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Overview of Archaeological Deposits at 11 - 13 Wheelgate, Malton, North. Yorks

Bold references appear on Figures Land 2

Following the removal by a demolition contractor of concrete floors and hard standings in the area to the rear of 11 - 13 Wheelgate, Malton a sequence of archaeological deposits was excavated in an irregular area chosen to maximize the understanding of the sequence and its relationship with the proposed development of the site (Fig. 1)

The earliest feature in the sequence of deposits encountered at Wheelgate was a substantial limestone wall (012) consisting of at least seven courses and standing to a height of 0.56m (A O D). The limestone blocks were irregularly sized but the face was vertical and the whole structure was of high quality. The upper fill (027) of a construction trench was encountered at the base of a small sondage (Fig. 1) excavated against this wall. A deposit of homogeneous fine silt (026), probably cultivated soil had built up against the southern face of the limestone wall suggesting that this was the exterior face. A medieval date for the material is suggested by the few finds that were recovered from this deposit. On the northern side of the wall a deposit of clay containing frequent, well sorted, inclusions of limestone appeared to be ground make-up (024). A feature or void under this deposit has caused the structure of the wall above to subside into a hollow caused by the settling of the leveling material into the void.

Above the uppermost course of limestone, at a level of 24.6m-24.8m A O D a second phase of walling or a later structure (011) had been constructed on the same alignment utilizing the lower wall as a foundation. The construction technique used in this element consisted of a rough sandstone block course on the southern side and a face of narrow coursed limestone blocks on the north side, the space between these faces was infilled with compact yellow brown clay forming the matrix of irregular blocks of limestone. It is possible the southern side was an eroded chamfer course again suggesting an exterior face. The uppermost surviving element of this structure consisted of the truncated remnants of a second wall face suggesting that above the chamfer the wall narrowed to half the width of the base. A curvilinear limestone structure (013) consisting of mixed single and double courses and integrated with 011 turned away to the north where it was eventually truncated by the rubble sub-floor of a later modern structure.

At the western end of the excavation area the alignment of the later wall caused it to intersect with the earlier structure and had truncated the upper courses.

Although this situation demonstrated the stratigraphic superposition of the upper wall, the relationships between the walls was more complex and was demonstrated by the sequence of deposits and structures that occupied the area between the two walls. Within the space between the two walls a primary deposit of stones (017) had tumbled forward from the earlier of the two walls, it was not possible to establish if these had been cut subsequently by the later wall.

Inset Archaeological features

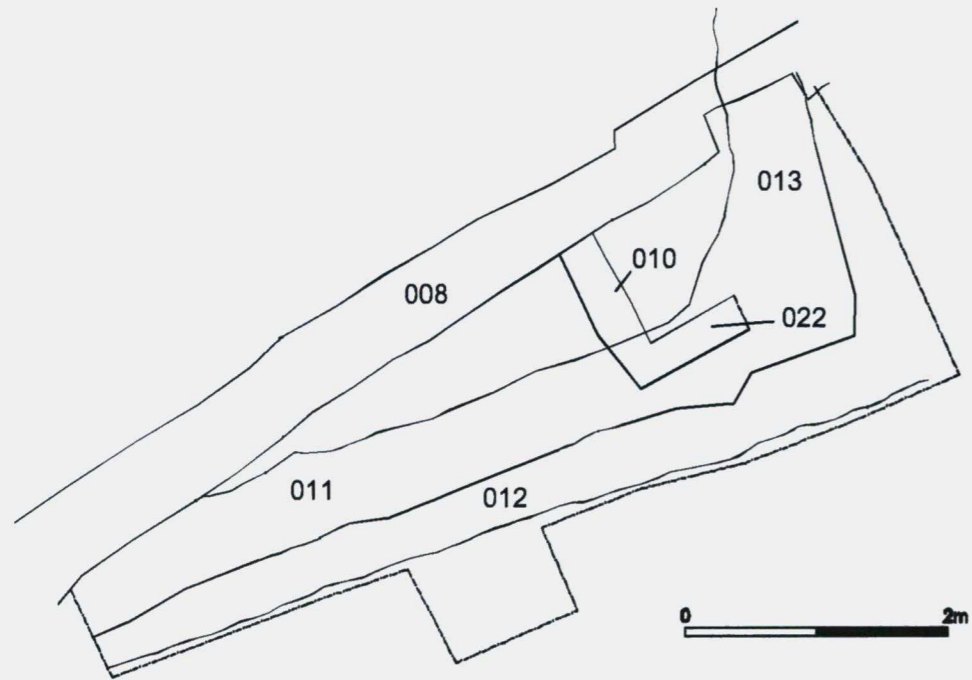


Figure 1. Evaluation area plotted over existing layout

A deposit (023) had built up over the northeru face of the upper structure, overlying the infill material. This deposit in turn was overlaid by the foundations of a later limestone wall (008), part of which survived and had been incorporated into the out buildings that were demolished in the primary stages of the project. The earlier wall had been truncated by a robbing cut (020). After the later wall had been constructed a midden pit (021) was cut into the space between the two walls. Pottery from the midden pit fill indicated that the later wall had been constructed before the early eighteenth century. The fill of the midden was partly cut away by the action of clearing a space for the construction of a small 'L' shaped stone structure (010 and 022). A further deposit of small limestone fragments in a dark loam matrix (009) had built up agamst the western side of the 'L' shaped structure. Above this material two intercut pits had further truncated the walls below. Pit cut 006 contained the skeleton of a dog, in turn this was cut by a small sub-circular pit (cut 002) filled with a mixed deposit of dark loamy material (001).

A shallow curved pit had been cut into deposit 023 and was filled by hardcore and rubble that appeared to be ground leveling for the structure represented by brick wall 005 and brick surface 004. These features were part of a garage that had used 008 as its southern wall.

Conclusion and recommendations

It appears likely that the earhest structure on the site was a substantial and well constructed medieval building or boundary wall. The wall underwent several processes of decay and robbing before it was replaced by a new stone boundary wall, probably associated with the construction of the stone elements of the standing building that occupies the frontage of the southern of the two properties. This structure formed the basis of the present complex of buildings and the structures that were recently demolished.

Little is known of the buildings occupying Wheelgate in the medieval period and the discovery of such a substantial medieval building on an alignment unrelated to the present arrangement is of significance.

The area excavated was limited in the evaluation stage and the full extent of the structures within the boundary of the development was not revealed. At the western limit of the site within the area currently used as a car park it is likely that both walls are preserved in good condition. This area is under considerable threat from the excavation of construction trenches and the stanchions required to support the new development. This area represents the maximum extent to which the course and structure of the wall could be determmed and it is possible that a return or further structural elements could be encountered.

External Groundworks

The construction of a floor slab for the new structure on the western side of the properties requires the reduction of the area to a level of 24 354m A O D In addition the original proposal requires the excavation of a series of pads to support the steelwork of the structure (Fig. 2, central pads hatched) The pad dimensions proposed are 1 4m square (half size, 1 4m by 0 7m, along the edges) The base of the pads would extend to a depth of 24 004m A O D In addition 0 45m wide strip footmgs would also be excavated around the perimeter of the structure to the same depth as the pads

Internal works

Within No 13 Wheelgate the existing concrete floor is to be broken out and the level reduced to a new formation depth to match the existing floor level of No 11 (Fig. 2, B) In addition pads for two internal steel columns will be excavated within the building, these will be of identical dimensions to those in the new building and will be excavated to the same depth (24 004m A O D)

Implications for the archaeological deposits

External works

- The highest point on top of the upper course of the medieval wall (011) is at an elevation of 24 6m A O D , 0 246m above the base of the excavation for the floor slab The remainder of the wall was only exposed in a sondage during the evaluation stage while further information was requested on the construction process and its implications to such substantial surviving structures In order to reach the required depth three courses of the wall would need to be removed after sufficient recording To record an elevation of at least the three courses to be removed part of the deposit against the face of the wall would need to be removed
- Within the development area the two intersecting walls extend beyond the evaluation area into the car park (Fig. 2, A) At this point the structures are under threat from the excavation of footings for the new building As this area represents the limit of investigation of these structures within the present development and the point at which any return or structural features might be preserved this represents the most significant threat to the preservation of the archaeological features within the development As a design solution would be difficult an extension of the evaluation excavation to fully record and reduce the walls in the same way as was proposed for the original evaluation area would seem to be the most appropriate strategy
- The proposed pads for the steelwork of the new building would extend 0 6m below the level reached in the evaluation excavations The central pad of the row in the middle of the building is of particular concern, as it would require excavation below the evaluation depth into known archaeological deposits, possibly internal to the major building A design solution has been proposed to replace the external pads with

Inset Archaeological features

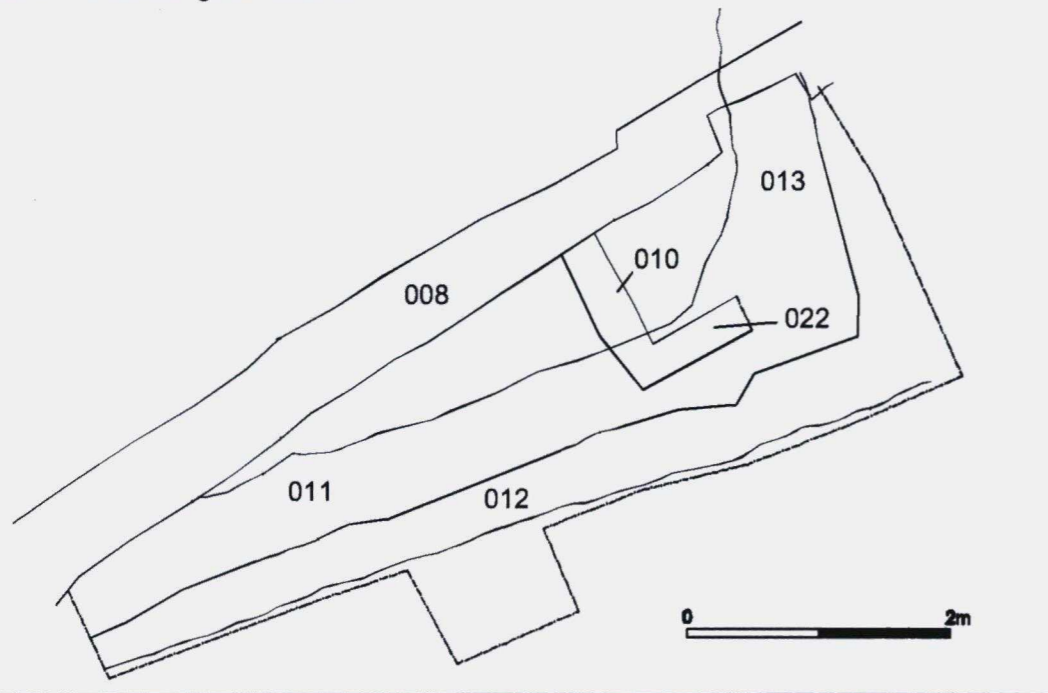


Figure 2. Evaluation area plotted over proposed layout

a pile, requiring a smaller and shallower pile cap minimizing the intrusion into the archaeology. Design details of this solution are not available at this moment.

Internal Work

- Design details of the new formation levels required for the floor of No 13 Wheelgate are not available at this moment, however it is likely that archaeological deposits may exist immediately below the existing floor. It is proposed that when further detail is available a strategy for recording any archaeology that might be revealed is factored in to the internal works. This strategy would also take into account other major intrusions into archaeological material caused by the internal construction details. The quality and preservation of any archaeology is unknown and further information would be dependant on observations as the construction process proceeded.