

KNARESBOROUGH CASTLE GROUNDS

EASTERN PERIMETER DEFENCES

KNARESBOROUGH

NORTH YORKSHIRE

SE 34870 56920

S.A.M.NO. 481

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

FOR

HARROGATE BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE AND AMENITY SERVICES

JULY 2000

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**KNARESBOROUGH CASTLE GROUNDS,
KNARESBOROUGH,
NORTH YORKSHIRE.**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALAUTION
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INTRODUCTION

In June 2000, Harrogate Borough Council instructed Kevin John Cale, Archaeological Consultant, to carry out an archaeological evaluation on the line of the eastern defences of Knaresborough Castle in order to make recommendations prior to the proposed formation of a Yew planter/hedge.

Before the commencement of groundworks Mrs.M.Kershaw, Curator, Harrogate Museums Service, had liased with K.Wilson, English Heritage regarding obtaining the necessary consent for the excavations within Scheduled Ancient Monument No.481.

The proposed landscaping works are to be undertaken as part of a long term and on going project to improve both the aesthetic and practical configuration of the Castle grounds. The proposed works would involve the planting of Yew hedge between the northern turret of the east gate and an isolated section of curtain wall to the north.

The evaluation would help determine the likely level of impact that the proposals may have on any buried archaeological remains. It was hoped that the evaluation would provide useful information as to nature and extent of the curtain wall.

Following a recent archaeological watching on other landscaping works within the Castle Grounds (Cale pers com) it had been determined that Outer Bailey precinct has been subject to a high level of 19th century landscaping which involved the raising of ground levels by over 300mm.

The evaluation was undertaken on the 19th July 2000 and concluded on Monday 24th July 2000.

LOCATION AND STATUS

The study area is situated within the north eastern extent of Knaresborough Castle Grounds, on the line of the former curtain wall.

Below ground in this area the site is Scheduled as an Ancient Monument (SAM North Yorkshire 481) located at SE: 440564 466483 at 76m AOD, within the parish of Knaresborough.

FIGURE 1

SITE LOCATION PLAN

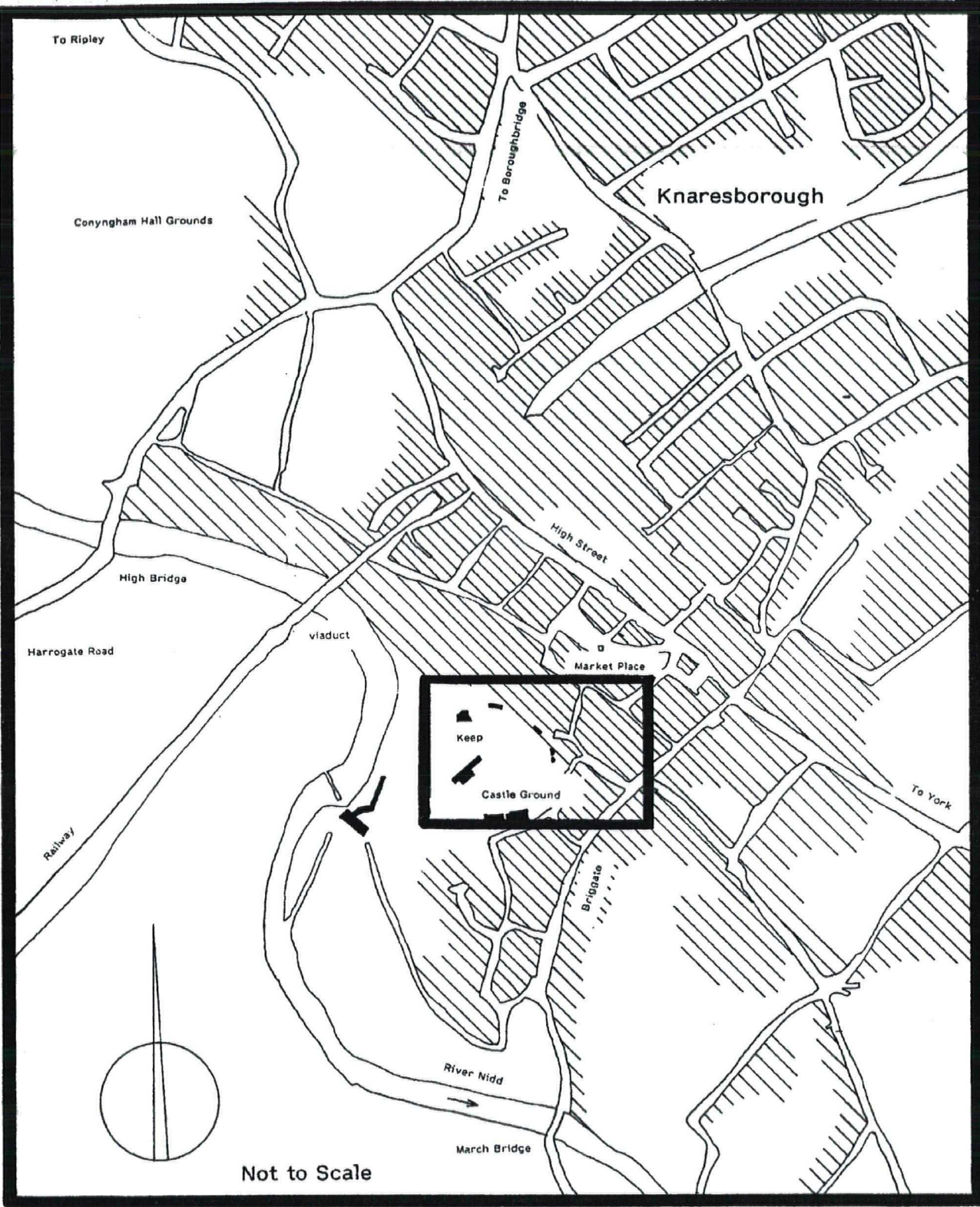


FIGURE 2

SITE PLAN

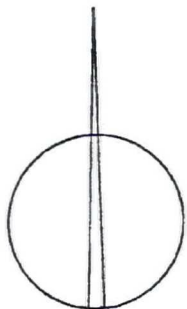
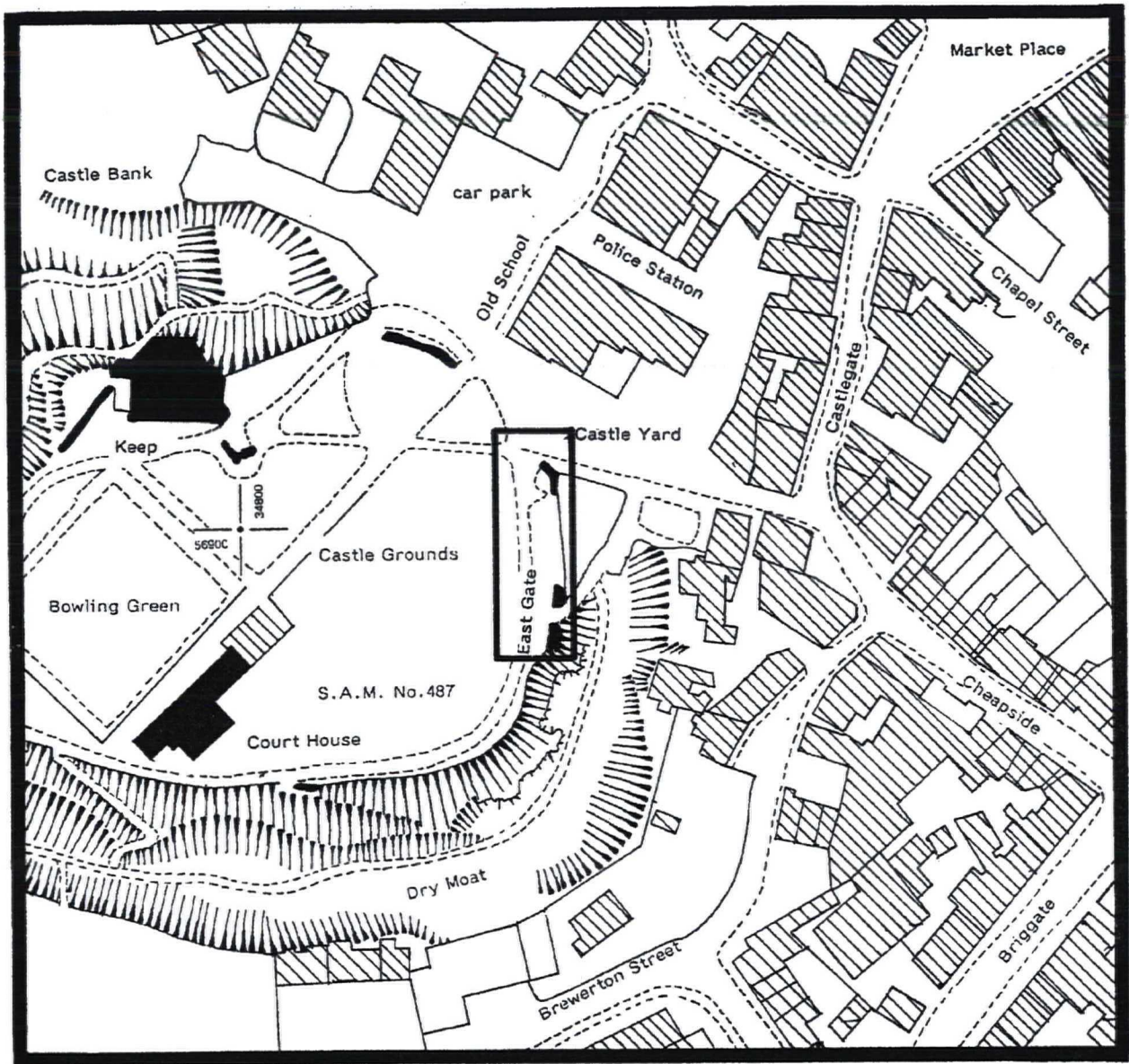
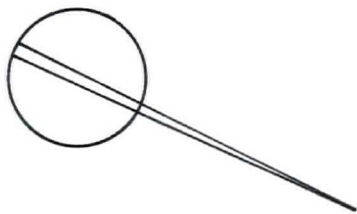
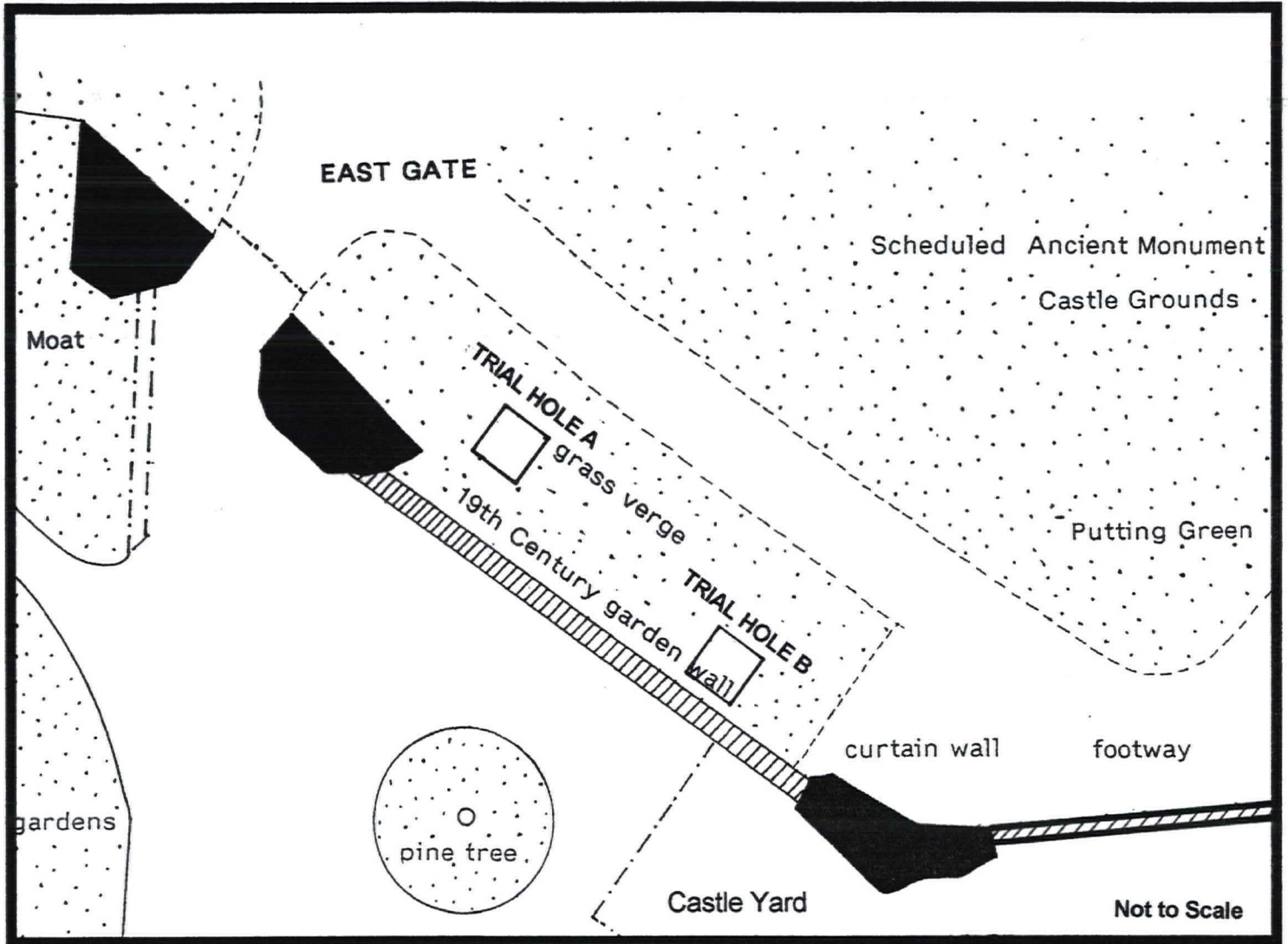


FIGURE 3

TRIAL HOLES 1 & 2



SITE DESCRIPTION

Knaresborough

The market town of Knaresborough is situated on an outcrop of Magnesian Limestone that forms an area of relatively high ground on the 76 metre contour on the western side of the Vale of York. The town is situated approximately four miles to the north east of Harrogate and eighteen miles west of York. The settlement is located on the eastern side of Knaresborough gorge a natural fissure cut by the River Nidd.

Castle Grounds

The Castle Grounds are located within the centre of Knaresborough, enjoying a cliff top aspect overlooking Knaresborough Gorge and the River Nidd. The 2 ½ acre grounds lie within the perimeter defences of Knaresborough Castle. The curtilage of this historic monument is today defined by intermittent sections of curtain wall and two sections of a moat. The internal area contains the extant remains of the Keep, Porch and Courthouse Building, together with two subterranean Sallyports.

The Site

The study area is located within the northern eastern corner of the complex, to the immediate north of the twin turrets of the East Gate. Situated within a 20m x 5.9m area of grassed lawn that lies between the perimeter footway and a late 19th / early 20th century sandstone retaining wall. The existing ground levels are gently sloping, at 77.705m AOD. A difference of 0.64m in ground levels was recorded between that Castle Yard surface and the study area.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Knaresborough

The origins of the settlement of Knaresborough are relatively obscure. The first reference to the town is in 1086 in the Domesday Book, where it is recorded as Chearesburg, this place name evidence would suggest that the site may have been fortified and may date back to Anglo Saxon period, 'burg' meaning defended enclosure. There is however no physical evidence of the pre-Norman settlement at Knaresborough, and from references within the Domesday book it would appear that the 11th century settlement if not deserted was greatly reduced.

It seems likely that the settlement began to develop during the first half of the 12th century, when it is known that both the Castle and the parish church were in existence, both structures continued to develop well into the late medieval period.

By the 13th century, Knaresborough was acting as the centre of an iron-working industry, processing the ironstone mined from the Forest of Knaresborough.

During the 14th century the settlement continued to develop and expand, largely because of it being ideally situated as a catchment foci for the trade and exchange of goods between the Pennine economy to the west and that of the Vale of York to the east. The documentary evidence confirms that by 1307, Knaresborough had been granted a weekly market and an annual fair and the inhabitants of the town were made free burgesses. Trade and industry during the later medieval period would appear to have centred on the woollen industry, but also included a wide variety of other trades such as cobblers, brewers, butchers, tanners, metalworkers and blacksmiths.

The post medieval period witnessed a transition from the woollen to the linen industry. This industry continued to grow during the 18th and early 19th centuries and the town benefited from this boom. However, during the second half of the 19th century, this industry contracted and Knaresborough was eclipsed by the growth of the new, regional administrative centre at Harrogate.

The Castle Grounds and The Castle Yard

Medieval References:

It has been established from surviving historical records that the site has supported a defensive structure from as early as the 12th century. The extent and form of this early fortification is not known although it is likely that it was a combination of concentric defensive earthworks and timber palls surrounding a compound containing timber buildings.

Early accounts indicate that in 1130 the sum of £11:00 was spent on the King's works at the castle, however it would appear that it was not until the 13th century that extensive improvements were made to strengthen the defence's, this included the excavation or enlargement of the dry moat, and it is suspected that it was during this period that magnesian limestone was first incorporated in the fabric of the structure.

Between 1300 and 1312 the greater part of the fortification was rebuilt, the fragmentary remains of which survive today within the Castle Grounds, the works included the Great Hall, Great Chamber, Great Chapel, Chapel of St. Thomas, the White Tower and the Great Gate, and it was during the same phase of works that the Great Keep was constructed. These structures were all contained by the Curtain Wall and were situated within a two and a half acre site that was divided into two main precincts known as the Inner and Outer Wards. It is suspected that it was during this phase of works that the two subterranean passages known as the Salleyports were excavated, these rock-hewn tunnels ran from the outer ward into the base of the dry moat in an easterly and northerly direction. It would appear that this programme of works was the last major alterations to the Castle.

Late Medieval References:

During the mid 16th century a detailed survey was undertaken of the fortification by Henry Cumberland and from which it is clear that many of the timber and stone built ancillary buildings within the Outer Ward of the Castle were in a ruinous state as were a

number other structures within the Inner Ward, that is with the exception of the Keep which together with the Curtain Wall was found to be in a good state of repair.

The survey refers to the two main gateways into the Castle; these were situated within the eastern and northern aspects of the Curtain Wall. The following notes were made about the eastern gate and adjacent structures:

"The Gatehouse roof was rotten and threatened the lodgings beneath, there was need to repair the two timber portcullises."

"The bridge across the moat from this gateway we are informed was covered and thatched with single board."

It would appear that there were two buildings butting to the eastern gatehouse namely:

"A receivers lodging abutting the eastern gatehouse, this timber structure was roofed in slate and had two chimneys, with glazed fenestration. The building was measured as 60' x 15'."

"a timber stable that was roofed in slate, the structure could accommodate 23 horses and contained two chambers for the horse boys."

It is evident from this documentation that the Eastern Gateway was part of a complex of structures situated within the northern eastern corner of the Outer Ward. It has since been speculated (E.Hargrove, The History of the Castle, Town and Forest of Knb. 1832) that a complex of fortified structures were situated on the counter scarp of the dry moat immediately adjacent to the eastern gate, this would have been known as the barbican or ante mural an offensive / defensive fortification constructed with principal role of strengthening the defences of the gateway.

Post-Medieval References:

The Castle led an active roll within the Civil War and was placed under siege by the Parliamentarians in 1644, the damage inflicted on the structure and the following slighting of the fortification in 1647 resulted in the demolition of much of the complex and the removal of the salvageable stone for building works within the town.

As points of weakness within the curtain wall both the eastern and northern gateways into the castle grounds were the focus of 17th century artillery bombardments, this almost certainly resulted in the complete destruction of the northern gatehouse and the near complete destruction of the east gate with only the twin semi-circular turrets of the former gatehouse complex surviving the siege and subsequent salvage works.

It was during this period that the dry moat, which had originally separated the fortification from the town, was partially backfilled; this landfill formed what is now known as Castle Yard.

During the 18th century, the ruins of the Keep were utilised as a prison in conjunction with the Courthouse.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Knaresborough

Knaresborough is a historic town of interest and importance, and as there has been only a limited amount of modern development within the town centre, there is a high potential for the survival of historical standing structures and there is a high potential for the preservation of buried archaeological deposits.

Within the town centre, over the last number of years, a series of watching briefs have been maintained on local authority trench excavations and private developments in an attempt to locate and examine the nature and form of the town defence's. Unfortunately, these works have failed to identify any evidence of these defensive structures.

Other entries in the archaeological record are from the declared chance finds, information of which has been noted since the 18th century.

The finds range from a Bronze Age perforated stone axe that was found at Blind Lane Farm, to a Roman urn or cooking pot of Antonine date that was recovered from south of Tentergate Avenue. The greater majority of these finds are isolated coins dating from the Roman period onwards.

The Castle Grounds and The Castle Yard

A number of small scale archaeological excavations have been undertaken within the castle grounds, these have taken place, intermittently, over the last sixty years, unfortunately the records for these works are incomplete and sketchy.

Recently a three year programme of ground investigation has concluded, these excavations, located immediately adjacent to the north and east elevations of the keep were conducted by Harrogate Museums and Art Galleries. These works were undertaken in support of a ten phase building repair programme to the historical fabric of the fortification. The excavations, which were conducted to the immediate west of the Keep, revealed evidence of the earthwork defence's of the 12th century fortification as well as confirming the site and nature of the 14th century northern gatehouse. The excavations to the immediate south of the Keep exposed a series of floor surfaces associated with the post medieval and more recent activity around the Keep, together with evidence of the 14th and pre 14th century buildings.

Concerning the area under investigation it has been noted (H. Speight, Upper Nidderdale with the Forest of Knb. 1906) that during August 1891 the remains of two human skeletons were found during works near the east gate. It was believed at the time of the discovery that the remains were those of a 17th century Royalist defender of the castle.

During 1995, K.J.Cale conducted an archaeological watching brief on a programme of improvement works within the Castle Yard.

These works provided an opportunity to make a detailed inspection of the fabric and nature of the Eastern Gate and the north and north eastern sections of the curtain wall.

It was confirmed that the present ground levels across the southern extent of Castle Yard had been largely formed by the deposition of recently imported sandy clays and hard cores, it is suspected that the majority of which were deposited during the late 19th century. These deposits have largely obscured the sequence of 17th and 18th century fills which have been deposited within the dry moat. Unfortunately, the limited depth of excavation across the site prevented any detailed inspection of the sequence and nature of the fills within the moat.

The watching brief identified a sequence of works that have been conducted within the area of the eastern gate since the late medieval period, the threshold from this period was identified in situ, but unfortunately no contemporary road surfaces were identified, these having been removed and replaced during the late 19th century when a major programme of landscaping was undertaken that involved the construction of footways leading to and from the Castle Grounds.

Furthermore it was confirmed that the removal of stone from the curtain wall from the mid 17th century onwards had been thorough, and had involved not only the demolition of the greater part of the extant wall but also the removal of the wall foundations. No further evidence of the curtain wall was identified, the watching brief revealed that any evidence of this structure had been obscured by the landscaping of the northern extent of the Castle Grounds during the late 19th century with the similar hard cores and sandy clay deposits that are found within the Castle Yard.

AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Prior to the commencement of groundworks, it was considered that there was a **reasonable** potential for archaeology to be present across the site.

It was anticipated that the archaeology would most likely comprise of demolition material associated with the post medieval removal of the curtain wall. It is possible that the foundations/coring of this wall will survive in situ.

The Aims

The aims of this archaeological investigation are as follows:

- a. To liaise with M.Kershaw, Museums and Arts, Harrogate Borough Council and Kate Wilson English Heritage regarding recommendations to the proposed works to ensure the minimum damage to archaeological remains which have been identified at or above the maximum depth of excavation; and
- b. To record any finds, features or structures of archaeological interest and obtain information on the presence, extent, character, date and depth of these remains.