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Spital Farm
Staxton
North Yorkshire
NGR TA 0230 7960

Archaeological Evaluation

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MAP

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Archaeological Evaluation

Contents	Page
Figure List	2
Plates List	2
Non Technical Summary	3
1. Introduction	3
2. Site Description	3
3. Geology	3
4. Historical and Archaeological Background	4
5. Methodology	4
6. Results	5
7. Conclusions	7
8. References	8
Appendices	
1. Written Scheme of Investigation	16
2. Context Listing	23
3. Drawing Archive Listing	23
4. Photographic Catalogue	23

Figure List

Page

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|----|
| 1. | Site Location 1:25000 | 9 |
| 2. | Trench Location | 10 |
| 3. | Plan of Excavated Features | 11 |
| 4. | Sections | 12 |

Plate List

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|----|
| 1. | General Shot of Trench 1 | 13 |
| 2. | General Shot of Trench 2 | 13 |
| 3. | General Shot of Trench 3 | 14 |
| 4. | General Shot of Trench 4 | 14 |
| 5. | Sondage showing Natural Gravel | 15 |

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Archaeological Evaluation

Non Technical Summary

During September 2003 four trenches were excavated to assess the presence or absence of archaeological activity at Spital Farm, Staxton. No archaeological features were exposed in Trenches 1, 2 and 4. Two undated pits were located in Trench 4. Elsewhere on the 'Sherburn Sands' (the natural deposits in this geographical zone) wind blown deposits have been identified as fine brownish yellow sand. No such material existed at Spital Farm as attested by the presence of gravel within the soils.

1. Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Mr A Hunneybell, in advance of the proposed change of use of farm buildings to a Rural Craft centre at Spital Farm, Staxton, North Yorkshire (TA 0230 7960 : Fig. 1). The site lies in the parish of Willerby, on the edge of the village of Staxton and bounded by the A64 to the south and east of the site.

This document sets out the details and results of Archaeological Evaluation Trenches as specified in the agreed Written Scheme of Works (Appendix 1).

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This report has been funded by Mr A Hunneybell.

2. Site Description

The site was under rough grassland at the time of the Evaluation Trenches. The ground surface was relatively flat, with a slight slope from the north to the south.

3. Geology

The soils on the site are of the Newport 1 Association, deep well drained sandy and coarse loamy soils, over a solid geology of glaciofluvial drift (Mackney 1983).

4. Historical and Archaeological Background

The proposed development site lies within an area of potential archaeological significance with high archaeological potential for the survival of remains dating from the prehistoric to medieval periods. Of particular significance to the application site are the remains of the medieval hospital of St Mary, an area to the west of the present farm designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, SAM NY558. The hospital belonged to the Priory of Bridlington, and although the date of its foundation is unknown, it was in existence in the 13th Century.

Work was undertaken by T.C.M Brewster in the 1950's when he located structures associated with the hospital. Recent works to the south of the farm for the creation of a pond disturbed a number of human burials, believed to have been part of the cemetery associated with the hospital. Earlier burials from the Anglian and prehistoric periods are also known from the area.

There was potential, therefore, for the redevelopment of the present farm and farmyard to encounter remains associated with medieval and potentially earlier settlement.

5. Methodology

A total of four trenches were excavated to the north of the site (Fig. 2).

Topsoil and overburden were removed by a JCB excavator using a toothless bucket to the top of archaeological or natural deposits under direct archaeological supervision.

The areas were then hand cleaned to record in plan archaeological features. All ditches and gullies were hand excavated in segments with a minimum length of 1m; isolated features such as pits were excavated in half section.

A drawn, written and photographic record was made of all features and deposits. Plans and sections were drawn at scales of 1:20 and 1:10 respectively. The written record was compiled on standard forms using a continuous context recording system and all finds recovered were recorded by context.

6. Results

A total of 4 trenches were excavated as part of the archaeological evaluation of the site (Fig. 2).

Trench 1 (Plate 1)

Trench 1 measured 8m x 1.6m and was located c.5m north of the proposed craft centre.

The topsoil consisted of brown, friable silty sand containing natural chalk and flint fragments approximately 0.4m deep. No archaeological features were exposed in this trench. The natural was a yellow orange sand with natural chalk and flint inclusions. A small machine excavated slip trench was placed at the centre of this trench against the baulk to a depth of c.1 metre, to check that there were no archaeological deposits "hidden" by wind blown sand. It was clear that no such deposits were in the area, the gravel extending to a depth of at least 1m (Pl. 5). The natural deposits here were gravelly in nature, quite unlike the fine sand indicative of a windblown layer.

Trench 2 (Plate 2)

Trench 2 measured 5m x 2m and was located where proposed drainage pipes are to be placed.

The topsoil consisted of brown, friable silty sand containing natural chalk and flint fragments approximately 0.5m deep. No archaeological features were exposed in this trench. The natural was a yellow orange sand with natural chalk and flint inclusions.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3 & Plate 3)

Trench 3 measured 5m x 2m and was located c.20m north east of the current farm buildings.

The topsoil consisted of brown, friable silty sand containing natural chalk and flint fragments approximately 0.65m deep. Below this were two pits (Contexts 3002 & 3004) located in the centre of the trench (Figs. 3 & 4 & Plate 3). The latest of these pits (Cut 3004) went beyond the evaluation trench. The exposed area measured 1.10m in length, 0.40m in width and 0.60m in depth. This pit was steeply sided and filled by Context 3003, a dark brown, friable silty sand containing no finds.

Pit 3002 was sub square shaped with steep sides and cut by 3004. The pit was filled by Context 3001, a dark brown, friable silty sand, containing no finds. The feature measured 0.90m in length, 0.80m in width and 0.15m in depth.

Although these features contained no finds for dating it seems likely that they date from either the medieval or post medieval period for depositing waste from the farm.

The natural was a yellow orange sand with natural chalk and flint inclusions.

Trench 4 (Plate 4)

Trench 4 measured 5m x 2m and was located where proposed drainage pipes are to be placed.

The topsoil consisted of brown, friable silty sand containing natural chalk and flint fragments approximately 0.7m deep. No archaeological features were

exposed in this trench. The natural was a yellow orange sand with natural chalk and flint inclusions. A small machine excavated slip trench was placed at the centre of this trench against the bulk to a depth of c.1 metre. This was done to check that there were no archaeological deposits "hidden" by wind blown sand. It was clear that no such deposits existed in this area, with the natural existing as a gravelly deposit, clearly unlike a fine sand Aeolian layer..

7. **Conclusions**

The absence of any significant archaeological features during this excavation was initially surprising. However, it is clear that the area of land to the north of the present farm buildings has been disturbed over the centuries of its existence, therefore, removing much of the archaeology which is present in the other areas of the farm and surrounding fields. There is also no evidence of any "hidden" archaeological features below any blown sand material from the two slip trenches excavated in Trench 1 and Trench 2. Elsewhere on the Sherburn Sands, the natural deposits in this geographical zone, wind blown deposits have been identified as fine brownish yellow sand. No such material existed at Spital Farm, where the natural had a high gravel content quite unlike the distinct fine sand that would be indicative of windblown origin.

Elsewhere at Spital Farm, Brewster's excavation north of the farmhouse (i.e. within 50m of the present evaluation area), archaeological deposits were recorded 0.30m from the modern ground surface, with a sandy gravel natural material occurring at a depth of 0.60m (Photographs in possession of East Riding Archaeological Research Trust – St. Mary's Hospitium, Staxton, 1950: neg. nos. 1-3). These depths are comparable with those of the present evaluation.

Brewster's excavations at Newham's Pit (c. 150m south-east of Spital Farm) showed a coverage of sandy loam between 0.60 and 0.90m above the archaeological horizon (Brewster 1957). The sandy loam contained 13th century pottery, which suggests it was created during medieval agriculture, perhaps having an element of aeolian origin (Brewster 1957).

8. **References**

Brewster TCM 1957 Excavations at Newham's Pit, Staxton, 1947-48. *YAJ*
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Mackney D, 1983, Soil Survey of England and Wales.