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**NEWSTEAD FARM,
SAXTON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

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**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

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1997 FIELD REPORT

NUMBER 21

**NEWSTEAD FARM, COCK BECK,
SAXTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

CONTENTS

1. Introduction
- 1.1 Methodology
- 1.2 Geology and Topography
- 1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background
- 2.. Results
3. Conclusions
4. Archaeological Implications
5. List of Sources
6. List of Contributors

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location plan
Fig. 2 Plan of earthworks
Fig. 3 Location of trenches

1. Introduction

On the 15th September 1997 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on the stripping, levelling and excavation of foundation holes for a new barn at Newstead Farm, Cock Beck, Saxton, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 46093810) on behalf of A. Lawson and Son, the present tenants. The work was carried out to fulfil a planning condition set by Selby District Council on the advice of North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Unit. The machine stripping and levelling of the area and the excavation of foundation trenches was monitored for any evidence of archaeological deposits which may have survived in the area.

1.1 Methodology

The area was stripped and the post-pad foundations excavated under archaeological supervision by a JCB Site Master mechanical excavator using a toothless bucket. The deposits revealed in plan and 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 Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:1997.100

1.2 Geology and Topography

Newstead Farm is situated within a shallow valley to the north-west of Saxton, within the ridge of magnesian limestone hills that borders the western side of the vale of York. The farm is situated on a geological fault between the lower magnesian limestone which lies to the north-east and the middle Permian marl which lies to the south-west (Geological Survey of England and Wales sheet 70). The buildings lie on the north side of the valley, the ground sloping down moderately to the south and west to the valley bottom and a small stream. The area where the new barn was to be constructed lay to the south of the existing farm buildings on the site of a former barn, which had been dismantled, leaving only the concrete post-pads in situ prior to site clearance.

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The area where the new barn was to be constructed lay adjacent to a medieval moated site which consisted of a small sub-rectangular raised central island surrounded by a moat. The new building position lay to the east of the island overlying and partially within the projected line of an outer enclosure.

Documentary research by Le Patourel during excavation work between 1963-5 revealed nothing of Newstead's medieval history although the site is mentioned in the early 16th-century on a list of lands and rents held by William Mirfield and in 1562 it was the subject of an arrangement between George Gascoigne and Sir William Vavasour of

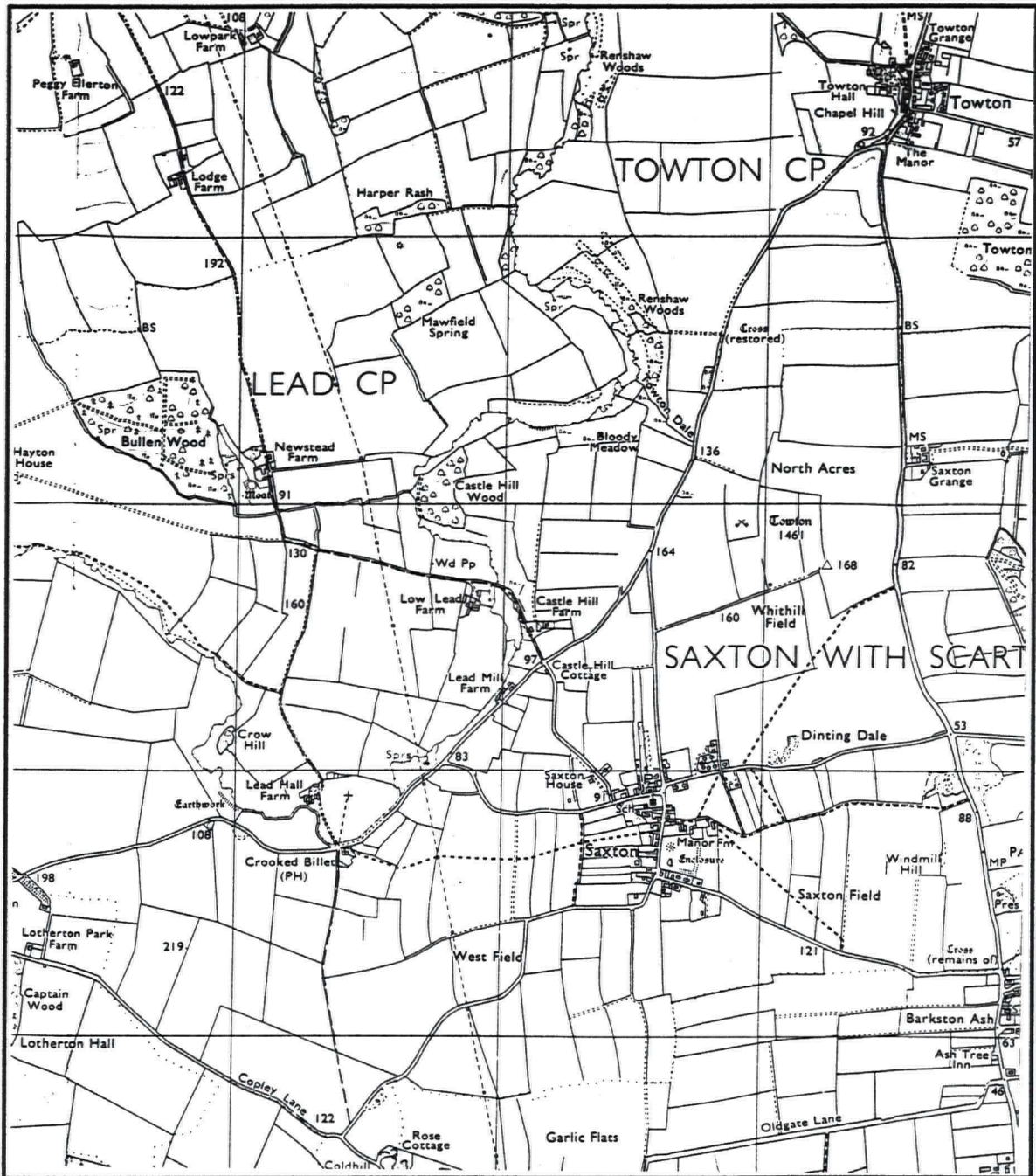


Figure 1. Site location plan

Scale 1:25000

Reproduced from the 1972 Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Pathfinder map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright, York Archaeological Trust, Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York Licence number AL 854123

Hazlewood, where the latter acquired 'the *manors* of Newstead and Lead' for a payment of £600. An 18th-century document in the Vavasour collection records a free rent of 2d a year paid on the property but does not specify the date it was paid nor to whom. The only other mention is of a dovecote still in use in 1807. If the property was in fact ever a manor, as implied in 1562, this dovecote may represent the last remnants of manorial rights (Le Patourel, 1973).

Le Patourel's excavations revealed a complex sequence of building activity on the island and within the outer enclosures. The island was raised with re-deposited clay from the moats and was thought originally to have been square in shape, suffering from erosion on the east side. Four phases of building construction were recovered from the raised platform on the island.

After the initial construction of the moat, possibly in the 13th- or early 14th-century, a large timber frame building, c. 21 m. in length, was erected on the north side of the island and divided into two rooms by a timber partition. A second structure, possibly a shed, was located along the south side of the island, but its precise dimensions could not be fully determined due to erosion and disturbance.

In phase two the edge of the island was enclosed by a stone wall. The main building or hall was rebuilt and extended to c. 23 m, its north side being set against the perimeter wall and its southern side constructed of timbers, set within post-holes. Two aisle-like lines of post-holes, which are likely to have been successive, were found within the building though the sequence and dating was unclear. A kitchen was also constructed in the north-west corner of the island but this was almost completely removed by later rebuilding.

During the 15th-century the structures were again rebuilt utilising the entire island, the buildings now surrounding the edge of the island and facing inwards onto a cobbled courtyard, bisected by a stone lined drain. The hall still occupied the site used in the previous phases on the north of the island but the construction techniques altered slightly. The southern wall was rebuilt using a mixture of stylobate (stone post pads) and post-hole construction which terminated at either end in low sill walls. In the north-west corner the kitchen continued in use, expanding to include a large kitchen range with two west and one north-facing ovens. The accommodation block to the south of the kitchen in the western range was largely destroyed by later construction work but certain features suggest that a building may have been erected here to complete the courtyard. Three shallow depressions may also suggest a further building, probably a shed, on the east side.

The final phase of construction on the island, in the later 15th- to mid 16th-century, brought a complete re-arrangement of the buildings occupying the island. In the south-west corner an L-shaped building was constructed, possibly two-storeys in height. The ground floor was divided into two rooms, built independently (the southern room being a secondary addition), neither of which were thought to have been residential in character. The kitchen, in the north-west corner of the island, was further altered and now contained a large central oven. South of the kitchen a small stone structure was built which was

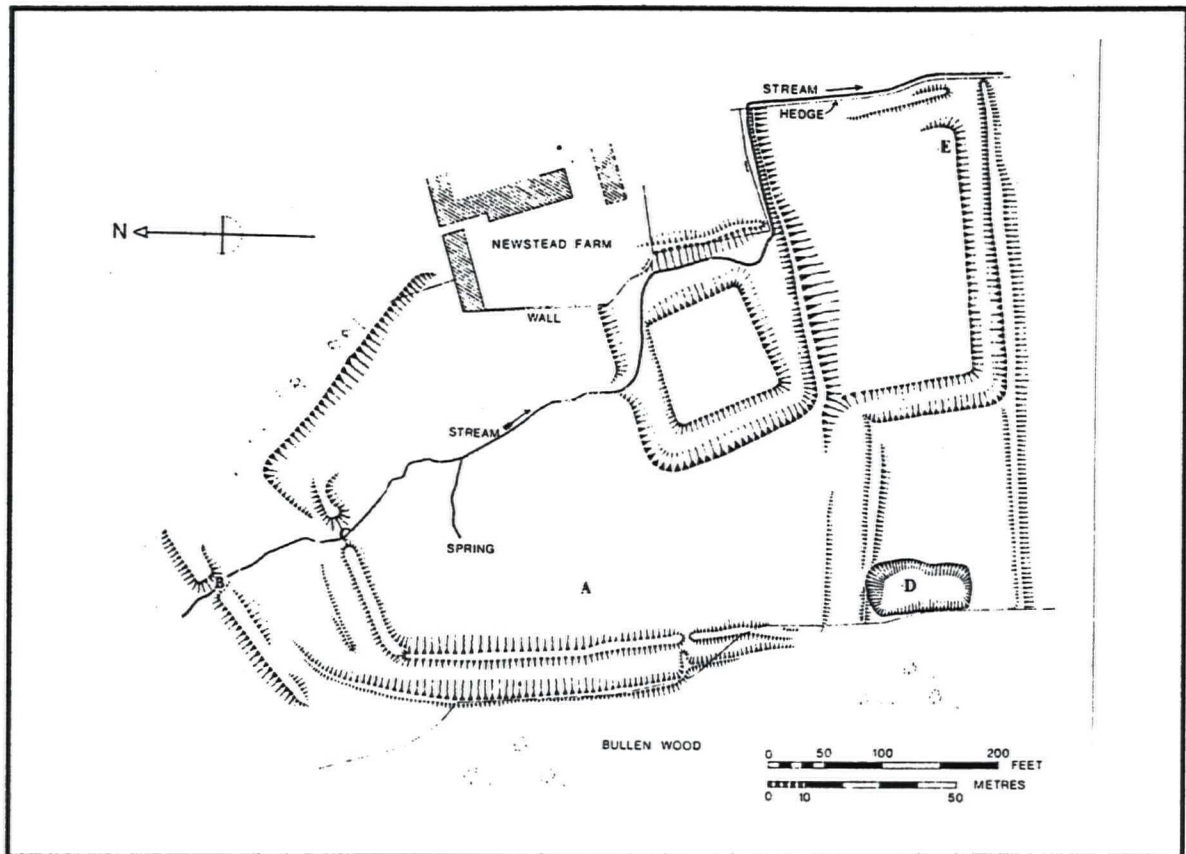


Figure 2. Plan of earthworks (Le Patourel, 1973)

interpreted as a garderobe. On the north side the hall continued in use from phase three although it may have been subject to alteration during this final phase.

Excavations in other parts of the site revealed further evidence of its development. At the north end of the site, excavation close to the stream, where its line past through the banks of the outer enclosures, revealed a sequence of post-holes interpreted as timber supports for sluices which controlled the stream and water flow from a pond at the north end of the site into the moat.

Excavations within the southern most enclosure revealed two floor surfaces relating to 18th-century domestic buildings, thought to have been of stylobate construction. A circular structure in the south-east corner of the enclosure with an internal diameter of c. 4 m. was also excavated and this was interpreted as the remains of the 19th-century dovecote. Overall the southern enclosure contained very few medieval finds and was the only area to contain post-medieval material, other than that recovered from the island. It was therefore suggested to have been 'herbage', orchards and gardens prior to the 18th-century, although due to the lack of any medieval garden features it is more probable that this area was just used for pasture.

Le Patourel concluded that the moated site was constructed by an anonymous 'assarting freeman' on virgin soil. The area in which the new barn is to be constructed may produce further evidence of medieval or post-medieval occupation and buildings associated with this important site that helps us to confirm the findings of the earlier excavations or helps to develop new theories about those members of society responsible for moat construction in the medieval period.

2.0 Results

The earliest deposit located within the foundation slots for the new post-pads was natural limestone bedrock located within post-pads 1, 7, 8, 9, and 13. This was overlain by a compact plastic, mid to dark grey, natural clay only located in post-pad 3 which in turn was overlain by a compact plastic reddish or brownish orange natural sandy clay located in post-pads 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13. Sealing the natural clay deposits was a compact light creamy pinkish brown sandy clay, with frequent inclusions of degraded limestone, which appeared to be natural in origin, possibly formed by peri- or post-glacial colluvial sedimentation. This latter deposit sealed all earlier deposits over the entire site and varied in depth between 0.28m and 0.83m.

Cutting into the natural subsoil were two ditches aligned roughly north to south and parallel to each other. The eastern most ditch, located within post-pad 9, was steep sided with a rounded base 1.40m wide and 0.60m deep. This was filled with friable light creamy grey sandy clay with frequent inclusions of limestone fragments. The second ditch, located in post-pad 10, was not fully revealed by the machine slot. Its sides broke sharply into a moderately steep slope which graded out into a flattish base. The width of the ditch could not be determined but its depth was 0.42m. It was backfilled with two deposits; the primary fill was a tenacious pinkish creamy brown silty clay with occasional calcareous flecking; the secondary fill was very similar to the primary, only differing in the much higher percentage of calcareous flecking contained within it. Both ditches appear to have silted up slowly under wet conditions, the eastern most ditch containing fragments of snails, usually only deposited in wet micro-climates. No dateable material was recovered from either of the ditches but it is thought most likely that they were of medieval date and relate to the construction of the outer enclosures to the east of the moat.

A third linear feature was located during the stripping in post-pad 3. This was also aligned north to south across the site, had shallow sides, was 0.70m wide and 0.38m deep. It appeared to have been completely backfilled with loose limestone rubble and occasional brick fragments. This may have been the rubble foundation for a drystone wall but it is thought more likely to have been a soakway running at 90 degrees from the 18th century barn to the north of the watching brief area.

Within the post-pad holes two land drains constructed with bright orange ceramic pipes were located in numbers 2, 8 and 9. These were aligned north to south and were probably a 19th century attempt to drain the land between the 18th century barn and the southern enclosure, prior to the construction of the new stream channel in the early 20th-century. The pipe located within post pads 2 and 8 was laid fairly deep at the bottom of the natural clay at 0.75m, whereas the pipe in post-pad 9 was very shallow (0.30m) and followed the

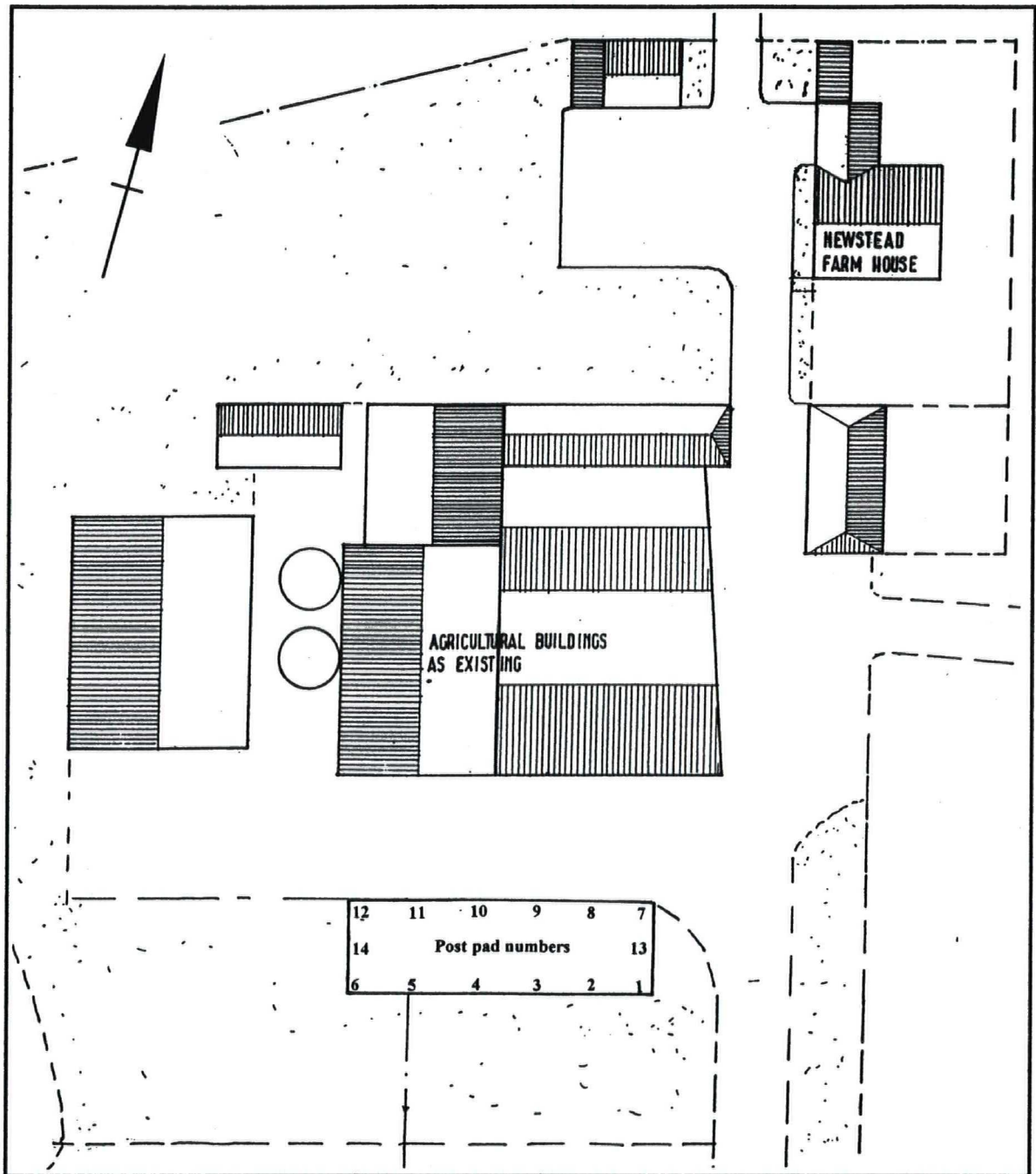


Figure 3. Location of trenches

line of the backfilled medieval ditch. This suggests that this feature was still an earthwork when this particular land drain was laid and that there may have been several phases of land drain insertion to try to dry out the area.

A rubbish pit measuring 1.00m long by 0.46m wide was located in the south-east corner of the excavation area. This was backfilled with a friable dark brown sandy silt and contained frequent broken fragments of late 19th-century mould blown bottles, ash and cinder. The pit was not excavated due to the occurrence of modern finds in its upper fill but on the north-eastern side the skeleton of a small mammal, possibly a mouse, was recovered.

The whole area was overlain with friable loose dark brown sandy silt topsoil to an average depth of 0.30m.

Cutting the modern topsoil and the natural subsoil were the post-pads for the original modern barn. The concrete post-pads, measuring 0.65m long by 0.60m wide with a circular post-pipe at the centre c. 0.25m in diameter seemed to have disturbed an area of c.4 square metres when they were inserted. Several of the post-pads still contained wooden posts within them.

A modern ceramic water or drainage pipe was also discovered within post-pad slot 1 at a depth of 0.90m.

Overlying the topsoil at the eastern end of the site was a dump of almost a metre of modern rubbish and rubble. The original ground surface in this area appeared to drop rapidly towards the moat that encloses the island platform. The dumping raised the ground surface up to the same level as the barns constructed to the north of the site.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

The watching brief carried out on the area in which the new barn was to be constructed produced archaeologically significant deposits. Below c. 0.30m the deposits appear to be geological in character relating to peri- or post-glacial sedimentation which was deposited on top of Permian magnesian limestone. Natural deposits were cut by two ditches interpreted as being part of the medieval outer enclosure system to the east of the moated island platform. These were preserved under a thin topsoil which probably was formed when the area was used for pasture throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. No evidence for medieval or post-medieval buildings or structures were located although a comparative analysis of the excavated sites to the south and east reveals that the buildings and structures of these periods were preserved beneath only 0.05 to 0.10m of turf. The insertion of the soakway, land drains and the original modern barn is likely to have cleared and levelled any structures that were originally located here during the medieval or early post-medieval period. The only other feature discovered was a late 19th-century or early 20th-century rubbish pit located in the south-east corner of the site.

4. Archaeological Implications

The archaeological watching brief of the area designated for the erection of the new barn located two probable medieval ditches to the east of the moated island platform. These were probably part of the system of outer enclosures used to channel water to the moat itself from the pond at the north end of the site. No evidence was recovered for the preservation of buildings, structures or stratigraphy within the area under observation. It is clear that no further work is required for this particular planning application although any future planning applications should be carefully monitored in case *in situ* medieval deposits are threatened.

5. List of Sources

Le Patourel, H. E. J. (1973) *The Moated Sites of Yorkshire*; The Society for Medieval Archaeology, Monograph Series No. 5, London.

York Archaeological Trust (1996), *Context Recording Manual*, York.

6. List of Contributors

Watching Brief and Report

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