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**HERRIOT CENTRE CAR PARK,
KIRKGATE,
THIRSK,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

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**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

**1998 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 17**

**HERRIOT CENTRE CAR PARK,
KIRKGATE, THIRSK, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

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WATCHING BRIEF**

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the 21st and 22nd April and 5th May 1998, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new car park for the proposed 'James Herriot' Centre at 23-25 Kirkgate, Thirsk. The car park is to be situated to the rear of the Cross Keys Public House, Kirkgate, Thirsk, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 42848222), (Fig. 1).

The work was carried out on behalf of Hambleton District Council who were the main contractors for this programme of works.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The ground works carried out involved the machine removal of top soil prior to the construction of the car park (Trench 1; Fig. 2), and the excavation of an inspection chamber (Trench 2; Fig. 2) for the new drainage system.

Deposits in both trenches were recorded as drawn sections at a scale of 1:20 and described using pro-forma context recording sheets with a series of 35mm colour print photographs being taken.

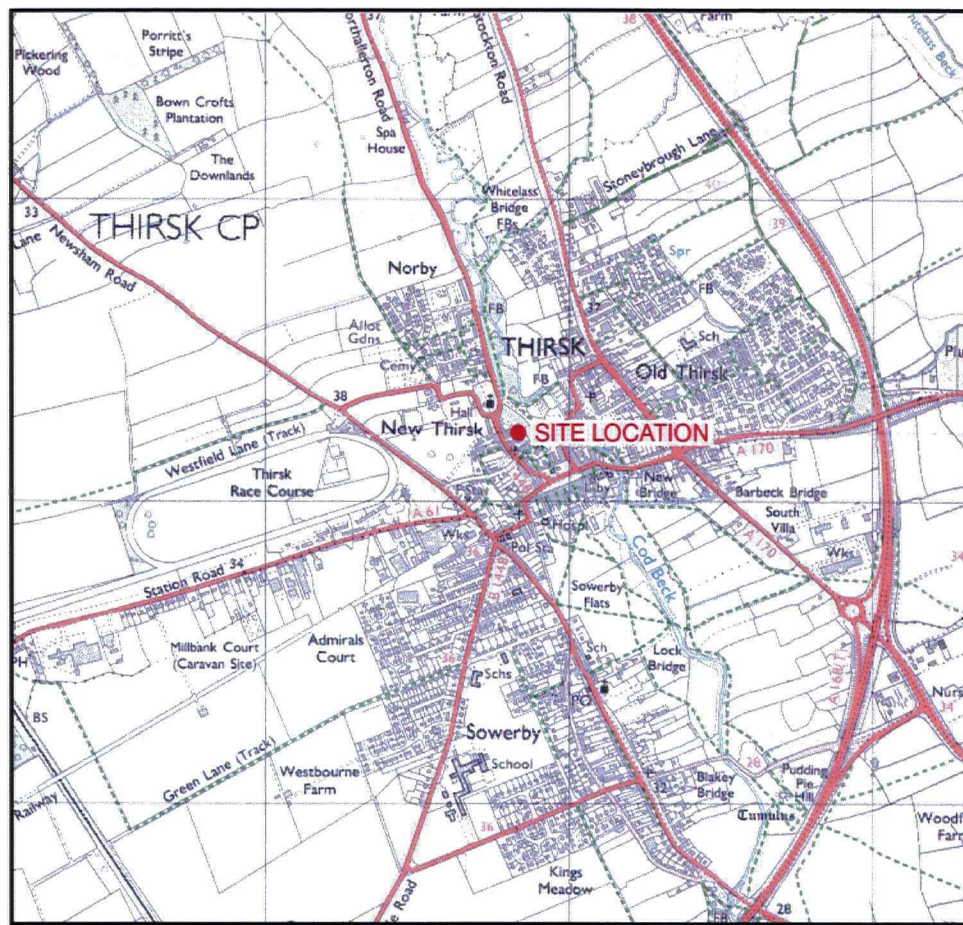
The finds and site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession number YORYM: 1998.33.

1.2 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The development site is situated on the east side of Kirkgate and to the west of the Cod Beck. Kirkgate leads off the north west corner of the Market Place to form part of the high road to Northallerton and the north. The street itself is of considerable antiquity and appears in documents from at least as early as the 12th century.

A system of earth works, the remains of Thirsk Castle (built prior to 1130-31) lies approximately 240m to the south west. It has been suggested that a settlement in the form of a manorial vill developed on the west side of the beck around the castle bailey, (VCH, 1923).

In addition to the castle, a number of upstanding medieval monuments are situated close to the site. These include a moated area approximately 120m to the north east and, 150m to the north west, the 15th century church of St Mary which is thought to include 12th century fabric (Thompson, 1913).



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Scale 1:25 000

Figure 1 Site location.

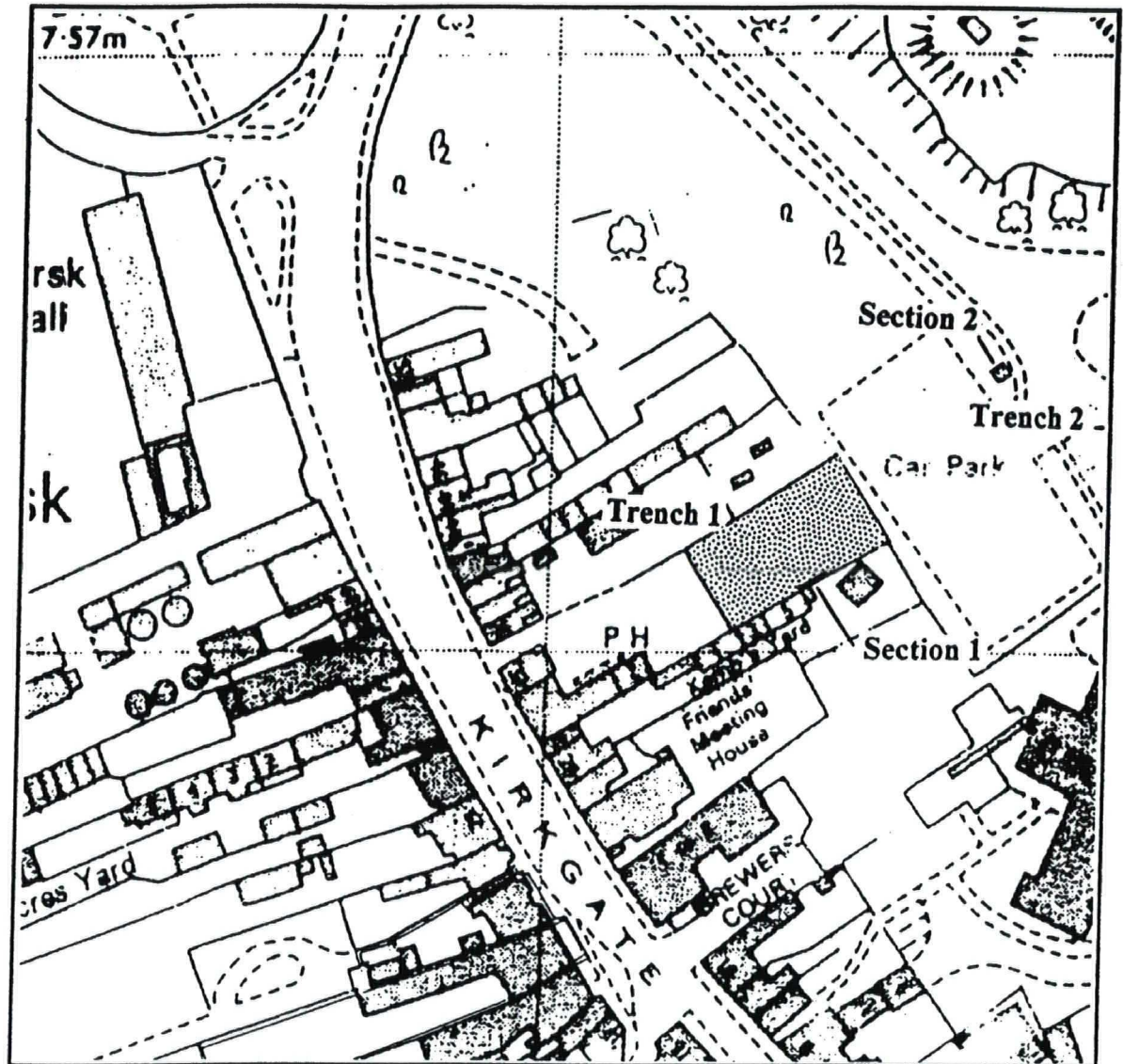
The Union Mill, a large watermill that used to stand on Millgate, some 150m to the east of the site ceased to function in 1955. Two years later the millrace, which ran parallel to the Northallerton Road (Fig. 3) was infilled with rubble from the demolished cottages of Old Norby. (P. Wyon and W. Foggit). Union Mill stood until at least 1967 (Fig. 4) before being demolished to make way for a small public garden.

A large pond known as the 'Marriage' was situated between the millrace and the rear of the properties fronting on to the east side of Kirkgate (Figs. 3 and 4). It is not entirely certain what function this pond performed. It may have been a predecessor to the millpond that was situated to west of Union Mill, (1856 O.S map - Fig. 3) or, as is perhaps more likely, it may simply have been an area of low lying land which frequently flooded. The 'Marriage' was finally filled and levelled at some time after 1967 (Fig. 4) prior to the construction of the car park that now occupies the area immediately east of the site under observation.

Very little archaeological work has been carried out in Thirsk in recent years. Much of this has been small scale and centred on sites close to the castle. The only extensive areas of excavation on the castle were those on the site of an electrical substation in 1994. Although the report has not yet been submitted it is understood that parts of a possible castle mound and pre-conquest burials were found.

A small scale excavation on the moated site produced a number of pottery sherds of a probable 13th century date but failed to reveal any archaeological structures or features, (Robinson 1993).

Recent trial trenches in St James Green revealed very little except a considerable raising of the ground surface in the post-medieval period. A similar sequence of events was seen in recent excavations to the rear of 23-25 Kirkgate where there had also been a substantial raising of the ground level in the post-medieval period (Johnson, YAT 1998).



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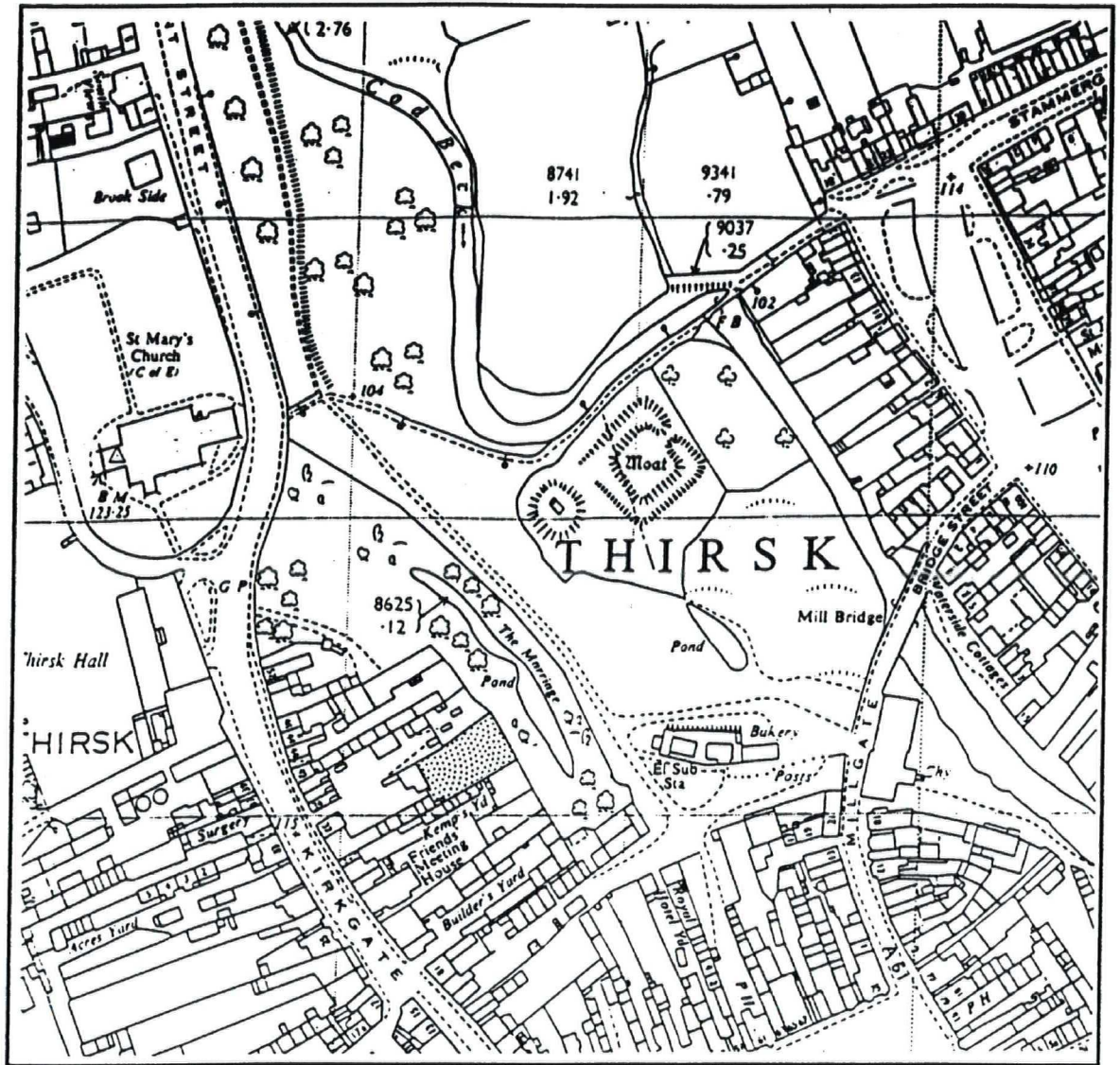
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Figure 2 Location of Trenches and Sections



Not to Scale

Figure 3 1856 O.S. Plan of Thirsk



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Scale 1:2500

Figure 4 1967 O.S. Plan of Thirsk

2. RESULTS

2.1 Trench 1. (Fig. 5)

Trench 1 was machine excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m. B.G.L.(metres Below Ground Level). The earliest deposit seen was a buried garden soil at 0.80m B.G.L. that consisted of a plastic moist mid grey sandy clay silt with charcoal flecks, small pebbles and brick/tile fragments (102). Sealing this was a levelling deposit of light grey - brown sandy clay silt (101) 0.32m thick which contained moderate amounts of demolition derived material and had been used to raise the ground surface, probably to alleviate the problem of water-logging that was evident in context 102. Directly above context 101 was a friable dark grey - brown garden soil (100) 0.50m thick which forms the present day ground surface.

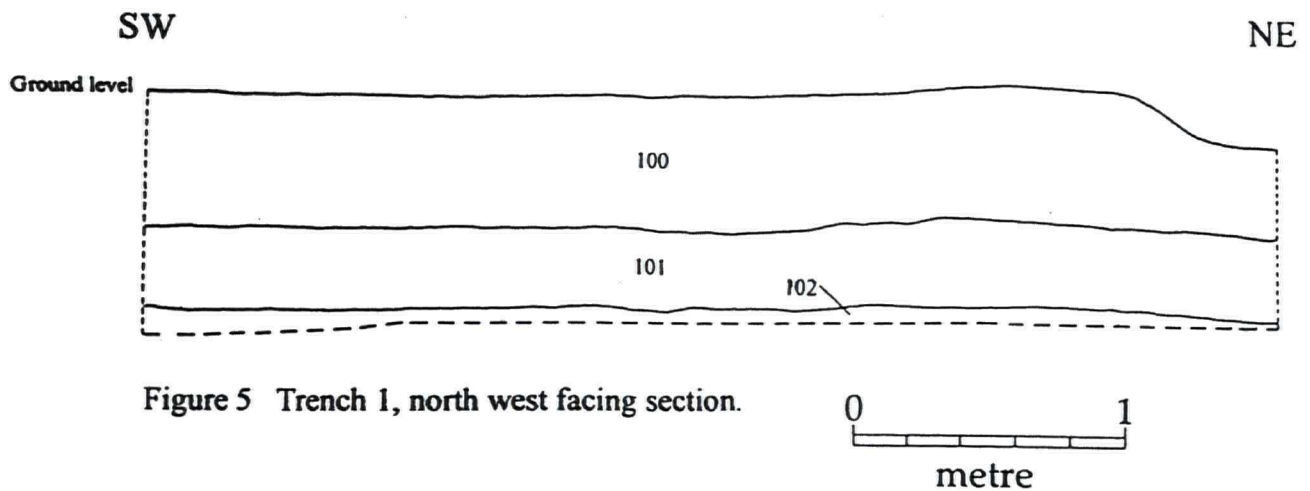


Figure 5 Trench 1, north west facing section.

2.2 TRENCH 2. (Fig. 6)

Trench 2 was machine excavated to a maximum depth of 2.40m BG.L. The earliest deposit reached in this trench was seen at 1.72m BG.L and extended below the base of the trench to form a deposit in excess of 0.68m in depth. It was a slightly humic, green tinged pale grey silt (203) containing the remains of intact freshwater mussels and 19th century pottery. This was interpreted as a pond silt which had formed in an area of static or slow running water. Cartographic evidence suggests that this deposit had most likely accumulated within the body of water previously known as the 'Marriage' (Figs 3 and 4).

Directly above context 203 was a deposit of demolition material (202), 0.73m thick, which appeared to relate to the infilling of the 'Marriage' and the construction of the car park that currently occupies the site. Overlying context 202 was a layer of hard-core (201) 0.90m thick which was the levelling deposit for the car park. This was sealed by turf (200) on the grass verge and tarmac on the parking bays lying 3.5m to the south west of Trench 2.

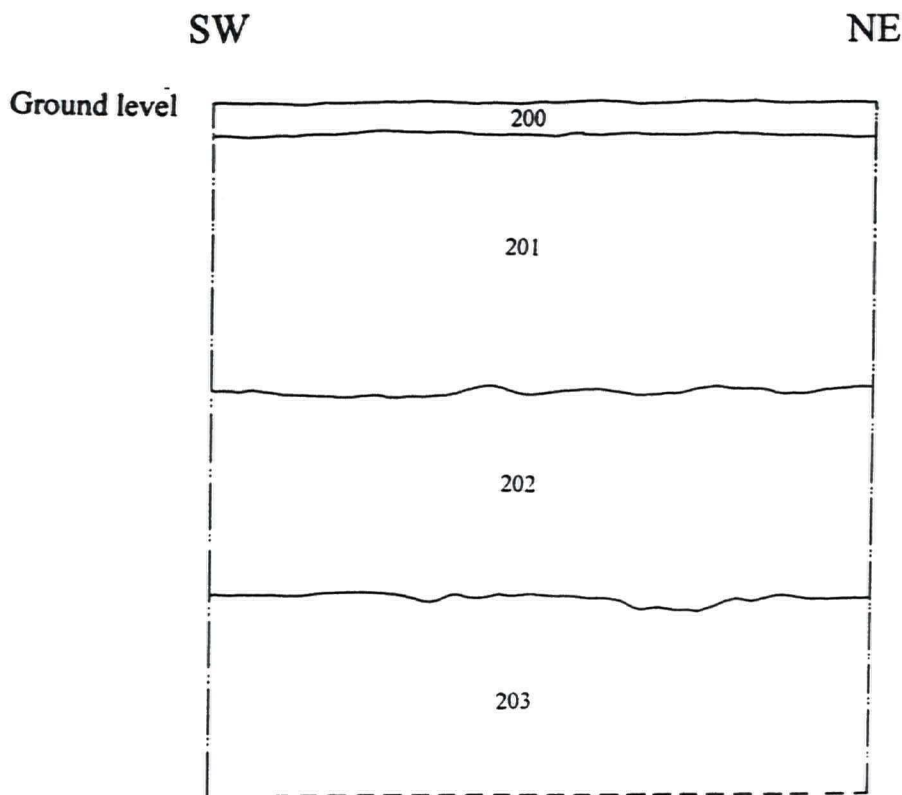
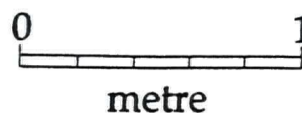


Figure 6 Trench 2, south east facing section.



3. CONCLUSIONS

None of the deposits seen in either trench proved to be of any great antiquity and all were apparently the result of late post-medieval activity. In Trench 1 it was evident that the area had been under cultivation for some time. The earliest deposit (102) was a garden soil (102) which appeared to have become unworkable through water logging. This resulted in the surrounding area being raised by dumps of demolition material (101) before the garden was re-instated (100). The water logging may have been brought about by a localised change in the water table caused by the silting (203) of the Marriage pond which appears to have been considerably larger in 1856 (Fig. 3) than in 1967 (Fig. 4). It was shortly after 1967 that the Marriage was filled in (202), for the construction of the present car park (201, 202).

4. LIST OF SOURCES

Thompson, A.H. (1913). Thirsk Church of St Mary, Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, vol 22.

Peter Wyon and William Foggit. Thirsk, Past and Present

Robinson, P. (1993). Evaluation at Millgate Moated Site, Thirsk. (archive report).

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5. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Watching brief and report

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