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Watching Brief, Front Garden of Treasurers House, York
17th March 1993

The National Trust sought, and were granted, Scheduled Monument Consent for the removal of a stone feature and replacement of two trees in the front garden of Treasurers House (Monument number 314). The Consent (ref: 9/2/39 pt9) stipulated that the work should be conducted under the supervision of the National Trust's archaeologist, Mark Newman, and this was duly done on March 17th 1993.

Apart from the fact that it lies within the walled city of York and is therefore legally protected, there were other reasons for being interested in the layers effected by the work in hand. The walls of the garden are decorated with fragments of medieval stone work believed to have been disturbed from the garden area during the restoration of Treasurers House by Frank Green in 1900. This has given rise to the suggestion that the area may have been a masons yard for the Minster in the medieval period. The western side of the garden was also the scene of excavations in 1988 (Newman, 1992, Archive report MNNTYR30) which exposed the remains of a Victorian conservatory, and a few underlying layers. The hole at location B was likely to provide further commentary on the layers seen in 1988.

The stone feature at location A was dismantled, and the stones which formed it examined. None showed any signs of reuse, and presumably they had been cut to create this feature. The structure was not deeply foundationed, but was found to have been set on a shallow layer of mortar, resting on garden soil. This extended no further than 5 cm below the pre-existing lawn level. Much of the interior of the structure was formed from dumped cement-based rubble fragments, which extended down into the planting soil of the removed shrub.

Once this mixture was removed, the original planting hole was emptied revealing a second layer - of loam mixed with 10% building rubble - lying under 10-15cm of humic rich garden soil. The new shrub hole was excavated through this rubbly layer. At the base of the cut a third layer was encountered. This contained a higher concentration of rubble, including York stone fragments, pieces of stone roofing slabs, and seventeenth century bricks.

The middle layer produced six sherds; two sherds of later medieval green glaze, three from early post-medieval vessels, and a nineteenth century fragment.

The exposed layers probably all relate to the gardening and landscaping work undertaken by Frank Green in 1900, the upper two being layers deposited for gardening purposes, and the lowest one possibly resulting from building work. The presence of the shallow bricks was noteworthy, though it was not clear if they derived from the demolition of seventeenth century structure on site, or were imported onto it. The other building material

confirmed a late nineteenth/early twentieth century date for the deposition of this material. It was noted that the depth and character of the sequence was somewhat different from that encountered during the 1988 excavations at the other end of the garden.

The shrub hole at location A was only excavated to a depth of 40 cm, at which point dumped a clay-dominated layer (with a rubble component) was exposed. This layer, contrasting strongly with the overlying humic rich garden soil (deposited in 1900), exactly matched deposits exposed at the southern end of the 1988 excavation. This would suggest that the feature exposed at the eastern edge of that excavation was indeed a narrow trench, and that stratified deposits should indeed lie underneath the lawn to north and south of the pool, and were not cut away by Frank Greens labourers.

The only find from this trench was a nineteenth century hand-finished bronze clock key.

The two holes were photographed before infilling. The photographs will reside with the archaeological archive currently at Fountains Abbey, which may move to Goddards in due course. The finds will be returned to Treasurers House.

MN 17.III.93

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