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**Land Adjacent to Chapel Street
Thirsk
North Yorkshire
SE 4310 8200**

Archaeological Watching Brief

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MAP October 2002

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Archaeological Watching Brief

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Archaeological Watching Brief

1. Introduction

A Watching Brief was carried out in April 2002 on the excavation of foundations for the construction of three apartments on land adjacent to Chapel Steet, Thirsk, North Yorkshire (Figs. 1 & 2: SE 4310 8200). The observations were undertaken in accordance with a standard written scheme of investigation for limited archaeological recording issued to the developer Mr. Steve Knowlson by the North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Unit.

All work was funded by S. K. Contracting, Yorkshire Ltd.

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2. Archaeological work on the adjacent site

In May 2002 an evaluation excavation and Watching Brief took place at the Three Tuns Yard adjacent to the site on the north side (MAP 2002 : Fig. 3). The results of this excavation provided further evidence for interpreting the limited results of the Watching Brief in Chapel Street. In Trench 1 a waterlogged silty clay deposit was overlaid by a cobbled working surface of Thirteenth to Fourteenth century date. Above this surface there was evidence of a further phase of structural cut features and a sequence of dumps and spreads of leveling material that made the ground up to the level of the car park from where the evaluation commenced. Trench 2 was excavated to a maximum depth of 28.88m A.O.D. by mechanical excavator, the deposits removed were of an entirely different character to Trench 1, consisting of layers of fine loamy garden soil

occasionally interspersed with thin spreads of pebbles or cobbles which seemed to be irregular surfaces laid over the soils. A single pit was recorded at the base of the trench, cut into the earliest loam deposit which contained two sherds of medieval pottery. A later linear ditch cut the upper levels of loam and was probably of Post-medieval or modern date. The uppermost deposit was 0.65m thick, and was a garden soil.

3. Methods

The groundworks observed consisted of the excavation of the 0.45m wide footings around the perimeter of the property from existing ground levels, approximately 30.94m A.O.D., to a depth of 0.9m (30.04m A.O.D.). The excavations were carried out using a mechanical excavator alternately using a toothed and non-toothed bucket as ground conditions required.

4. Results

The site occupies a terrace revetted by a brick wall at the western limit of gardens belonging to a new housing development to the east. The garden wall forms the eastern limit of the construction. There were two distinct builds to the wall, a lower structure consisting of narrow bricks, overlaid by two courses of concrete blocks and an upper brick wall contemporary with the recent housing development. This structure has important implications for the deposits observed in the Watching Brief as the ground level in the gardens was below that of the surviving deposits on the site.

No construction cut was visible for the wall and the most likely explanation was that the site had been reduced on the eastern side, perhaps in the Nineteenth century, and the wall constructed to retain the deposits at the higher level on the development site. The wall is built along a property boundary and extended through the adjacent Three Tuns Yard to the north and beyond into the market square.

Much of the material removed in the excavation of the foundations consisted of brick walls and footings for the garage buildings that formerly occupied the site. Earlier deposits survived at the bases of the construction trenches. There were no distinct

features within the surviving deposits but there was a distinction in the composition of material between the eastern and western sides of the site. The earliest deposit occurred in the western north-south footings and consisted of homogenous waterlogged gritty sand that appeared to be a natural deposit. In the east-west footings and in the easternmost north-south footing deposits consisted of dark brown silty sand with occasional patches of pebble and sparse cobbles. These larger inclusions appeared to represent truncated layers of metalling or capping within a mixed build up of loamy garden soils. In the north facing section of the southern, east-west footing approximately 0.2m of an interface or cut line could be seen between the sand deposit and the loamy soil. This line was reflected in the gradual transition between the two deposits in the base of the trench.

5. Conclusions

Despite the proximity of the site to the likely course of the Town Ditch enclosing the medieval core of Thirsk, it is unlikely that the deposits observed at this site related to it. Evaluation Trench 2 in Three Tuns Yard (Fig. 3) excavated immediately to the north of the site proved that there was a build up of similar loamy material in bands alternating with occasional layers of pebbles and sparsely distributed cobbles in this area. It is certain that this represents a continuation of the deposits observed in the Watching Brief in Chapel Lane. At the limit of excavation in the Three Tuns Yard excavation a single cut feature was seen suggesting that this was an occupation level later sealed by rapid dumping of soil over the area. The highest level of the fill of this feature was at 28.95m A.O.D., 1.09m below the level reached in the foundation trenches at Chapel Lane. The presence of natural material at the western side of the Chapel Lane site suggests that originally there had been a natural fall westwards toward the Cod Beck that was raised and leveled by the deposition of loamy soils interspersed with occasional spreads of pebbles and cobble.

6. Bibliography

- MAP 2002 Three Tuns Yard, Chapel Street, Thirsk:
Archaeological Evaluation and Watching Brief

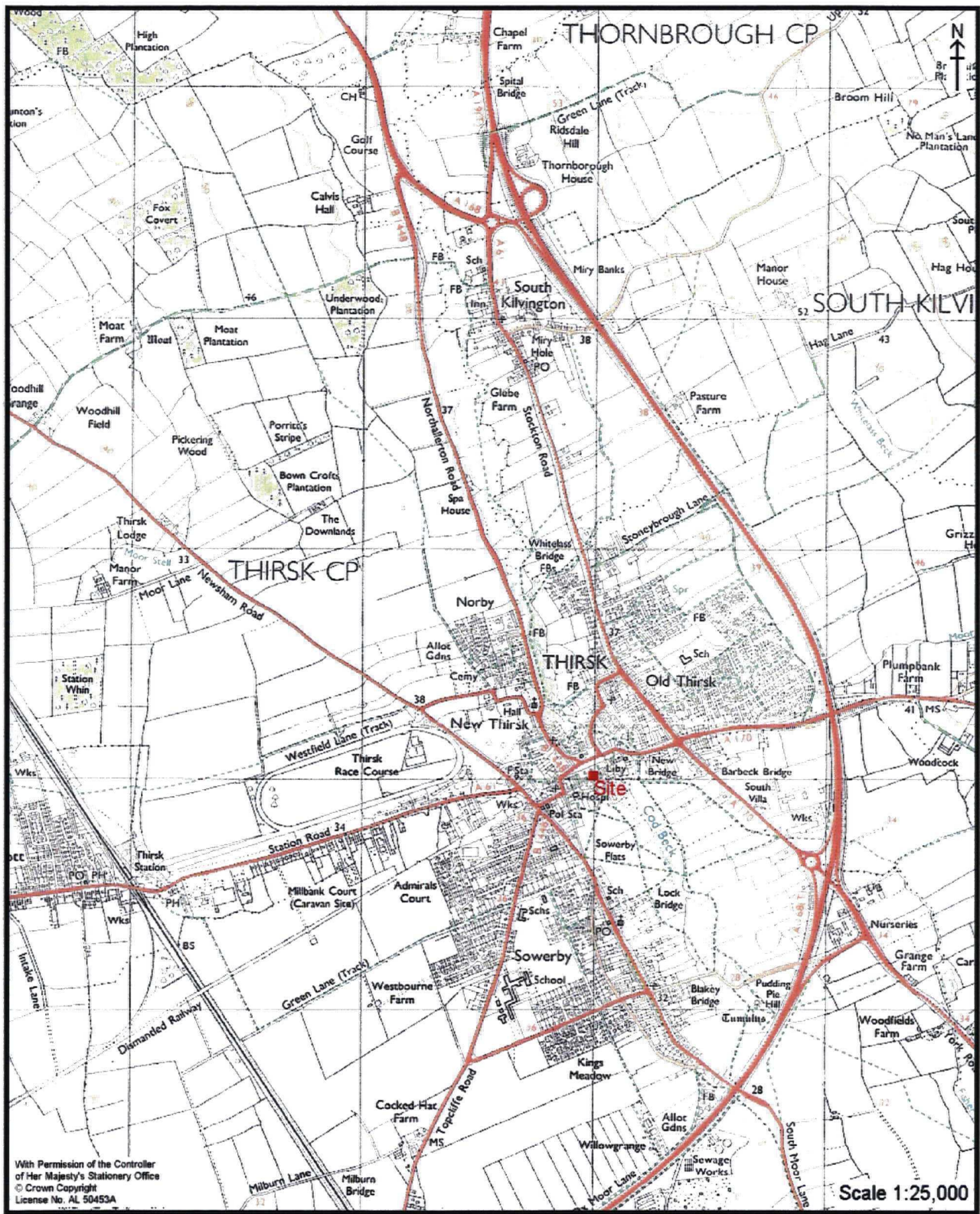


Figure 1. Site Location

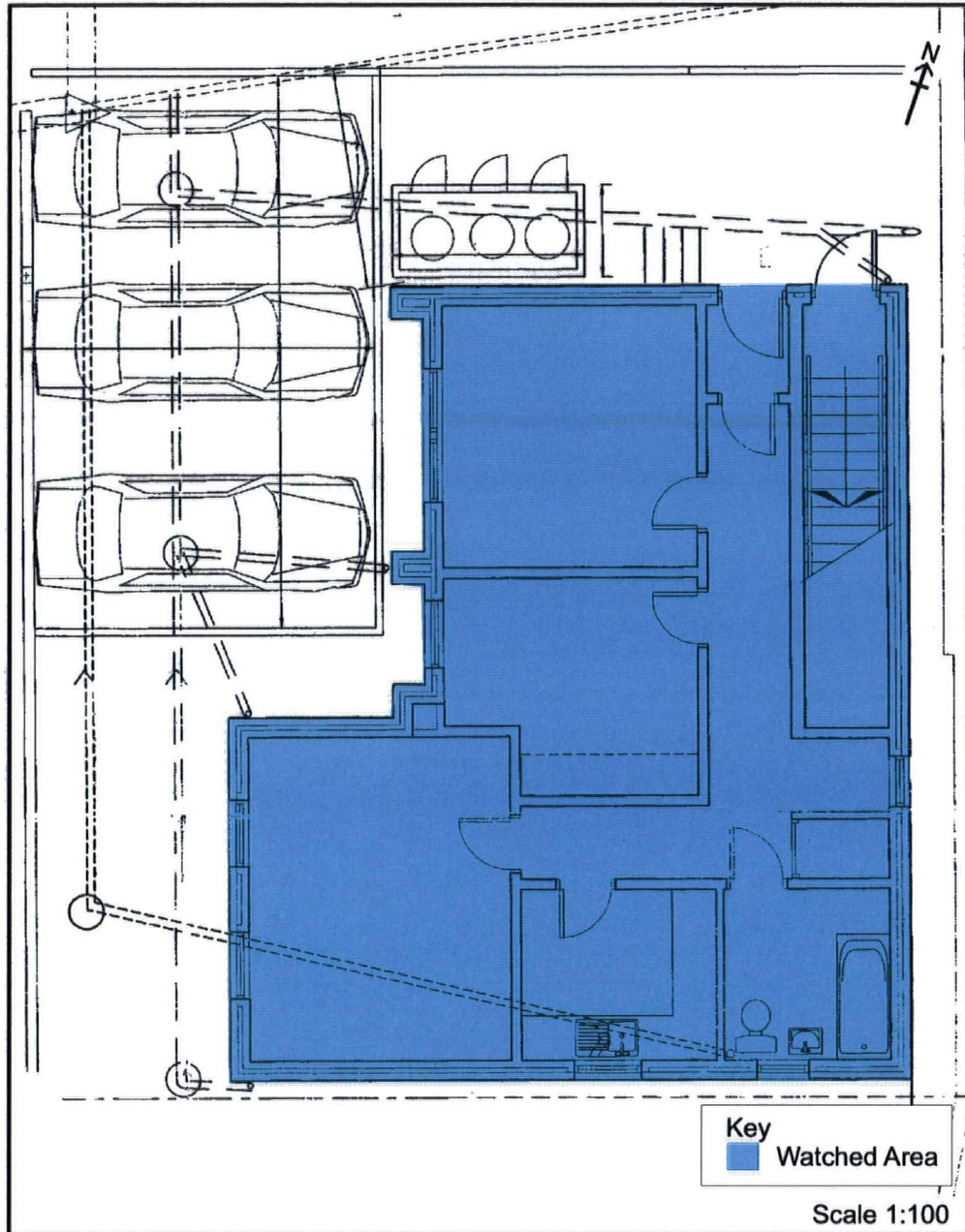


Figure 2. Proposed Development

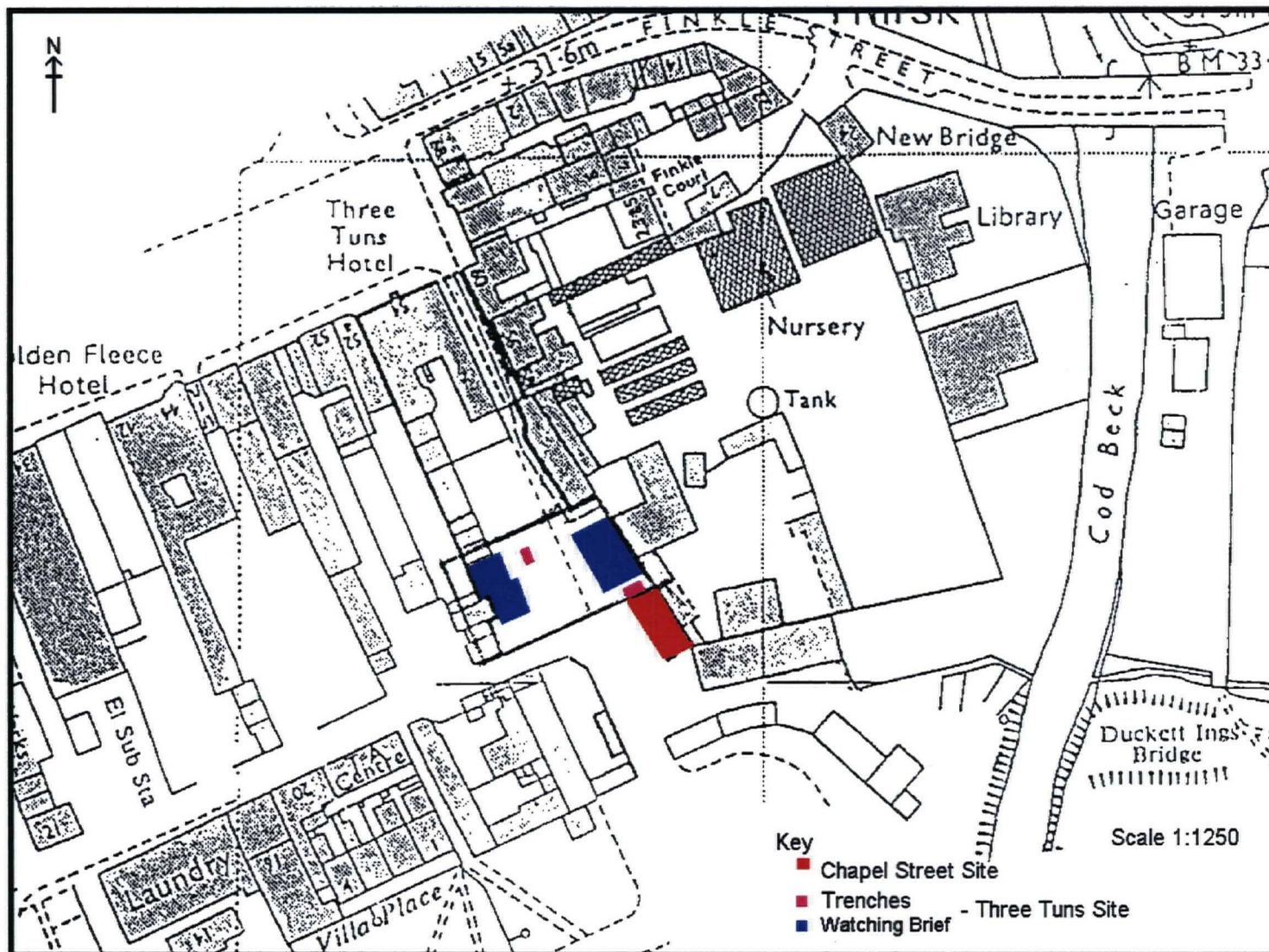


Figure 3. Location of Chapel Street and Three Tuns Sites.