

INTERIM SUMMARY REPORT: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON BECKLANDS LANE, ROECLIFFE, BOROUGHBRIDGE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Limited at land of Becklands Lane, Roecliffe, North Yorkshire, pre-determination of a planning application for a proposed development of the site. The site lies to the east of the A1(M) between the village of Roecliffe and the historic market town of Boroughbridge in the Harrogate district of North Yorkshire, centred at National Grid Reference NZ 3850 6572. The fieldwork, undertaken between 22 February and 8 March 2011, was commissioned by Prospect Archaeology on behalf of the developer, Reed Boardall.

The main archaeological interest of the site stems from known prehistoric and Roman activity in the vicinity. Evidence of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age activity in the form of prehistoric standing stones known as the Devils Arrows lie immediately to the west of Boroughbridge forming part of a wider prehistoric complex concentrated around the River Ure. Extensive Roman period settlement within the wider vicinity of the site includes the Roman tribal town and fort at Aldborough (*Isurium Brigantum*) located to c. 1.7km to the east and the early Roman fort and settlement discovered within the vicinity of Roecliffe village c. 600m to the north of the site. Numerous roads extended across the landscape in this area during the Roman period and the projected line of the Roman road between Hampsthwaite and Aldborough crosses the development site.

Aim and Method

In broad terms, the evaluation aimed to establish the archaeological potential of the proposed development site. The evaluation comprised nineteen machine-excavated trenches (Trenches 1-19), each measuring c. 50m by 2m. Trenches 1-8 were located in Area 1 (western field), Trenches 9-18 in Area 2 (larger eastern field) and Trench 19 in Area 3 (smaller eastern field). The evaluation trenches were positioned either to target potential archaeological remains identified by previous geophysical survey (anomalies A-E) or as 'judgement' trenches.

Results

Natural sub-stratum

Natural boulder clay was the basal deposit encountered within all the trenches and generally comprised stiff clay of varying colours. This material represents the predominantly boulder clay (till) glacial 'drift' geology of the area.

Late prehistoric or Romano-British

Activity tentatively assigned a late prehistoric or Romano-British date was recorded in several trenches. Trench 11, located at the western extent of Area 2, had been positioned to identify a north-east aligned geophysical anomaly 'E'. To this end no archaeological features were recorded to account for this anomaly, which may be the result of the underlying geology. However, within the central portion of Trench 11, two parallel NE-SW aligned linear features, [11.7] and [11.9], and two sub-oval features, [11.5] and [11.11,] were recorded. Linear feature [11.7] measured c. 2.50m in length, with a rounded terminal to the north-east, and was 0.18m wide and up to 0.16m deep. Located immediately to the north-west was a similarly aligned feature, [11.9], measuring c. 1.68m in length, also with a rounded terminal to the north-east, and 0.25m wide and up to 0.15m deep. Neither feature yielded dating

evidence, but based on their form and the composition of their fills both could potentially represent parts of a drip gullies associated with a roundhouse structures of late prehistoric or Romano-British date.

The sub-oval features, [11.5] and [11.11], were recorded to the east and west, respectively, of the aforementioned gullies and measured up to 0.40m by 0.25m and up to 0.20m deep. These features have been interpreted as probable postholes representing structural elements, possibly associated with one or more roundhouse dwellings. Again no dating evidence was recovered, but based on their form and the composition of the fills, both could potentially be of late prehistoric or Romano-British date.

Trench 12 was positioned to test a NE-SW aligned geophysical anomaly 'D'. To this end, a NE-SW aligned ditch, [12.6], 1.98m wide by 0.90m deep, was recorded crossing the trench and this is likely to be the cause of the anomaly. Although no artefactual material was recovered from the feature, its distinct V-shaped profile suggests a Romano-British date. Within the central portion of Trench 12 two linear features, [12.8] and [12.10], were recorded. The latter was a slightly curvilinear north-south aligned feature, 2.66m in length by c. 0.38m wide and 0.17m deep, interpreted as a possible drip gully associated with a roundhouse structure. It yielded a scrap of ceramic building material of possible Romano-British date. Feature [12.8] was a NE-SW aligned linear feature, 0.80m in length, with a rounded terminal to the south-west, and 0.38m wide and 70mm deep, it is also interpreted as a probable drip gully.

Trench 13 was positioned to identify an ENE-WSW aligned geophysical anomaly 'trend'. A NW-SE aligned shallow ditch, [13.3], was recorded measuring up to 1.60m wide by up to 0.15m deep. Two scraps of ceramic building material were recovered from its single fill and these are likely to be of Romano-British origin.

Trench 15 was positioned to test an ENE-WSW aligned geophysical anomaly 'B'. A very shallow ditch, [15.4], was recorded on this alignment, measuring 0.70m wide by up to only 70mm deep. The shallow depth of this feature probably would not account for the geophysical anomaly, which may be the result of underlying geology. Although no artefactual material was recovered, the fill of the feature suggests a later, possibly post-Roman, date.

Trench 17 was positioned to identify three variously aligned linear geophysical anomalies 'B', 'C' and 'D'. A group of five variously aligned linear features, [17.8], [17.10], [17.11], [17.12] and [17.6] were recorded within Trench 17. At the southern extent of the trench an east-west aligned ditch, [17.10], 0.60m wide by 0.14m deep, was recorded, which potentially represents geophysical anomaly 'C'.

Two intercutting ENE-WSW aligned ditches, [17.8] and [17.13], were recorded within the central portion of Trench 17. The earlier ditch, [17.14], measured 0.73m wide by 0.36m deep. Although no datable material was recovered from its single fill, it certainly pre-dates the similarly aligned ditch, [17.8], which was 1.90m wide by 0.76m deep. Three sherds of probable Romano-British pottery sherds were recovered from the single fill of this later ditch. These ditches probably represent geophysical anomaly 'D'.

Also in Trench 17 was a NE-SW aligned linear feature, [17.6], 2.20m in length, with a rounded terminal to the north-west, 0.30m wide and 0.19m deep. This feature is interpreted as a possible drip gully associated with a roundhouse structure.

The northernmost feature recorded in Trench 17 was a NNE-SSW aligned ditch, [17.12], at least 2.20m in length by c. 1.50m wide and up to 0.40m deep. This narrowed at its NNE extent, possibly indicating

the convergence of two ditches. This feature may represent geophysical anomalies 'B' and 'C'. A flint blade was recovered from its single fill, suggesting a possible prehistoric date.

Trench 18 was positioned to identify NNE-SSW aligned linear and a NE-SW aligned linear geophysical anomalies 'C' and 'D', respectively. To this end a NNE-SSW aligned ditch, [18.8], measuring 1.04m wide by 0.48m deep was recorded. Although no artefactual material was recovered from its single fill, its V-shaped profile suggests a Romano-British date. This feature probably represents geophysical anomaly 'C'.

A sub-circular feature, [18.6], measuring c. 0.50m by 0.53m and up to 90mm deep, was recorded in the south-eastern portion of Trench 18. No artefactual material was recovered from its single fill and is interpreted as a possible posthole.

Medieval or later

Across the eastern fields (Areas 2 & 3) evidence of agricultural activity of probable medieval or later date survived in the form of linear ridge and furrow earthworks aligned ENE-WSW. Such earthworks were generally less pronounced on the western field (Area 1), probably due to recent ploughing. In general, this activity was manifest in the evaluation trenches as broad U-shaped linear features, up to 5.20m wide by up to 0.60m deep, these representing plough furrows. Three sherds of pottery were recovered from the fills of different plough furrows, all certainly medieval, with two probably pot discs rather than simply ordinary sherds

Modern

Topsoil and developed turfline formed the uppermost deposit in all 19 trenches, this forming the existing ground surface of the pasture fields.

Summary

In sum, the evaluation identified archaeological remains of significance, with a focus of activity in the southern half of Area 2. Ditches recorded in Trenches 12, 17 and 18, as identified by the geophysical survey, are likely to represent elements of a field system and possibly settlement enclosures. Features recorded in Trenches 11, 12, 17 and 18 included narrow linear features, interpreted as possible drip gullies, and discrete features, interpreted as probable postholes representing structural elements of roundhouse dwellings. The very small amount of dating evidence recovered, along with the general form of the features and the composition of their fills, strongly suggest a later prehistoric or Romano-British date for the activity recorded in the southern half of Area 2.