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**MASONIC LANE,
THIRSK,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
DESK-TOP STUDY**

**2000 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 54**

**LAND OFF MASONIC LANE,
THIRSK,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
DESK-TOP STUDY**

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. METHODOLOGY
3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
5. WALK-OVER SURVEY
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
8. LIST OF SOURCES
9. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1, Site Location Plan
 Figure 2, Area of Development Location Plan
 Figure 3, Plan of Thirsk, 1792, showing approximate location of development site
 Figure 4, 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1856, showing approximate location of development site
 Figure 5, 2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1912, showing approximate location of development site

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 3rd October – 10th October 2000, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological desk-top study on an area of land off Masonic Lane, Thirsk (NGR SE 4273 8213) (Figure 1, site location map). The study was carried out to a specification provided by The Heritage Unit, North Yorkshire County Council on behalf of Seeger Homes Ltd. in order to assess the likely impact of proposed development on any archaeological deposits that may be present at the site. The proposed development involves the conversion of two ranges of existing disused farm building into seven dwellings and the construction of fourteen other houses and two flats together with car parking and garage spaces. A planning application was submitted to Hambleton District Council in December 1999 (ref.2/00/152/0608) but was subsequently withdrawn.

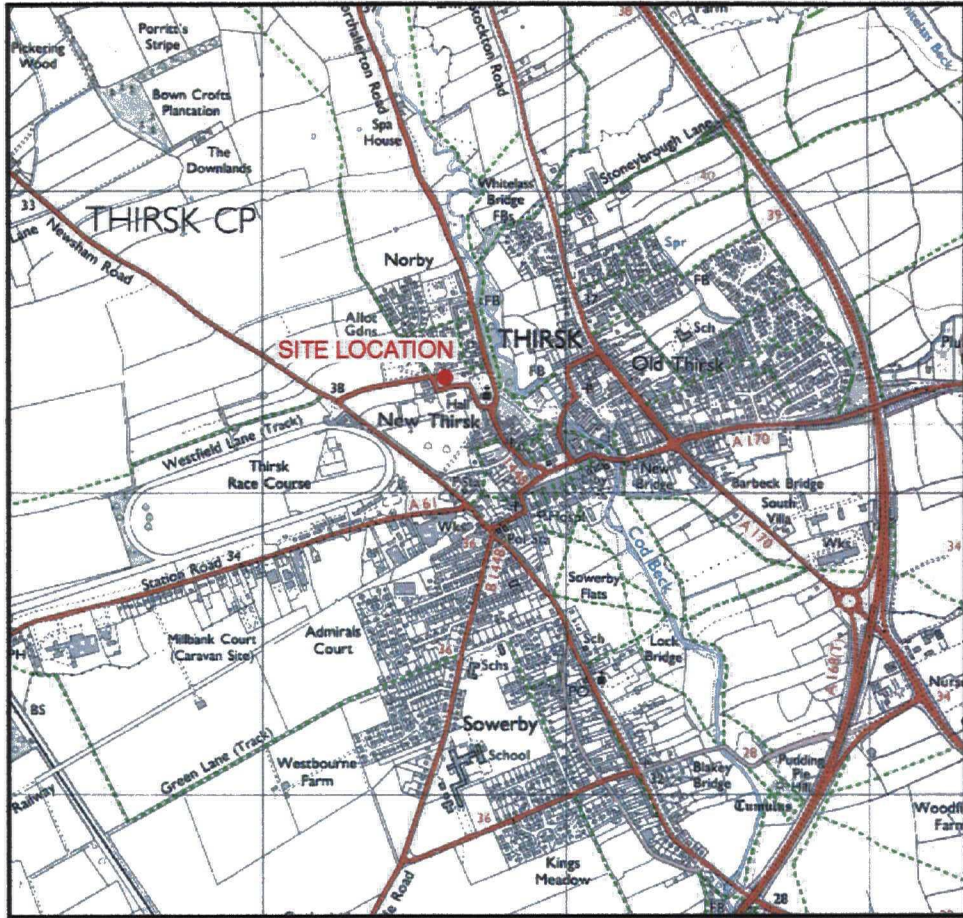
2. METHODOLOGY

The historical and archaeological background to the area was studied via a variety of media. The media consulted for the study comprised the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) of North Yorkshire County Council, (records cards and maps), cartographic data (18th century to late 20th century), published and unpublished archaeological reports and works of historical and archaeological synthesis.

Research notes are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:2000.2401.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The study area lies on the western edge of Thirsk and occupies a block of land covering approximately 0.35 ha. This block is located to the rear of building plots which lie on the west side of Kirkgate and is bounded by Masonic Lane to the south, Coach House Close to the north and an unnamed back lane running north at right angles from Masonic Lane to the west. The drift geology of the area is glacial sands and gravels which are overlying a solid geology of Triassic mudstones (British Geological Survey 1977 and British Geological Survey 1979).



Scale 1:25 000

BASED UPON THE 1988 ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25 000 SCALE MAP WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK, YO1 7FG. LICENCE NUMBER AL 854123.

Figure 1, Site location Plan

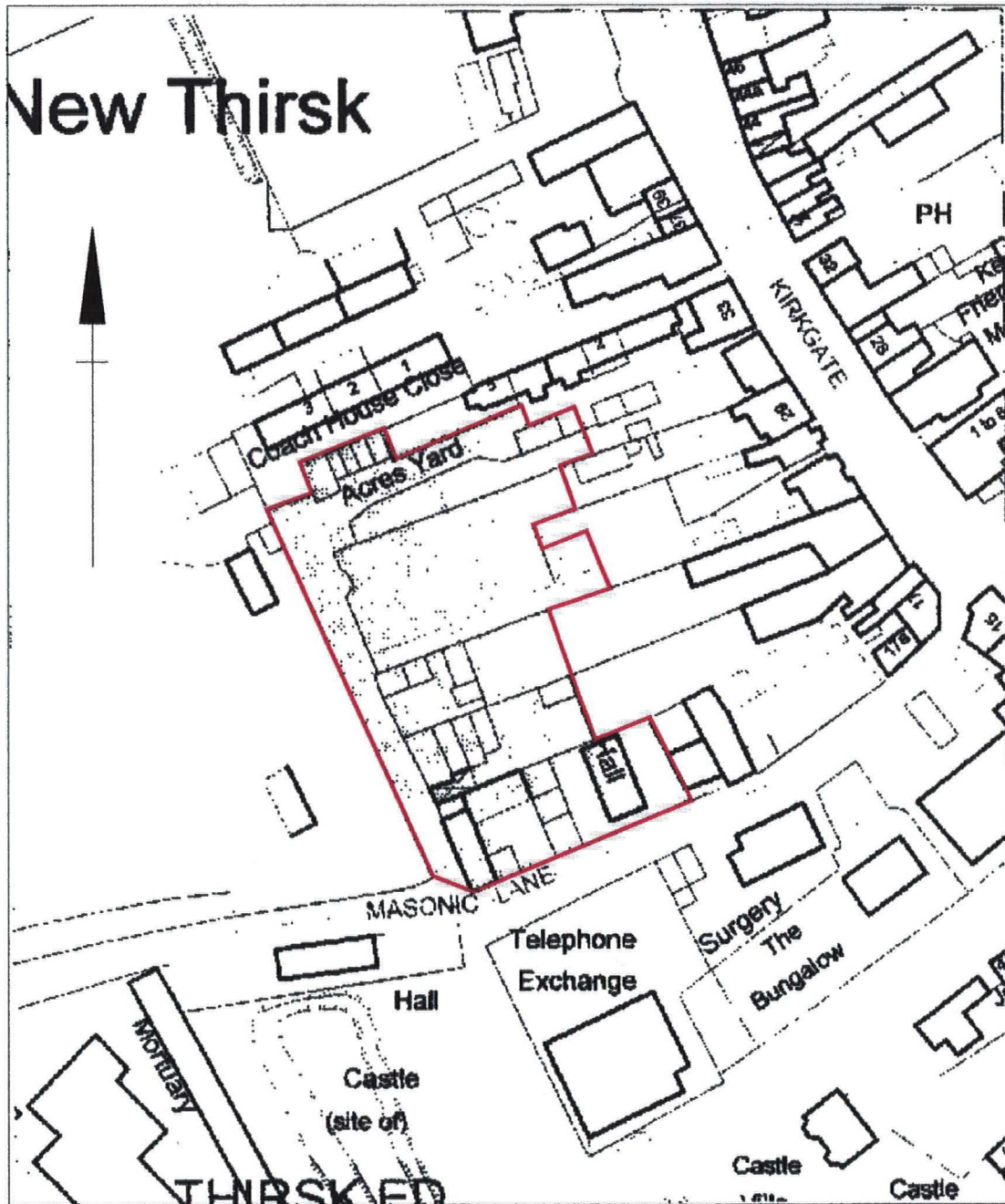


Figure 2, Area of Development Location Plan

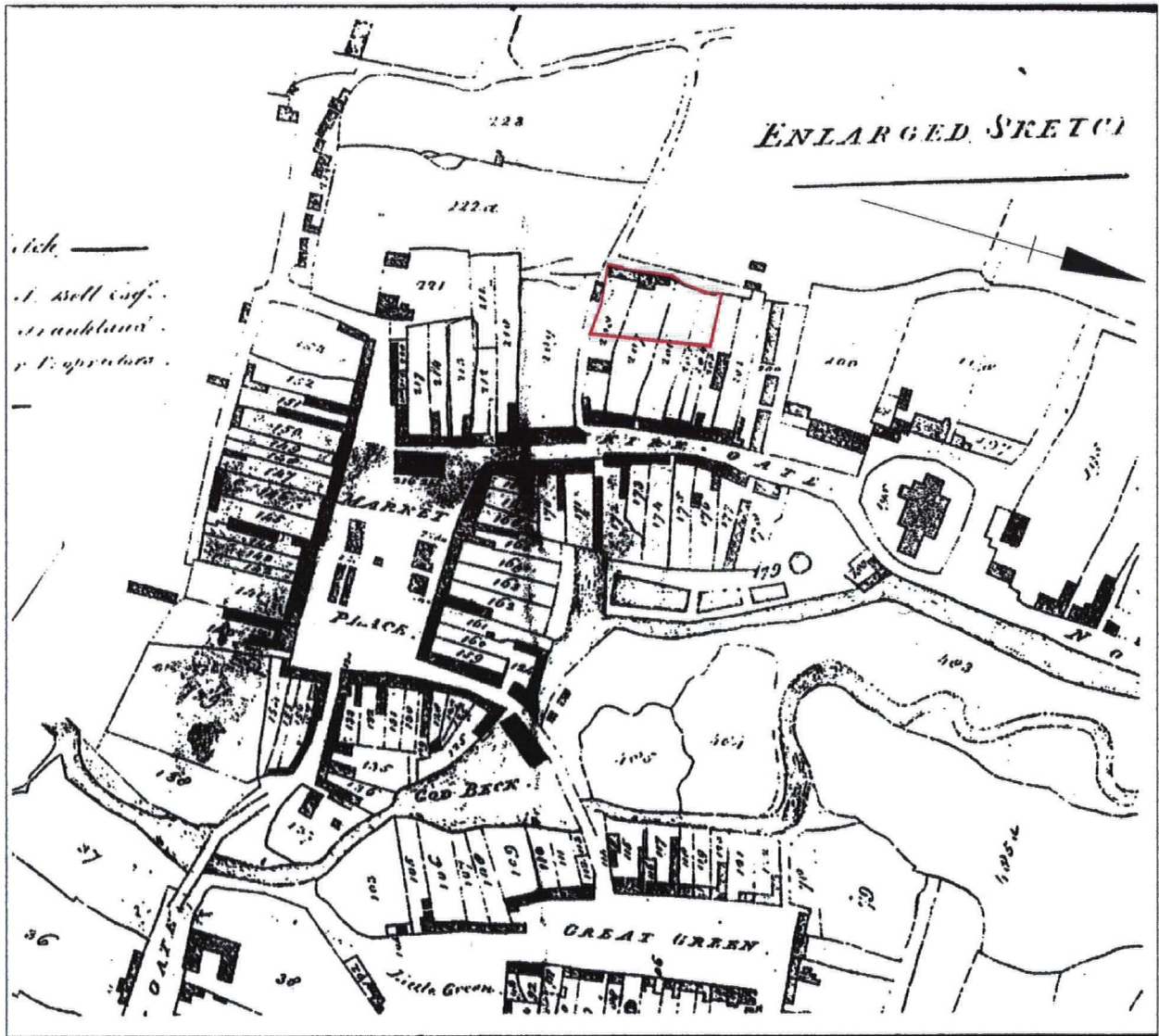


Figure 3, Plan of Thirsk, 1792, showing approximate location of development site

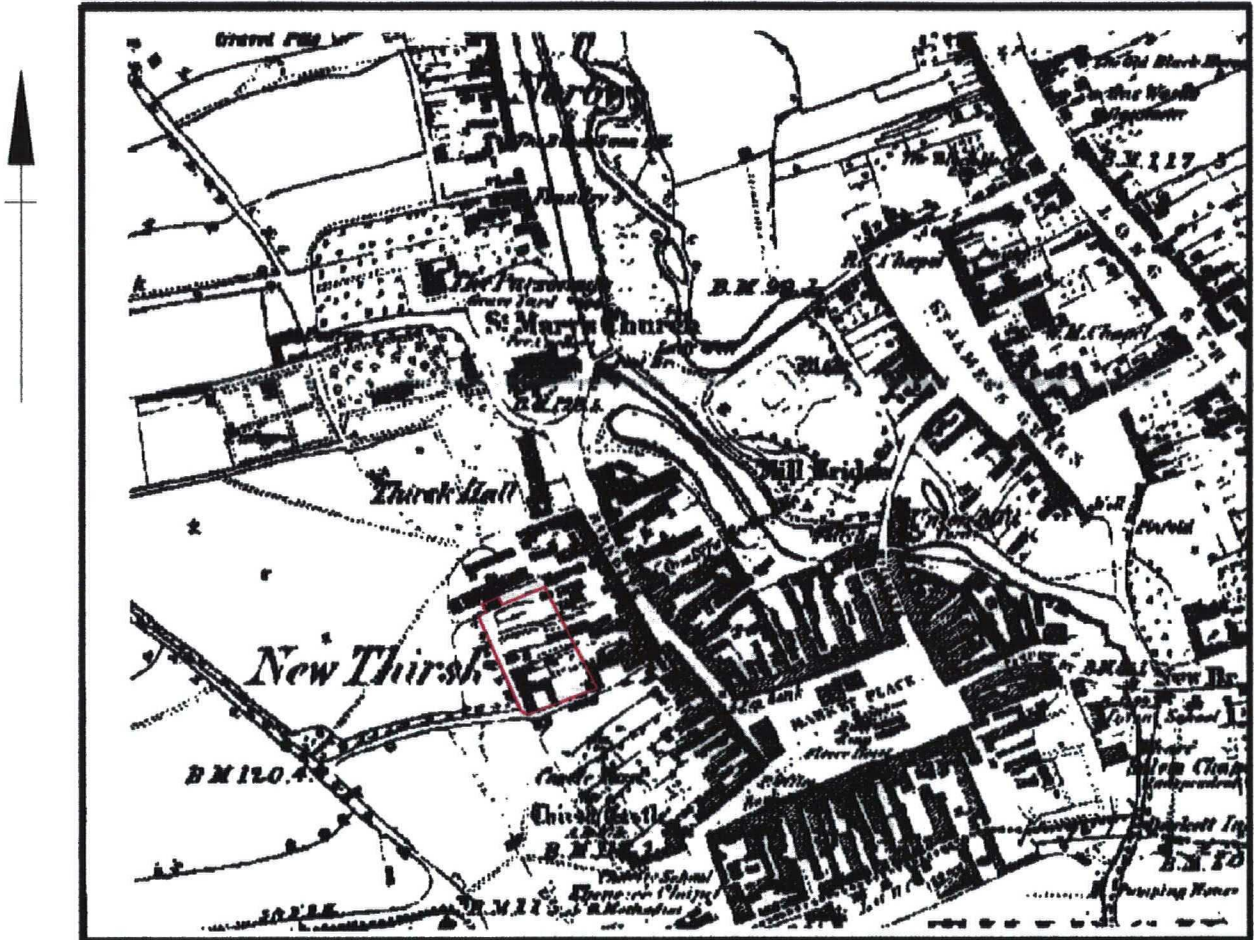


Figure 4, 1st edition Ordnance Survey, 1856, showing approximate location of development area.

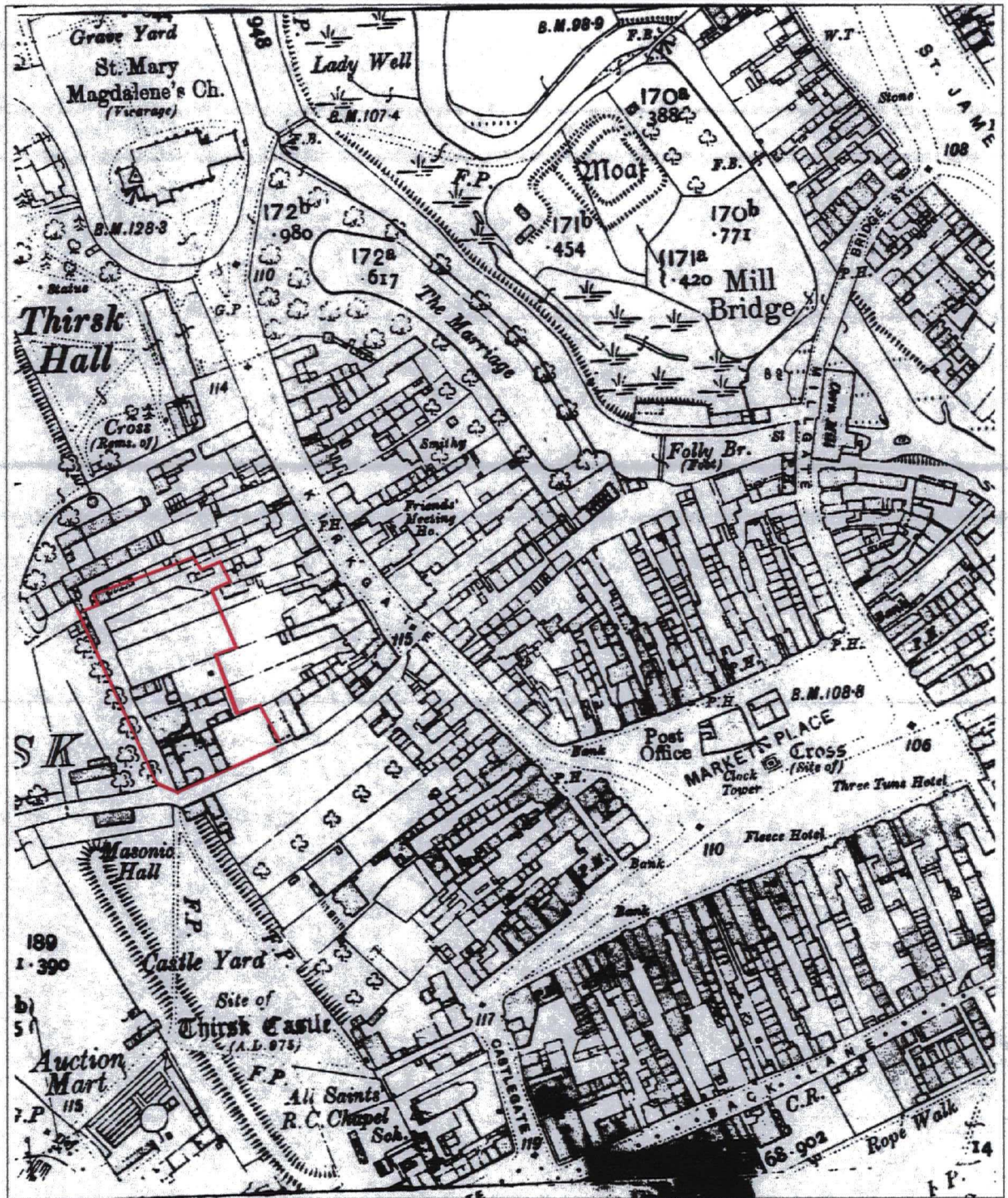


Figure 5, 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey, 1912, showing approximate position of development site

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The development site lies within the historic core of the medieval settlement to the rear of plots on the west side of Kirkgate in an area of the town known as New Thirsk. It is located c.200m north of the site of Thirsk Castle, which survives as earthwork remains with Scheduled Ancient Monument Status.

4.1 Prehistoric period (to 1st century AD)

There is plentiful evidence of prehistoric settlement in the vicinity of Thirsk. Specific evidence close to the town is a Bronze Age round barrow located at Pudding Pie Hill near to Sowerby (to the south of Thirsk) and enclosures and prehistoric field systems which are visible as crop and soil marks on air photographs (Tyler 1978). When new houses were constructed in St Mary's Walk (NGR SE 4349 8273) in 1989 a collection of Bronze age metal work was recovered. Excavations at the castle recorded two undated linear features which, because of their stratigraphic position, were interpreted as being of possible prehistoric date. These excavations also recovered two pieces of worked flint as residual material in later deposits also suggesting a prehistoric presence in the area (MAP 1995).

4.2 Roman period (1st to 5th centuries AD)

A Roman road which ran parallel to Dere Street for part of its route is thought to have crossed Cod Beck near to Thirsk, and a now disused route, Saxty Way may represent a link between the two (Tyler 1978). It is possible that there was some settlement here in the Roman period but no evidence of such occupation has been recovered from the town, although Roman and Saxon burials have been discovered nearby at the prehistoric earthwork at Pudding Pie Hill.

4.3 Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th-11th centuries)

During the excavation of a drainage trench in the Castle Garth in the 19th century "*a brooch or toga pin*" was recovered (Grainge 1856, MAP 1995). More recently archaeological investigation within the Castle Garth revealed a small cemetery comprising seven graves with associated inhumations and three disinterred burials. A group of grave goods including a cruciform brooch suggest an early 6th century date for these burials. The limits of this cemetery were not defined and MAP suggest that it was indicated that further burials exist to the north, west and east of excavated areas. This excavation also recorded a post hole, slot and pit from the same period (MAP 1995). Further Anglian evidence has been recovered in the form of a single sherd of

Anglian pottery recovered from a turf line below the castle rampart during an archaeological evaluation at the rear of 33 Market Place (MAP 2000). Together this evidence clearly indicates that there was settlement in the vicinity dating from at least the 6th century but little is known of the extent, form or character of settlement in Thirsk at this time.

A fortified house is supposed to have been built at Thirsk in 979 (VCH 1913), but its location is not known. It is possible that the idea of a pre-Conquest date for the Castle foundation is derived from this source. Excavations at the castle indicate that part of the castle rampart may be a re-modelling of an earlier earthwork (MAP 1995) and this could be interpreted as evidence of pre-Conquest defences but it should be regarded as unproved. The first documentary evidence for settlement at Thirsk is found in the Domesday Book, 1086, where there are two entries "*In Thirsk Thorr had 12 carucates of land taxable. There is land for 6 ploughs. Hugh (son of Baldric) has there 10 villagers who have two ploughs. Meadow 8 acres. Value before 1066 £4, value in 1086 10s*" and "*In Thirsk, Ormr, 8 carucates of land taxable. Land for 4 ploughs 20s*" (Faull and Stinson 1986). This reflects the fact that land at Thirsk in the late Saxon period is known to have been held as two separate manors on either side of Cod Beck, that to the east was held by Orm and that to the west was held by Thorh. Tyler has suggested that settlement on the western side of the Beck may have developed around the church, opposite the river crossing which was probably a ford at the end of Stammergeate (Tyler 1978) and that this may have provided the focus of a manorial *vill*. There may have been pre-Conquest defences on the site of the later castle, and it has been suggested that this settlement may have taken the form of a burgh, although there is no direct evidence to support this. Indeed evidence from the castle excavations suggest that in the period between the 6th and 11th centuries part of the site of the later Castle Garth may have been cultivated land, followed by its use as pasture, or possibly abandonment, before another layer of accumulated deposits preceded the construction of a clay bank associated with the castle on the site (MAP 1995).

4.4 Medieval period (11th-16th centuries)

The documentary evidence for the development of settlement of Thirsk in the medieval period is not clear cut. It is not known for certain when the settlement at Thirsk acquired borough status, and there is even some contradictory evidence of the location of the borough to the west or east side of Cod Beck. A 12th century charter of Newborough Priory is quoted by the historian Grainge as indicating that Old Thirsk, on the east side of the Beck, was a village and new Thirsk,

on the west side had the status of a borough (FAS 2000). However, significant evidence suggests that the borough was located on the east side of the Beck, and became known as Old Thirsk. Tyler notes that Orm's manor on the east side of Cod Beck passed to the King at the time of the Conquest, and it is possible that it was during the 12th century, while Thirsk was in royal hands, that it became a royal borough with burgesses and a market place at St James Green (Tyler 1978). Thirsk is referred to as a borough by Henry II, who held the manor some time after 1106 (VCH 1913).

Hugh son of Baldric's manorial land held on the west side of the Beck was inherited by Robert de Stuteville but was forfeit to the king in 1106. A castle is thought to have been erected by Robert de Stuteville in c.1092 and it had certainly been built before 1130-31 although its original extent is not known. Some time before 1130 the land was granted to Neil Daubenay who was succeeded by his son Roger de Mowbray. The construction of the castle is thought to have provided a new focus for settlement (New Thirsk) with a manorial *vill* developing around the bailey of the castle (VCH 1913). Tyler also suggests that when the castle was built it "*may have been responsible for moving the nucleus of settlement away from the church to the area between the castle and Cod Beck, now the Market Place*", noting that the building plots around the market place were not held as burgages and New Thirsk remained a manorial *vill* distinct from the borough to the east (Tyler 1978). It is not known when markets began at New Thirsk but in 1398 the market place in Old Thirsk is recorded as the "Oldermerkat Sted", indicating that before the end of the 14th century a market place had been established in New Thirsk. Tyler states that there was probably a woollen cloth industry at Thirsk from the early medieval period, but that the basis of the prosperity of the town mainly resulted from its position as a route center and as a market town for a rich agricultural district (Tyler 1978).

The date of construction for the castle which lies on level ground to the west of the market place is not known with certainty. It was once thought to have been in c. 975 but there is no substantive evidence of pre-Conquest foundation and the English Heritage Listing notes suggest that it dates from between c.1092 and 1130 when the earliest documentary reference to it occurs. Its life span was quite short since Henry II ordered its destruction in 1176 after Robert de Mowbray held it against the Crown in 1174. The Mowbray family continued to hold a manor there in the 13th and 14th centuries but it was not their main seat. In the 13th century there is a reference to the destruction of a house and dovecotes by the Scots in 1322. In 1376 Castle Garth is recorded as

being used as a garden but by the end of the century it was laid to grass (Clarke 2000b). When Camden visited Thirsk in 1695 nothing could be seen of the castle “*except the rampire*” (MAP 1995). Excavations at the castle have confirmed it was in use for c.100 years and that in the period after its destruction the area became a garden (MAP 1995).

It is estimated that that Thirsk castle originally lay within an area bounded by Westgate, Castlegate, Kirkgate and Masonic Lane and therefore approximately 50% of the original area of the castle enclosure survives as earthworks, which are Scheduled Ancient Monument no. 20454. The northern, western and southern extent of the outer ditch of the motte and bailey castle have been traced, but the eastern extent has been obscured by development along the Kirkgate and Market Place frontage. The bailey rampart is located in Castle Garth and comprises an earthen bank 1.5-2.5m high with a length of 140m surviving with an outer ditch which, although it has become infilled, is estimated to be 10m wide and 2m deep. The northern end of the western edge of the rampart runs beneath the grounds of the 19th century Masonic Hall which lies on the opposite side of the road to the development site. To the east of the rampart is an open area which is the interior of the bailey and this contains a number of low, rectangular earthworks which indicate the layout of building plots and gardens within the enclosure. Along the eastern edge of the bailey is a motte (mound) which was separated from the bailey by a ditch.

The extent of the castle enclosure is not completely defined but below ground evidence of the castle rampart and ditch, together with earlier stratification have been recorded in Thirsk by both antiquarian observations and by more recent archaeological investigations. Drainage work to cut a sewer from Kirkgate to Cod Beck via Finkle Street in 1856 is reported as cutting through a feature 16 feet deep in Kirkgate which was interpreted as the rampart ditch and waterlogged deposits of excellent preservation were observed (Grainge 1856). Although this feature has continued to be accepted as part of the rampart ditch, its depth might suggest that it could have been an old water course. A section through the inner rampart bank together with a cobble surface below it was recorded in the Castle Garth by Aberg in 1963, probably at the site of the electricity sub station (MAP 1995, 2000). The rampart bank was also observed to seal earlier activity and to comprise more than one phase of make-up during a watching brief at 11 Kirkgate (Hatch 1981). The line of the ditch, but no other features, were recorded in a geophysical survey by AML in the 1980's when the telephone exchange in Masonic Lane was constructed (MAP 2000). Work on the site of Calverts Carpets yard close to the southern area of the castle, outside

the Garth, revealed what may have been part of a rampart bank and its associated ditch (Clarke 1991). A watching brief on the north side of the castle in Pick Lane exposed what may be part of a bank pertaining to the castle and showed that the bank was constructed of sands and gravels with a thin clay capping and below this make-up there was a series of earlier features including ditches. The bank was also shown here to have consisted of more than one phase of construction (Clarke 1995). Further observations by Clarke at 2-4 Castlegate demonstrated the presence of a considerable depth of made ground suggestive of a castle moat (Clarke 1996). A map of 1796 shows the Castle Garth divided into two parts along the line of the bank with a small building in the centre of the boundary. There is also a suggestion of a pond to the south of the building and this may reflect the position of the ditch. The 1843 tithe map confirms the information on the earlier map with few alterations. The pond in the middle of Castle Garth and another near Masonic Lane in the vicinity of the telephone exchange are shown. These are roughly in line with the deep ditch noted to the rear of 33 Market Place and could represent the remains of the motte ditch (Clarke 2000b). The only extensive areas of excavation at the castle were those at the site of an electrical sub station and associated works in 1994. These excavations recorded evidence of the construction of the rampart banks, deposits sealed below and later deposits accumulated against the bank. The clay bank above the Anglo Saxon burials was dated to the 11th century which confirms the historical evidence for the construction of the castle but elsewhere to the south the bank may have been of later date and to the north it may represent a remodeling in the 11th century of an already extant earthwork. These excavations also revealed that 20th century service trenches, the construction of a tank trap in the second World War and an ATC building have caused localised disturbance to archaeological deposits in the area (MAP 1995).

The recent evaluation at Finkle Street has provided some evidence of a large clay bank and ditch, constructed in the late 12th or early 13th century, which was apparently redefined no later than the 15th century. This feature, which appears to have been constructed on open ground previously under agricultural use, may have defined an enclosed settlement area possibly associated with the castle. The ditch and bank may have provided some protection against flooding from the Cod Beck. Its fill indicated it was used as an open sewer or midden (FAS 2000). A settlement boundary can be interpolated from this evidence and could follow the alignment suggested by FAS, *“centered on the Market Place, and bound by Chapel Street and Castlegate on the southern and western sides respectively and the rear boundaries of possible burage plots*

elsewhere" (FAS 2000). It should be stressed that this boundary is supposition and further archaeological investigation would be required to confirm or correct the true line, pointing to the potential significance of the development site.

The 1792 map of Thirsk (Figure 3) shows the meandering course of the Cod Beck. Of possible interest in relationship to the development site is a water course shown branching towards the west, but then apparently abruptly stopping, raising the possibility of an ancient waterway running westward along the course of Masonic Lane, which may even have been used to define an area of settlement. The 16 foot deep ditch recorded in the 19th century in Kirkgate (Grainge, 1856), (the location and alignment of which are not known) could represent part of a water course rather than a section of the castle ditch.

In addition to the castle, a number of significant upstanding medieval monuments lie close to the site, namely a moated site some 200m to the north-east (on the east side of the Cod Beck) and the 15th century church of St Mary (which is thought to include 12th century fabric) 200m to the north (Thompson, 1913). The moated site, which is Scheduled Ancient Monument No. 20532, represents a well preserved example of a small homestead and has the unusual addition of an external building platform. It is one of the few remaining visible features relating to the medieval settlement of the town. Small scale archaeological work at the moated site has produced a number of probable 13th century pottery sherds but did not reveal any archaeological structures or features (Robinson 1993).

The area immediately to the west of the current site was the site of an archaeological evaluation and watching brief (Johnson 1998). The earliest in-situ remains uncovered were a probable pit and adjacent garden type soil to the rear of 25 Kirkgate with pottery suggesting a possible 11th-12th century date for this feature. No other features or deposits on the site could be proved to be of medieval origin and indeed the amount of residual medieval material found was very small (Johnson 1998, 19).

4.5 Post medieval period (16th-19th centuries)

Examination of available cartographic evidence permits some understanding of the development of the building plots at 17-25 Kirkgate and the properties on the Masonic Lane frontage over the last 200 years. During this time their respective land boundaries have remained largely intact

apart from certain alterations to the rear. A map of 1792 (Figure 3) shows the development area was occupied by six building plots which fronted onto Kirkgate. These plots do not appear to be divided but buildings are shown to also occupy the back lane frontage to the rear of the southern most two plots, together with a further building at right angles to Masonic Lane in the middle the southern most plot. The only change represented on a 1796 map shows an additional building to the rear of the most northern plot within the area. The tithe map of 1843 shows that by this time the properties have buildings on the Kirkgate frontage although the architectural style of the buildings would suggest that they have almost certainly been rebuilt since the 1792 map. By this time there are additional ranges projecting to the rear of these properties, together with some additional buildings located at the west end of the plots. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1856 shows a similar arrangement of buildings and a few additions and subtractions are shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1912 (Figure 5). The present building at 23 Kirkgate dates from the early 19th century and was the former home and surgery of the veterinary surgeon "James Herriot"; it has now become visitor centre. It was probably built as one of a matching pair of houses with no. 21. The building at no. 25 is a later Victorian or Edwardian house. Masonic Lane takes its name from the masonic hall (first shown on the 1st edition OS map, 1856) located on the south side of the road, opposite the development site.

Archaeological evaluation of the area to the rear of these Kirkgate houses (Johnson 1998) recorded post-medieval structural remains in two trenches which were located closest to the street frontage. Indeed it was only in Trench 1 (which was by far the closer of the two trenches to Kirkgate) that structural remains were found which related to a building or outhouse; later yard surfaces were also revealed. An intriguing subterranean domed brick structure, possibly an icehouse or well, was dated as a post 17th century construction (Johnson 1998, 19).

Evaluation trenches in the garden of 23 Kirkgate (Johnson 1998) all revealed loamy soils directly over the pale, sandy "natural" sub-soils (indicative of old garden or horticultural soils) that were in turn sealed by later build ups of soils. Within the excavated trenches features of either medieval or post medieval date were found to cut the sub soil.

4.6 Negative Archaeological Evidence

Recently, during a watching brief on the opposite side of Kirkgate, to the rear of no. 18 Kirkgate, natural deposits were observed at a depth of c. 1m below the ground surface. No medieval

that the original shape of the market place was more symmetrical and that its western end has been built over.

Excavations at the castle (MAP 1995) record a sequence which indicates that the site of the castle was used for agricultural purposes for a period before the castle was built. This suggests that the castle was not necessarily planted on the site of an existing settlement necessitating the planting of a new settlement, but nevertheless the castle building appears to have triggered settlement development and may have initiated a second nucleus of settlement located around the market place. The extents of the castle and its associated settlement and its development from the earlier forms and land uses are not fully understood and the development site lies in an important location which may allow evidence of this history to be recovered.

The bank and ditch recorded at Finkle Street (FAS 2000), which may form part of a settlement boundary, indicate that the development area may lie outside the suggested boundaries of the enclosed area. It should be stressed that this boundary is interpolated from limited evidence and further archaeological investigation would be required to confirm its alignment. The development area, lying on the margin of the boundary of the castle and on the margin of, or outside this enclosed settlement has the potential to clarify these boundaries. The area of medieval settlement associated with the church and that associated with the castle to the south could be represented by medieval occupation or structural deposits within the development site.

Archaeological evaluation work on Kirkgate (Johnson 1998) found evidence of a medieval pit and garden soil in the trench nearest the street frontage but an absence of evidence for medieval features in trenches further from the street. This evidence points towards the likelihood that medieval structural remains are most likely to occur closer to the Kirkgate street frontage and would tend to suggest that there may be not a strong likelihood of finding evidence from this period a greater distance from the street, within the development site. However, the development site covers a large area, parts of which do not appear to have been disturbed by post medieval construction and therefore the findings from the evaluation work in 1998 cannot necessarily be regarded as informing the potential of archaeological survival in the development area.

deposits were observed overlying the natural sand and sub soil to the rear of the standing buildings (NAA 1998). Closer to the development site a watching brief at The Bungalow, Masonic Lane observed deposits to a maximum of 0.40m below ground surface, which were interpreted as being associated with the construction of a former garage on the site (Clarke 2000).

5. WALK-OVER SURVEY

The site is bounded by brick walls, which enclose level ground. Various ranges of unoccupied 18th/19th century brick built structures are present on the site, previously known as Castle Yard Stables, together with a building which is used as a scout hut.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The periods for which significant archaeological deposits could be represented within the development site range from the Anglian to the post medieval. Pre-Conquest settlement is likely to have been located close to the burials found in the Castle Garth area. If present these would be archaeologically significant and their investigation could help to illuminate an understanding of Thirsk in this period. To date, no deposits from this period have been found in the course of observations made closest to the development area but this does not rule out the possibility that they may survive in the vicinity.

Significant above ground medieval remains survive near to the development site in the form of the castle earthworks and the church. Further below ground evidence from the period has been recorded in areas adjacent to the development site. The history of the development of the town is not fully understood at present. Tyler noted that the settlement may have centered around the church and have moved when the castle was built in the 12th century but that this can only be proved or disproved by archaeological evidence (Tyler 1978). While subsequently, further archaeological investigations in Thirsk have enabled a fuller record of settlement to be recorded it is clear that major questions regarding its development have only theory and assumption to answer them rather than archaeological evidence.

It has been suggested that the construction of the castle may have been accompanied by the development of a planned settlement around the market place and it has been suggested by Tyler

7 **ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Anglian remains found in Thirsk indicate that further important pre-Conquest deposits may survive. The site lies within an area which was identified by Tyler (1978) as archaeologically important. The complexities of the development of Old and New Thirsk, both of which may have been planned, gives Thirsk a wider significance (Tyler 1978). The development site is potentially a significant site archaeologically because of its location. Surviving archaeological deposits may have the potential to demonstrate the relationship of the castle to the development of medieval settlement and help to illuminate the settlement history of New Thirsk.

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Map of Thirsk, 1792, by J. Cobeck for J. Bell

Map of Thirsk, 1796, by J. Cobeck for J. Bell

1st edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1856

2nd edition Ordnance Survey Map, 1912

All examined maps housed in North Yorkshire Record Office.

All examined archive reports housed in SMR of NYCC Heritage Unit.

9. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Research and Report Rhona Finlayson

Illustrations Rhona Finlayson

Editor David Brinklow



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. It can manage projects, provide professional advice and monitor archaeological works to ensure high quality, cost effective archaeology. Its staff have a considerable depth and variety of professional experience and an international reputation for research, development and maximising the public, educational and commercial benefits of archaeology. Based in York its services are available throughout Britain and beyond.



York Archaeological Trust
Cromwell House
13 Ogleforth
York YO1 7FG

Telephone: 01904 663000
Fax: 01904 663024
E-mail: dbrinklow@yorkarchaeology.co.uk
Internet: <http://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk>

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