292 BISHOPTHORPE ROAD,

YORK

REPORT ON AN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

LIST OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

York Archaeological Trust : a registered charity
Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York YO1 7FG
Tel. (01904) 663000 Fax. (01904) 640029

ABSTRACT

In July 1998 a series of four archaeological evaluation trenches was excavated by York Archaeological Trust on a site at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York.

Trench 1, close to Bishopthorpe Road, produced thick deposits relating to Roman and possibly medieval agricultural activity and a number of mortary deposits which may derive from the construction of the present building on the site.

Trench 2, south of Trench 1 and also close to the street frontage, contained parts of two slots, possibly shallow drainage ditches dating to the 2nd/3rd century. A large shallow feature of uncertain function and dating to the 14th-16th century was also recorded in this trench.

South of Trench 2, and again close to Bishopthorpe Road was Trench 3. Here extensive modern levelling had removed all deposits and features of archaeological interest with modern deposits lying directly above natural clay and gravel.

Trench 4 was located close to the eastern boundary of the site c.80m from the street frontage at the base of the slope down to the bank of the River Ouse. In this trench the uppermost 1.4m of deposits were modern dumps. Below these was an extensive silty deposit which may be the result of river flooding.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 13th and 21st July 1998, York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological evaluation in advance of the proposed redevelopment of land at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York (NGR SE 6011 4997) (Figure 1). The objective of the evaluation was to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains on the site and to determine the extent, date, type, and quality of any archaeological deposits under threat from the proposed development. The evaluation was carried out on behalf of Wimpey Homes Ltd, in accordance with a specification drawn up by John Oxley, Principal Archaeologist for the City of York Council. Two structures were present on the site at the time of the evaluation. The first, located towards the street frontage, was a three storey brick building erected c.1900, most recently used as a nursing home. The second building, situated towards the south-east corner, was a modern pre-frabricated bungalow on a brick base.

.

1.1 Geology and Topography

A tarmacadam car park occupied much of the area immediately adjacent to Bishopthorpe Road but otherwise most of the site was grassland descending in a series of terraces to the flood plain of the River Ouse. The uppermost part of the site, adjacent to Bishopthorpe

© Crown copyright, Based on Ordnance Survey Digital Data

Road was at c.15m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and dropped to c.7.5m AOD at the base of the terraces. From north to south the car park area sloped gently to the south but much of the rest of the site was level. The underlying drift geology is of mixed sands and gravel. Below this the solid geology consists of Keuper and Bunter sandstones.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation consisted of four trenches (Figure 2) each measuring 4m by 4m which were excavated to a maximum depth of 1.5m or to natural deposits whichever came sooner. Three of these trenches (1-3) were positioned along the western limit of the site close to Bishopthorpe Road. The fourth (4) was adjacent to the centre of the eastern boundary of the site at the base of the terraces. Prior to the archaeological evaluation a series of nine engineers test pits was dug by machine around the site. These were the subject of an archaeological watching brief and are described in a separate report.

All obviously modern deposits were removed by machine except for Trench 4 where machine clearance ceased at c.1.1m below modern ground level and further excavation was by hand. In Trenches 1, 2, and 3 when deposits of probable archaeological significance were recognised all further excavation was by hand. A system of single context recording was employed to plan most contexts at a scale of 1:20. One side of each trench was drawn as a section at a scale of 1:10. All modern deposits appear only on these section drawings. All contexts were described on a separate pro-forma sheet. Colour print photographs were taken of significant contexts and as a general site record during the excavation.

All finds and site records are presently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM 1998.162.

2. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies c.1.2 km south of the medieval city walls of York on the south-west bank of the River Ouse. This survey of the historical and archaeological evidence has been compiled from readily accessible sources, previous archaeological discoveries, and examination of old maps of the area.

The documentary evidence for the area is slight but the area including the present site belonged to St Clement's Nunnery before its suppression in 1536. The strip of land adjacent to the River Ouse is still known as Nun Ings and land to the west as Nunthorpe. By 1586 the site had become part of the parish of St Mary Bishophill, Senior. Two windmills belonging to Isabella Ward, Prioress of St Clement's nunnery in 1524, are said to be in Bishopthorpe Road. One of them is known to have been on the rising ground close to or on the site of the present Southlands Methodist church but the location of the other is uncertain. The high ground south and east of the site could be a possible location.

The earliest maps of York concentrate on the walled area of the city but an 18th century map of Micklegate Stray, by R Kershaw and J Lund 1719/72, does include the present site and shows it to be split between Nun Ings Common and Bawtry Pastures Common. No

structures are shown on or close to the site so it would appear to have been open pasture at this point in time. The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1853 appears to show two adjacent properties running back from Bishopthorpe Road on or very close to the site. These may have been demolished in the late 19th century to make way for the present structure.

There have been no archaeological investigations in the immediate area but 18th century gravel digging revealed Roman occupation debris just over ½ a mile north of Middlethorpe Manor (NGR SE 6000 4960) and another occupation site has been recorded at Old Nunthorpe (NGR SE 6007 4998), less than 50m from the present site. In the early 19th century Roman burials were found in a field between Middlethorpe and Old Nunthorpe. It is also recorded that in 1839 a skull and a coin of Claudius Gothicus were found in the vicinity of Campleshon Road. In 1981 an archaeological watching brief on a deep sewer excavation in Bishopthorpe Road (NGR SE 6015 5097) noted a compact layer of cobbles 2.15m below the modern street. This was probably part of a previously unknown Roman road whose projected course would take it very close to the area of the evaluation.

3. THE EXCAVATIONS

3.1 Trench 1 (Figure 3)

3.1.1 The lowest deposit recorded in this trench, c.1.4m below the modern ground level, was a loose clean orange-brown sand (1007). This lay at a height of c.12.00m AOD and was believed to be the natural sub-soil in this area. Above this was a layer of orange-brown silty sand (1006), c.0.20m thick. Soil sample 4 was taken from this layer.

3.1.2 Sealing 1006 was a deposit of friable orange-brown silty sand (1005) c.0.50m thick which contained small quantities of tile, brick, cobbles, and charcoal. This layer produced three sherds of Roman pot dated to the late 2nd century. Soil sample 1 was taken from this layer.

3.1.3 Above 1005 was a layer of friable orange-brown silty sand (1004) containing many small cobbles and small amounts of charcoal, brick, and tile. It was usually c.0.10m thick and contained two sherds of pottery, one from the 13th century and one from the 18th century.

3.1.4 A group of four deposits formed the next stratigraphic horizon. These were; a compact mid grey silty clay (1001), a compact light grey mortar (1002), a very compact light grey mixture of mortar and lime (1003), and a brown silty sand (1008).

3.1.5 All deposits above this group were modern and were given a single number (1000). These consisted of a layer of brick rubble c.0.20m thick, a mixed deposit of sand and gravel c.0.15m thick and the modern tarmac car park surface which was c.0.07m thick and in this part of the site lay at a height of c.13.40m AOD.

3.2 Trench 2 (Figure 4)

3.2.1 The lowest deposit encountered in this trench, at c.12.90m AOD, c.0.70m below modern ground level, was a mixture of clean grey and yellow sand (2011) which was believed to be a natural deposit. Above this was a layer of mixed orange clay and gravel (2010) c.0.40m thick which was also thought to be naturally derived.

3.2.2 Cut into the above deposits was a linear feature (2008) aligned approximately east-west. Only a short length, c.1.60m, of this cut was traced since although its west end was within the trench its east end had been truncated by a later intrusion. The original depth of 2008 could not be determined since it had also been cut by another later intrusion. Feature 2008 was at least 0.16m deep and had an average width of 0.85m with very gently sloping sides. The fill was a mid brownish-grey silty sand (2007).

3.2.3 Truncating the east end of 2008 was another linear feature (2006). The northern, southern and eastern extent of 2006 lay beyond the limits of excavation and its full depth could not be ascertained since it had been cut by the same later intrusion as 2008. Feature 2006 was at least 0.27m deep, had a steeply sloping west edge and clearly cut through 2008. The fill of 2006 was a mid brownish-grey silty sand (2005) identical to the fill of 2006. From fill 2005 came four sherds of Roman pottery dated to the 2nd/3rd century. Soil sample 5 was taken from this fill.

3.2.4 Both 2006 and 2008 had been partially cut away by a large feature (2009) of indeterminate size and shape since only parts of the west and north sides lay within the trench. The north-west corner of 2009 was a rounded right-angle suggesting that the feature may have been square or rectangular in shape. Machining may have truncated the top of 2009 but it was at least c.0.40m deep and had nearly vertical edges. The fill was a compact but friable mid brownish-grey sandy silt (2002) which contained 13 sherds of pottery ranging in date from the 2nd/3rd century to the 14th-16th century. Soil sample 2 was taken from this context.

3.2.5 Into 2002, in the south-east corner of the trench, was cut a group of thirteen irregular holes and hollows (2004). They formed no coherent pattern but there was some suggestion of intercutting. All were filled with the same material, a compact mid orange-brown sandy clay (2003) which contained a considerable amount of fine gravel. This produced pottery which was dated from the Roman period to the 16th century.

3.2.6 Two later contexts were recorded, both of them modern. The first was a patch of crushed red brick/tile (2001) in a matrix of orange-red silty clay. The second consisted of a mixture of crushed brick, dark greyish sandy silt, and ashy clinker capped by a layer of tarmac c.0.05m thick which were removed by machine and given the overall number (2000). The tarmac formed the modern car park surface and in this area lay at a height of c.13.70m AOD.

3.3 Trench 3 (Figure 5)

3.3.1 The lowest deposit recorded in this trench, at c.0.50m below modern ground level, c.13.50m AOD, was a coarse orange-brown sandy gravel (3004). A 1m square test pit dug in the south-east corner of the trench through this gravel was discontinued at a depth of c.13.30m AOD when the total lack of any inclusions within this material demonstrated that it was a natural deposit. In the northern third of the trench this gravel was overlain by a 0.10m thick layer of compact yellow-brown slightly sandy clay (3003) also thought to be naturally derived.

3.3.2 All deposits above 3003 were believed to be modern and were machined off. From bottom to top these were; a 0.15m thick layer of compact dark grey clayey loam (3002) containing occasional small cobbles, a loose grey mortary loam (3001) up to 0.15m thick with occasional brick and the tarmac car park surface (3000) which was 0.07m. thick In the area of this trench the modern ground level lay at between 13.86m and 14.04m AOD.

3.4 Trench 4 (Figure 6)

3.4.1 In this trench the lowest deposit recorded lay c.1.40m below modern ground level, c.6.40m AOD. It was a greenish-grey slightly clayey silt (4003) A 1m square test pit dug in the north-east corner of the trench to a maximum depth of c.6.10m AOD revealed no other deposits and produced no finds. Soil sample 3 was taken from 4003.

3.4.2 All deposits above 4003 were definitely modern and were encountered throughout the trench; sealing 4003 was a layer of ash and clinker (4002) containing many glass bottles and occasional pieces of metal, plastic covered wire and two shoes. It was very loose and up to c.0.70m thick. Over 4002 was a layer of mid orange-brown clayey sand (4001) c.0.6m thick with occasional lenses of dark greyish-brown loam. The uppermost layer was a dark greyish-brown loam (4000) with grass on top. This was c.0.25m thick and represented the modern ground level which sloped considerably in the vicinity of the trench with the south-east corner lying at 7.65m AOD and the south-west at 8.05m AOD.

4. FINDS ASSESSMENT

4.1 The Pottery

context	No of sherds	Date range
1004	2	13th; 18th
1005	3	1 vessel, Roman – late 2nd century
2002	13	2nd/3rd; 14-16th
2003	4	Roman-16th century
2005	4	Abraded Roman – 2nd/3rd century

A small and abraded assemblage of pottery was recovered. The Roman pottery in particular was all very abraded and rolled. There was a range of the early oxidised and Samian wares as well as later grey wares. The medieval and post-medieval pottery included the usual range of Brandsby-type ware, Cistercian ware and post-medieval red earthenwares.

4.2 Ceramic Building Materials

4.2.1 Roman material

There were fragments of Roman imbrex and tegula, which was Roman roofing material. There were at least two sizes of Roman roof tile in York, and this material belongs to the group with smaller measurements. There were also a few fragments of daub, which were found in the same context as the ceramic building material.

4.2.2 Medieval material

The medieval material consisted of plain tile. This was medieval roofing, which could either be a peg tile or a nib tile, but no diagnostic fragments were collected.

4.2.3 Post-medieval material

There were several fragments of brick, which judging by the characteristics of manufacture, and the refined fabric are likely to be post-medieval in date.

4.2.4 Discussion

The daub could have been used for walling but also may have been used for an oven or industrial purposes. It is possible that the fabrics and form sizes of the ceramic material could indicate the date of the activity on the site. The sample should be retained for further study, when it can be recorded by a qualified specialist. Most of the material can then be discarded due to its fragmentary nature.

4.2.5 Context Listing

Context	Form/s	Spot date	Date range
1004	Imbrex, Roman brick	Roman	Roman
2001	Medieval or later brick, Post medieval brick, Post medieval brick (burnt)	18th+	14th-19th
2002	Imbrex, Roman brick, Plain, Medieval or later brick	14th+	Roman-post medieval
2005	Tegula, Daub	Roman	Roman

4.3 The Small Finds

Only four finds were recovered from the site. These were all from context 2002 and are of no significance for interpreting the site.

Small find no.	context	description
1	2002	Fragment of Roman bottle glass
2	2002	3 nail fragments
3	2002	Tiny fragment of possibly medieval vessel glass
4	2002	Minute fragment of modern glass

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

5.1 Summary

Five samples of sediment from deposits excavated at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The sediment samples warrant no further analysis, and additional excavation is unlikely to recover biological remains in sufficient quantity or of suitable quality to require investigation.

5.2 Introduction

Excavations were undertaken at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York during July 1998 by York Archaeological Trust. Five sediment samples ('GBA' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) taken from deposits in three of the four trenches have been examined to evaluate their bioarchaeological potential.

5.3 Methods

5.3.1 Sediment samples

All the sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithology was recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 1 kg or 3 kg were taken from four of the samples for the extraction of macrofossil remains, whilst the remaining sample was bulk-sieved (to 500 μm), following procedures of Kenward *et al*. (1980; 1986).

The resultant washovers and residues were examined for plant and invertebrate remains.

5.4 Results

The results of the investigations are presented in sample number order. Archaeological information and/or archaeological questions to be addressed (provided by the excavator) are given in square brackets.

Context 1005 [?Roman - dump/?build-up deposit - What is the nature and derivation of this sediment?] Sample 1/T (3 kg)

Just moist, light to mid brown, crumbly to unconsolidated, slightly silty sand, with very small to medium-sized (2-60 mm) stones and ?mortar fragments.

The very small washover of perhaps 1-2 cm^3 of modern root fragments and root bark, with charcoal, 'char' (vesicular or amorphous charred organic matter) and mortar fragments up to 2 mm in maximum dimension, and coal to 5 mm. The very small residue was of sand and gravel.

This deposit is essentially natural sediment (not necessarily *in situ*), with a small admixture of occupation debris.

Context 2002 [Medieval - back fill in ?pit 2009] Sample 2/T (1 kg)

Just moist, light to mid grey-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated (working soft), moderately stony, slightly clay, sandy silt, with very small to large (2->60 mm) cobbles.

The washover of 1-2 cm^3 of modern woody and herbaceous root fragments with a little charcoal and brick/tile to 5 mm; a single very eroded and unidentifiable charred cereal grain was also noted. The tiny residue was of sand and gravel with a single large rather rounded clast of brick/tile to 70 mm.

Context 4003 [?Post-medieval or ?modern - unknown deposit/?flood silts - could this be a flood deposit?] Sample 3/T (1 kg)

Just moist, mid to dark grey-brown, crumbly (working soft and sticky when wet), clay silt, with fragments of brick/tile (to 60 mm), roots, twigs and ?bark.

The washover consisted of about 40 cm^3 of modern woody and herbaceous root fragments, root bark and pale and very modern-looking elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) seeds. There were also traces of 'char' less than 2 mm. The tiny residue was of undisaggregated silt with a few more root fragments.

There is no evidence from this sample to either confirm or contradict the interpretation of this sediment as a flood deposit.

Context 1006 [Natural/?dump - Is this natural?] Sample 4/BS (8 kg)

Just moist, light orange-brown, unconsolidated sand, with light to mid grey clay mixed throughout and in discrete lumps.

The residue was very small: no more than a few hundred grams of sand with a little 'grit'.

As there are no remains to suggest otherwise, it seems highly likely that this deposit is natural.

Context 2005 [?Roman - back fill in ?drain/?ditch 2006] Sample 5/T (1 kg)

Just moist, mid grey-brown to mid to dark grey, crumbly (working soft), slightly clay, sandy silt, with small and medium-sized (6-60 mm) stones.

The washover of 1-2 cm^3 comprised fine charcoal, 'char' and coal to 2 mm. The tiny residue was of sand and gravel with traces of brick/tile to 10 mm.

5.5 Recommendations

Ancient plant remains were scarce in these deposits and the invertebrates absent. Consequently, additional work on the samples is not considered worthwhile. Further excavation is unlikely to recover biological remains in sufficient quantity or of suitable quality to justify investigation.

5.6 Retention and disposal

All remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be sieved for artefact recovery.

5.7 Archive

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

6. CONCLUSIONS (including period by period analysis)

The excavations have shown that the survival of archaeological deposits and features was very variable across the site. Along the street frontage there were areas, such as Trench 3, where all archaeological deposits had been removed by modern levelling activity. Further north, in Trenches 1 and 2, deposits and features survived on a limited scale. These appear to date from the Roman to the medieval period and seem to be agricultural in nature, none of the trenches producing any evidence for structural or occupation activity. Trench 4, at the base of the terraces, produced evidence for extensive modern dumping. Below this was a possible archaeological deposit which could not be investigated in detail because the depth limit for the trench had been reached. Information from this evaluation was very similar to that from the engineers test pits, differing only in detail. All excavated deposits at the street front were dry with no evidence of any survival of organic matter. When excavation ceased in Trench 4 the soil was becoming damp and in view of the proximity of this trench to the River Ouse it is likely that waterlogged deposits exist at greater depth. In Test Pit 4, immediately north of Trench 4, it was recorded that at c.3.3m below modern ground level an alluvial deposit had organic inclusions. Organic inclusions were also recorded from Test Pits 8 and 9 towards the north end of the site at a depth of c.3.0m below modern ground level.

Prehistoric and Roman (pre 1st - 5th centuries AD)

No evidence for pre-historic activity in the area was found in this limited evaluation. The uppermost of two slots in Trench 2 contained abraded Roman pot of the 2nd/3rd century and thus may be Roman in date although they could belong to a later period if the pot is residual. Even if this is so the quantity of Roman pottery recovered from just two of the four trenches clearly indicates some form of activity in the immediate area in the Roman period.

Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5th - 11th centuries AD)

No deposits or finds of Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian date were recognised in any of the excavated trenches. Considering the distance of the site from the city centre and the known areas of occupation belonging to these periods this cannot be considered unusual.

Medieval (11th - 16th centuries AD)

A small quantity of medieval pottery from Trenches 1 and 2 indicated some medieval activity on the site. It was neither intensive or structural in nature with the evidence from Trench 1 suggesting agricultural activity. The feature recorded in Trench 2 is of unknown function but may be connected with quarrying for gravel since the base of the cut broadly coincided with the base of the gravel/clay deposit 2010 found within this trench.

Post-medieval (16th - 18th centuries AD)

Although a small amount of pottery dated to the 16th and 18th centuries was recovered from deposits in Trenches 1 and 2 no deposits or features could be convincingly dated to this period and it is likely that any post-medieval archaeology has been destroyed by modern activity.

Modern (19th and 20th centuries AD)

Modern deposits were encountered in all four of the excavated trenches and in Trench 3 formed the only deposits surviving above the natural sub-soil. A number of compact mortary surfaces within Trench 1 may be associated with the presumably 19th century buildings shown on the 1853 Ordnance Survey map of the area. However, no walls were located in any of the trenches adjacent to Bishopthorpe Road and the mortary spreads may thus be connected with the construction of the present building. The extensive dumps in Trench 4, at the base of the terraces, were of obviously modern origin and are to be dated to the second half of the 20th century. The evidence from Trenches 1, 2, and 3 indicated extensive modern levelling towards the street frontage which was confirmed by the former owner of the site.

7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The evidence from the three trenches close to Bishopthorpe Road was limited both in quality and quantity. No structural remains were located and the nature of the deposits, where they survived, suggested agricultural activity although a small quantity of Roman roofing tile may indicate Roman structural remains in the vicinity.

Since much of the proposed development lies towards the middle part of the site, where extensive modern dumping has taken place, it is unlikely that significant archaeological deposits will be damaged or destroyed. Although much of the archaeology adjacent to Bishopthorpe Road has suffered partial or total truncation it is still possible that some deposits of archaeological interest survive towards the northern end of the street frontage. Observation of any works which disturb the ground adjacent to Bishopthorpe Road would thus seem to be a reasonable archaeological response.

8. LIST OF SOURCES

Brinklow. D (et al), (1986). Coney Street, Aldwark and Clementhorpe, Minor sites, and Roman Roads. *The Archaeology of York 6/1*.

Dobney, K., Hall, A. R., Kenward, H. K. and Milles, A. (1992). A working classification of sample types for environmental archaeology. *Circaea, the Journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology* **9** (for 1991), 24-6.

Kenward, H. K., Engleman, C., Robertson, A., and Large, F. (1986). Rapid scanning of urban archaeological deposits for insect remains. *Circaea* **3** (for 1985), 163-72.

Kenward, H. K., Hall, A. R. and Jones, A. K. G. (1980). A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal macrofossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits. *Science and Archaeology* **22**, 3-15.

Raine, A (1955). Medieval York.

RCHMY (1962). An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume 1, Eburacum, Roman York

Tillot, P.M. (ed) (1961). The Victoria County History of Yorkshire, The City of York

9. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Excavation team	Mike Andrews, Bryan Antoni, Dave Evans, Mark Johnson, Neil Macnab, Russell Marwood.
Finds Assistant	Jonathan Bateman
Report preparation	Dave Evans
Pottery and Small Finds	Ailsa Mainman
Ceramic building materials	Sandra Garside-Neville
Environmental analysis	John Carrott, Allan Hall, Deborah Jaques, and Darren Worthy, Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York
Illustrations	Glenys Boyles and Mark Johnson
Editor	David Brinklow