

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE SCARBOROUGH MARINE ENGINEERS SITE, QUAY STREET/SANDSIDE, SCARBOROUGH – A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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NOTE

This report first appeared in the Transactions of the Scarborough Archaeological & Historical Society, number 42: 2009. It is intended to produce a more detailed report in due course.

INTRODUCTION

Excavations were undertaken within the building formerly occupied by Scarborough Marine Engineers between November 2008 and February 2009 at National Grid Reference TA 0493 8883. The Society's site code is ME08. The following report is very much a preliminary one since analysis of the pottery, leather, organic material and other finds continues.

The site is a large steel framed building on the south side of Quay Street which extends through to Sandside. The building has a frontage of 14 metres to Quay Street and a visible frontage of 4 metres to Sandside where it is tightly located behind the early eighteenth century building 34-35 Sandside to the south .

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

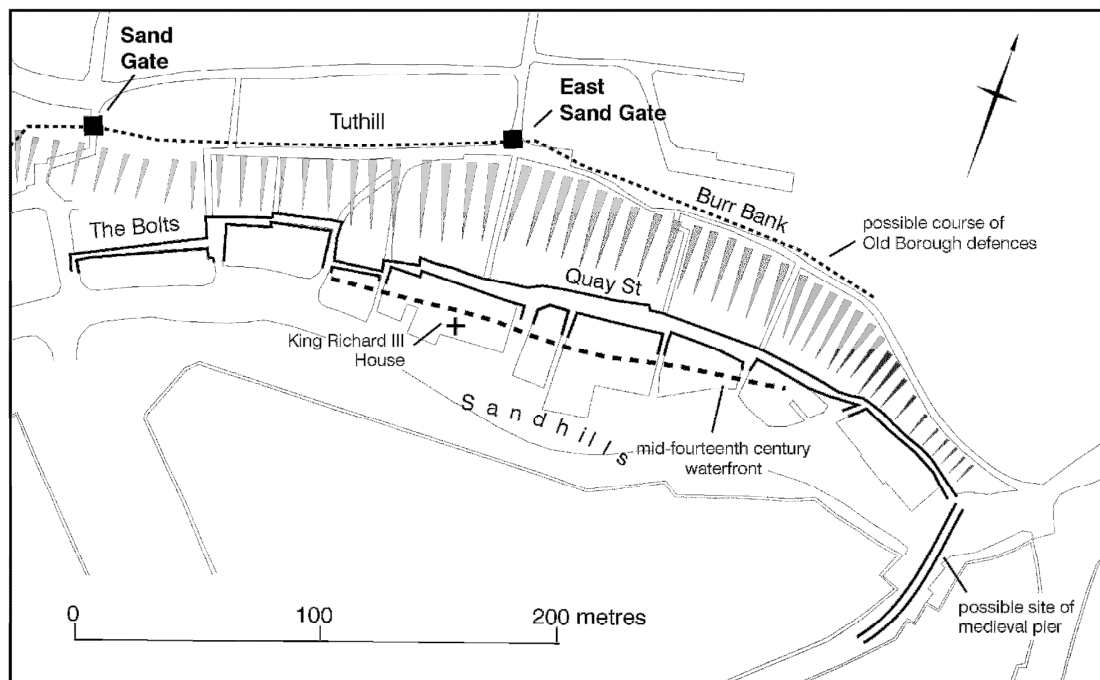


Figure 1 Postulated mid fourteenth century quay alignment – from Pearson 2005

The site lies in the area of the medieval town of Scarborough, within the Old Borough, close to a possible medieval waterfront alignment. Previous archaeological investigations on the north side of the road (about opposite the present site) revealed the presence of a thick deposit of soil containing domestic refuse dumped on to the site in the fourteenth century prior to the construction of a building, represented by a single surviving stone wall. The dumped material raised the ground level to form a platform for the construction of a new building, which stood adjacent to the seafront along the line of Quay Street.¹ However an excavation immediately to the west of the present site, at 23 Quay Street, carried out in 2005/06 revealed the presence of deep cellars below the site of a demolished late medieval building, the cellar having been built directly off the sand.² Pearson has postulated that a mid-fourteenth century waterfront crossed the site about half way into the Marine Engineers building – see figure 1.³

Prior to the erection of the boat builder's shed in about 1964/5 part of the site frontage to Quay Street (3.6m) was occupied by a timber framed building known locally as Crazy Cottage (variously numbered 25 or 27 Quay Street) illustrated in figure 2. On stylistic grounds, this building is thought to be late fourteenth or early fifteenth century in date.⁴



Figure 2 - 'Crazy Cottage' in 1953. The garage behind the lady is the location of the excavation carried out in 2005/06, the garage being on the site of 23 Quay Street

Before the boat builders shed was built, the rest of the site was occupied by tenements known as Whartons Yard (the yard still partially exists behind the Golden Ball public house) and Mast Yard. These are likely to have been early eighteenth century buildings on earlier stone bases as at 34-35 Sandside. A nineteenth century photograph of Mast Yard – see figure 3 - appears to show a break of slope at its north end; this may be the same as the rise and fall found in some of the lanes between Quay Street and Sandside (eg alongside the former Bethel Mission Chapel). These rises and falls have been postulated to indicate the line of the medieval sea front.⁵



Figure 3 looking north into Mast Yard in the nineteenth century. Note the apparent break of slope in front of the window facing down the yard

OBJECTIVES OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

The objectives of the work were set out in a Project Design which stated that excavations were intended to determine the nature, depth, extent and state of preservation of archaeological deposits on the site and , more specifically, to test:

- the survival of the remains of the (presumed) late medieval timber building (“Crazy Cottage”) known to have stood on the south side of Quay Street prior to the construction of the Marine Engineers; and
- the possible alignment of the later medieval sea wall.⁶

THE EXCAVATIONS

Four trenches were opened within the building, Trenches 1, 2, 4 and 5 - “Trench 3” relates to the recording of structural evidence revealed during building work to the south of the Marine Engineers.

In total the trenches opened covered an area of 35 sq m, some 10% of the total interior area of the building. In several places it was necessary to excavate to a depth of about 2.5m below the present concrete floor.

Trench 1 was opened in the north-west part of the building and successfully located the linear foundations of stone boulders which supported the timber frame of Crazy Cottage. Trench 2 was opened to the south and east of Trench 1 and was sited across the line of a distinct rise still observable in the nearby alleys linking Quay Street and Sandside. It was thought possible that this rise might mark the line of the medieval sea wall.

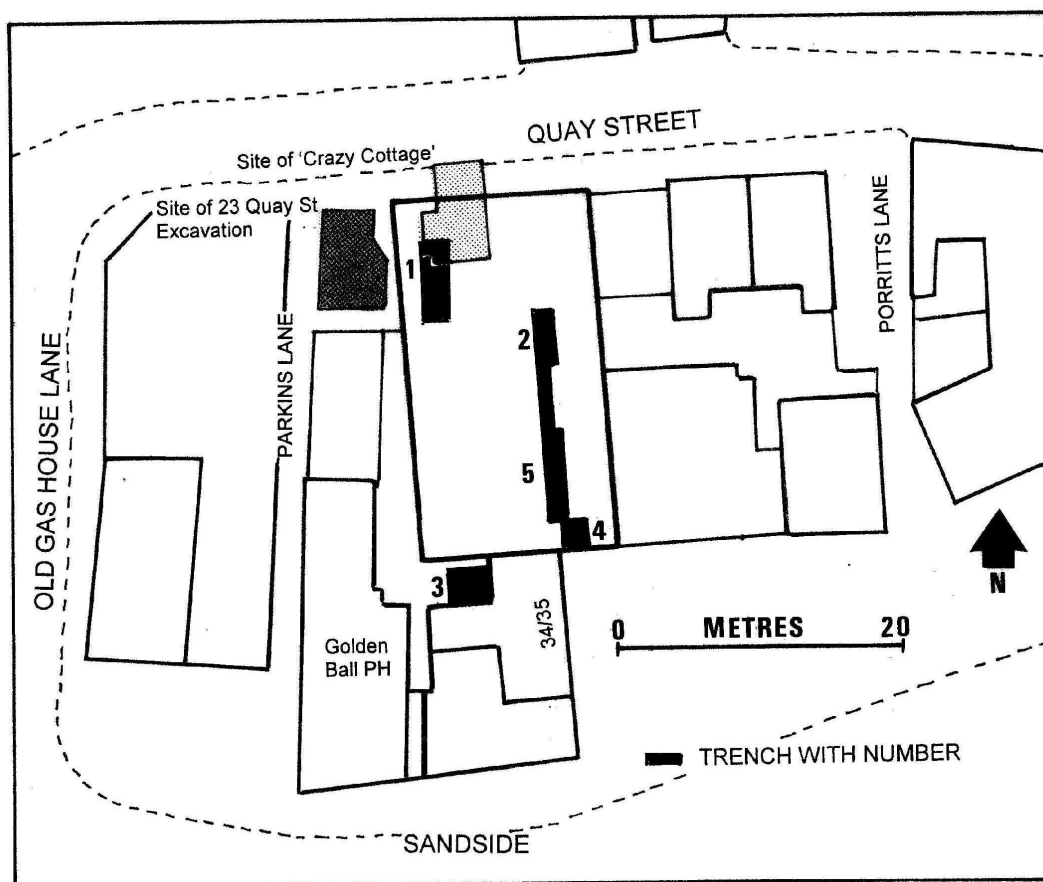


Figure 4 The location of the trenches

Below the late medieval foundations in Trench 1 and throughout Trench 2 was a massive dump of soil, about 2.5m deep, representing a major episode of land reclamation in the late medieval period. Incorporated within the reclamation in trench 1 was a well-constructed stone-lined drain running north-south. Evidence from the excavations suggested that the rise in the modern ground surface is a reflection of a pre-existing dune system of which the reclamation took advantage.



**Figure 5 Trench 1 looking south showing the well constructed stone lined drain.
Scales 2 metre, 1 metre and 500mm**

As it was clear from Trenches 1 and 2 that the later medieval sea wall which retained the reclaimed land must lie to the south, a small trench (Trench 4) was opened at the southern end of the site to see whether the medieval dumping extended all the way to the present Sandside. This proved not to be the case, post-medieval infill being found all the way down to the underlying sand.

A final trench (Trench 5) was therefore excavated to the north of Trench 4, linking it to Trench 2 and thus providing a complete north-south transect across the site from Quay Street to Sandside. This trench located the approximate position of the medieval sea wall which had at this point been entirely robbed out, presumably so that the stone could be re-used in the post-medieval sea wall further south. One massive stone block was found in the underlying sand where it had probably fallen prior to the demolition of the earlier sea wall. The robbing “cut” and the area to the south was filled with dumped soil containing sixteenth/seventeenth century material. Sand was again encountered at about 2.5m below the present building floor.



**Figure 6 Trench 5 looking east showing the robbing cut
Scales 2 metre and 1metre**

Trench 3 was located to the south of the Marine Engineers shed and abutting 34-35 Sandside. This was a monitoring trench, observations being carried out during the demolition of a shed and the erection of a new brick built extension. Removal of the old shed has revealed a section of stone wall constructed in large squared coursed blocks providing the foundations to the brick building above. It is possible that this stone wall represented the re-used foundations of an earlier building but no definite evidence of this was found. The extension was built off a slab which involved lowering the older concrete floor slab by 300mm (400mm at the corners). The construction work was monitored and revealed that this area consisted of entirely twentieth century demolition fill to the full depth of the excavation.

THE FINDS

Full analysis of the finds is still being undertaken. Significant quantities of pottery were recovered from both principal phases of land reclamation. The earlier phase of dumped material included a high proportion of Scarborough ware (including fragments of knight jugs) and Staxton ware, suggesting a fourteenth century date. Pottery from the later phase of reclamation to the south was of sixteenth or early seventeenth century date.

Anaerobic conditions within the soil dumps in some parts of the site led to the preservation of wood and leather objects (the latter principally shoes). Also preserved, primarily in the later contexts, were strands of fibrous material interpreted as caulking for the seams of boats. Other evidence for shipwrighting in the vicinity was provided by iron and timber nails, quantities of iron slag and a (possible) pitch pot.

Building materials were present throughout and included both limestone roofing and clay tiles. Quantities of heather recovered from anaerobic contexts may also indicate the use of this material as a roof covering.

SUMMARY

The excavation revealed two major phases of land reclamation adjacent to Scarborough harbour. The first phase, dating to the fourteenth century, was clearly a major engineering exercise, creating what was effectively a new maritime suburb to the town on the south side of Quay Street.

Overall a good understanding of the archaeology within the Marine Engineers site was achieved. However, when the site is developed it may be desirable to machine-dig a trench under archaeological observation to the west of Trench 4 in order to confirm the line of the medieval sea wall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Society and the excavation directors extend their thanks to James Corrigan who sponsored this research excavation.

The excavation was directed by the authors and carried out by SAHS members Frank Beeley, Martin Bland, Craig Bridgewood, Diane Coates, Gareth Davies, Chris Evans, Siriol Hinchliffe, Ron Lewis, Vanessa Milner, Mick Panton, Carl Racey, Chris Smith, Lesley Smith, Sue Wood and Jordan Veil.

Carl Racey is thanked for his efforts in breaking out the concrete floor and making good the back filling.

The excavation benefitted from the knowledge of Dr Brian Sweeney of Hull University Scarborough Campus on dune formation in coastal situations.

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