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**CALVERTS CARPETS  
WESTGATE  
THIRSK  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**DESKTOP ASSESSMENT**

**MAP 02-01-02  
January 2002**

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## NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The site stands on the south-eastern corner of the outer rampart bank of Thirsk Castle and immediately to the south of the 1995 archaeological excavations in Castle Garth which located the early Saxon cemetery. The archaeological potential for the site is therefore high. Consideration of the cartographic, archaeological and historical evidence illustrates the development of the site and reinforces the likelihood that important archaeological deposits/features may still survive on the site.

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report has been undertaken, by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd on behalf of Calvert Carpets Ltd at the request of Downs Illingsworth, to evaluate the nature of deposits which may be affected by a potential redevelopment at their current operation on land to the rear of Westgate, Thirsk, North Yorkshire (SE 4281 8194 : Figs. 1 - 3 : Pls. 1 - 4).
- 1.2 All maps within this report have been produced from Ordnance Survey with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Crown Copyright. License No. AL 50453A.

**2. SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 2.1 The site is located in the market town of Thirsk, on land behind 27 Westgate (NGR SE 4281 8194 : Fig. 1).
- 2.2 The site is bounded by All Saints Roman Catholic Church to the east, Westgate to the south, 25 Westgate to the west and Castle Garth to the north, The site slopes down from the north to Westgate in the south and is presently used as hard standing/car park.
- 2.3 The site is situated adjacent to Castle Garth (Thirsk Castle - SAM 20454) and would have been within the castle's bailey. The present ground level of the site, immediately adjacent to Castle Garth is approximately 0.3m - 0.4m lower on the Calvert side (Pls. 3 & 4).

**3. AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT**

- 3.1 The site lays within the historic centre of the market town of Thirsk. Sites of known historical and archaeological significance occur within the town's environs. Hambleton District Councils policy in conjunction with the advise issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment, contained in Planning Policy Guideline 16 (PPG 16) 'Archaeology and Planning', require that an evaluation and appropriate mitigation strategy will normally be required before an application is taken to Planning Committee.

- 3.2 By assessing the known historical and archaeological records for the site and its immediate environs a projection of the nature and depth at which archaeological deposits may be encountered can be produced. The Assessment and deposit model can then be used to determine the necessity for any further archaeological evaluation and a mitigation strategy.

#### **4. METHODS**

- 4.1 The aims of the Assessment are to be achieved by : firstly the evaluation of historical information derived from cartographic and pictorial documents, trade directories, registers and the RCHM surveys and books. Secondly by consideration of previous Archaeological Excavations, Evaluations and Watching Briefs. Both primary and secondary sources will be consulted.

#### **5 GEOLOGY**

- 5.1 The underlying geology on the site is deep well drained sandy and coarse loams of the Newport 1 Soil Association over Glaciofluvial drift.

#### **6. TOPOGRAPHICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL STUDY**

##### **6.1 Introduction**

- 6.1.1 A general survey of the morphology of the urban areas immediately adjacent to Thirsk (Old Thirsk, Norby and Sowerby) and the main road and river network illustrates a multi-phased development of settlements. This development is strongly influenced by the local topography.
- 6.1.2 The outlying areas were considered using cartographic evidence, a digital elevation model and a thematic map of the area was produced of a smaller sample area of 600m square focused on the main medieval core of Thirsk.
- 6.1.3 The developed urban area surrounding Thirsk is situated at the point of convergence of two roads running broadly north-west to south-east with the Cod Beck aligned roughly parallel between them (Fig. 4 A & B). A further three important medieval roads, (C - E) intersect at the south-western corner of the town. Old Thirsk, (Fig. 4: F) Sowerby (G) and Norby (H) are linear villages extending from these main roads. The crucial relationship between these networks is the bridging point between New and Old Thirsk. which allows the irregular course of the Cod Beck to be crossed and permit access to the transport networks. Thirsk itself is situated on a meander in the line of the Cod Beck.
- 6.1.4 The short span of the river at this point was exploited by a mill driven by water from an artificial bypass channel. North of the burgages on the north side of the market square a rectangular wharf extended from the mill bypass channel.

6.1.5 A series of rectangular tanks are shown on the 1796 map (Fig. 00). This is depicted on later maps as one continuous body of water called the Marriages (Marishes). The interpretation of these features is problematic they could have been used as fish tanks or have other industrial usage. What it does show is the utilisation of this low lying area of Thirsk.

## 6.2 Methods

6.2.1 A smaller study area was chosen taking in Thirsk and the crucial bridging point of the Cod Beck.

6.2.2 Elevation data provided by spot heights from a series of Ordnance Survey maps of the area combined with levels derived from previous archaeological interventions were used to generate a digital terrain model of the study area using MapMaker Pro. A model generated using data of this kind has limitations, particularly with close detail but a contoured map was created (Fig. 2) with a finer contour resolution than is available on commercial maps. The map does demonstrate the larger scale changes in elevation in the sample area and allows the informed study of the morphology of the urban areas.

6.2.3 Figure 4 shows the central line of major roads and does not connect them at points of intersection as this would prejudice the interpretation of the relationships between these routes.

## 6.3 The Study

6.3.1 Cod Beck flows through a wide channel of low lying land which is under 30m AOD. in the immediate vicinity of Thirsk. This channel is roughly the same width in this area except at the point where the bend in the river is matched by a spur of land forming the bridging point at which Thirsk has developed. Land to the north-east and south-west of the bridging point gradually rises. At a point of c. 35m the land on both sides accommodates the two parallel main roads. This arrangement is probably not coincidental but corresponds with the maximum flood levels of Cod Beck. The outlying urban developments of Old Thirsk, Sowerby and Norby occupy a similar elevation above the flood plain of the Cod Beck.

6.3.2 A moated site is located on an area of higher land within the flood plain to the east of the church of St Mary again illustrating early opportunist settlement of natural raised areas.

6.3.3 At an intersection of two important roads and a navigable river the opportunities for trade and exchange and the necessity to pass through the town contributed to the growth of Thirsk.

6.3.4 Two major medieval market places existed in Old Thirsk at St James Green and Imgramgate. A large open market square occupies the central portion of the spur of land on which Thirsk now stands. Cartographic evidence shows three blocks of urban development within Thirsk (Fig. 3) :

A : The Market Place, two opposing blocks of burgages and a small amount of infill on the eastern edge of the town around Finkle Street

B : A small block of long narrow properties placed oddly within the eastern side of the market square suggesting a later development

C : A block of burgages either side of the north-west south-east main road A.

It is likely that these developed at different times and in response to different circumstances.

6.3.5 **Block A** : The regular symmetrical arrangement of the eastern part of Block A suggests that Block B is an insertion into what was originally a rectangular area enclosing the market square. The rectangular form of this block is paralleled by the two rows of burgages surrounding St James Green in Old Thirsk and Imgramgate at the southern end of Old Thirsk. In its earliest form there appears to have been three rectangular market places straddling the crossing of the Beck. This rectangular urban form suggests a pre-Conquest origin.

6.3.6 **Block B** : Using the data from archaeological work carried out at 33 Market Place the elevation model suggests that the backyards of Block B occupy a distinct raised mound. The extent earthworks south-west of this area, which have not been adequately surveyed to make a conclusive comment, have been taken to be the remains of Thirsk Castle. But the new evidence that the raised area was artificial and combined with the elevation model suggests that this area was probably the site of the castle motte. The building occupying the frontage at 33 Market Place overlay a ditch infilled in the late medieval period. This proves that land block B is post-medieval in date and encroached on to the infilled castle ditch and terracing in to the castle mound. The castle had been placed deliberately to dominate the market square and all commercial life of Thirsk. The abandonment of such a prime site would provide an excellent opportunity for new development in a commanding location.

6.3.7 **Block C** : Situated to the north of Castle Garth land block C appears to have been a sub-urban development extending from the north-western side of the castle along the road to St Mary's church. This development post-dates the Castle and is a classic strip suburb seen in many fully developed medieval towns that have the full complement of castle, market place and church.

## 7 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

### 7.1 Historical Background

7.1.1 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).



- 7.1.2 By 1086, Domesday records that Thirsk (Tresc/Tresche) belonged to the King 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
- 7.1.3 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.
- 7.1.4 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.
- 7.1.5 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.
- 7.1.6 Excavation of a drainage trench in the Castle Garth in the mid Nineteenth century located a 'brooch or toga pin' (Grainge 1856).
- 7.1.7 Drainage work in 1856 in Kirkgate cut through the rampart ditch illustrating that water logged deposits of excellent preservation (ibid).
- 7.1.8 The 1796 map of Thirsk an "Enlarged Sketch of Thirsk" (NYCRO : Fig. 5) shows the site to be an area of garden or waste land numbered as plot 222a (Castle Garth) with buildings fronting on to Westgate (221).
- 7.1.9 In 1803 a "Plan of Thirsk" (NYCRO : Fig. 6) shows the same plot, still numbered as 221 and 222a. There seems to have been little or no change in the land distribution during the period between 1796 and 1803. The buildings shown on the 1796 map are clearer on the 1803 map and show no regimented distribution with associated burgage plots. This may be because the land immediately to the rear is the Castle Garth and in the hands of the Bell Estate.
- 7.1.10 The 1843 Tithe map (NYCRO : Fig. 7) shows the plot once again shows an arrangement of buildings and land to that of 1796 and 1803. Castle Garth plot is numbered 62.
- 7.1.11 The 1856 First Edition Ordnance survey map (Fig. 8) shows the plot as an area of open land (the Garth) with properties fronting Westgate.
- 7.1.12 In the early Twentieth century major changes are made in the arrangement of the land to the rear of 27 Westgate. The 1912 Ordnance survey map (Fig. 9) shows that square block of land immediately behind Westgate has been taken from the Garth and three outbuildings constructed. The land to the west shows the line of the rampart bank as an earthwork The 1914 1:10560 Ordnance Survey Map (Fig. 10) illustrates a similar arrangement.

- 7.1.13 By the early 1970s (Fig. 11) these structures have been removed and a single square building placed in the north-eastern corner of the site. The northern boundary now extends through the rampart bank to the west.
- 7.1.14 During the early 1990's the square building was replaced a 'L' building and a further warehouse was built in the mid 1990's in the north-west corner of the site, over the rampart bank.

## 7.2 Archaeological Background

- 7.2.1 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).
- 7.2.2 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).
- 7.2.3 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.
- 7.2.4 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.
- 7.2.5 A Watching Brief at Calverts Carpets in 1991 provided a section through the rampart bank and associated ditch.
- 7.2.6 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.
- 7.2.7 A Watching Brief outside of the Garth in 1994 on adjacent land at Calvert's Carpets provided information on the rampart bank (Clarke 1995).
- 7.2.8 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.
- 7.2.9 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.

- 7.2.10 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.
- 7.2.11 A Watching Brief at 18 Kirkgate by NAA in 1998 located only Post-medieval pottery and no features.
- 7.2.12 A Watching Brief in 1999 by C Briden at St Marys Church located human remains and a structure dating to the Thirteenth - Fifteenth century.
- 7.2.13 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.
- 7.2.14 An evaluation at Station Road, Thirsk by Lancaster Archaeological Unit in 2000 recorded undated features and a complete lack of finds.
- 7.2.15 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.
- 7.2.16 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.
- 7.2.17 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.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The site stands on the south-eastern corner of the outer rampart bank of Thirsk Castle and immediately to the south of the 1995 archaeological excavations in Castle Garth which located the early Saxon cemetery. The archaeological potential for the site is therefore high.
- 8.2 Cartographic evidence illustrates the relatively static nature of the site until earlier this century when development occurred to the rear of the Westgate properties. The

difference in the levels of land in Calverts Yard and Castle Garth, approximately 0.3m - 0.4m suggests that ground reduction has taken place on the site in the recent past, potentially removing and or disturbing archaeological deposits/features of medieval and earlier date.

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