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NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL, PRIEST LANE, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

A series of six geotechnical test pits excavated in a recreational field adjacent to Priest Lane, Ripon, were archaeologically monitored in July 2000 by York Archaeological Trust. Deposits of "natural origin" were located in all pits. Five of the six pits showed evidence of deposits of an archaeological origin. The depth of such deposits was variable, there being a considerable build-up of materials in the lower western part of the site whilst in the more elevated eastern areas archaeological remains were shallow; for the most part these are likely to be features cut into the underlying natural deposits. The results of the test pits were in broad accord with the archaeological evaluation of 1998.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 10th July 2000, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on a grassed recreational field at Priest Lane, Ripon, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 3165 7121), (Figure 1., Site location map). The monitoring works involved the recording of six geotechnical test pits mechanically excavated on behalf of White, Young and Green, Consulting Engineers. These works were prompted by proposals to build a primary school and playing fields within this recreational ground.

The aims of the archaeological work were to establish the presence or absence of any archaeological remains within the area of the test pits and to determine the location, date, extent, character and quality of any such deposits that may be found. The watching brief was carried out on the instructions of White, Young and Green acting for Accord PLC and was conducted in accordance with the "standard written scheme of investigation (WSI) for limited archaeological recording (Watching Brief)" issued by the Heritage Department of North Yorkshire County Council.

A marked slope across the site from east to west is very apparent. A further north – south slope is evident along the northern edge of the site whilst a slight slope from the edges of Ailcy Hill northwards is present in the south central part of the site. The eastern boundary is marked by a vertical drop of some 1.50m from the field down to Priest Lane. At the north-west corner of the site the ground falls away sharply for a depth of up to 1.75m towards the recreational field. The site is bounded by Priest Lane to the east, by Residence Lane to the north and by Cathedral Close to the west. The southern boundary is formed by Ailcy Hill, a natural mound of glacial origin which has been altered in profile by quarrying operations for sands and gravels. The drift geology of the site is of glacial sands and gravels with an underlaying solid geology of Permian mudstones.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first references to Ripon are of the 8th century and record the donation of land for the foundation of a monastery (H.E.). Post-medieval tradition associates this first monastery with land immediately north of Residence Lane (Hall and Whyman, 1996). In the later 7th century Wilfrid built his monastery at Ripon. A crypt of Wilfridian origin survives below the present cathedral (Taylor and Taylor, 1965). There is scant reference to the monastic settlement during

the later pre-conquest period when it came to be controlled by the Archbishops of York. Domesday Book records the ecclesiastical settlement as a college of secular canons.

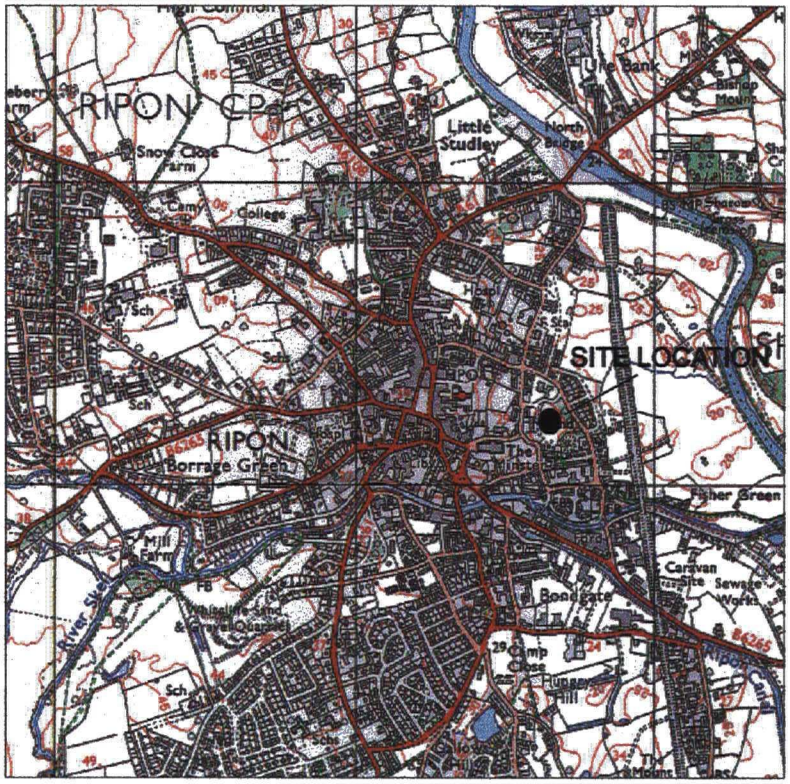
Under the tutelage of church magnates the secular town is known to have undergone a period of expansion during the 12th – 14th centuries. By the 14th century the present market place was established and the city centre located away from the ecclesiastical focus (MacKay, 1982).

Since the mid 1950's a number of excavations have taken place across the city. This includes the excavation of a number of pre-conquest burials at Ailcy Hill (Hall and Whyman, 1996), and a two cell church (Ladykirk) with burials a short distance to the north-west of the site. Excavations in the Deanery Gardens some 80m to the west uncovered parts of two structures and a number of possible garderobe pits believed to be of 12th-13th century date (Whyman, 1997). Activity of the 11th/12th – 15th centuries in the form of stone foundations overlying an earlier ditch and itself sealed by a later surface was recovered from Low St Agnesgate, some 50m west of the site (Whyman, 1997). In 1998 a series of eight evaluation trenches was excavated within the development site (Johnson, 1998). This work revealed the presence of a number of ditches and cut features in the eastern part of the site. Two of these ditches were aligned parallel to Priest Lane. Several quarry pits were located across the site. Deeper stratified deposits were present in the western parts of the site. Many of the upper deposits in this area appear to relate to processes of dumping.

3. METHODOLOGY

The watching brief consisted of the observation and recording of deposits (in accordance with NYCC WSI guidelines) revealed during the excavation of the six geotechnical pits (see Figure 2., for location of test pits). Each pit was mechanically excavated by a JCB machine equipped with a small toothed bucket under the supervision of an environmental engineer. All test pits were nominally 2.5m x 0.40m in plan area and were cut to depths of between 1.50m – 3.50m. For health and safety reasons, detailed section examination could only be carried out in the uppermost parts of the pits; examination of soils at depth was accomplished by inspection of the contents of the machine bucket. All records were made in a site notebook, this includes measured section drawings and soil descriptions/notes. A number of 35mm colour print photographs were also taken of both the pits and the site. All depths in the text are given as below ground level (BGL) i.e. from the ground surface at the top of each pit.

All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM: 8947



Scale 1:25 000

Figure 1, Site location plan

Figure 2, Test pit location plan

4. WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 Test pit 1

Test pit 1 was excavated to a depth of 3.50m BGL. At and above this level to a depth of 1.98m BGL, context 16 was present. This material was a buff coloured, soft/moist, silty fine sand that became clayey below 2.30m BGL and wet after 2.40m BGL. Small-large cobbles formed approximately 25% of context 16 though the proportion of these varied throughout the deposit. Sealing this material was context 15 which extended from 1.52m – 1.98m BGL. This context was essentially comprised of very clean pale grey clay and cobbles, the cobble element forming approximately 30% of the context. Contexts 16 and 15 represent deposits of "natural" origin.

Context 14 overlay 15 and extended to an upper limit of 1.10m BGL. A mid greyish brown, compact, loam, in excess of 40% of this deposit was comprised of cobbles and boulders up to 0.48m in size. Small quantities of animal bone and charcoal were also present within 14. Sealing 14 and extending to an upper limit of 0.30m BGL was context 13, a mid brown (with a slight reddish tinge) loam that was seen to contain some gravel. A sherd of medieval pottery was recovered from this deposit. Context 12 sealed 13 and had an upper limit at 0.30m BGL. This material was comprised of gravel and mid brown loam in roughly equal proportions. Contexts 14, 13 and 12 were clearly "archaeological" and of human origin. Collectively they form around 1.34m of archaeological deposit.

The uppermost deposit observed in test pit 1 was the mid brown, friable, loam that forms the existing topsoil and turf. This extended to a depth of 0.18m BGL.

4.2 Test pit 2

Excavation ceased in test pit 2 at a depth of 2.60m BGL. Extending beyond the basal limits of the pit and with an upper limit at 0.80m BGL, context 23 was observed. The upper part of this deposit was composed of gravel and cobbles (approximately 60%) and light brown sandy silt (approximately 40%). It was noted however, that with increased depth the sandy silt component became increasingly sandy and pinkish in colour. This change was very gradual. Context 23 is interpreted as representing material of a "natural" origin.

Sealing 23 and extending to an upper limit at 0.25m BGL was context 22, mid brown (with a slight reddish tinge) loam that contained quantities of gravel. Though no artifacts were recovered from this deposit it is considered that this material is of archaeological interest.

The uppermost deposit in pit 2 was the extant turf and mid brown, friable, loamy topsoil that extended to a depth of 0.25m BGL.

4.3 Test pit 3

Observed from the base of the pit (2.80m BGL) to an upper limit at 2.0m BGL, context 34 was composed of pinkish red slightly clayey sand (50%) and cobbles and gravel (50%). This was sealed by context 33 that extended to a height of 1.20m BGL. This material was pinkish yellow, slightly sandy clay (50%) and cobbles and large gravel (50%). Both contexts 34 and 33 are considered to be of "natural" origin.

Context 32 overlay 33 and extended to an upper height of 0.20m BGL. This material was essentially mid brown (slightly reddish) loam that contained small quantities of mortar flecks and fragments and quantities of white glazed 19th-20th century pottery. This modern pottery was still present at a depth of approximately 1.0m BGL. This material was clearly of human origin.

Sealing 32 was context 31 formed of the extant turf and loamy topsoil.

4.4 Test pit 4

Test pit 4 was excavated to a depth of 2.35m BGL. At this depth and extending up to 0.40m BGL was context 43. This was composed of gravel and cobbles (55%) and pinkish coloured sand (45%). This was in turn overlain by context 42, a darkish brown, gritty/friable, sandy silt that contained a substantial amount of gravel and extended to an upper limit at 0.18m BGL. The uppermost deposit was context 41, the present dark greyish brown loamy topsoil and turf.

All deposits encountered in test pit 4 are thought to be of a "natural" origin. As such context 43 represents natural of glacial origin, 42 represents a sub soil and 41 the topsoil.

4.5 Test pit 5

Encountered at 2.60m BGL and extending beyond the base of the pit at a depth of 3.00m BGL was context 55. This was pinkish red clayey sand (70%) and cobbles (30%). Overlying this and extending to an upper limit at 1.75m BGL was context 54. This was light yellow/buff coloured fine grained sand that contained a small quantity of cobbles. Context 53 sealed this material and extended to a height of 0.97m. A light brown sandy clay (50%) and cobbles and gravel (50%), it was noted that 53 became clayier with depth. The three deposits 55, 54 and 53 are all considered to be of natural "origin".

Context 52 sealed 53 and extended up to 0.25m BGL. This material was composed of dark greyish brown loam, (60%) and rubble (40%). This rubble component was of brick fragments and flecks and fragments of lime mortar. Context 52 can be considered as being of archaeological origin.

The turf and dark greyish brown loamy topsoil, context 51, overlay context 52.

4.6 Test pit 6

Excavation ceased in test pit 6 at a depth of 1.50m BGL. The earliest observed material was context 63, a pinkish coloured sand (30%) and gravel and cobbles (70%) that extended up to a height of 0.30m BGL. This was sealed by context 62 which extended to an upper height of 0.15m BGL. Context 62 was mid brown sandy loam (50%) and gravel and cobbles (50%). Both these contexts are of "natural" origin. Context 63 represents material of glacial origin, context 62 a sub soil.

Cutting through the above described deposits was context 64. The material of 64, a mixture of gravel and cobbles (approximately 70%) and pale brown, slightly silty sand (approximately 30%). The texture and consistency of 64 was similar to that of 63, though more silty and darker in colour. No finds were recovered from 64. The interface between 64, which occurred only

partially within the pit, and 63/62 was a near vertical edge. This putative cut was numbered 65. It was most regrettable that instability of the pit edges prevented a detailed examination of 64 which may well be of an archaeological rather than natural origin. It is worthy of note that the fills of the two parallel ditches in Trench 2 of the 1998 evaluation had fills similar to that of 64.

The uppermost deposit in pit 6, context 61, which sealed the possible feature 64/65, extended from 0.15m BGL to the ground surface. This was dark greyish brown, loam topsoil supporting turf.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Clean deposits of "natural" origin were located in each of the test pits. The depths to the upper parts of these ranged from ground level in pit 4 to 1.52m BGL in pit 1. The depth of deposits of potential archaeological interest was seen to be up to 1.34m (in the case of test pit 1). Examination of the overall depths of archaeological deposits in relation to the location of test pits shows that those pits to the west contained deep deposits whilst those to the east contained little or none. This coincides with the low lying ground at the west of the site and the higher ground to the east. Any archaeological deposits at the upper eastern side may be more likely to be features cutting into "natural" rather than deeply stratified deposits. Certainly the results of the test pits are in broad accordance with the results of the 1998 evaluation. It should be noted that few of the deposits considered to be archaeological could be examined in any detail. It is probable that a number of layers may be present within each identified unit.

6. LIST OF SOURCES

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