

MARKENFIELD HALL,
NEAR RIPON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE

NYCC HER	
SNY	584
ENY	177
CNY	1685
Parish	6053
Rec'd	13-07-00

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

In November 1999 York Archaeological Trust observed the digging of a drainage trench through part of the scheduled area to the south-east of Markenfield Hall near Ripon, North Yorkshire. A shallow ditch beneath successive banks close to the edge of a possible terrace to the east of the moated hall were discovered. No dating evidence was recovered from any of the features although all are assumed to be medieval.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 16th of November 1999 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at Markenfield Hall, Harrogate Road, Harrogate, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 2956 6731) on behalf of Strutt and Parker, agents for Lady Grantley, owner of the Markenfield Hall Estate. The work was carried out as a requirement of Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) for the excavation of a new drain, to carry overflow water from the moat to the south-east of Markenfield Hall (Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM - 1209, DCMS reference HSD 9/2/1470 Pt 2, 2 November 1999). The machine excavation of the route of the new overflow drainage trench was monitored for evidence of archaeological deposits such as archaeological features or stratigraphy that may have survived in the area.

1.1 Methodology

The trench was excavated under archaeological supervision by a JCB sitemaster mechanical excavator using a toothed (2ft - 0.6m wide) bucket. The deposits revealed in section were cleaned, measured, drawn and recorded. 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 Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM: 10266

1.2 Geology and Topography

Markenfield Hall is situated on the east slope of a hill that overlooks the vale of York, at c.94m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The solid geology is Permian magnesian limestone overlain by a drift of glacial boulder clay (Geological Survey of England and Wales 1959, sheet 62). The present Hall is surrounded by a moat and substantial earthworks which are all scheduled (SAM 1209). The watching brief took place in the field to the south-east of the Hall, the new drainage trench truncating the tip of one of the earthworks, before proceeding eastwards out of the scheduled area.

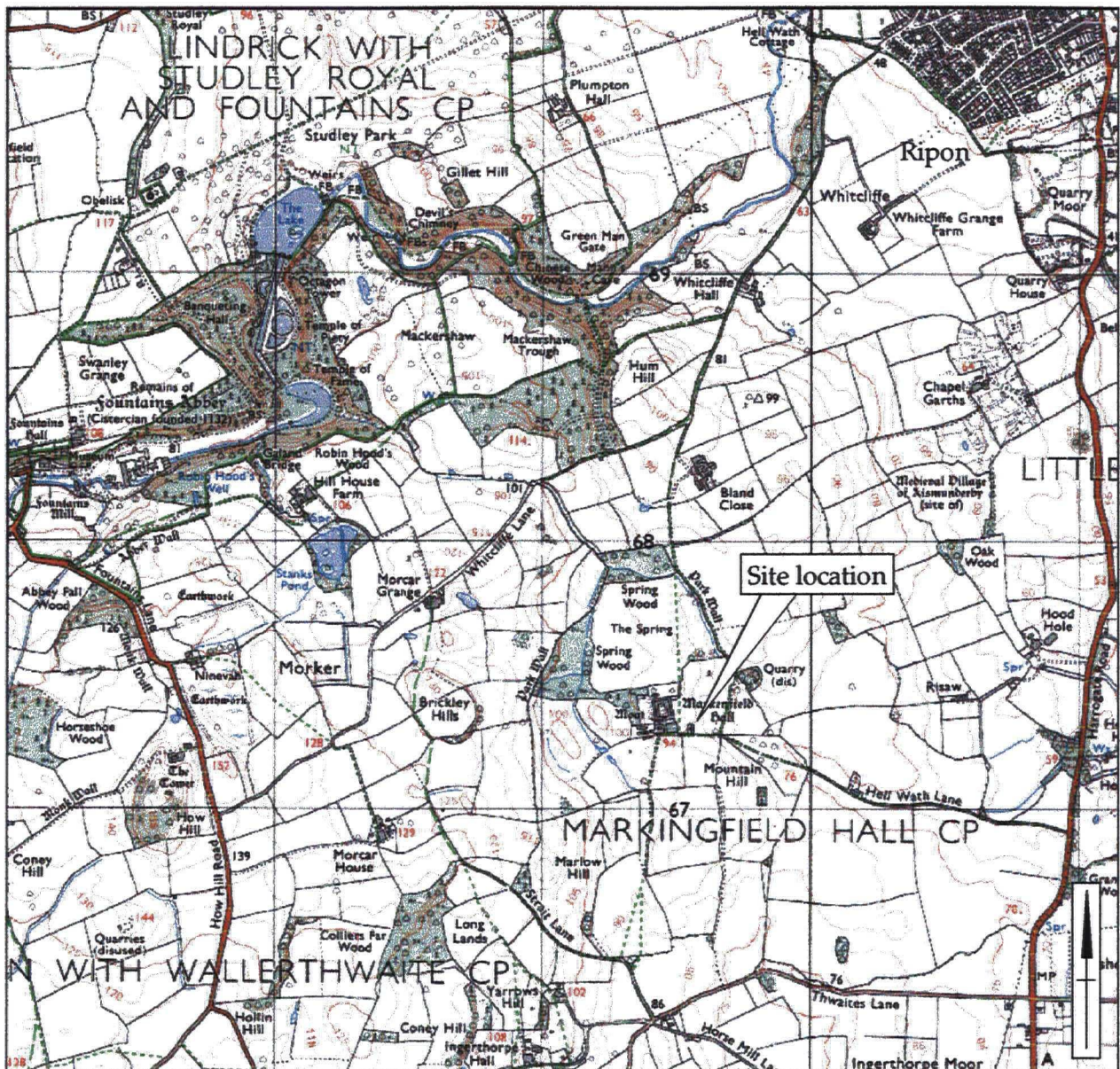


Figure 1 Location of Watching Brief
See Figure 2 for details

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1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The construction of Markenfield Hall dates from between 1310, when Edward II granted licence to crenellate the Hall, and 1323, when John de Markenfield died (Miller 1985, 101). It was held by the Markenfields until it was forfeited to Elizabeth 1st after the Rising of the North. It was then sold to Sir Thomas Egerton, her Lord Keeper, who altered it considerably and added the gatehouse. Sir Fletcher Norton, Speaker of the House of Commons, bought it from the Egertons, and on retirement in 1783, was created the 1st Baron Grantley of Markenfield. He was responsible for drastic interior alterations and for the replacing of the roofs. The 4th Lord Grantley made further alterations in the 1850's (ibid).

Markenfield was one of the major medieval houses in the north of England, and has had little exterior alteration to obscure its medieval form and character. It consists of a series of buildings surrounding a rectangular courtyard, which themselves are surrounded by a moat. An outer wall and ditch are still visible on the north and west sides (ibid). Le Patourel, in her survey of the moated sites of Yorkshire, notes that there are considerable unrecorded earthworks to the north, east and west of the house enclosure, and indications of an important outer gatehouse below turf to the east. There are also further earthworks to the south of the present entrance road, including at least one hollow way (Le Patourel 1973, 125).

The trench monitored during the watching brief crossed both the line of the predicted outer ditch to the east of the moated manor and the road predicted by Le Patourel (Miller 1985, 102, Fig.1). Evidence for a predicted pond might also have been forthcoming.

2. RESULTS

A single trench, measuring c.50m in length, was monitored, which crossed the scheduled area. Within the trench the contexts are considered in chronological order, from the bottom up.

The earliest deposit was magnesian limestone bedrock (context 1010), which was encountered at the base of the trench for its entire length.

At the south-eastern end of the trench the bedrock was sealed by fractured (but laid in bedding planes) small to large limestone fragments (which made up 90% of the deposit) in a matrix of creamy pinkish clay (context 1009). This may have formed by frost shattering of the bedrock in the post-glacial period. At the north-western end of the trench soft mid orange brown silty clay (1008) with occasional to moderate rounded cobbles, pebbles and gravel sealed bedrock (1010). The latter appears to be the remnant of a natural sub-soil, which formed on a slight natural plateau or terrace of the hillside.

A feature (1006) truncated the natural deposits in the central portion of the trench. This had steep sides and a flat base and measured 2.6m wide and 0.72m deep. Its profile does not suggest a defensive ditch but it may be the ditch predicted by Le Patourel (Miller 1985, 102). It was filled with two deposits. The primary deposit consisted of jumbled loose creamy white limestone fragments (context 1005) which was in turn sealed by jumbled loose limestone fragments (80%

of the deposit) in a matrix of pinkish creamy brown clay (1004). These deposits differed considerably from the natural deposits, which were laid in horizontal bedding planes. A further layer (1003) very similar in composition to (1004) but compacted, capped the fills and formed the first noticeable raised bank in the area. No finds were recovered from any of these deposits.

On the edge of the plateau/terrace a feature (1007) truncated (1003) and (1009). This had steep sloping sides and a flattish base, which sloped from north-west to south-east. It may have been dug to quarry material for a second bank. Backfilling it completely and radically embanking the area was a deposit of limestone fragments (60% of the deposit) in a matrix of pinkish creamy brown sandy clay (1002). This deposit was up to 0.85m thick and appears to be the eroded remnants of a substantial bank/earthwork at the edge of the plateau/terrace.

Sealing this at the north-western end of the trench was a deposit of soft orangey creamy brown crumbly sandy clay (1001). This may have been formed by the slow erosion of the bank to the north-west, or be a silting deposit within the northern edge of the pond predicted by Le Patourel (Miller 1985, 102).

Sealing the whole trench was mid brown sandy loam (1000) top soil, which was up to 0.35m thick and which was capped by turf.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Natural deposits appear to have been glacially shaped into a terrace or plateau in the east facing hillside. This was cut by a possible linear feature, close to the edge of the plateau/terrace that may corroborate with Le Patourel's outer ditch, but it was undated, and its profile does not suggest that it was dug for defensive purposes. Its backfills were sealed by an initial attempt at an earthwork/bank, prior to a major operation to construct a high bank on the plateau edge. This probably dates to the medieval period. The bank then eroded considerably to the south-east backfilling a feature that was probably dug for materials to construct it. The north-western side of the bank was sealed by a possible ponded silt. The whole area was capped with topsoil.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The archaeological watching brief of the drainage trench produced an interesting sequence of archaeological deposits, showing the creation of a substantial multi-phase earthwork on the edge of a natural plateau /terrace. No dating evidence for any of the deposits was recovered. There are no recommendations for further work under the present watching brief, but should any further work arise within the scheduled area it is clear that archaeological deposits are well preserved and close to the surface.

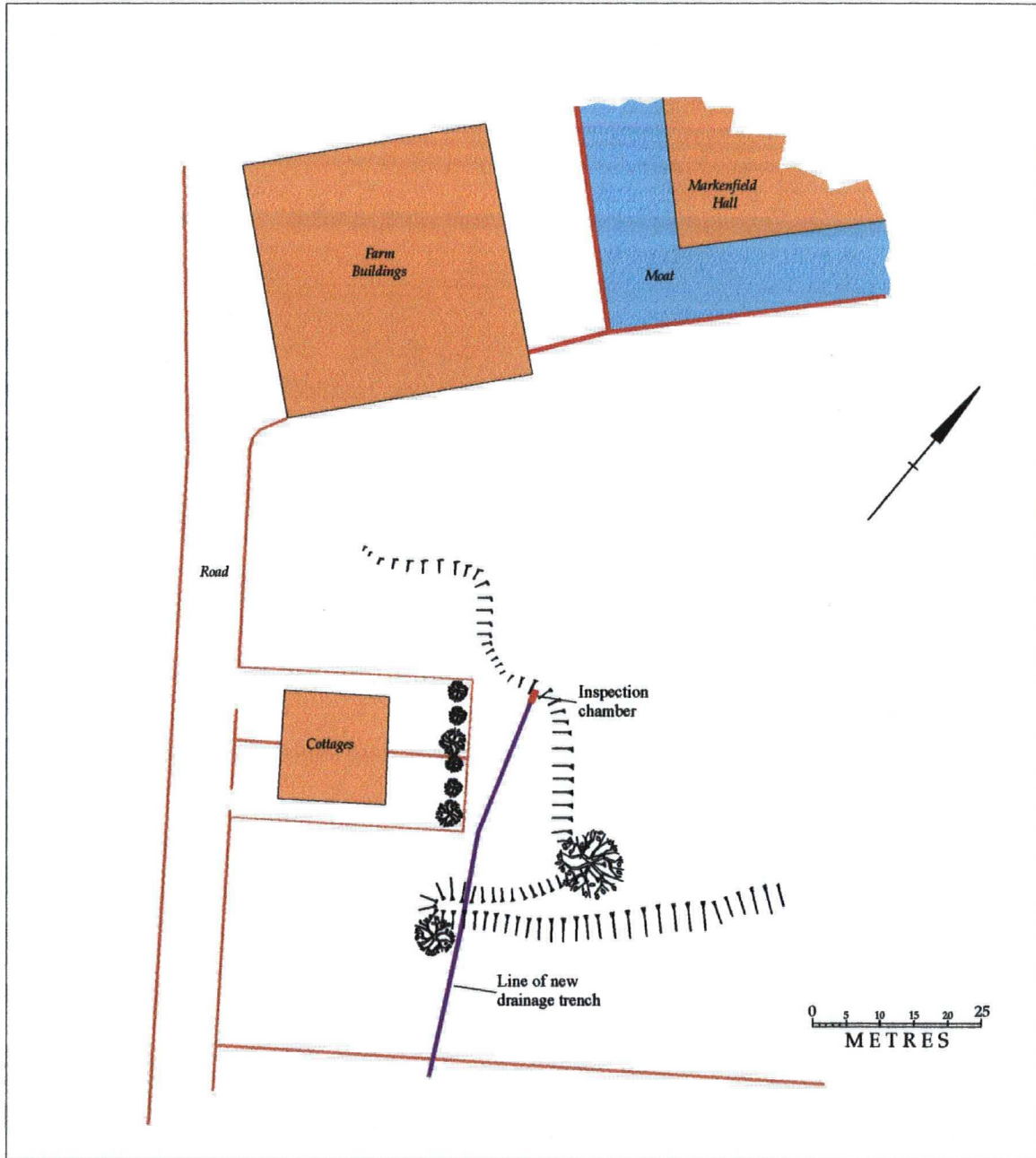


Figure 2 Location of trench observed during watching brief

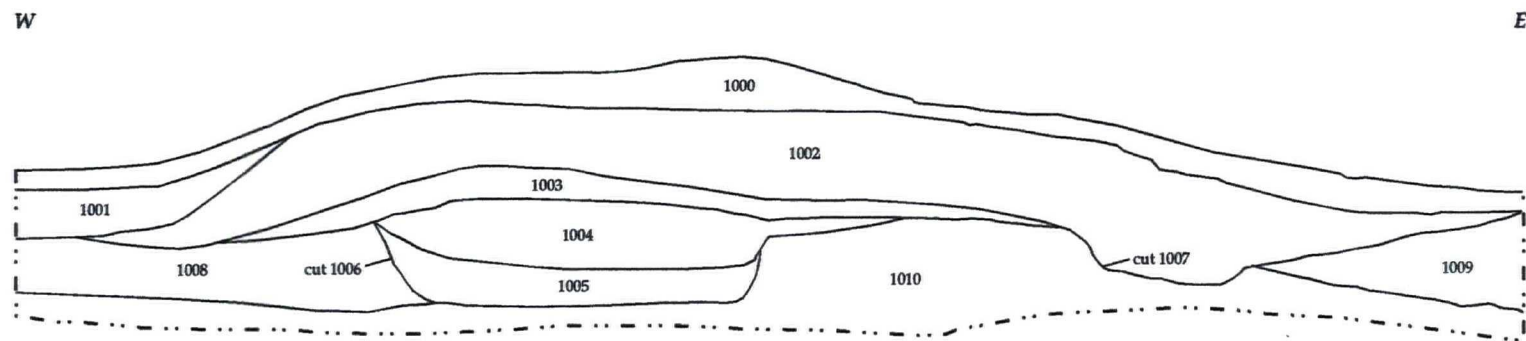


Figure 3 Showing section through earthworks



5. LIST OF SOURCES

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

Miller, J. S. (1985) 'Restoration Work at Markenfield Hall, 1981- 4.' *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Volume 57, 101- 110

York Archaeological Trust (1996) *Context Recording Manual*

6. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Watching Brief and Report

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