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**The Spinney
Low Street
Sherburn-in-Elmet
North Yorkshire**

**Desk Based Assessment
and Archaeological Evaluation
INTERIM**

Work done in August 2000

**MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd
August 2000**

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**'The Spinney', Low Street
Sherburn in Elmet
North Yorkshire
SE 4953 3350**

**Desk Based Assessment
and
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1 **Non Technical Summary**

1 1 Three evaluation trenches were excavated at the site of 'The Spinney' to the rear of Low Street. Trench 3 contained no archaeological features. In Trench 2 part of a wall foundation and two truncated pits of the medieval period were encountered in addition to a possible ditch fill deposit containing a number of medieval sherds. A rectilinear ditch running north - south in Trench 1 was cut by a later east to west ditch. Although the ditches could not be securely dated they are possibly the continuation of a Roman 'Ladder Settlement' located to the south of the site.

2 **Introduction (Fig 1 and 2)**

2 1 The evaluation of land at 'The Spinney' was carried out in advance of a proposed residential development by Barratt York. The site is situated behind properties fronting Low Street and a new Barratt residential development to the east. A nursery with a range of greenhouses and a cafe share an access from Low Street ending in a yard adjacent to the site. The western part of the site is heavily overgrown with brambles surrounding mature ornamental and fruit trees. The trenches were positioned to locate any former boundaries within the site and establish their origin and date and to also ascertain any medieval activity.

2 2 The archaeological evaluation was carried out to fulfill the detailed specification issued by the Heritage Unit at North Yorkshire County Council.

2 3 All work was funded by Barratt York Ltd.

2 4 All maps within this report have been produced from Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright License No AL 50453A.

3 **Geology**

3 1 The soils on the site are shallow brown earths of the Aberford association overlying a solid geology of Magnesian Limestone of the Permian age (Mackney et al 1983).

4 Historical and Archaeological Background

4 1 *Historical Background*

4 1 1 Documentary and Archaeological evidence suggest that Sherburn was the capital of the eastern frontier of the Ancient British Kingdom of Elmet. The town dates from the at least the ninth century. The name derives from 'Shire-burn' meaning 'bright clear stream' and is recorded as Scireburn in Domesday Book.

4 1 2 Historical records attest a palace of King Athelstan in Sherburn at a site referred to as Hall Garth. Extant earthworks show this building to a large rectangular structure possibly with a moat. The palace is reputed to have been passed to the See of York in 937. The building was demolished by John Thoresby, Archbishop of York in 1361.

4 1 3 'The Sherburn charter is a grant of twenty hides at Sherburn made in 963 by King Edgar to a nobleman and described in the charter as the venerable AEsclac' (Long, 1993, 117). The charter is the earliest form of evidence for land divisions in the area and although not totally reliable it can depict various physical features of the landscape such as streams, tracks and trees. The Sherburn Charter survives in the Registrum Magnum Album in the Minster Library at York. The register is a Fourteenth century document compiled from original Anglo-Scandinavian documents that were not fully comprehended and hence the question over reliability. However there is little dispute that the brook mentioned in the charter running westward is the present Mill Dyke which now forms the Parish boundaries between Sherburn and South Milford, (Fig 3).

4 1 4 By 1030 A.D. the Manor of Sherburn controlled a large area within the territory of Elmet. The present village church is a Norman structure of twelfth century with thirteenth and fourteenth century alterations but may have replaced a church of tenth century origin.

4 1 5 During the Medieval period the Manor of Sherburn was held by the Archbishop of York. The Estate came into the possession of the Crown in 1545, at the time of the

Reformation The Crown proceeded to sell the estate to the Hungate family who held it until 1608, when it was confiscated by the Crown The estate was restored to the Hungates in 1662 who continued to hold the land until 1749 when it passed to the Gascoigne Family by marriage They held it until 1938 when the estate was broken up

4 1 6 The land was enclosed by Parliamentary Enclosure Act in 1770, the award exists in Leeds City Archives, (Ref Acc/1249) The associated plan (greys 2/2/40, Fig 00) reveals the site to be on a block of land belonging to Mr Sawyer but no value is given to this plot

4 1 7 The Great North Road, (Low Street) went through the village, a major Drove road for cattle during the Post-Medieval period

4 1 8 The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1850 (Fig 5) shows the long distinctive burgage plots of the properties fronting Low Street in the area of the proposed development These property boundaries had probably been little altered since the Medieval period

4 1 9 The 1908 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 6) shows that several plots have been amalgamated and used as orchards

4 1 10 The 1950 and 1967 editions of the Ordnance Survey map (Figs 7 and 8) reveal a similar pattern to the earlier village plan with adaptations to several plots and the addition of allotments by 1967

4 2 *Archaeological Background*

4 2 1 Sherburn lies on the eastern edge of the magnesian limestone belt in an area known to have attracted early settlement, (Fig 9) In recent years air photography has revealed that the light, well drained soils of the magnesian limestone ridge supported intensive prehistoric and Romano-British agricultural activity and settlement

- 4 2 2 Recent archaeological investigations have improved the quantity of information about Sherburn in the Roman period
- 4 2 3 A large multi-period site with enclosures and evidence of high status Roman occupation was discovered south of the site, east of Low Street and was the subject of archaeological investigations in 1997 (MAP 1998)
- 4 2 4 Two Roman inhumations in gypsum within stone Sarcophagi were excavated at Garden Lane Sherburn in Elmet, west of the site in 1997 (MAP 1997)

5 Methodology

- 5 1 The trenches were dug by a mechanical excavator using a back actor with a non-toothed bucket until archaeological features were encountered. The trenches were trowelled clean and the archaeological features were planned at a scale of 1:20. An appropriate sample of each feature was excavated and the profile of each cut feature was drawn at a scale of 1:10. A photographic record on 35mm colour print and Black and White print film was made of the archaeological deposits.

6 Results

6 1 *Trench 1 (Figs 10 and 11, pls 1 and 3)*

- 6 1 1 Trench 1 was located at the western end of the site and measured 10m by 6m. A linear ditch extended from the centre of the northern side of the trench curving slightly to the south - east and becoming less well defined as it reached the south - eastern corner of the trench. Two segments were excavated in this feature showing that on the northern end the ditch was a slightly rounded V shape ditch cut (cut 1006) into the natural clay and limestone below. A slight shouldering of the profile was recorded where the clay deposit interfaced with the limestone. At this point the ditch was 0.7m deep and 1.7m and 1.6m wide. The edges of the feature recorded on the surface suggested that the ditch reduced in width toward its southern end.
- 6 1 2 A second segment was excavated at the junction between the ditch and a later east - west ditch that cut through it. The profile of the south facing section demonstrated a similar V shaped profile at a depth of 0.6m depth. The primary fill in both segments was a firm grey clay that appeared to be the result of silting when the ditch was open (1014). In the northern segment a further thin silty clay deposit 1012 overlay 1014.

This appeared to be an interface with the basal silt and later heavy clay backfill material 1013 seen in both segments

- 6 1 3 A deposit of limestone fragments and occasional more substantial limestone blocks was observed at the eastern edge of the feature extending along its whole length (1010) In the two ditch segments this deposit was seen to slump into the ditch fill A slight depression in the deposit was filled with a further clay material (1007) suggesting that the limestone fragments had accumulated in the eastern side of the ditch cut while it still existed as an earthwork It is possible that this material was the remnant of a bank on the eastern side of the feature that had been ploughed into the ditch or deliberately used to back fill the feature
- 6 1 4 The north - west facing section of the ditch intersection showed that ditch 1006 had been truncated to the depth where the base of the cut reached the natural limestone and only the basal deposit 1014 remained
- 6 1 5 Sometime after it had been filled ditch 1006 was cut by a linear ditch running northeast - southwest from the western corner of the trench Two segments were excavated into this feature at the south - western end and at the intersection with 1006 The profiles showed that the ditch cut 1008 was broad and flat based along its length but where it cut the upper fill (1007) of ditch 1006 it became narrower with a steep V shaped profile It is likely that the irregular constriction of the plan of the ditch appears to show the influence of the earlier ditch whose bank was perhaps standing as an earthwork when the later ditch was excavated A single homogenous clay deposit filled the ditch (1009) Large limestone fragments were visible on the surface of the western stretch of the ditch fill A concentration of smaller fragments of limestone occurred slightly to the east of the intersection of the two ditches
- 6 1 6 Two modern sub rectangular postholes crossed the site at the northern end of the trench A third posthole was visible in the east facing section of the trench continuing the line in a north - east to south west direction Posthole fill 1005 was not excavated but the fill (1003) of post hole cut 1004 was removed where it cut the ditch fill deposit 1007 The truncated cut was 0.07m deep

6 1 7 A deposit of material at the north western corner of the trench was planned as a possible feature but was shown to be the remnant of the sub soil deposit removed by machine in the rest of the trench

6 1 8 At the north east corner a modern field drain in a trench filled with loam was the latest feature encountered in the trench

6 2 *Trench 2 (Figs 10, 12 and 13, pls 2 and 4)*

6 2 1 Trench 2 was located in a central position to the site and measured 10m by 4m. A group of stratigraphically contemporary features that may be of medieval date were encountered in the central part of Trench 2. A linear cut contained a clay deposit (2005) on to which a stretch of rough wall foundation consisting of thin limestone slabs averaging 0.06m thick and between 0.2 and 0.4m long had been built. The wall was sealed under a deposit of clay (2002) within an irregular linear cut which may have been a robber trench.

6 2 2 A sub circular pit filled by two deposits was situated to the east of the wall footing and cut the backfill of the robber trench (cut 2011). The lower fill 2010 was fairly sterile with only a small amount of charcoal flecking to distinguish it from natural material. The upper deposit 2012 was a clay deposit with occasional concentrations of charcoal and more evenly distributed limestone fragments. A single medieval rim sherd was recovered from this deposit which may have been domestic waste. The upper fill deposits 2001 and 2009 contained an even distribution of limestone fragments and chips.

6 2 3 To the west of the robbed wall foundation a second pit (cut 2020) contained three fill deposits. The basal fill deposits were clays with few inclusions of limestone fragments (2003, 2006). The upper fill 2017 contained more frequent limestone inclusions. Deposit 2006 contained a high quality flint scraper.

6 2 4 Both pits and the upper fill of the robber cut for the wall foundation were cut by a pipe trench (cut 2007) for a modern land drain (2008).

6 2 5 At the southern end of the site a segment through a linear deposit of silty clay 2021 showed that the material sealed a group of circular cut features, possibly post

settings Each of the post settings would have had a diameter of approximately 0.4m. The most substantial of the cuts (2022) had limestone packing against its eastern edge.

6.2.6 Deposit 2021 filled all the features excavated in the segment. Cuts 2023 and 2024 were not visible until the segment was excavated through the material. The northern edge and limestone packing of post setting 2022 were visible on the surface because the feature lies outside the line of the main deposit. It is likely that 2021 was deposited after the removal of any structure represented by the posts.

6.2.7 Two small intercut pits were excavated in the north west corner of the trench. Cut 2014 was an irregular sub-rectangular pit approximately 0.3m by 0.4m. The fill of this feature 2013 contained a single sherd of medieval pottery. The second pit was also sub-rectangular, the south eastern edge intersected with 2013/2014 but it was not possible because of the similarity in the composition of the fills (2013 and 2015) to distinguish the stratigraphic relationship between the two features. Deposit 2015 contained sherds of more modern pottery.

6.3 *Trench 3 (Fig 10)*

6.3.1 Trench 3 was located at the northern edge of the site and measured 10m by 2m. Trench 3 was excavated to natural clay deposits. No archaeological features were seen in this trench.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Two of the trenches excavated on the site contained archaeological features.

7.2 The linear features in Trench 1 seem to be part of a multi-phase sequence of land divisions with evidence to suggest that the earliest north-south feature remained visible when the later division was created. No dating evidence was recovered for these features but it is possible that they are part of the outlying field systems belonging to the high status Iron Age/Romano-British enclosures observed in excavations to the south of the site (MAP 1998). Alternatively the later ditch might have been a medieval boundary imposed over the earlier Roman land divisions.

7.3 The features in Trench 2 appear to be of medieval date and although truncated they represent a possible stone built structure and associated domestic waste pits. In

addition there was evidence for a structure or fence line running east - west at the southern end of the trench. One pit produced a high quality flint tool suggesting that there was activity on the site in the prehistoric period that was truncated by later archaeological features.

8 Mitigation Strategy

- 8.1 Due to the lack of dating material and the percentage of the site covered in the evaluation it is proposed that a Watching Brief on all groundworks in relation to the new development be observed by an archaeologist under a standard Watching Brief.
- 8.2 A Watching Brief is necessary in order to record further orientations of the ditches and the location of further flint artefacts.

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