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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
T R U S T

**KNARESBOROUGH TOWN CENTRE,
NORTH YORKSHIRE
CABLE TRENCHES**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



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CABLE TRENCHES
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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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1. Introduction

Between 22nd April and 9th May 1997, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on cable trenches excavated in Knaresborough town centre (centred on NGR SE 3502 5691). The trenches were monitored for archaeological deposits and for evidence of the survival of archaeological features and stratigraphy. The work was funded by Bell Cable Media. The streets which were observed were situated close to Knaresborough Castle and included Castle Gate, Castle Yard, Cheapside and Brewerton Street (as far as Wellington Street).

1.1 Methodology

The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by a 2.5 tonne mini mechanical excavator using a toothless bucket. The deposits revealed, usually in section, were cleaned, sketched, measured and recorded. All significant archaeological deposits were photographed using colour print film. Recording followed procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust *Context Recording Manual* (1996).

Site Records and finds are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM:8801.

1.2 Geology and Topography

Knaresborough is situated on a ridge of Permian magnesian limestone (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Sheet 62 1973). at c. 77.0m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) overlooking the picturesque valley of the River Nidd to the west. The town is located c. 5 km north-east of Harrogate and c. 25 km west of York. Topographically the town is dominated by the steep river valley created by the River Nidd, and Castle Cragg, on which the Castle was built, overlooking the river. To the north-east of the Castle the area of the town incorporating Market Place, Castle Gate and Castle Yard is fairly level. However, to the north and south the land drops dramatically, Brewerton Street and Kirkgate being built on quite steep slopes. Cheapside, the only other street within the study area, slopes gradually down to the east to a height of 75.8m AOD at its eastern end.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

A number of historical accounts of Knaresborough have been written to various levels of detail. Little appears to be known in detail about the origins and early history of the town which is thought to have been closely associated with the castle and situated on the level ground to the north-east of it (Kellett, 1991).

Chenaresburgh manor is mentioned in the Domesday book of 1086 by which time, after the harrying of the North, it was said to be in a poor state. Between 1086 and 1115 the royal estates of Knaresborough and Aldborough were completely reorganised and the Honour (or Lordship) of Knaresborough was formed (Jennings, 1970). A church situated in the town was first mentioned in 1114 when it was given to Nostell Priory by Henry I and castle building is first mentioned in 1130 as being undertaken by Eustace Fitzjohn. Knaresborough Castle was completely rebuilt between 1307-1312.

The date of the initial creation of the town is uncertain but it probably developed with the construction of the castle and land reorganisation at the beginning of the 12th century, placing Knaresborough at the administrative heart of the royal estate. The medieval borough of Knaresborough was first mentioned in 1169 in a reference to burgesses (Jennings, 1970) and by the 13th-century it is thought to have developed into a considerable royal stronghold (Kellett, 1991). In 1304-5 eighty-six burgesses are noted within the town and though designated a borough in 1310, it was never incorporated and remained under the control of the Honour Court (Stockwell, 1993). Jennings has suggested that the burgrave plots occupied most of the north-east side of the High Street, both sides of Finkle Street, the north-west side of the Market Place and along Cheapside (1970). Little archaeological research, in the form of detailed excavation has been carried out on the town centre, especially with the research aim of verifying these burgrave plots and their subsequent development during the medieval period. A town ditch referred to in documents and thought to run along the north-east side of the High Street, behind the frontage, across Windsor Lane and along the south-east side of Cheapside (Jennings, 1970) has not been located by any excavation work to date.

Archaeological watching briefs behind 14, High Street by York Archaeological Trust, in Jockey Lane by Mary Kershaw of Harrogate Museum, and in Brewerton Street by Northern Archaeological Associates have all failed to produce any evidence within the town centre of activity prior to the 17th-century. Indeed it has been suggested that the town may have been levelled during the English Civil War in the 1640s (Kershaw, pers comm). Such clearance would certainly explain the absence of medieval archaeological deposits within the town to date. Further archaeological work is required to clarify whether or not truncation has actually taken place.

2. Results

The excavation results are presented street by street in the order in which assessment and recording was carried out.

2.1 Castle Gate

The deposits here appeared to have been truncated down to the natural magnesian limestone. No earlier road surfaces or archaeological features were noted. Previous surfaces, such as cobbling, appear to have been stripped prior to the laying of the modern tarmac road surface. Natural limestone appeared at between 0.36m and

0.46m below the modern road surface throughout the trenches. One sherd of 19th or 20th century tin glazed earthenware pottery was recovered from context (007), a mid brownish grey clayey sand layer that was sandwiched between the modern hard-core for the tarmac road and the limestone natural. At the intersection between Cheapside, Castle Gate and Castle Yard, the deposits were very disturbed and heavily truncated by services. Natural limestone appeared at a depth of 0.70m.

2.2 Cheapside

A considerable amount of truncation by modern service trenches appeared to have removed earlier deposits down to the natural limestone varying in depth from 0.36m to 0.60m and averaging at 0.46m. Fragmentary areas of cobbles appeared in places to seal layers of fine crushed limestone and clays resting on top of natural limestone. These deposits all seem to be fairly recent in date and are probably associated with road make-up. A possible pit like feature cut into the natural limestone was located outside the junction between 6 and 8 Cheapside and contained a dark grey clayey silt. This was not excavated and no finds were recovered from it. Close to the southern end of Cheapside natural limestone was not located. A mixed silty clay deposit was the base layer reached within the trench which varied between 0.33m and 0.49m. in depth. It has been suggested that the town ditch turned north-east and crossed Cheapside rather than continuing across Gracious Street before turning in this direction (Kershaw, pers comm). No evidence for this was located in the ground, further analytical study of documentary and cartographic evidence may shed some light on this.

2.3 Brewerton Street

Deposits in this area appeared to be modern in date, a sherd of 19th/20th century tin glazed earthenware was found in the lowest deposit (317) within the trench. Natural limestone was not located but a possible cement floor and brick wall of 19th century date were found in the middle of the road in line with Belmont View. This is believed to be the remains of a demolished building preserved beneath the road.

2.4 Castle Yard

All of the deposits within the part of Castle Yard which was observed up to the public toilets had been disturbed by service trenches. Outside the toilet block, however, in situ archaeological deposits survived. One definite ditch, (218) aligned WSW-ENE filled with (217), which contained sherds of pottery dateable to the late 17th to the 19th century, including slipware, redware and blackware, was located directly outside the men's toilets. Another possible ditch, containing 19th century pottery, and a burnt deposit (203) above a mid grey silty sand (204), were located in the road itself just north-west of the toilet block and west of a storm drain. At the terminus of the cable trench in Castle Yard a third feature was discovered. This may represent the edge of the moat, or a large ditch close to it, the upper most fill (207) of which contained 19th century material. All of this indicates that the resurfacing of the road with tarmac and landscaping around the eastern side of the castle, as well as