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**CEMETERY ROAD,
THIRSK,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**A REPORT ON TWO
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEFS**

**1998 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 61**

CEMETERY ROAD, THIRSK
NORTH YORKSHIRE

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A Report on Two Archaeological Watching Briefs

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In advance of the proposed redevelopment of Vicarage Field, Cemetery Road Thirsk, (NGR SE 4258 8240), an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Jane Lilley for York Archaeological Trust on behalf of Seeger Homes Ltd (Figure 1). The watching brief was undertaken on the 4th September 1996. Vicarage Field fronts onto Cemetery Road on both the southern and western sides, the eastern side borders the Vicarage and the northern side borders the garden of a modern house. The site is located close to both Thirsk parish church and Thirsk Hall, and it was thought that earlier buildings might have existed fronting onto Cemetery Road.

On 10th November 1998, a further watching brief was carried out in advance of a housing development immediately to the east of the above site, at the west end of the Vicarage property (NGR SE 4261 8240), also on behalf of Seeger Homes Ltd.

1.2 Brief and methodology (Figure 2)

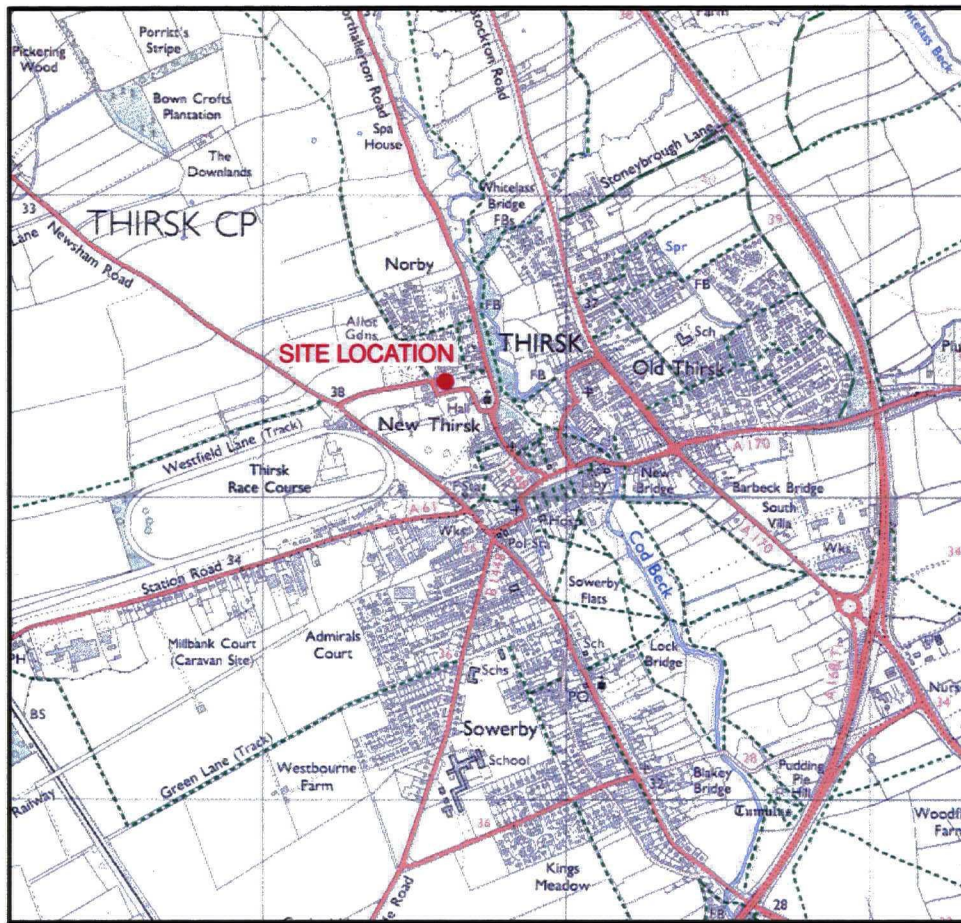
During the 1996 watching brief the excavation of the foundations of one of the three houses to be constructed on the site was observed. The foundation trenches were 0.68m wide and 0.55m deep and were located in the north western corner of Vicarage Field. In addition, the excavation of a 3.00m deep pit at the northern edge of Vicarage Field, which was excavated to assess ground drainage, was observed.

The 1998 watching brief involved monitoring the excavation of the foundation trenches for a single house. All but the south trench was available for examination. The trenches were approximately 0.60m wide by 0.8m deep.

2.0 RESULTS OF THE WATCHING BRIEF

The topsoil had been stripped from the site prior to both watching briefs; examination of the resultant spoil heaps showed this was a mid brown silt loam under turf, 0.30m thick on average (see Figure 2, 1000). It contained occasional fragments of modern glass and pottery, which were not retained. Along the western edge of the 1998 site a hedge of substantial shrubs and small trees, which formed the boundary with the 1996 site, was seen to have developed within the topsoil; here, the topsoil was some 0.6m thick, so that it formed a low bank on the line of the hedge.

The topsoil overlay a deposit of mid brown sandy silt loam with occasional gravel inclusions, which did not contain any dating evidence. In the 1996 watching brief trenches this deposit was between 0.35m and 0.42m thick. On the 1998 site it was some 0.65m thick overall (see Figure 2, 1001-2). The bottom 0.15m was slightly darker, greyer and contained a higher proportion of gravel (Figure 2, 1002). Taken as a whole, these deposits



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Scale 1:25 000

Figure 1 Site location.

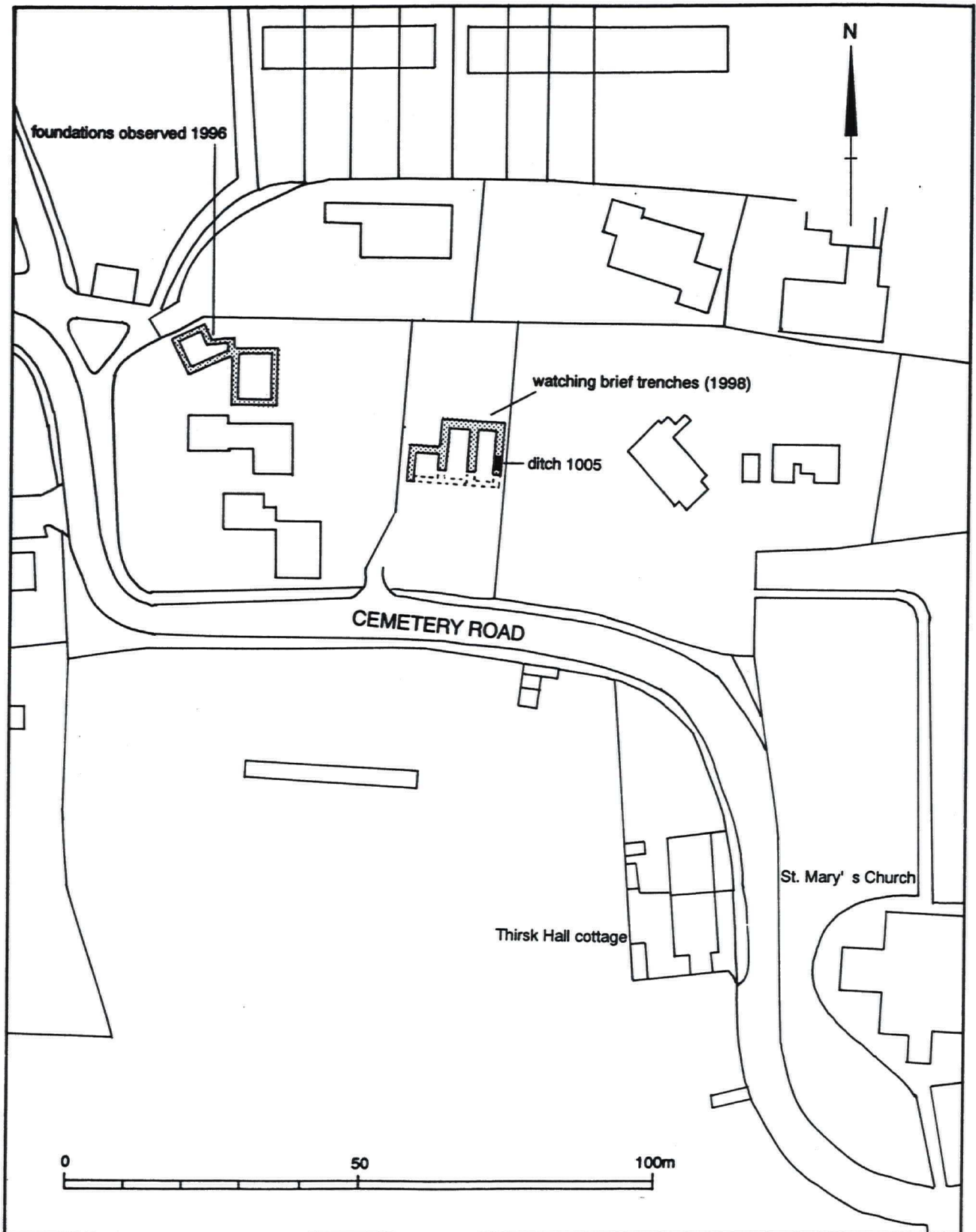


Figure 2, Location of watching brief trenches

are interpreted as a plough soil, the lower part of the deposit on the 1998 site having been formed by the disturbance of the underlying sub-soil (see below).

Only one possible archaeological feature was identified, during the 1998 work (Figure 2). A cut, aligned east-west was observed in the east wall trench (1005) (Figure 3). Its centre was 7.5m from the north end of the trench. It was not seen in the other trenches, indicating that it either turned south or terminated a little to the west. This feature was cut into the natural sub-soil, and was sealed by the plough soil. The cut was up to 0.65m deep and at least 1.5m wide, although the exact width was uncertain due to its irregular profile. The north edge was straight and steep throughout with a rounded upper break of slope. The south edge sloped gently for up to a metre before falling steeply to the U shaped base of the feature. As a result, the ground surface to the north of the ditch would have been much higher than that to the south. The form of this cut suggests that it was a ditch, perhaps intended to prevent access by animals from south to north. The bottom 0.10m of the fill was pea gravel (1004), and represented primary in-fill due to collapse of the ditch edges. This was overlain by mid grey/brown silty sand up to 0.20m thick (1003) which appears to have formed through natural silting. The overlying plough soil had subsided into the cut, and formed the upper part of its fill. No dating evidence was recovered from the ditch fills.

The plough soil sealed natural sub-soil. On the 1996 site, this took the form of pale brown-buff sandy silt with frequent pebbles which extended to depths in excess of 3.00m below present ground level. In the area of the 1998 watching brief, the sub-soil generally consisted of gravel, with interleaved layers of mid grey sand and sandy gravel (see Figure 2, 1006).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The absence of dating evidence from the watching brief means that the evidence for past activity on the site is difficult to interpret. However, the depth of plough soil suggests that it formed over a considerable period of time. The most likely explanation is that the plough soil was the product of prolonged agricultural activity relating to medieval settlement in Thirsk. The hedged boundary between the 1996 and 1998 sites post-dates the plough soil; as it originally formed the boundary between the Vicarage and Vicarage Field, this hedge is tentatively interpreted as part of a post-medieval reorganisation of the landscape that presumably followed the establishment of Cemetery Road. Ditch 1005 would appear to have been part of a phase of land-use that preceded the formation of the plough soil, but is of uncertain date.

3.2 The site evidently had an agricultural function throughout. There was no evidence for any form of earlier occupation or buildings in the vicinity.

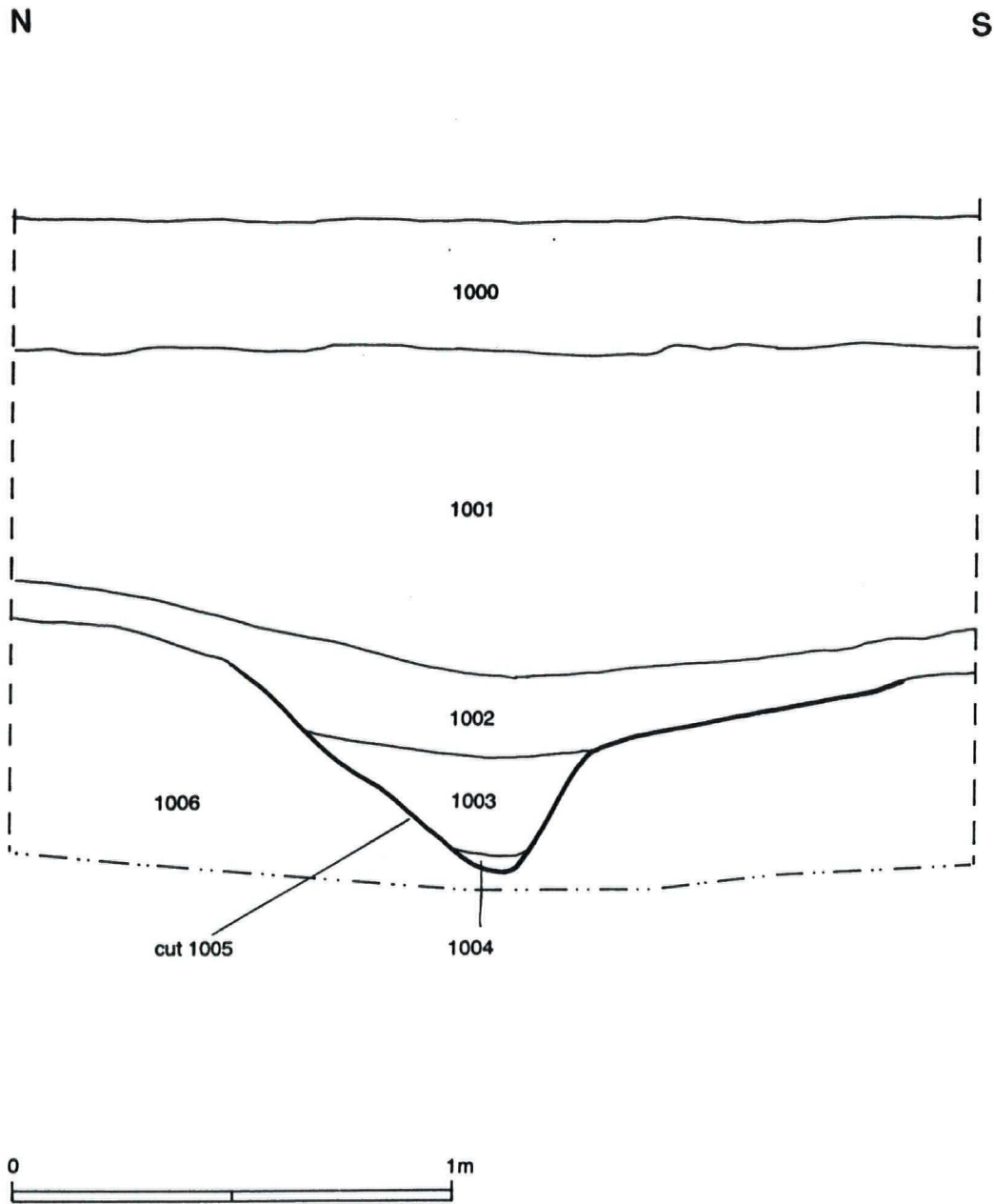


Figure 3, West facing section, ditch 1005

4.0 LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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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.

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