Boundary Bank
Osgodby
Cayton
North Yorkshire

Archaeological Excavation

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1. Introduction

A residential development by Persimmon Homes (Yorkshire) Ltd. to the south of Osgodby Lane, Osgodby, North Yorkshire required a large-bore drain to be laid roughly north-south across the site to link with existing drainage services at the southern end of the site (NGR TA 5057 4846 : Fig. 1).

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The trench excavated for the drain crossed a bank and hedge marking a field boundary and the southern limit of the site (Fig. 2, Feature 1; MAP 2000b).

In addition to the trench for the drain, a gap wide enough to allow access to the mechanical excavator that would cut the drainage trench was needed. The archaeological excavation of a 6.2m section of the boundary bank to allow sufficient access allowed the structure of the bank to be examined in detail and dating evidence to be collected providing information on the historical development of the field boundary.

All work was funded by Persimmon Homes (Yorkshire) Ltd.

2. Geology

The geology of the site consists of boulder clay with covering soils of the Burlingham 2 Association (Mackney *et al.* 1983).

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

The historical and archaeological background to the residential development at Osgodby Lane has been summarised previously in the written scheme of works produced for the site (MAP 2000a) and a summary of the results of an earthwork survey carried out by MAP Archaeological Consultancy (MAP 2000b). Previously a pre-planning evaluation including an earthwork survey of part of the site was carried out by On-Site Archaeology (On-Site 1998a & 1998b).

4. Methodology

The centre line of the drainage trench was marked at the boundary by the developers' surveyors and an area 3m either side of this centre line was cleared of the hawthorn hedging and turf that covered it (Pl. 1).

The bank was excavated by hand in order of the sequence of deposits that were encountered. Individual deposits were not planned but excavation in stratigraphic sequence allowed the development sequence to be clearly understood.

A written record of all deposits was made on proforma record sheets. All artefacts encountered were recovered and recorded (Appendix 2). Both sections of the bank revealed by the excavation were recorded at a scale of 1:10 and a post excavation plan of the trench was drawn at a scale of 1:20 (Appendix 3). A photographic record of major development sequences and features within the bank was made using colour and monochrome print (Appendix 4).

5. Results

The bank stood on a ridge of natural clay 1.8m wide north to south that sloped slightly from approximately 69.96m AOD on the northern edge to 69.84m AOD on the southern edge. The ridge was formed by two breaks of slope on the northern and southern sides whose origin is discussed later (Fig. 3; Pl. 2 & 3).

A deposit of sandy clay (004) varying between 0.1 and 0.15m thick lay above the natural clay toward the western side of the excavated area. The deposit was distinguishable from a more

substantial overlying deposit of similar material (005) by a slight increase in compaction and plasticity. The former material could not be discerned in the west facing section of the bank (Fig. 4; Pl. 2 & 3).

Fourteen pottery sherds and two fragments of ceramic building material were recovered from the interface between 004 and 005. In addition a lead bale seal was also found in this context. Most of the finds came from the western half of the excavation where 004 was present (Appendix 3).

Deposit 005 formed the core of the bank over which several later deposits had accumulated. Along the southern edge the material overlay a distinct break of slope in the natural clay, visible along the length of the excavation but reducing to a very shallow slope near to and within the recorded west facing section (009). The slope was perhaps shaped by an early phase of ploughing against the bank. It is possible that the slope as recorded was exaggerated during the excavation by reducing sharply a subtle gradiation from context 005 to clean natural material. The sandy silty clay deposit 007 was the remnant of the cultivated soil of the field immediately to the north within which there were well preserved ridge and furrow earthworks (On-Site Archaeology 1998a; MAP 2000b).

A later deposit of sandy, slightly silty clay (003) formed the upper part of the extant field boundary. This deposit clearly sealed the relict cultivated soil 007 on the northern side although the interface is not as distinct in the east facing boundary where the section was through a more degraded section of bank (Pl. 4).

On the eastern side of the bank, deposits 010 and 011 were evidence of the irregular episodes of deposition that appear to have raised the bank to its present level in recent times. Deposit 011 was a clay mixed with humic material much disturbed by root penetration from the hawthorn bushes of the hedge that grew along the top of the ridge. Deposit 010 was a sandy clay dump built up behind the hawthorn on the crown of the bank.

A revetment of roughly coursed, large rounded cobbles (002) had been built up against context 003 (Pl. 5).

A base course of cobble approximately 2.5m long at the eastern end of the bank had been carefully laid with their faces to the south (Pl. 6).

The revetment was overlaid with a dark, humic agricultural soil (006) from the modern cultivation of the field to the south. The entire bank and part of the deposit of modern agricultural soil were sealed by an irregular growth of turf and decomposing humic material (001) intermixed with rotten fence rails and and polythene fertiliser bags.

6. Conclusions

In the discussion of the earthwork survey carried out by MAP it was suggested that the irregular sinuous shape of the boundary reflected its origin in the unenclosed medieval cultivation system. The core of the bank represented by contexts 004 and 005 is likely to have been material surviving from the earlier system, the finds sealed within the deposits reflecting the period over which field manuring took place prior to the enclosure of the field. The planting of a stock proof hawthorn hedge to enclose the field fossilised the linear form of the bank and protected it from further encroachment and erosion by the plough.

At its functional optimum the bank would have been lower and more carefully managed with the hedges trimmed by hand and the low cobble revetment limiting the form of the bank and maximising the usable cultivation area. The subsequent development of the bank into its present height and shape seems to have been through accumulation of material against this fixed barrier forming an east west focus for the collection of field debris.

The bank was raised gradually by the deposition of wind blown or dumped material collecting around the hedge. In more recent times humic material from decaying undergrowth has increased the top soil layer capping the bank. When cultivation ceased on the field to the north, sloping up to the village of Osgodby, the grass that grew over the ridge and furrow further stabilised and increased the integrity of the bank on the north side. Where cultivation continued on the lower field to the south, the cobble revetment demonstrates that attempts were made to manage and limit the growth of the bank. In recent times less labour intensive cultivation and management of the fields has led to the accumulation of humic material and

rubbish against the southern face of the bank. The northern edge of the lower field is used as a trackway for vehicular access and is no longer ploughed as close to the edge as it was in the past allowing more material to build up on this side.

The impression of a process of gradual accumulation of material over a core representing a ridge or a headland is re-enforced by the amount of recognisably modern material that has collected in the upper surface of the bank and continues to decay and be absorbed into the upper bank.

8. Bibliography

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