

**BIRCHWOOD HOUSE FARM
MOOR LANE
COPMANTHORPE
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

by

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List of Abbreviations

BGL	Below Ground Level
VCHY	Victoria County History of York

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief at Birchwood House, Copmanthorpe was carried out by York Archaeological Trust in September and October 2004 during the excavation of foundation trenches to extend the existing building and the creation of a new access road and driveway. During the watching brief on the access road it was observed that the topsoil and sub-soil was heavily disturbed by root action from birch trees that had been removed. In monitoring the excavation of foundation trenches for the new extension on the eastern side of the house, deposits associated with the construction of the existing building were observed close to the wall of the building, and the natural sub soil was recorded. The foundation trenches for the extension to the northern end of the house exposed the natural sub-soils directly below the topsoil. In the area of the new driveway to the north-east of the house, across a field, the natural sub-soils were observed directly below the top soil. No deposits of archaeological significance were observed in any of the areas monitored during the watching brief.

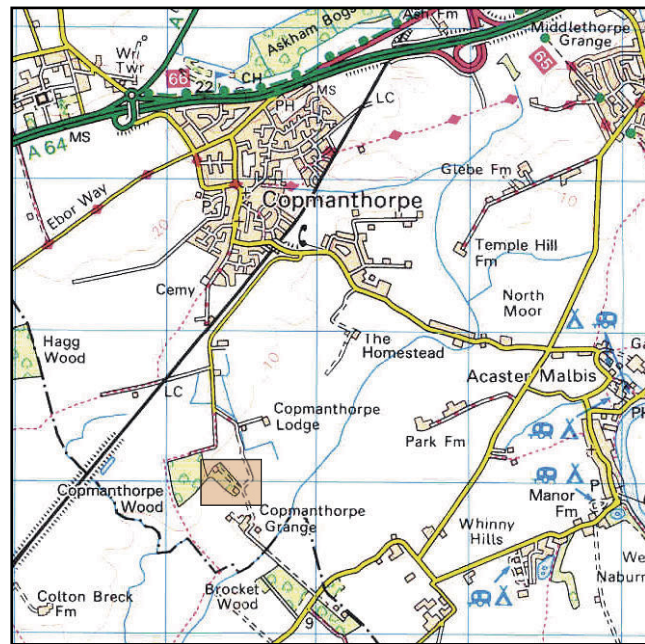


Fig. 1 Site location

1. INTRODUCTION

The City of York Council approved an application to build extensions at Birchwood House Farm, Moor Lane, Copmanthorpe, North Yorkshire, on the proviso that an archaeological watching brief was carried out on all of the ground works.

From September 23rd to October 19th 2004 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) conducted a watching brief on the excavations for the foundation trenches for the house extensions, as well as on the site stripping for the access roads. The purpose was to record any archaeological features present, possibly undisturbed beneath the plough soil, that would be threatened by the ground works. The building work was carried out by H. Watson and sons Ltd, to the design of the architect Ian Atkinson, who was commissioned by the land owner, Roger West. All records pertaining to this site are currently held by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:2004.356.

2. METHOD STATEMENT (Fig 2)

During the watching brief all records were made in a watching brief note book. The watching brief was carried out on the topsoil stripping for the access road parallel to the stable complex, heading into the woodlands to the west of the site, and on the digging of foundation trenches for the house extension. The stripping for the access road was conducted over two days and was dug to 0.3m Below Ground Level in a non-linear course over a distance of 70m which just exposed the top of natural deposits c. 0.25m BGL.

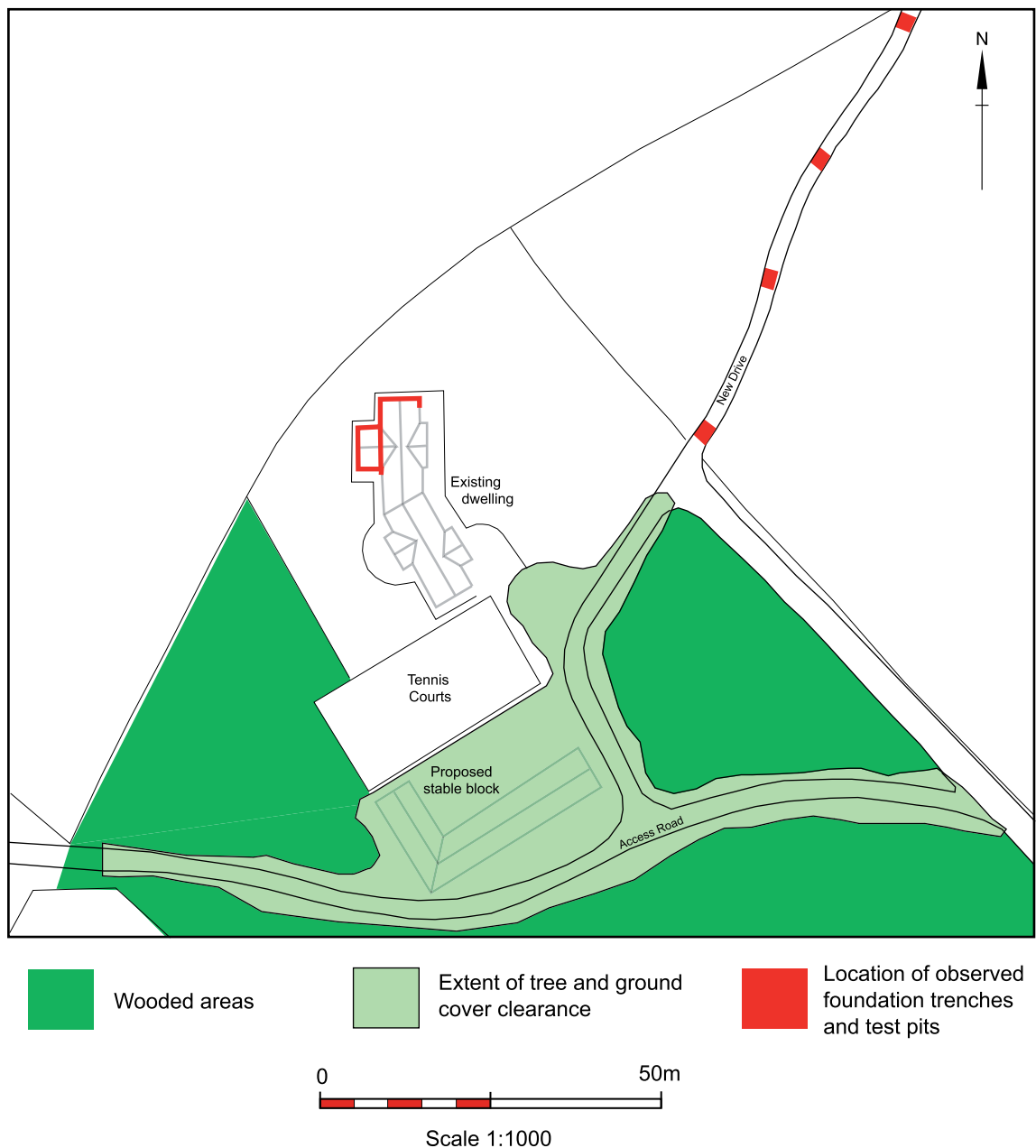


Fig. 2 Showing location of observed works

The new driveway to the house across an open field was not subject to constant monitoring. A series of short sections, each approximately 4m long and 3m wide ~ the width of the new drive ~ was stripped under archaeological supervision to assess whether any archaeological deposits were likely to be exposed. All depths were recorded in relation to the ground surface as it was when the work was carried out and are referred to as Below Ground Level (BGL).

3. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The village of Copmanthorpe lies four miles south-west of York. The drift geology is boulder clay and sand. Birchwood Farm itself is located c.1.5km to the south of the village of Copmanthorpe and is built on level, rich agricultural land that, with the exception of the wooded area of silver birch trees, was farmed agriculturally until quite recently.

4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The watching brief at Copmanthorpe was carried out to assess whether any archaeological deposits survived in the area around Birchwood Farm. This was deemed necessary because a number of chance archaeological discoveries have been made in the area surrounding the village of Copmanthorpe. Background information has been compiled from the SMR (Sites and Monuments Record), the English Heritage Pastscape web page, the Copmanthorpe Village Design Statement and the Victoria County History for the City of York (1961).

There is a total of 15 sites of historical interest recorded on the Pastscape web page relating to Copmanthorpe and 6 sites are listed on the Sites and Monuments Record for the area. A Neolithic handaxe (SMR 5456) has been found in the area, reflecting known prehistoric activity along the glacial moraines around York. The Roman road (SMR 5467) from York to Tadcaster runs across the northern side of the village of Copmanthorpe and is roughly on the line of the road known as Top Lane. There has been limited evidence of settlement activity in the area although a Roman altar stone (SMR 5452), Roman pottery and an area of paving (SMR5457) have been found. Oblique aerial photographs show the cropmarks of part of a possible settlement complex straddling the Colton and Copmanthorpe parish boundary, where it meets Appleton Roebuck. The date of the site is uncertain, but on morphological grounds it probably is Romano-British. The portion in Copmanthorpe appears to be overlain in part by levelled ridge and furrow cultivation.

In the period after the Romans there is limited evidence for activity in the area. The name Copmanthorpe itself is of Viking-Age origins and is thought to mean 'village of the merchants'; it is mentioned in the *Domesday Book* of 1086. In the later medieval period a Knight's Templar preceptory was established on the south-east side of the village. It was founded in AD 1258, the last reference to a prior being in 1292. Traces of enclosures, boundary ditches and possible ponds, possibly associated with the Preceptory, were seen as soil marks on air photographs. Place-names associated with the Templars also survive in this area ~ Temple Lane, Temple Garth, Temple Hill and Temple Field. The historical core of the village also reflects medieval

planning, with a main street and a back lane with evenly spaced burgage plots in between them. The present church building is 12th-century in origin, although it was heavily altered by 19th century 'restoration'. Areas of medieval ridge and furrow field systems have also been identified from aerial photographs.

The village remained predominantly rural with some development taking place in the 19th century. Even the arrival of the railway in 1839 did not have a significant impact on the village. In the 1920s and 1930 isolated ribbon development focussed along Top Lane from its junction with the A64, and it is from this period onwards that the dominance of agricultural activity started to subside and the village became a dormitory for York. In 1969 the village was selected as suitable for development to ease York's overspill problems, and as a result the population of the village has quadrupled since 1961.

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 New Drive (Fig. 2)

Within the exploratory trenches excavated along the new drive the natural sub-soils consisted of firm mid orangey-brown clay (5000). This was overlain by a friable mid-brown sandy silt (5001) that contained fragments of 19th and 20th century pottery. No features were observed cut through the natural subsoil.

5.2 House Extension (Figs 3-5)

On the western side of the house the earliest deposit exposed was a compact orange-brown sand sub-soil (3002) identified at the base of the foundation trenches, between 0.7m-0.9m BGL. This was overlain by 0.3m of clay (3001); it is unclear whether this forms part of the natural sub-soils or is associated with the construction of the house. Adjacent to the west wall of the present house there was a layer of mortar and rubble (3003), c.0.3m thick, probably associated with the construction of the house in 1985. Overlying these deposits was 0.3m of mid greyish-brown silt- sand topsoil (3000).

In the trench for the extension on the northern end of the house the deposits were very similar to those on the eastern side of the house. The earliest deposit exposed was a firm orange-brown sand (1001). The clay deposit identified on the eastern side of the building was not observed in the northern foundation trench and deposit 1001 was overlain by topsoil (1000).

5.3 Access Road (Plate 1)

The earliest deposit observed within the access road was the natural sub-soils that consisted of either a firm sandy clay (4000) or soft, yellow-brown clay (4001). Overlying these deposits was a 0.3m thick deposit of mid-brown sandy silt which was heavily disturbed by the roots of the birch trees.

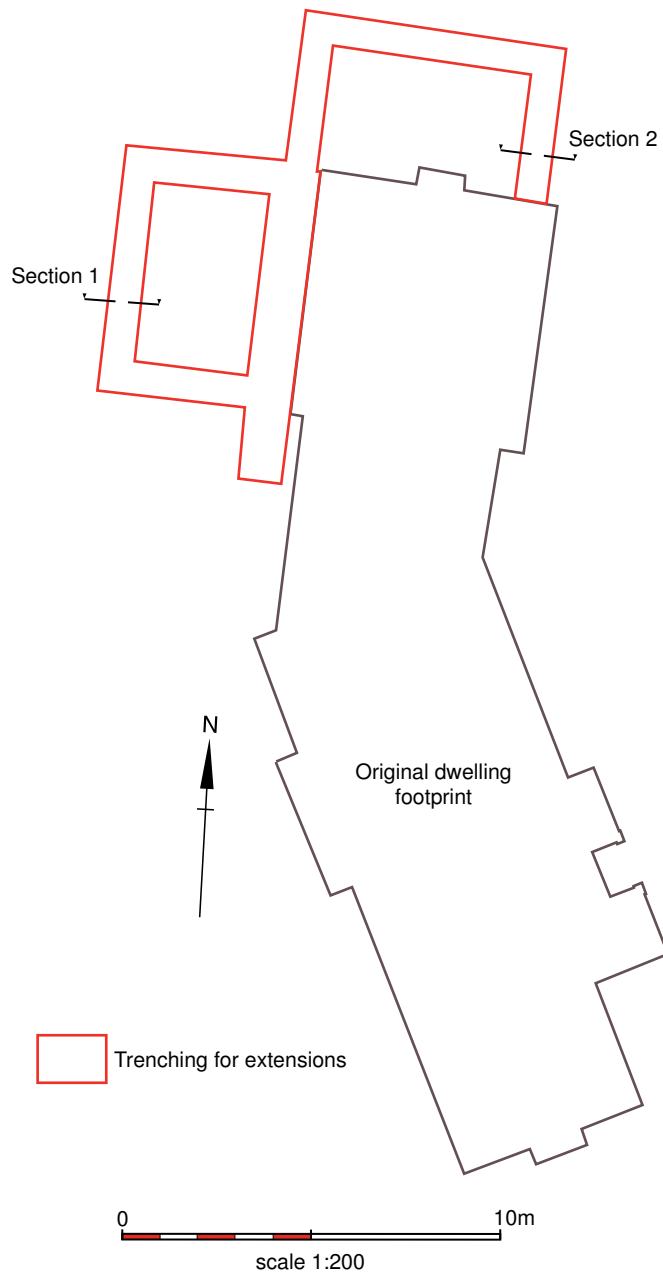


Fig 3 Location of observed foundation trenches and recorded sections

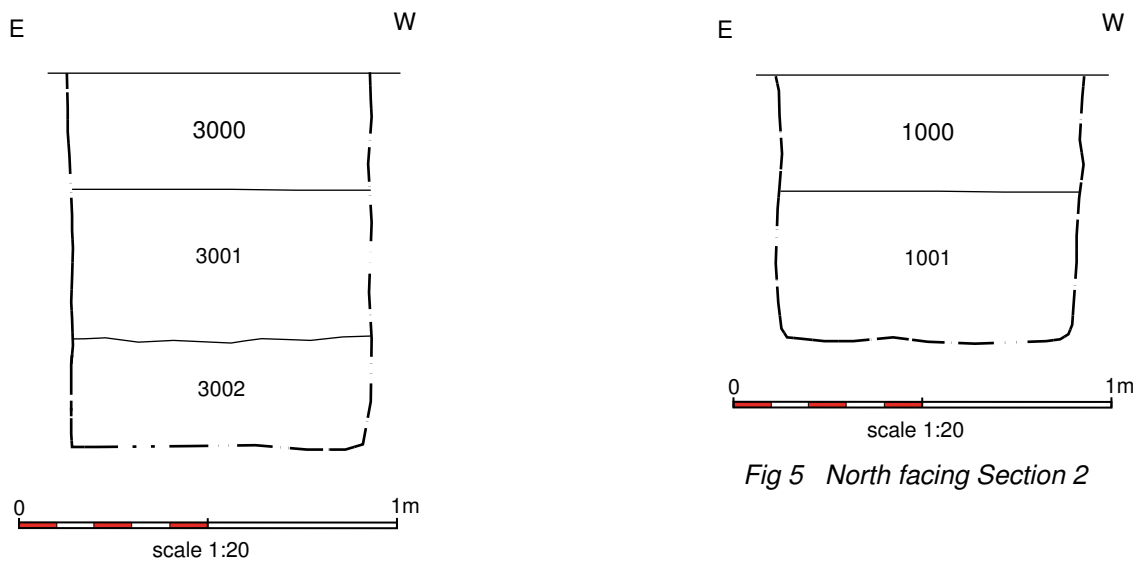


Fig 5 North facing Section 2



Plate 1 Access road, looking east

6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

During the watching brief no deposits of archaeological importance were observed. Within the foundation trenches for the extension to the house, deposits were predominantly associated with either levelling or construction debris associated with the building of the house in 1985. Natural deposits were exposed 0.7m BGL and consisted of an orange sand. In the area for the new stable block and the associated access road, deposits were heavily disturbed by the roots of the birch trees and appeared to consist of mixed material probably associated with the construction of the house and associated landscaping in 1985. The exploratory trenches in the new driveway across the field to the north-east of the house showed that the natural sand deposits were 0.4m BGL and were sealed by a topsoil that contained fragments of 19th and 20th century pottery.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VCHY. 1961. P.M. Tillott (ed.) *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of Yorkshire. The City of York* (London).

7.2 Internet Sources

<http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk/html800x600/start.html>

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Figure 1

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey
Mapping with the permission of the Controller
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Figure 2

Reproduced from architects measured sketch

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