

ALDBOROUGH GATE, BOROUGHBRIDGE.**NORTH YORKSHIRE****ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-TOP STUDY**

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1998 Field Report no. 2

Aldborough Gate, Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire.

1. Introduction

In January 1998 an archaeological desk-top study was undertaken by York Archaeological Trust on land at Aldborough Gate, Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire. The study was undertaken to provide background information for the Harrogate District Local Plan Inquiry. The historical and archaeological significance of the study area was assessed using a variety of sources including aerial photographic evidence, the sites and monuments record, and published archaeological and historical reports.

2. Methodology

The first source of evidence to be assessed was the archive of aerial photographs held at the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), in the Heritage Unit based at North Yorkshire County Council's offices in Northallerton. Both the oblique and the vertical archives were checked for cropmarks, surface features and earthworks in the area. The SMR record cards and the SMR computer database were also checked for any references to the land in question, or for sites in the vicinity, and previous historical and archaeological publications were also consulted.

Site research notes are currently stored with the York Archaeological Trust.

3. Geology and Topography

The study area lies on Bunter Sandstone solid geology (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Sheet 62 1967) on the western side of the vale of York. The drift geology of the land studied consists of glacial beds of boulder clay, mixed with pockets of sand and gravel. The land, which lies to the south of the market town of Boroughbridge and to the west of Aldborough, appears to be relatively flat between the 20 and 30m contour lines, apart from in the eastern and south-western corners where it rises to just over 30m. At present it is utilised for agricultural purposes, mainly arable, with a small proportion used for horse pasture.

4. Archaeological and Historical Background

Little has been published about the detail of archaeological or historical background of the study area which lies between 0.75km and 1km south of Boroughbridge and within 0.5km of the centre of Aldborough, formerly the Roman town or civitas known as *Isurium Brigantum*. The south-eastern wall surrounding this particular Roman settlement (Scheduled Ancient Monument (S.A.M.) NY436) is only c. 0.07km to the east of the eastern corner of the study area.

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4.1 The prehistoric period (to the 1st century AD)

Evidence for human activity within the area is known from the Mesolithic period onwards and it is probable that the Vale of York was initially cultivated and settled in the Neolithic period (Radley, 1974). Evidence for prehistoric activity close to the study area is present at the nationally important 'Devil's Arrows', 0.75km to the north-west, where three giant monoliths form a stone row c. 170m long. These are believed to date from the Late Neolithic period to the Early Bronze Age, though no datable material has yet been recovered from excavations adjacent to the stones. These stones stand in the Vale of York at the southern edge of a concentration of prehistoric barrows and henges extending several miles to the north (Burl, 1991), and it is therefore possible that settlement evidence related to this period of monument construction may be found within the study area.

Recent archaeological landscape studies in advance of the improvements to the A1 motorway indicate that the landscape to the west of the road supported complexes of small farmsteads and accompanying field systems that may have been occupied into the Early Iron age period (Cale, 1995). However, a recent programme of fieldwalking revealed concentrations of flint scatters to the west and north of Boroughbridge with little activity to the south (Cale, 1995), although a bronze leaf shaped spear head of possible Bronze Age date was recovered from a field within the study area (NGR SE 4000 6600). Field walking by the Aldborough Research Committee within the study area has also not revealed any concentrations of prehistoric artefacts (Dobinson, pers comm).

4.2 The Roman Period (1st to the 5th centuries AD)

Recent excavations in advance of the A1 Road improvement schemes revealed an early Roman Fort at Rocliffe to the north-west of the study area (Cale, 1995). This was square shaped, with double ditches and a box rampart together with evidence of an extramural settlement. This fort, 8 acres in size, was constructed in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD, in order to guard an east/west road crossing of the River Ure but was probably only occupied for a short period of time being superseded by the fort at Aldborough, *Isurium Brigantum*. This was situated on the line of the principal Roman road to the north, Dere Street, which forded the River Ure to the east of Boroughbridge at Milby.

Isurium, a fort of c. 55 acres, later developed into the civilian administrative centre, or civitas capital, for the territory of the Brigantes which covered much of the north of England. Its initial defences comprised an earth rampart and ditch constructed late in the 2nd century but these were strengthened by the late 3rd-century with the addition of a masonry wall, with towers and corner bastions, and a second, outer, ditch. These defences were complimented by four gates, north, south, east and west, constructed roughly in the centre of each side of the rampart. Previous excavation and survey work has demonstrated excellent preservation of archaeological deposits within the town. The status of the few houses known from Aldborough, which include a number of mosaic floors, provides the impression of a well appointed town with a fair number of comfortable houses, but by the end of the 4th century the town seems to have started to decline (Wacher, 1995).

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Extramural settlement in the Roman period is also known at Aldborough, a ribbon development flanking Dere Street as it by-passed *Isurium* on its way northwards having been found to the north-east of the town. However, to the south-east of the town it is likely that Aldborough Gate and Chapel Hill preserve the line of a former Roman Road leading from the south gate of the fort (Dobinson, pers comm). Close to the study area an amphitheatre may have existed at Studforth Hill (NGR SE 4063 6599 - SMR 10080.10650), a temple site (NGR SE 4077 6605 - SMR 10080.10780) may have been discovered close to this by the Aldborough Research Committee during field walking, and cremation and inhumation burials were discovered in 1808 from the area just to the south of the south gate near the cross-roads of Chapel Hill and York Road (NGR SE 4048 6603 - SMR 10080.10500).

Within the study area the following data was found on the SMR.

10080.10063 (NGR SE 4027 6623) Kilns? West of the south-west corner of the town Ecroyd Smith records flagstones set in brick bearing traces of fire, an open ended rectangular enclosure in brick containing ashes and samian sherds and a large amphora with its neck removed. Smith interpreted it as a burial ground but it is thought more likely to be the site of Roman kilns.

10080.10026 (NGR SE 4020 6610) Penannular brooch fragment found by metal detector in 1989 (possibly associated with field walking conducted by the Aldborough Research Committee)

Site Record Number

6381 (NGR SE 4000 6600) A bronze leaf shaped spear head, possibly of Bronze Age date was recovered from this fields at the north side of the study area, the exact position was not recorded.

8009 (NGR SE 3970 6580) Cropmark recorded by aerial photography, see below.

8025 (NGR SE 39956577) This field contains ridge and furrow earthworks, still upstanding.

The Aldborough Research Committee has also field walked extensively within the study area, covering field numbers OS.0001 and OS.3000. Findings suggested no concentrations of Roman material. In field number OS.0001 virtually no Roman pottery was recovered apart from in a narrow area immediately flanking the modern road (Aldborough Gate), and a similar strip at the extreme western extremity of the field. These possibly indicate tracks, or roads of Roman date. In field number OS.3000 the recovery of finds was marginally more productive. This may indicate that within these fields little arable agriculture was carried out during the Roman period, possibly indicating an area of permanent pasture or woodland (Dobinson, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, pers comm). However, this may also indicate an area where little agriculture was carried out in the Roman period such as a burial ground. It has already been suggested that

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burial may have taken place outside the south gate, and are characteristically found outside walled Roman towns, flanking the main roads into them.

4.3 The Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th to 11th centuries AD)

Little is known of settlement within the area dateable to these periods. It is possible that Aldborough continued to be occupied throughout this period, but no evidence has been found as yet to support this. It is more likely that settlement would have shifted towards the river possibly close to the Milby ford or to the site of the present town of Boroughbridge, although Cale (1995) suggests that the latter is unlikely.

4.4 The Medieval Period (11th to the 16th centuries AD)

The development area is likely to have remained farmland through-out the period being part of the lands of the Lords of the Manor at Aldborough. Aldborough, a manor mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, was transferred to the Honour of Knaresborough in the early 12th century and included the settlement at Boroughbridge (apparently established in the early 12th century, and containing three market areas and a centrally located church). The latter was ideally placed at the cross-roads of land and water routes and soon outstripped her neighbour. By the late medieval period it was booming economically from the transport of linen from Knaresborough and metals from mining activity in the Dales.

4.5 The Post-Medieval and Modern Periods (17th to the 20th centuries)

In the post-medieval and modern periods the study area continued its agricultural role only seeing changes with the enclosure of the strip field systems in the 18th century and land drainage and the removal of the hedgerows in the modern period.

4.6 An archaeological evaluation by M.A.P. Archaeological Consultancy in 1991 to the west of the study area discovered little of archaeological importance. All cropmarks revealed in the SMR collection of aerial photographs or suggested by a geophysical survey were either proved to be the remnants of medieval ridge and furrow or of geological origin. One post-medieval ditch, orientated north-south across the site, was located. The only archaeologically interesting material recovered was a barbed and tanged arrowhead from a post-medieval ploughscar within evaluation trench 3. This indicates that some Neolithic/Bronze Age activity occurred within the vicinity. All archaeological features were deemed to have been removed by post-medieval and modern ploughing (Johnson, 1991).

5. Aerial Photographic Evidence

The SMR and York Archaeological Trust's own archive of oblique and vertical aerial photographs were consulted to evaluate the evidence for cropmarks, surface features and earthworks within or adjacent to the study area. Both the Meridian Airmaps, Ltd., North and West Riding vertical aerial photographic surveys showed traces of ploughed out ridge and furrow agriculture, evidenced in both crop and soil-marks. This suggests that the area was cultivated in the medieval period.

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Two oblique aerial photographs relate specifically to the study area. The first is situated in field number OS.0001 (NGR SE 402662, PVA 84 4/7/22-28), and shows three sides of a double ditched sub-rectangular enclosure, joined to a possible trackway. The second in field number OS.7286 (NGR SE 39736584, DNR 1100/19) shows one definite ring ditch and a possible second ring ditch with what may be associated linear boundaries.

The remains present in field number OS.0001 may represent the remnants of a ditch and round barrow(s) of Bronze Age date or prehistoric farmsteads of possible Iron age date. Those in field OS.7286 may suggest a small Roman encampment or farmstead, or an animal enclosure. From the work carried out by M.A.P Archaeological Consultancy in 1991, they may simply be variations in the underlying geology caused by the peri- and post-glacial tills that form the natural ground surface for the area.

6. Preliminary Walkover Survey

A preliminary walkover survey was also carried out during this stage of the evaluation of the study area. In general the majority of the fields have been agriculturally improved in the modern period, many of the original hedge lines from the 18th century enclosure of the strip field system having been removed and ridge and furrow ploughed out. Although no evidence of earthworks or standing buildings of archaeological significance were located during this ground survey, ridge and furrow was located in a small part of the development area, field number OS.8772. All of the land is utilised for arable agriculture apart from this field and field numbers OS. 8770, 8487 and 8959 all just to the east of Greystones which are used for pasturing horses. The western side of the development area (field numbers OS.7286 and 7466) contains root crops such as onions or turnips, the northern side has just been freshly ploughed (fields just south of Boroughbridge High School), and the eastern side is utilised for cereal crops (field numbers OS.3000 and 0001) planted in the autumn.

The only other distinguishing feature within the study area is a large modern pond on the eastern side of field OS.7286.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

It would appear that the study area is likely to contain archaeological deposits of the prehistoric and Roman periods. These may include prehistoric farmsteads or Bronze Age barrow(s), a possible Roman enclosure and the probability of Roman burials on the south and east sides of the area, adjacent to Aldborough Gate. The extreme western fringe of field number OS.0001 may also contain Roman occupation, or burials adjacent to a trackway. Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian deposits are thought to be unlikely within the study area and medieval and post-medieval deposits are thought likely to relate to agricultural activity.

Most of the archaeological deposits and features will either lie directly on top of natural sub-soil or be cut into it, the probability of well stratified deposits surviving within the study area being slight. Field numbers OS.7286, 3000, and 0001 are thought most likely to contain features of archaeological interest with field numbers OS.8772 and 8497 being

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the most likely to have preserved prehistoric activity beneath the medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

8. Archaeological Implications

This archaeological desk-top study has produced evidence to suggest that the study area may contain preserved archaeological features. However, the significance of these features is not likely to be great enough to prove a hindrance to development of the site. It is advised that, as part of a mitigation strategy, archaeological field work should be carried out on the site prior to development. This should include geophysical survey in the first instance, followed by a series of archaeological evaluation trenches to follow up the geophysical survey results and to determine, as far as is reasonably possible, the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of any archaeological deposits and features. This would allow the detailed layout of any development to be planned with regard to significant archaeological remains, if these are found.

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10. List of Contributors

Research and Report

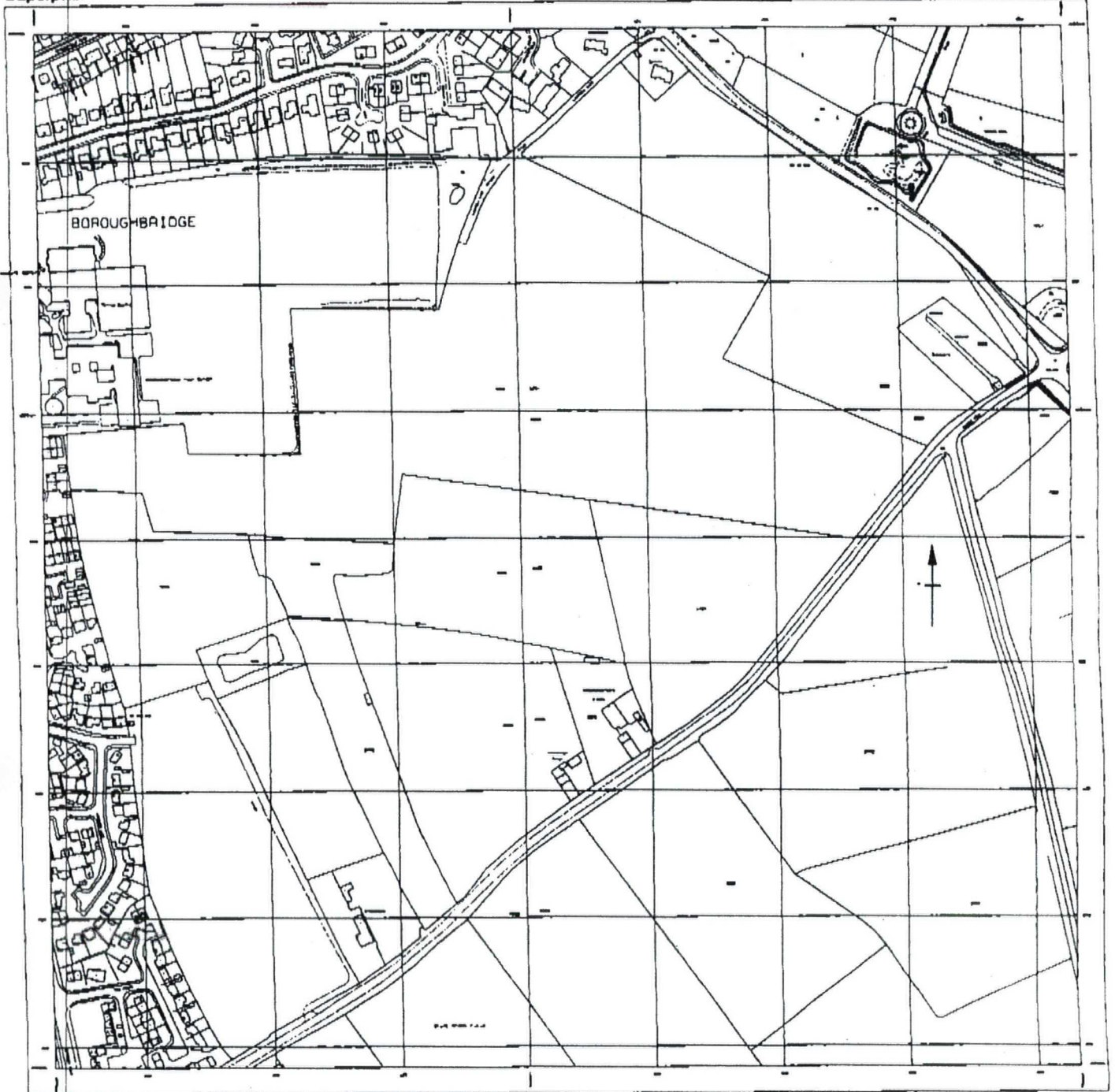
Neil Macnab

Editor

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City of Harrogate
Survey
Superplan

Option 1
Site-centred



1. All dimensions are in metres unless otherwise stated.
 2. The site is shown as it is, and not as it may be.
 3. The site is shown as it is, and not as it may be.
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