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Skipton Flood Management Scheme
Skipton
North Yorkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

January 2011

Report No. 2160

CLIENT
Environment Agency

Skipton Flood Management Scheme, Skipton, North Yorkshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

Summary

Archaeological Services WYAS (ASWYAS) undertook an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of two geotechnical test pits dug to inform a scheme of flood management north-east of Skipton. No archaeological features or deposits were present in either test pit.

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Report Information

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Address:	Richard Fairclough House, Knutsford Road, Latchford, Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 1HG
Report Type:	Watching Brief
Location:	Skipton
County:	North Yorkshire
Grid Reference:	SE 00641 52251
Period(s) of activity represented:	None
Report Number:	2160
Project Number:	3681
Site Code:	SFMS10
Planning Application No.:	
Museum Accession No.:	
Date of fieldwork:	December 2010
Date of report:	January 2011
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Authorisation for distribution: ----------

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ISOQAR ISO 9001:2008
Cert. No. 125QM8003

Contents

List of Figures

List of Plates

Acknowledgements

ASWYAS would like to thank representatives of the Environment Agency as well as ARUP and Ian Farmer Associates for their help and discussion on site.

1 Introduction

Archaeological Services WYAS (ASWYAS) monitored the excavation of two geotechnical test pits on behalf of the Environment Agency, carried out in advance of a proposed flood management scheme on Eller Beck, located to the north-east of Skipton, North Yorkshire (see Fig. 1). The test pits were excavated on December 17th 2010 under the direction of representatives of ARUP Ltd, the main commercial contractor, and the ground works sub-contractor, Ian Farmer Associates. The work to be monitored originally consisted of three test pits, Test Pit (TP) 1 and TP 2 located immediately on either side of the beck and TP 5, located upon the slopes of the valley several hundred metres to the north. Ground conditions were such that TP 2 could not be excavated on the day and only TP 1 and TP 5 were monitored.

Site location and topography

The section of the development site containing the three proposed geotechnical test pits is located approximately 1km to the north-east of the town of Skipton in an area known locally as Waller Hill. It consists of an irregular parcel of land extending east along the course of Eller Beck for approximately 1km, between the A65 to the north and the A6069 immediately to the south. Within this general area TP 1 and TP 2 were located in the immediate environs of the beck, one on either side of the watercourse, within a small, steep-sided erosion channel containing a narrow flood plain, at the centre of a wider glacial valley. TP 1 was located approximately by a hand-held GPS system at SE 00641 52251. TP 5 was located several hundred metres to the north of the beck and further up the valley side at the centre of an open arable field, located approximately by hand-held GPS system at SE 00566 52312. The main channel of the beck and the wider glacial valley collectively open out to the west with Eller Beck continuing on to join several other watercourses, at the confluence of which is Skipton.

Soils, geology and land-use

The solid geology of the area is characterised as limestone and mudstone bedrock of the Clitheroe Formation (BGS 2001) with a superficial cover of Devensian Till primarily consisting of clay and clay soils (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1980).

2 Archaeological and Historical Background

There are no known archaeological remains in the development area and no previous archaeological work has been undertaken in the immediate vicinity. However, the wider area has produced evidence of occupation as far back as the Mesolithic period. Perhaps more significantly it is also known that Skipton was probably established during the early medieval period (7th or 8th century A.D.) and became the location of a castle and associated settlement soon after the Norman conquest (Martin and Grassam 2009). While there is currently no evidence therefore to indicate the presence of archaeology within the development site there

remains the potential for chance finds relating to a broad spectrum of cultural periods and more likely of medieval or later origin.

3 Aims and Objectives

To identify, record and characterise any archaeological features or deposits excavated during the ground investigation works.

4 Methodology

Excavation of the geotechnical test pits were carried out using a mechanically operated hydraulic machine equipped with a toothed bucket under the direction and parameters set by operatives of Ian Farmer Associates. The pits were approximately 2.5m by 0.6m and excavated to a variable depth depending upon the nature of the geology encountered and the requirements of the geological brief. All excavations were monitored by a qualified archaeologist in order to determine the presence/absence of deposits or structures of archaeological interest. The nature of the deposits were recorded in relation to each test pit and a representative photographic record was made during excavation.

5 Results

Three test pits were originally intended to be the subject of archaeological monitoring. However, due to the health and safety issues of crossing the beck in spate TP 2 was abandoned. This report therefore details observations made on TP 1, located to the immediate north of Eller Beck, and TP 5, located further north again upon the slope of the wider glacial valley containing the beck.

TP 1 was excavated to a maximum depth of approximately 2m at which point limestone bedrock was encountered and excavations stopped. Two distinct deposits were observed to overly the bedrock within the confines of the test pit, both of a natural origin and devoid of archaeological material. The uppermost layer consisted of a dark brown silty clay extending to a depth of 0.7m and obviously deriving from the deposition of fluvial sediments (Plate 1). Beneath this was a medium brown clay deposit with variable inclusions of bedrock boulders, increasing in quantity and size with depth, probably indicative of a natural weathering and fragmentation of the bedrock.

TP 5 extended to a maximum depth of 3.1m where excavations ceased, this being the maximum depth that could be reached by the machine. A slightly different stratigraphic sequence was recorded within this pit, with a dark brown silty clay topsoil deposit extending to a depth of 0.3m below the ground surface, overlying a sandy clay subsoil with clay bands extending to between approximately 0.9m and 1.1m. Below this the ground primarily

consisted of sandy gravel layers extending to a depth of approximately 2.4m (Plate 2) above a boulder clay layer extending to the limit of excavation. Again no archaeological deposits were observed.

10 Conclusions

No archaeological structures, deposits or material inclusions were identified in either of the test pits. The restrictions imposed by the local topography in the vicinity of TP 1 are likely to have been prohibitive to archaeological activity in the immediate area of Eller Beck, although the potential for alluvium masking evidence of more transitory and perhaps prehistoric activity remain. While the open nature of the immediate area of TP 5 may have been more conducive to archaeological activity no evidence was observed here either. Without recourse to further archaeological resources, such as arial photography, and based upon the evidence of the limited test pitting it would have to be concluded that any archaeological presence in the development site is probably negligible.

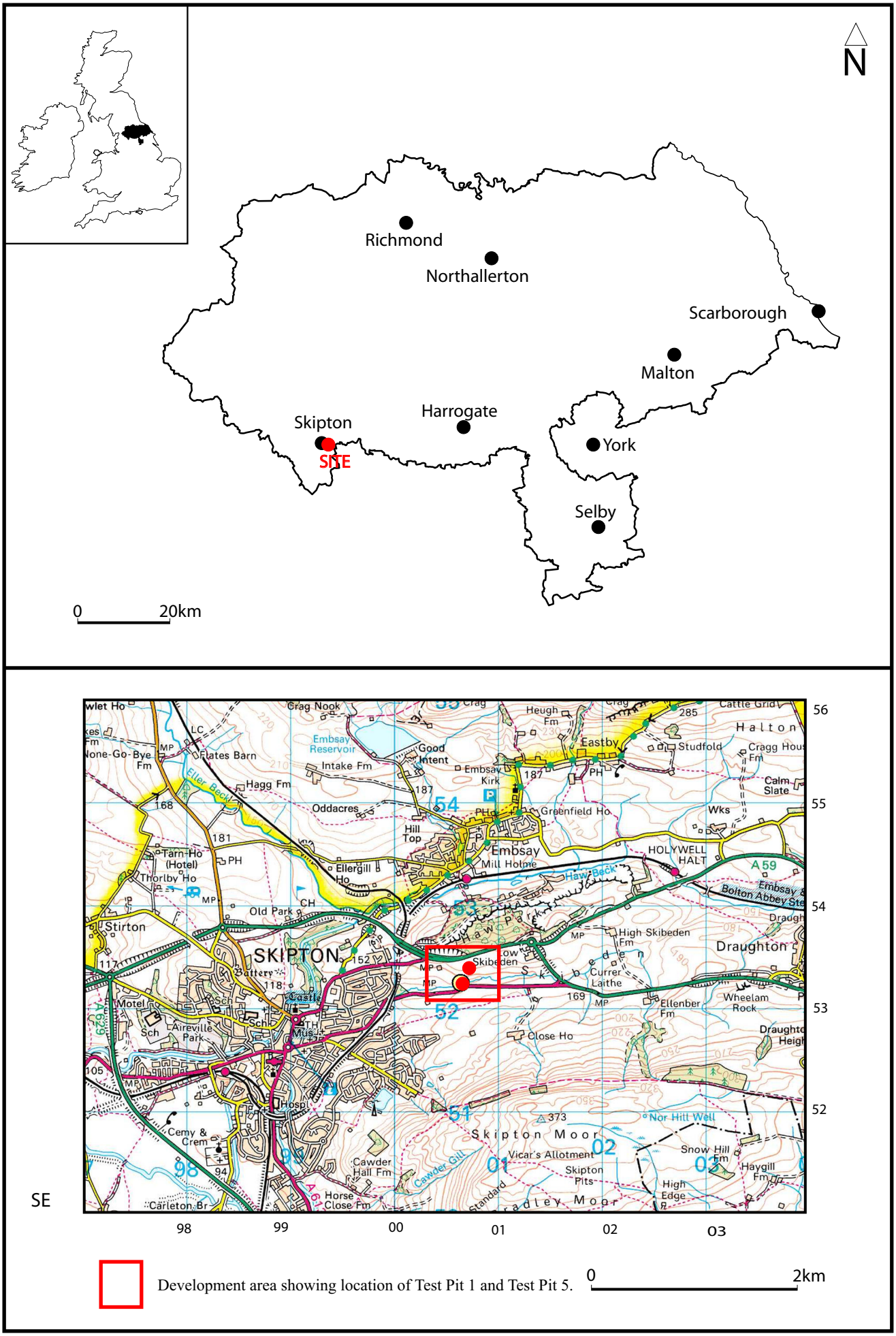

Fig. 1. Site location

Plate 1. The east facing section of Test Pit 1 after intial exposure of the upper natural layers, viewed facing west.

Plate 2. The east facing section of Test Pit 5 after excervation to a depth of 2.4m, viewed facing west.

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Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1980, Soils of Northern England Sheet 1.