Crambeck Village
North Yorkshire

Archaeological Recording Brief
SAM NY325

MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd

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Introduction

In September 1997 planning permission and Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC 700/97) was granted for the erection of two new houses near Crambeck village in Welburn parish, North Yorkshire (SE 7372 6714 : Fig. 1). Site clearance and groundworks for foundations and services for the new houses were the subject of an archaeological recording brief undertaken by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd in late 1997 and early-mid 1998. The results of the recording brief form the body of this report.

The house plots occupy the site of a market garden formerly part of the Castle Howard Reformatory/Regional Community Home. The site is within an area designated as a scheduled ancient monument due to its proximity to the known location of Roman pottery kilns and associated features (SAM NY325).

The soils in the area conform to the Denchworth soil association, slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils. The underlying geology is Jurassic and Cretaceous clay (Mackney 1983).

All work was funded by Mr and Mrs Richard Pollard and Mr Allan Elliott.

Archaeological Background

The important mid to late-Roman Crambeck pottery industry has been intensively studied. Archaeological investigations were carried out at the site of an old quarry at Jamie's Craggs to the south-west of the site of the new houses in 1927 (Fig. 2.1.). This work revealed an extensive settlement and kiln field (Wilson 1989). In the nineteenth century the discovery of a pair of skeletons was reported, apparently buried within a kiln structure immediately north-west of the site (Fig. 2.2.). A find spot recording the location of the discovery is marked on the six inch Ordnance Survey map of 1912, on the road at the northern edge of Plot B. Roman coins associated with the burials were also reported (Fig. 2.2.). The discovery of Roman pottery in a field south-west of the plots is also recorded by a find spot on the same map (Fig. 2.3. : Wilson 1989). In 1937 further work was undertaken by Corder and further kiln sites were recorded (Fig. 2.4.). In 1981 a programme of geophysical survey and fieldwalking was undertaken to the north of Jamies Craggs (Fig. 2.5). A ditched field system and six kilns were located.

Although the site is on the periphery of the known Roman pottery kilns and settlement it appears to be out of range of any intensive occupation. The excavation of a series of trial pits by D. Powlesland of the Landscape Research Trust produced no evidence of significant archaeological features within the boundary of the two building plots (Powlesland 1997). Only a single sherd of undateable pottery was recovered. No other significant archaeological features have been observed in watching briefs conducted in the area of the Castle Howard reformatory.

As the preliminary trial pits in 1997 showed limited potential for archaeological deposits on the site, it was recommended that a watching brief condition should be placed on the groundworks associated with the construction of the two properties (Powlesland 1997).

Method

Construction of the properties commenced in 1997 and ground works were completed in 1998. The groundworks observed consisted of the initial reduction of ground levels and the excavation of foundation trenches in both Plots A and B. The platform and footings for House A were excavated into ground previously used for cultivation within the market garden. A concrete shed base and associated services had intruded into the platform area at the north-western edge but the rest of the area appeared to be undisturbed by modern features below the level of the topsoil. The construction trenches for the house within Plot B were contained entirely within the footprint of a previous dwelling built this century.

A written record was kept using proforma recording sheets. Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, with sections drawn at a scale of 1:10 (Appendix 4). Photographs were taken on colour print film (Appendix 5).

Plot A Results

The initial clearance of a turf layer in plot A revealed some shallow linear intrusions into a silty sand topsoil (Pl. 1). These features contained plastic and metal debris which identified them as horticultural beds of recent date. The excavated ground works for plot A were then conducted in two separate phases. The plot occupies a gentle slope north-east toward the river valley and the platform for the new building was excavated by a mechanical excavator lowering the south-western edge to the same level as the parallel north-eastern edge at approximately 35m A.O.D. The second phase cut foundation trenches along the perimeter and internal structural wall lines for the new building prior to the construction of a concrete building platform.

The deposits removed by machine in the first phase of excavation consisted of an homogenous deposit of reddish brown, slightly silty sand with occasional lenses of clayey sand (context 001). A number of pottery sherds were recovered from the deposit during excavation but none were associated with any features and were probably residual, having been deposited during cultivation of the ground in the past.

Feature 1

At the south-eastern corner of the platform a concentration of loose fragments of stone (context 002: Fig. 3) was hand excavated. This was cleaned and a section excavated through it eventually revealing a north-east-south-west aligned feature (Fig. 4: section 1-2 : Pl. 2; section 3-4 : Pl. 3).

The smaller fragments of stone initially encountered were the upper layers of a dense deposit consisting of variously sized stone fragments from approximately 0.05m in diameter to large flat pieces of stone around 0.5m by 0.3m in size. In places small vertical stones stood in bands that formed a regular striated pattern on the surface (Fig. 3: A), and a wavelike curl existed in section where upper layers had peeled away from the main body of the material (Fig. 4: 1-2/3-4:B). The smaller fragments of stone appeared to have been formed by the decomposition of larger pieces along bedding planes, possibly through natural action such as frost cracking.

The upper surface of the south-eastern end of the deposit consisted of larger horizontal slabs of stone laid over each other (Fig. 3:C). Although generally a light brownish grey colour, the upper surfaces of the larger flat slabs were stained dark grey. The slabs showed no sign of the fragmentation observed in the smaller pieces although they were weathered (Pl. 4).

Initially it was thought that the feature might have been the remains of a structure, the larger slabs perhaps walling stones or large stone roof tiles. Near the north-eastern end there was a strip of small vertical stones at right angles to the direction of the other stone work (Fig. 3:D). Beyond this abrupt change in orientation the feature was composed of a solid mass of rock that showed distinct structural planes and fracture lines (Fig. 3). Several holes of varying depth intruded into the rock at this point (Fig. 3: E,1-5). Although it appeared that the holes might form a regular linear pattern not enough of the material was exposed to conclusively distinguish them from solution holes formed by natural processes. It is possible that they were caused by driving a fence line through the bedrock at some point although this would not necessarily be contemporary with any structure represented by the stone. A further series of similar holes were observed in the south-western foundation trench. These were filled with a compact grey silty clay and it appeared more likely that these were a natural phenomenon of the bedrock (Pl. 6).

A machine cut trench (003) excavated approximately three metres south-west of the edge of the plot showed no continuation of the stone deposit (002) and reached a level surface of natural bedrock 0.6m below the surface (Pl. 7).

At a later stage, the excavation of the foundation trenches around the perimeter of the platform and across the lines of internal walls revealed further evidence about the nature of the deposits of stone. Alterations to the original structural plan meant that the excavated areas of the feature remained outside the boundaries of the construction trenches and they were back filled with sandy soil.

A construction trench excavated along the south-eastern edge of the perimeter of the house plot revealed more of the possible structure (context 002). A surface of large flat slabs of stone averaging

0.4m by 0.3m were associated with the feature, continuing the lowest layer of stone seen in section (Pl. 8). These were photographed before they were removed by the excavation of the foundation trench. This surface extended out across the intersection of trenches at the south eastern corner. A depression observed in the west facing section through the stone feature (context 002) appeared to be a later intrusion into which some of the stones had tipped. This intrusion, recorded as a cut feature (context 006) was filled by (context 005 : Fig. 4: section 3-4). The material filling the feature appears to be similar to context 001 but with the inclusion of some lighter yellow sand.

A soft clean sand (context 004) was observed beneath the slab surface (context 002) and it was also visible in the section under the feature. The sand lay between the feature and the bedrock, again suggesting that it was part of an archaeological deposit associated with Feature 1 (context 002).

Along the south-western edge of the plot the foundation trenches were excavated to the level of bedrock. Fresh bedrock tended to fracture along natural planes and appeared to have a more gritty, crystalline structure than the weathered slabs observed in Feature 1 (context 002). In other places the foundation trenches were cut through the brown sandy material that sealed the feature down to the level of natural firm sandy clays or dense gritty sand. In several places there were bands of stone showing the distinctive swirling pattern, lying in fairly regular parallel bands running roughly east-west. On the north-western half of the house plot, two bands were observed that appeared to run broadly north to south. This would suggest that the abrupt change in orientation observed in the excavated feature might occur elsewhere.

Plot B Results

The excavations on Plot B revealed only the footings for the demolished modern dwelling. Beneath these was a layer of reddish brown sand (context 001) which covered the natural limestone bedrock to a depth of between 0.6 and 0.8m. These deposits were consistent with the deposits observed within the trial pits (Powlesland 1997).

Service Trench Results

The installation of drainage services to the two properties required the excavation of a trench to expose previously laid water, Telecom and foul and surface water pipes (Fig. 5). This phase of works were completed in July 1998.

The trench extended north-west from the boundary of Plot A to the bank at the edge of the road north of Plot B. Approximately 2m wide along its whole length, the base of the trench sloped from a level of 37.93m AOD at their origin on Plot A, to 37.7m AOD where it reached the boundary of Plot B.

The trench was excavated by cutting down both sides of an existing service trench into clean natural sand. No features wee observed over the whole length of the excavation and occasional patches of bedrock were revealed at the base of the trench.

Conclusion

Although the stone formations (Feature 1, context 002) observed had elements in common with the underlying natural, they appeared to have been affected by some sort of secondary geological, meteorological or archaeological action.

The principal area excavated and recorded appeared in part to be a weathered outcrop of natural bedrock, however the unusual arrangement and orientation of some of the loose material suggests that they originated in an archaeological process. Two elements of the deposits need to be considered. Firstly the possibility that within the area a building or platform of some sort was represented by the surface of stones. Secondly that the origin of the unusual distribution of small stone fragments over the whole site in distinctive pitching and swirling patterns.

Few finds were recovered from the material removed and none were associated with the features. This would suggest that even if there were the remains of a structure it was not intensively occupied. If a surface was represented not enough was revealed to conclude that it was a building or a functional structure such as a kiln. Obviously it would be of great significance if the structure could be related to the pottery kilns or any other Romano-British settlement features recorded in the area. The construction method of a building excavated by Corder in 1927 was of rough limestone flags set on to natural sand (Corder in Wilson 1989 p.6). Various photographs taken of the building and kilns excavated show building materials not dissimilar to the stacks of flat slabs recorded on plot A. The principal differences, apart from an obvious form to the deposits, is the lack of clay bonding observed by Corder in the kilns and the absence of finds or evidence of firing. Perhaps the material is the remains of an extensively robbed feature or an incomplete structure. Corder suggests that kilns were constructed rapidly as the potters followed the supply of timber fuel along the river valley and it is possible that other structures were equally rapidly erected on more marginal areas.

The deposits of more fragmented limestone were more widely distributed than the larger slabs and less distinct from the fractured upper layers of the bed rock. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that structures related to the establishment of an agricultural landscape such as ditches and banks or other boundary demarcations would be composed of material obtained nearby and would be very similar to natural deposits. It is possible that the material is derived from upcast material from a now deeply buried feature such as a ditch or bank. A ditch section recorded at Jamie's Craggs by H. G. Ramm shows an upper fill composed of 'limestone rubble' (Wilson 1989 p. 37). The tipping of weathered limestone fragments into a deep cut feature might account for the unusual pitching effect observed at various points on the site.

The undulating bands of fragmented sandstone were reminiscent of the regular pattern of ridge and furrow cultivation. The small fragments of stone may have been accumulated and concentrated by the regular ploughing of strips. The abrupt changes in direction in the material could mark the boundaries between the strips. In more recent times the site had been worked as a horticultural training centre and mature beach hedging and magnificent ornamental tree specimens suggest that extensive remodelling of the landscape must have occurred on the site. It may be that the deeper soil

covering of plot A masks the evidence of a past landscape that would require the exposure of a larger area to reveal conclusively.

In summary the observations on the plots at Crambeck produced some intriguing new evidence on the deposits that lie beneath the present surface. Unless further study in the surrounding area produces a more comprehensive context in which to place this evidence, the questions it raises will remain unresolved. The knowledge of the extent of the Romano-British settlement at Crambeck is gradually increasing and the 19th century reports of finds and structures in the immediate proximity of the site suggest that one day the observations reported here will be integrated into an understanding of the wider historical landscape.

Bibliography

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Wilson, P.R. ed. (1989) Crambeck Roman Pottery Industry.

APPENDIX 1

Context Listing

001 Reddish brown sand subsoil
002 Feature composed of fragments of pitched stone and slabs
003 Test pit, excavated to test extent of 002
004 Deposit, clean yellow sand below 002
005 Fill of cut 006, composed of mixed material similar to 001 and 004
006 Cut or depression, filled by 005
007 Surface composed of flat slabs of weathered limestone below/part of 002

APPENDIX 2

Finds Catalogue

Unstratified Total pottery- 4 sherds, 0.150 kg
2 sherds Crambeck ware Mortaria rim
1 sherd Flagon form Crambeck grey ware
1 sherd base flanged bowl Crambeck grey ware

APPENDIX 3

Archive Listing

1. Plan of stone feature in plot A, 1:20
2. East facing section through stone feature, 1:10
3. West facing section through stone feature, 1:10
4. Sketch plan of bands of stone observed in plot A foundation trenches, 1:100

APPENDIX 4

Photographic Listing

1. Garden features after top soiling, facing north west.
2. Garden features after top soiling, facing north west.
3. Trial Pit (Context 003), facing east.
4. Trial Pit (Context 003), facing east.
5. Feature 002 showing location of section, facing east.
6. Feature 002 showing location of section, facing north east.
7. Feature 002, facing south west.
8. Detail of 002 showing post/solution holes, facing north.
9. Feature 002, facing south west.
10. Feature 002 showing 'east' facing section, facing south west.
11. Feature 002 showing 'west' facing section, facing north east.
12. Feature 002 showing 'east' facing section, facing south west.
13. Feature 002 showing 'west' facing section, facing north east.
14. Cut/fill contexts 005/006, facing north west.
15. Cut/fill contexts 005/006, facing south east.

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16. Feature 002 showing foundation trench and stone surface, facing north east.
17. Intersection of foundation trenches at south west corner showing stone surface, facing north east.
18. Intersection of foundation trenches at south west corner showing stone surface, facing north west.
19. South western construction trench showing bands of limestone fragments.
20. Solution/post holes in south western construction trench, facing south east.
21. Solution/post holes in south western construction trench, facing north west.
22. Internal wall foundation showing pitched limestone fragments, facing south east.
23. Detail of north western facing section of internal wall foundation trench, facing south east.
24. North west facing section of internal wall foundation trench, facing south east.