

Received 3/10/02

NYS 865-0152

NYS 6956

NYS 895-WB

**Three Tuns Yard
Chapel Street
Thirsk
North Yorkshire
SE 43814382**

NYCC HER	
SNY	6956
ENY	865/895
CNY	861
Parish	2152
Rec'd	03/10/2002

**Archaeological Evaluation
and
Watching Brief**

**MAP
July 2002**

**Three Tuns Yard
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Thirsk
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1. Introduction

During May 2002 MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd undertook an Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief on land to the rear of the Three Tuns Public House, Chapel Street, Thirsk, North Yorkshire (Fig. 1 : SE 4381 4382). The work was carried out in advance of the residential development of the site and two Archaeological Evaluation Trenches (Trenches 1 and 2 : Fig. 2) were excavated. Following the Evaluation Trench work a Watching Brief was undertaken during the excavation of footings of two separate areas (Areas A and B : Fig. 2).

All work was funded by Applegarth Building Management Limited.

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2. Historical and Archaeological Background

2.1 Historical Background

In the Tenth century Thirsk possessed a fortified house, the foundations of which were laid in the reign of Edgar (King Edgar reigned from 959-97).

By 1086, Domesday records that Thirsk (Tresc/Tresche) belonged to the Kmg who had granted it to Hugh Fitzbaldric. William I gave the Manor of Thirsk to Geoffrey, Bishop of Constance, who died at the end of William's reign and all his titles and

possessions were transferred in 1086 to Robert de Stuteville (later Robert de Mowbray). It is suggested that the castle at Thirsk was constructed in about 1092 when Robert de Mowbray was Governor of Northern England

In 1138 Thursten, Archbishop of York and a group of nobles gathered at Thirsk to meet the threat from David king of Scotland, at the Battle of the Standard.

In 1173 Roger de Mowbray was implicated in a plot against Henry II. Henry II ordered Roger to surrender the castle and it was destroyed in 1176.

Built up areas to the east of the motte obscure the eastern extent of the castle but, by comparison with other mottes and baileys, it is estimated that Thirsk Castle originally lay within the area bounded by Westgate, Castlegate, Kirkgate and Masonic Lane.

Excavation of a drainage trench in the Castle Garth in the mid Nineteenth century located a 'brooch or toga pin' (Grainge 1856).

Drainage work in 1856 in Kirkgate cut through the rampart ditch illustrating that water logged deposits of excellent preservation (ibid).

The 1796 map of Thirsk an "Enlarged Sketch of Thirsk" (NYCRO : Fig. 2) shows the site to be an area of open land with buildings fronting on to the Place (Market Place).

In 1803 a "Plan of Thirsk" (NYCRO : Fig. 3) shows the same plot, now numbered 137. with a range of buildings extending away from the Market Place

The 1843 Tithe map (NYCRO : Fig. 4) shows little change to the overall layout of the plot of land except for the construction of a small rectangular building in the middle of the land block.

The 1856 First Edition Ordnance survey map (Fig. 5) is at too small a scale to provide accurate details of the site's layout.

In the early Twentieth century major changes are made in the arrangement of the land in the centre of the town. The 1912 Ordnance survey map (Fig. 6) shows development to the south of the site along Chapel Street. The site itself remains open behind the buildings on Market Place. The 1914 1:10560 Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 7) illustrates a similar arrangement.

By the early 1970s (Fig. 8) development in this area of Thirsk has continued apace, but the plot behind the Three Tuns public house remains clear of buildings other than those shown in earlier maps.

2.2 Archaeological Background

In 1963 a small scale excavation was undertaken in the Castle Garth which recorded section through the inner rampart bank and noted an earlier cobbled surface beneath it (Aberg unpublished).

A Watching Brief at 11 Kirkgate in 1981 showed that the rampart bank make up was of more than one phase and that it sealed earlier activity (Hatch unpublished).

A Geophysical Survey of the Garth by AML was conducted in the late 1980's in response to the building of a new telephone exchange off Masonic Lane. The survey was limited in size and results due to the area of redevelopment. The line of the ditch was noted but no other features which related to medieval or earlier activity at the site were recorded.

An archaeological evaluation at the Heriott Centre, 23-25 Kirkgate, consisting of five trenches, however, the main building of 23-25 Kirkgate had been cellared. Post-medieval remains close to Kirkgate. consisted of a building/outhouse and later yard surfaces, a post Seventeenth century domed brick structure - possible ice house, an Eleventh - Twelfth century pit and natural sands was seen at 1.3m below present ground level.

A Watching Brief at Calverts Carpets in 1991 provided a section through the rampart bank and associated ditch.

Cleveland County Archaeological Section undertook evaluation of five trenches at Waterside in 1994. Post-medieval activity on the site was shown to be prone to flooding, no medieval or earlier material was encountered.

A Watching Brief outside of the Garth in 1994 on adjacent land at Calvert's Carpets provided information on the rampart bank (Clarke 1995).

A Watching Brief on the extension to a car park along Masonic Lane in 1995 showed that the rampart bank was constructed of sands and gravels and a small clay capping layer (ibid). The section clearly showed various phases of construction and below the bank make up were a series of earlier features.

A Watching Brief at 4-6 Castlegate in 1995 located considerable deposits of made ground beneath the building, this very wet organic dark material may possibly relate to ditch fill.

Excavation in Castle Garth in 1995 provided information on the land use of the site prior to the construction of the Castle. Excavation located a small Anglian cemetery of Sixth century date. In addition evidence on the construction of the rampart banks was recorded. The periods after the destruction of the Castle were illustrated by deposits of garden soil. No later structural activity was recorded until the late Nineteenth century when a tank trap and the ATS building were constructed. The excavations also showed that disturbance to archaeological deposits had occurred in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries due to the installation of services.

A Watching Brief at 18 Kirkgate by NAA in 1998 located only Post-medieval pottery and no features.

A Watching Brief in 1999 by C Briden at St Mary's Church located human remains and a structure dating to the Thirteenth - Fifteenth century.

A Watching Brief upgraded to excavation by FAS in 2000 to the south of Finkle Street located a large bank and ditch of Twelfth century date, which was later recut in the Thirteenth - Fifteenth century as dated by associated pottery. In addition a small clay lined kiln was found.

An evaluation at Station Road, Thirsk by Lancaster Archaeological Unit in 2000 recorded undated features and a complete lack of finds.

An evaluation and Watching Brief by MAP in 2000 at the Royal Oak Yard located further evidence for the rampart bank and information on the original topography in this part of the town. Pottery of Anglo-Scandinavian date was recovered from the pre-bank surface.

Trial Trenching on the land to the rear of 33 Market Place (MAPi 2000) located Anglian pottery from the ploughsoils, horticultural features very similar to those recorded at the 1995 excavations in Castle Garth, medieval structures and pits and later Post-medieval and modern structures. Further work in 2001 located a substantial ditch interpreted as being associated with the Castle. This had been infilled in the Fifteenth century and then used as building land.

Evaluation by YAT in 2001 on Masonic Lane located a large medieval ditch of Twelfth century date, a large modern sand and gravel quarry cut and agricultural soils.

3. Methodology

The two Evaluation Trenches (Trenches 1 and 2) and Watching Brief Area were located in the Three Tuns Yard, one located in the south-eastern corner of the yard, the other towards the northern end (Fig. 9). The trenches were excavated using a small mechanical excavator using a toothless ditching bucket to the level of significant archaeological deposits.

Both Trenches were hand cleaned and a drawn, written and photographic record was made of all deposits and features encountered and excavated. All deposits and features

were recorded by a continuous context system and all finds were recorded in relation to contexts. Plans and sections were drawn at scales of 1:20 and 1:10.

Following the work on the evaluation trenches two areas were covered by a Watching Brief during the excavation of footings. One area (Area A) was located to the west of Trench 1, the other to the north of Trench 2 (Area B : Fig. 9).

4. Results

The two evaluation trenches located archaeological deposits, the first archaeological horizon being between 0.7m and 0.8m below the existing ground level.

Trench 1 identified a cobbled surface, probable remnants of a medieval courtyard or working surface, which overlay silty deposits, possibly flood deposits from Cod Beck which lies just to the east of the development area, or a linear feature. A later pit cut the cobbled surface and the upper part of the trench was made up of levelling dumps of material.

Trench 2 identified horizontal layers of occupation and levelling material, the earliest containing medieval pottery, a pit and later ditch, the upper fills comprising of more recent levelling material including topsoil and the yard make-up.

The Watching Brief Area A identified more cobbled surfacing to the west of Trench 1 and a continuation of the grey silty material which may have formed part of a linear feature. The other area, Area B, identified a continuation northward of the ditch seen in Trench 2, possibly post-dated by a silty deposit and a nineteenth century culvert.

Trench 1 (Fig. 10, Pls. 1 & 2)

Trench 1 measured 3.5m by 1.6m and was excavated at the northern boundary of the site.

The earliest deposits (Contexts 1003 and 1004) were observed at the southern end of the trench, both similar deposits of a blue grey silty clay containing pebbles.

Deposit (Context 1003) measured 1.7m by 0.7m, the consistency of the material suggested that it was either the fill of a very large water logged feature contained within a cut (Cut 1013) or a relic of inundation from the nearby river. The possible cut or slope formed an interface between deposit (Context 1003) and a similar silty deposit (Context 1004) which lay below (Fig. 10). Neither of the two deposits contained any finds.

The silt deposit (Context 1003) was directly overlaid by the cobble surface (Context 1002) and its bonding of compact clay which measured 2m long by 1.4m wide. The cobbles were in turn overlaid by a thin layer of soot demonstrating that the cobbles had once been a yard or internal working surface. The soot deposit contained a small number of pottery fragments contemporary with the period when the surface was in use. Preliminary analysis of the pottery suggests a date of thirteenth or fourteenth century.

A later cut feature a possible pit (Cut 1008) partly concealed by the western trench limit, measured 1.35m long by 1m wide, rounded at one end and cut cobble surface 1002. The feature was backfilled with a silty clay (Context 1001) containing few pebbles.

Evidence of some structural element was provided by three stake holes (Contexts 1005, 1006 and 1007) within deposit (Context 1001) which had diameters of 0.08m. In turn these features had been overlaid by a deposit of fine silty clay (Context 1015), the upper limit was at 31.78m A.O.D., 0.65m below the existing ground surface. This deposit was cut by the brick filled feature (Cut 1012) and represents the highest standing deposit potentially of a medieval date within Trench 1.

Cut 1012 represented the earliest event in a sequence of ground raising, backfilled with a deposit of demolition rubble consisting of broken narrow gauge brick in a matrix of lime mortar (Context 1011) forming the length of the trench, measuring 0.4m deep. The earlier cobble surface (Context 1002) formed the base of the cut feature.

Deposits encountered from the present ground surface to a maximum depth of 28.97m A.O.D consisted of horizontal bands of mixed material (Contexts 1009, 1010 and 1014) used historically to raise the ground level of the site to provide substrates for surfacing materials which had subsequently been removed (Fig. 10).

Trench 2 (Figs 11 & 12, Pls. 3 & 4)

Trench 2 measured 3.2m by 2.10m and was reduced by mechanical excavator to a maximum depth of 29.20m A.O.D. with a further smaller area excavated to 28.88m A.O.D. The earliest deposit encountered in the deeper area was a fine silty sand (Context 2010) which contained a few cobbles at its base and two sherds of medieval pottery. The pottery has been preliminary dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

A possible pit was partly obscured by the northern side of the trench and was represented by a brown clay (Context 2011) which contained a few cobbles and no finds (Pl. 3). The top of the feature was identified at the base of the trench and was not excavated as it exceeded a safe working depth. The visible part of the feature measured 0.95m long by 0.45m wide. The pit was cut into deposit (Context 2010) and was overlaid by horizontal layers of material.

The horizontal layers of material (Contexts 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2012) appeared to represent alternate surfacing materials and occupation deposits raising the ground level in this area. These bands of material were clearly visible in the north and south facing sections of the trench (Fig. 5, Pl. 3 & 4).

Deposits 2006, 2007 and 2009 were silty and silty sandy materials containing frequent stone fragments, the lower of the two containing water worn cobbles. Deposits 2008, 2009 and 2012 contained less stone; some brick fragments were present in deposit 2008, presumably the result of demolition. No other finds were recovered from any of the deposits.

A ditch (Cut 2005/2017) was visible in the opposing north and south sections of the trench running north-south, broadly along the axis of the property boundary and

perhaps echoing the alignment of the town ditch. In the south facing section the ditch (Cut 2017) measured 1.45m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.55m; the section revealed a steep sided profile, the base exceeding the bottom of the trench (Fig. 5, Pl. 4). A single fill (Context 2013) was identified, a gritty silty clay containing few stone inclusions but no finds.

In the opposing north facing section the ditch (Cut 2005) appeared much wider at 2.5m, suggesting that it had turned or begun to turn onto an east-west alignment thus appearing obliquely in the section (Fig. 5, Pl. 3). The single fill (Context 2004) was the same as (Context 2013) in the opposing section and contained no finds.

The ditch had been cut through a number of deposits (Contexts 2006, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016) representing dumps and levelling surfaces (Fig. 12).

The upper deposits within the trench were made up of a thick deposit of garden soil (Context 2002) which overlay the whole trench, its lowest extent being at 29.80m A.O.D., 0.65m below the present ground surface. The highest deposits within the trench were the existing surface of tarmac and concrete of the yard (Contexts 2000, and 2001).

Watching Brief Area A (Fig. 9)

This area lay to the west of Trench 1 and was observed during the excavations of footings. A surface of cobbles (3001) was visible which measured 4.8m long by 2m wide and may have been a continuation of the surface seen in Trench 1.

The other deposit within Area A was a mixed silty clay (Context 3002) containing rubble, including brick and tile fragments, which appeared to be of a post-medieval date.

Watching Brief Area B (Fig. 9)

This area lay to the north of Trench 2 and identified a continuation of the ditch (Context 4001) seen in Trench 2. The western side of the ditch was visible which ran

north to south, a distance of 10.5m before intersecting with a later deposit of mixed silty clay and cobbles (Context 4002) which obscured or overlay the ditch.

The only other feature was a Nineteenth century culvert and pipe (Context 4003), which ran on a north-south alignment.

On the western side of Area B natural material was identified at a level 0.6m below the existing ground level contrasting with the fact that no natural material was identified in the evaluation trenches which were excavated to over 1m below the ground level.

5. Conclusions

The two evaluation trenches located archaeological deposits and features, the earliest of which appeared to be of a medieval date. A build up of material between 0.6m and 1m in depth represented levelling deposits which sealed the first significant archaeological horizon.

Medieval and Post-medieval activity was identified within Trench 1. The cobbled yard or working surface had associated pottery finds of a thirteenth or fourteenth century date. The cobbles were cut by a pit but no finds were recovered to determine the date of this feature. The demolition deposit of narrow gauge bricks which overlay the cobbles was probably post-medieval date, the overlying material representing more recent levelling deposits.

It was uncertain if the silty deposits at the southern end of Trench 1 were actually archaeological or flood deposits from Cod Beck; no finds were recovered to determine a date.

Although only a limited quantity of finds were recovered from Trench 2 the earliest were two sherds of pottery of a medieval date from the lowest deposits, which appeared to be a series of levelling dumps.

The later ditch which cut the above deposits, was probably post medieval, possibly a property boundary, the overlying upper deposits representing more recent levelling material and the former topsoil.

Although the areas investigated were relatively limited in scope the archaeological work at Three Tuns Yard provided information into the processes carried out there in medieval and post medieval times. The boggy nature of the earliest levels - perhaps the result of flooding from the adjacent beck - was followed by the laying of a cobbled hard standing and then successive dumps intended to raise the ground level. Relatively recent horticulture was succeeded by modern car-park surfaces, and this use is now replaced with residential development.

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