing the interior space.

DRIVEWAY CABLE TRENCH

The watching brief on the cable trench extending from the sub-station down the private driveway to the footpath of Front Street was carried out on 8th and 9th October. This trench had a length of around 30m and was nominally 0.70m wide by 0.90m deep (Figure 3, Plate 7). The lowest observed deposit was a moderately compact, dark red-brown slightly silty sand containing occasional rounded stone and small cobbles together with patches of degraded sandstone. This material, which generally occurred at a depth of 0.35m – 0.42m below the surface of the driveway, is believed to be of entirely natural origin and can be directly equated to the lowest deposit encountered in the excavation of the sub-station. Laying directly over this natural material, though occurring only in the eastern ³/₅^{ths} of the trench, was a deposit of mid – dark greyish brown, slightly clayey sandy silt containing a number of pebbles and very occasional flecks of charcoal. It is thought that this soil, which survived for a depth of up to 0.20m, may represent the truncated (totally truncated in the western and extreme eastern parts of the trench) former topsoil. No artefactual material or dating evidence was recovered for this deposit. Directly overlaying this soil (and the natural material in the western part of the trench) was a series of laminated driveway surfacings which had a cumulative depth of up to 0.42m. In excess of eight successive and separate surfaces, or patchings, were apparent. The lower series of these tended to be comprised of larger materials, including fragments of brick and small cobbles. The upper surfacings tended to be of finer material, typically of pebbles and gravel. At least one of these upper surfaces had been laid with some tar or bitumen – though this did not form a proper ‘tarmac’ surface. A small quantity of pottery sherds spanning the 17th – 19th centuries was recovered from the ‘coarser’ lower surfaces. Also recovered from here was the only sherd of Roman pottery seen during the entire watching brief, part of an amphora stamped handle (identification awaited by specialist). This Roman sherd, and probably much of the other pottery also, would appear to be residual. The finer upper surfacings produced pottery of 19th – 20th century date. These metallised surfaces formed the uppermost deposits in the driveway trench and relate to a succession of surfaces and their patchings, seemingly of 18th/19th century – modern date.

PAVEMENT CABLE TRENCHES

The works within the pavement of Front Street were comprised of a trench extending from the end of the driveway trench in a north-east direction for some 12m and another extending in a south-west

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direction for around 11m. Both trenches were nominally 0.9m deep and from 1m – 1.2m wide and were excavated by a combination of mechanical and hand digging. This additional width, and the hand digging, was necessitated by the presence of multiple services, namely telecommunications, electricity, water and at least one drain. Excepting the cuts and backfills of the modern service trenches only a single deposit was observed between the base of the trenches and the tarmac pavement surface. This was a moderately compact, dark red-brown slightly silty and very slightly clayey sand containing occasional rounded stone and small cobbles together with patches of degraded sandstone. The characteristics of this clean deposit, which contained no artifactual material, suggest it represents in-situ natural of the drift geology.

CONCLUSIONS

The only archaeological deposits encountered during the works were a soil or truncated former ground surface within the former barn and a series of metalled surfaces within the existing driveway. In both cases the finds recovered suggest a later post-medieval date. The single find of Roman date, the amphora handle found within the driveway cable trench was clearly residual within the context in which it was found.

The lack of archaeological remains here is interesting given the site's proximity to known Roman remains. This may reflect major truncation in the area particularly during the building of the barn, which formed the eastern end of a range of buildings that constitute the southern side of a yard. The general topographic trend in this part of Aldborough is for the ground to slope steeply from south-west to north-east, and the yard area has clearly been heavily cut into this slope, thereby compromising the potential for survival of archaeological deposits. It is of course also possible that this particular area has seen relatively little activity, but given its location, the possibility of previous disturbance seems more likely.

REFERENCES

Ottaway, P, 2003. 'Roman Yorkshire: a rapid resource assessment' pp 125-151 in Manby, Moorhouse and Ottaway (eds), *The Archaeology of Yorkshire*, YAS Occasional Paper No. 3, 2003.

Loveluck, C, 2003. 'The archaeology of post-Roman Yorkshire, AD 400 to 700' pp 151-171 in Manby, Moorhouse and Ottaway (eds), *The Archaeology of Yorkshire*, YAS Occasional Paper No. 3, 2003.

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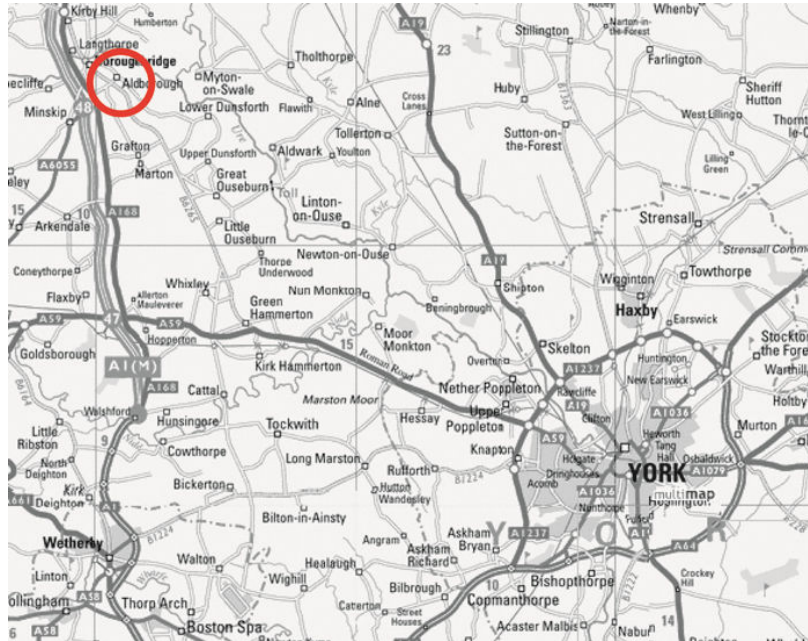


Figure 1 Site location

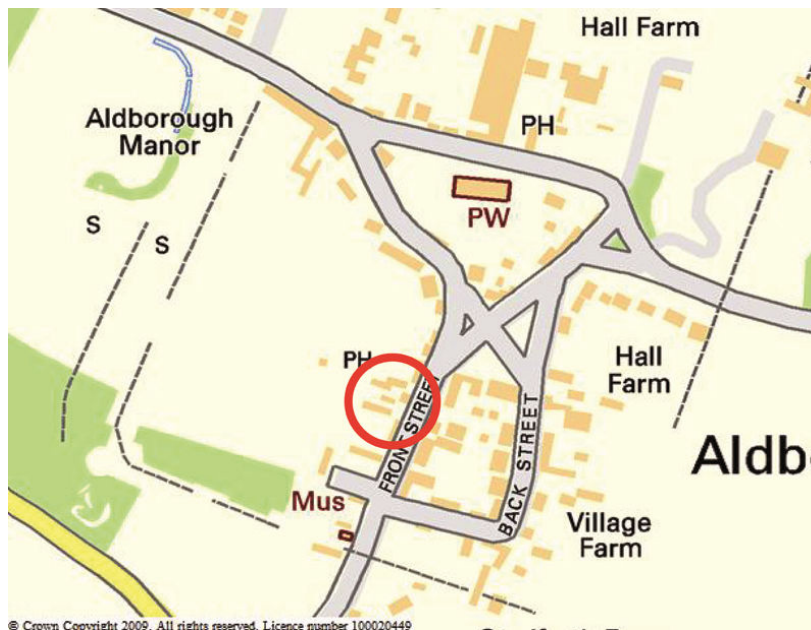


Figure 2 Works location

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Figure 3 Extent of works, based on client plan

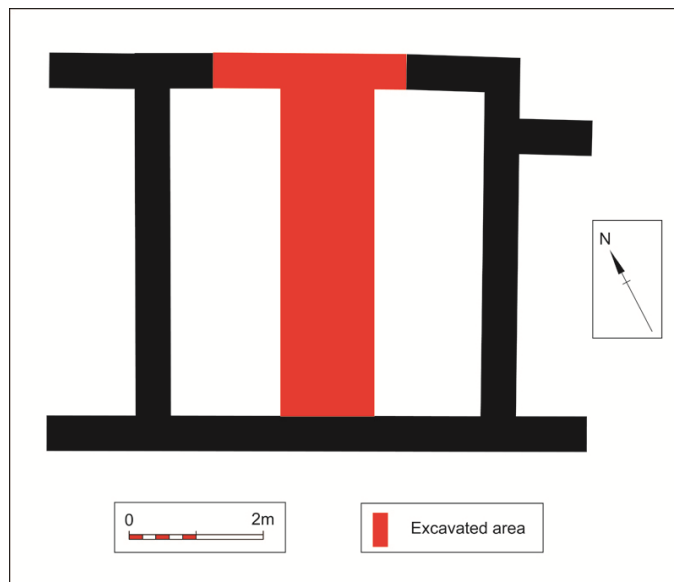


Figure 4 Detail of works within barn

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Plate 1 Works location, looking north-west



Plate 2 Works location, looking south-east

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Plate 3 General view of main trench



Plate 4 North-east facing section of main trench

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Plate 5 Make-up deposit beneath concrete floor, looking south-east



Plate 6 Foundation of doorway, looking north-west

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Plate 7 General view of driveway trench, looking ESE



Plate 8 Succession of metallised surfaces in NW part of driveway trench, looking NNW

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Plate 9 View of E end of driveway trench with electricity service trench to left, looking SW



Plate 10 View of area of pavement trenches, looking SW

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Plate 11 View of maze of services in part of NE pavement trench, looking WNW

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