

LABURNUM FARM MAIN STREET HESSAY YORK

A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

by

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Abbreviations

BGL	Below Ground Level
NGR	National Grid Reference
NMR	National Monuments Record
YAT	York Archaeological Trust

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at Laburnum Farm, Main Street, Hessay, York (NGR SE 5225653382) between 16 March – 26 May 2004. Along the boundary with Main Street, archaeological deposits were exposed in the trench excavated for the new access road and House Plots 1 and 2. The archaeology consisted of a ditch, the full dimensions of which are uncertain, running parallel to the boundary with Main Street. This ditch appeared to have undergone several re-cuts and the pottery from the latest ditch suggests a 15th century date. Another ditch then cut this feature but was aligned north-south and contained pottery and tile from the 14th-16th century. It is possible that the first ditch represents a medieval boundary with the land on the north side of the Main Street with a subsequent realignment or sub-division of the land in the 14th-16th centuries. In House Plot 3 a post-medieval well was observed. In this area there appeared to be contamination from the demolished farm buildings. In Plot 6 no archaeological deposits were observed

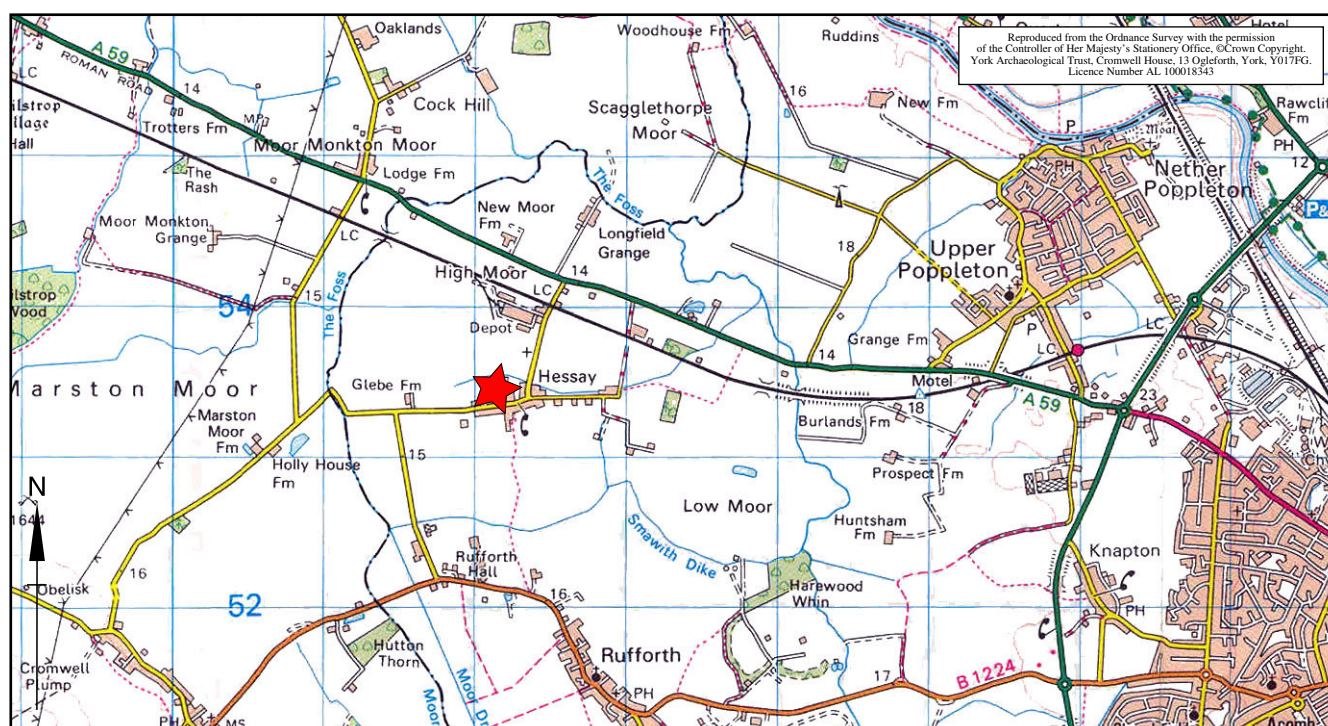


Fig. 1 site location

scale 1:50 000

1. INTRODUCTION

Between the 16 March – 26 May 2004 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) conducted an archaeological watching brief at Laburnum Farm, Main Street, Hessay, York (NGR SE 5225653382; Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Whitfield Homes Ltd., to the specification supplied by City of York Council. The aim of the watching brief was to assess the depth and character of the surviving archaeological remains in the area, and record any such remains encountered during the works.

2. METHOD STATEMENT

The watching brief at Laburnum Farm, Hessay, York involved the observation of ground works prior to and during the construction of new houses. Excavation of the areas for access roads and foundation plots was carried out using a mechanical excavator with a toothless bucket.



Fig. 2 New development overlaying original Laburnum Farm complex

Observations were made of a trench 22m long and 3.7m wide, excavated for the new access road to a depth of 1.4m Below Ground Level (BGL). Foundation trenches for housing plots 1, 2, 3, and 6 were observed (Fig. 2). These foundation trenches were on average 0.6m-0.8m wide and 0.8m-1.1m deep. A record of all deposits exposed during the watching brief was made in a site note book and where appropriate a photographic record was made.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Very little published information is available regarding the history and archaeology of Hessay, and little archaeological work has been undertaken in the vicinity. As such, the work undertaken during this watching brief may provide the first insight into the history and archaeology of this village.

Due to the scarcity of published material on Hessay, the majority of the background history of this area has been derived from NMR entries on the Pastscape website (see 5.1 below). The records for the area reveal the locations of cropmark sites to the north and east of Hessay, indicating that this area was exploited during the prehistoric period. The NMR records identify a further two landscape features that suggest agricultural activity in the area. Medieval ridge and furrow is visible to the north of Hessay, to the west of New Street (NGR SE 523535) and earthworks are discernable on aerial photographs to the south-west, thought to be potential field boundaries with associated rectilinear enclosures (NGR SE 5209 5301). The date of the latter features is, however, unknown.

Cartographic evidence for the village reveals that it has changed very little since the publication of the first Ordnance Survey map in the 1850s. Its form appears to be medieval in origin as it is a ribbon development, constructed along Main Street, with long narrow tofts located at the rear of the buildings.

Other notable sites within the vicinity include the Roman road from York to Aldborough which lies c. 1 km to the north of Laburnum Farm, and is followed by the present day A59. In addition Marston Moor, the site of the famous civil war battle on 2 July 1644, lies c. 3km to the south-west.

4. THE WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 Access Road (Fig. 3)

The earliest feature observed was a possible ditch (1001), which was cut through the natural (1000). This feature was not excavated as was cut at 1.4m BGL. Only its northern edge was visible within the trench, however it was interpreted as a large ditch aligned east-west. The feature was filled by Context 1002, which was a mid grey mottled gritty silt with frequent iron panning and occasional charcoal flecks.

This feature was sealed by a deposit of mid-grey clay silt with moderate inclusions of iron panning and occasional charcoal flecks (1029) 0.4m in depth. It is likely that this deposit was the fill of the ditch, however, no clear cut was identified on its north side. Cut into 1029 was another ditch (1003) which had steep sides and a concave base. It measured c1.2m in width and was aligned east-west.

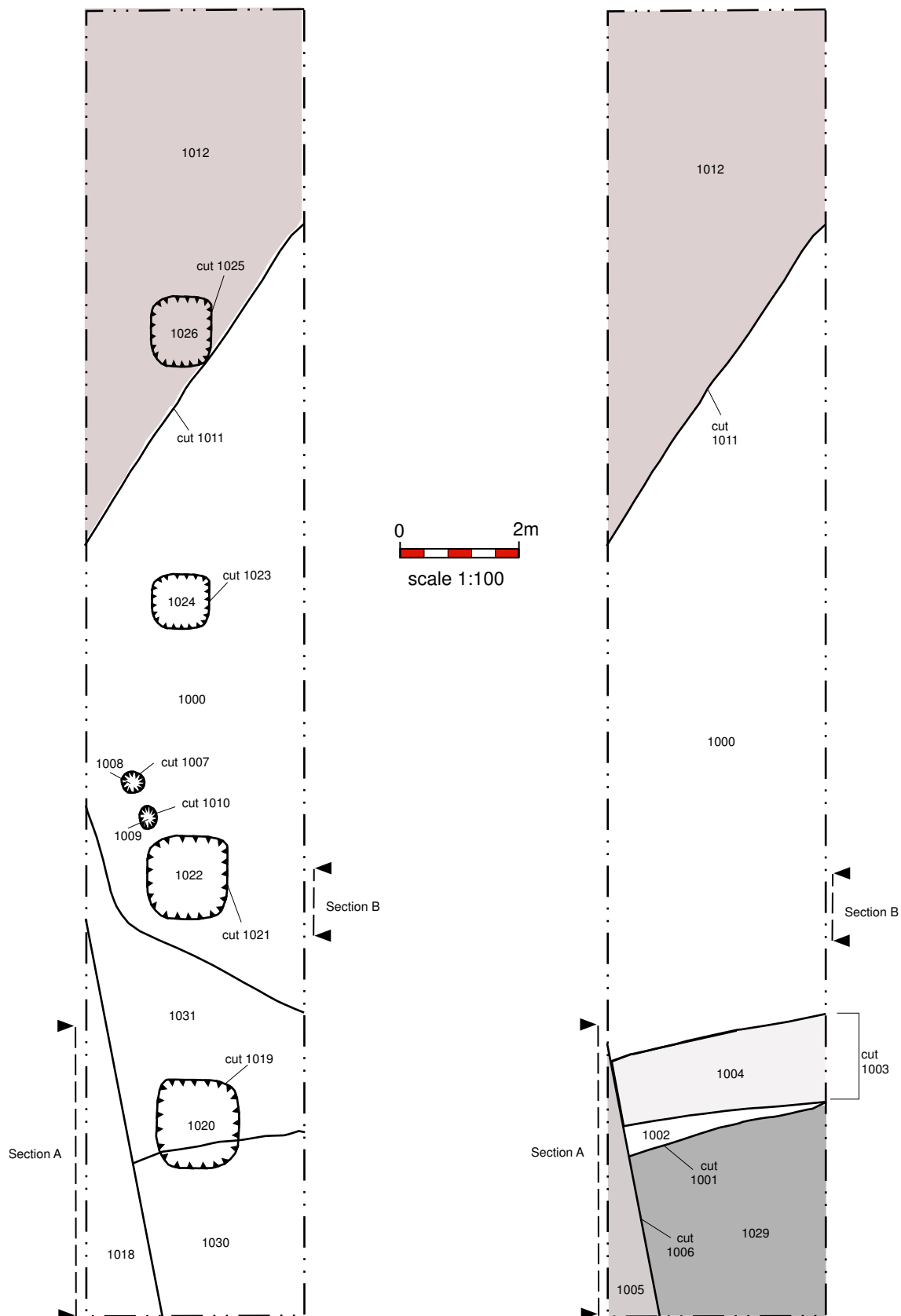


Fig. 3 Plan of excavations in access road trench. (left) after initial topsoil removal and (right) after completion of excavation

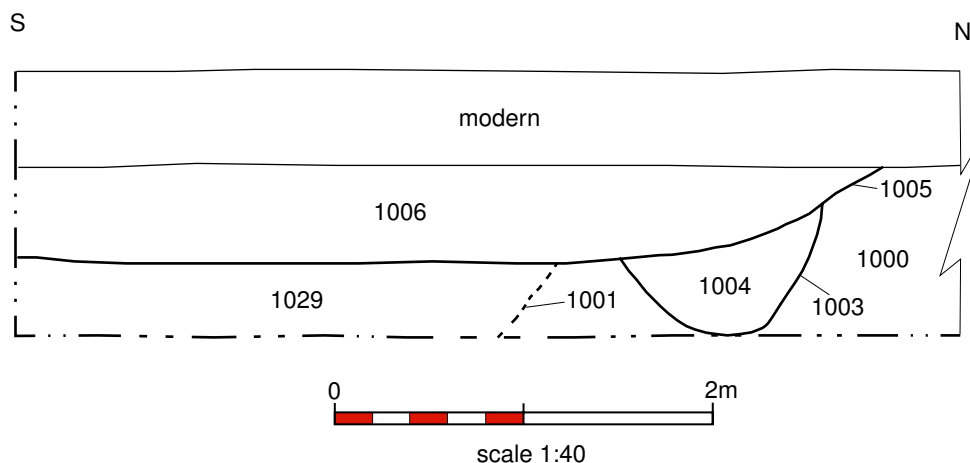


Fig. 4 Section A. Part of east facing section, access road trench

The ditch was backfilled with a light, grey brown sandy clay with frequent iron panning, frequent inclusions of gravel and occasional inclusions of small CBM fragments and charcoal flecks (1004). This backfill contained fragments of green glazed pottery dated to the 15th century.

This feature was in turn cut by another possible ditch (1005), seen at 0.50m BGL. This ditch was aligned roughly north-south but only the eastern edge of the ditch was visible in the trench. The cut had gently sloping sides fading imperceptibly into a concave base. The backfill of this feature was a mid-grey clay silt containing fragments of brick dating from the early post-medieval period (1006) (Fig. 4).

The only other dateable pre-modern feature on the site was located at the northern end of the trench where a large shallow cut (1011) ran diagonally across the trench, identified at 0.95m BGL. Only the south-eastern edge of this cut was visible in the trench and, as such, its

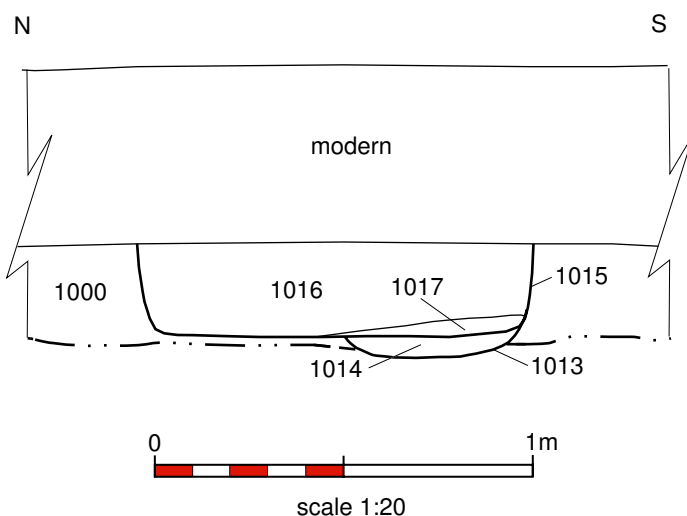


Fig. 5 Section B. Part of west facing section, access road trench

function is ambiguous. It had gentle sloping sides leading to a flattish base and was backfilled by Context 1012; a moist, light grey silty sand with a high organic content and fragments of brick dating from the early post-medieval period. The high organic content within this feature, as well as its shape and projected size, may suggest that this was a large pond.

Two features were identified in the east facing section of the trench after the stripping of the site which were not seen in plan (Fig. 5). At a depth of

0.72m a feature, 0.5m wide, was located 6.2m from the southern end of the trench cut through natural (1000). Cut 1013 was a shallow feature with gently sloping sides and a concave base. It was backfilled with a deposit of organic, dark brown sandy silt with inclusions of animal bone (1014). This feature was truncated by the cut of the larger feature (1015), 1.1m wide, again located 6.4m from the southern end of the trench, at a depth of 0.47m. Cut 1015 had steep sides and a flattish base. As this feature was only seen in section it was difficult to discern whether it was a pit or a ditch. The basal fill of this feature was an organic deposit of dark grey silty sand containing fragments of animal bone (1017). The upper fill was a mixed light – mid grey mottled silty sand (1016). No dating evidence was recovered from either feature.

Two small pits were identified in the centre of the trench after the removal of the modern rubble. These features were both cut through natural and neither contained any dating evidence. 1007 was 0.48m in diameter and vaguely oval in plan. It was backfilled with a deposit grey brown silty sand (1008). 1010 was also oval in plan with a diameter of 0.40m. This pit was also backfilled with a grey brown silty sand (1009). The function of these pits is unclear.

The rest of the features on this site were identified as modern and were associated with the barns that occupied the site prior to the new development. A deposit a dark grey brown clay silt with frequent inclusions of small – large fragments of asphalt (1030) was found to overlie Context 1029 towards the southern end of the trench.

Further north, overlying Context 1004, a deposit of light grey brown sandy clay with frequent iron panning and occasional inclusions of gravel (1031) was encountered. During the removal of deposits 1030 and 1031 it was not possible to discern the stratigraphic relationship between them. However, due to the fragments of asphalt in Context 1030 and due to the similarity of Context 1031 with earlier deposits, such as 1004, it is presumed that Context 1031 was the earlier.

Overlying both of these deposits were the remains of hardcore (1018) from the demolished barns and at fairly equal spacing throughout the trench the remains of four concrete stanchions for the barn were still visible (1019, 1021, 1023 and 1025).

4.2 Building Plots

4.2.1 Building Plots 1 and 2

The earliest deposit exposed 0.85m BGL was the natural subsoil that consisted of a friable, light orange-yellow sand (1032). Overlying the natural sand was a 0.3m thick deposit of firm, light grey clay silt (1033).

Visible in the north and west facing sections of the foundation trench for the footprint of the building cut into 1032-3 was a cut feature (1034) that was possibly a continuation of Cut 1001 observed in the stripping of the access road. In the north facing section the feature extended

for 5m and in the west facing section for 1m. The profile of the cut in the west facing section was of steep sides leading to a concave base. In the north facing section the part of the side but not the base was seen. The total depth of the feature was uncertain due to the trench collapsing. The feature was filled with soft, light grey silt sand (1035).

Sealing 1035 was loose, dark grey-black silt with frequent inclusions of brick rubble (1036) 0.35m thick, directly above which was a 0.2m of crushed stone (1037).

4.2.2 Building Plot 3

The natural subsoil (1038) was observed c.0.4m BGL and was the same as the subsoil in Plots 1 - 2. However, in this area the subsoil was heavily discoloured, probably by material leaching through from the farm buildings that stood in this area prior to the redevelopment. Overlying the natural was 0.1-0.2m of dark grey silt (1039). In the north facing section of the foundation trench was a layer of cobbles (1040) that may have formed a floor surface within the demolished barn. In the north-west corner of the building plot there were the remains of a round brick-built well (1041). The bricks were machine made, curved, and measured 190mmx100mmx80mm.

4.2.3 Building Plot 4

As in Building Plot 3 the natural subsoil of sand (1042) was observed 0.4m BGL and was discoloured in some areas, probably by material leaching through from the demolished barn buildings. Overlying Deposit 1042 was a 0.2m-0.3m thick deposit of firm, dark grey silt (1043).

4.2.4 Building Plot 6

Natural sand deposits (1044) were observed between 0.2m and 0.4m BGL directly below a firm, dark grey silt (1045).

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The watching brief at Hessay produced some useful archaeological information. The sequence of ditches observed primarily in the trench for the new access road and in Plots 1 and 2, appears to represent the successive re-cutting of some sort of boundary ditch next to, and parallel with, the main street. The last ditch in the sequence, however, was set on a different alignment and may demonstrate the dividing up of land or the realignment of the farm. The finds recovered from these features would suggest that this sequence of events occurred in the late medieval or early post-medieval periods. The only other feature exposed during the watching brief was a post-medieval, brick-lined well. The majority of the area of the observed building plots was disturbed by post-medieval and modern agricultural buildings.

The watching brief at Hessay has added useful information to this little investigated village and has identified a sequence of alterations and developments associated with the late or early post-medieval medieval village suggesting some decision to realign or alter the property boundaries.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

5.1 INTERNET SOURCES

<http://www.pastscape.org.uk>

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Watching Brief

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