A64 /TOP LANE JUNCTION,
COPMANTHORPE, YORK

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
1. INTRODUCTION
2. RESULTS
3. FINDS ASSESSMENT
4. CONCLUSIONS
5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
6. LIST OF SOURCES
7. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

List of Figures

Figure 1  Site location plan.
Figure 2  Location of works

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ABSTRACT

Intermittently between July 2001 and January 2002 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on land at the A64 Top Lane Junction, Copmanthorpe, York during the groundworks for a new junction on the A64. The work was undertaken on behalf of the Highways Agency. Natural deposits of sand and clay were disturbed by the construction of the A64 in the early 1970's. No archaeological features were encountered.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between July 30th 2001 and 17th January 2002 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) carried out a periodic watching brief on the restructuring of the A64/Top Lane Junction, Copmanthorpe, York (NGR SE 4820 5795, Figure 1). The work was undertaken for Horsman Woolley on behalf of the Highways Agency. The scheme involved several elements including the machine stripping of areas for the new roads, landscaping and the machine excavation of several test-pits and new drainage trenches.

1.1 Methodology

The machine stripped areas, landscaping, test-pits and drainage trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision by both JCB 360 degree and JCB sitemaster mechanical excavators using both toothed and toothless buckets. The deposits revealed were sketched, measured and recorded. Recording followed procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust Context Recording Manuel (1996).

Site records and finds are currently stored with YAT under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:2000.571.

1.2 Geology and Topography

The area lies on Bunter Sandstone solid geology (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Sheet 71 1973) in the centre of the Vale of York. The drift geology consists of a bank of morainic drift that forms a high natural ridge between Copmanthorpe and Dringhouses. South of the A64 and to the east of Copmanthorpe the land slopes moderately down from the glacial ridge to the flat lands of the Vale. Close to the railway line, the drift geology changes to glacial silts and clays similar to those on which Askham Bog formed to the north of the A64. In the Bond Hill Ash Interchange area, as the land slopes down from the glacial ridge, beds of glacial sand and gravel divide the ridge from the clays and silts in the Vale to the south-east. To the north of the A1036 a similar geological pattern can be seen with the morainic drift giving way to beds of sand and gravel and then the silts and clays beneath Askham Bog.
Figure 1  Site location plan  
(see figure 2 for detail)
Figure 2. Location of works.
1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

This has been covered extensively in Macnab (1997) and so only a brief summary is given here.

1.3.1 Prehistoric period (to 1st century AD)

It has been suggested that the morainic ridge between Copmanthorpe and Dringhouses was part of a cross Vale route-way, particularly in the Bronze age (Radley 1974). This route may have been used for a considerable length of time, dating back possibly to the Neolithic or even earlier. Evidence for prehistoric occupation in the Copmanthorpe area is extremely limited however. The only find to date is a Neolithic polished stone axe made from bluestone, found just to the west of Copmanthorpe (NGR SE 55804705) in c. 1928.

1.3.2 Roman period (1st to 5th centuries AD)

The prehistoric route-way was fossilized in the construction of a Roman road from Eboracum (York) to Calcaria (Tadcaster) along its spine.

The road has been excavated at Streethouses, c.4 km south-west of Copmanthorpe, and at Hob Moor Lane, Dringhouses, c.4 km north-east of Copmanthorpe. Within the area of road improvement, the Roman road is thought to run along the line of the old A64 (now the A1036) from Dringhouses. This forms a slip road from the A64, just to the east of Copmanthorpe to the Bond Hill Ash Interchange. The Roman road continues west, following the line of the A64 before turning south-west into Copmanthorpe along Top Lane. This route has not yet been proven and the road may lie either on the ridge to the north or south of the present alignment. There is also a high probability of Romano-British settlement alongside the road.

1.3.3 Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th-11th centuries)

At present there is no evidence for Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian settlement in the area. However, the Roman road possibly kept up its combined functions of overland transport and trade routes throughout this period. Indeed Copmanthorpe may have gained its name from being situated close to this east-west trade route. In the Domesday Book of 1086, the village is known as Copeman Torp; Copeman derives from the Anglo-Scandinavian word for a merchant; Torp from the word Thorp, which means a smaller village colonised from a larger one. The village was possibly initially settled to facilitate the overland trade route along the ridge from Jorvik (York).

1.3.4 Medieval period (11th-16th centuries)

By 1066 it is likely that a small settlement existed, probably in the area were the core of the medieval village of Copmanthorpe stands today. Little however is known about its subsequent development as few documentary sources for the history of the village are known. A tax role for 1389 indicates that 65 people were eligible for taxation, and the population has been estimated at c. 100 (Johnson 1984). The medieval village centre lies outside the junction restructuring area, which during the medieval period probably contained the strip fields for it. Little of this has survived subsequent development, due to the construction of the railway, the outer ring road.
(A64), the Bond Hill Ash interchange, modern housing development and agricultural improvements.

1.3.5 Post-Medieval period (16th-19th centuries)

Within the study area, several hedge lines close to but bisected by the interchange, probably still relate to the enclosure of these strip fields in the 18th-century. Also, some of the remnants of ridge and furrow, indicative of medieval agriculture, can be seen in aerial photographs of Pike Hills Golf Course just to the south-west of Askham Bog.

1.3.6 Modern (19th-21st centuries)

The area was agricultural land adjacent to the York road until the railway line was built in the late 1830s and early 1840s. The A64 ring road was constructed in the early 1970s.

2. RESULTS

The watching brief was divided into five areas of observation areas relating to the parts of the project which were monitored.

2.1 Excavation of the road to the south of the A64

The creation of the new link road from Copmanthorpe involved the excavation of a strip of land c.0.20m deep, c.15.0m wide and c.400m in length across a field of cereals. The excavated area ran roughly due east from Copmanthorpe before swinging northwards to the site of a new underpass beneath the A64. The field had previously been used as a borrow-pit to provide earth for the construction of the A64 road.

The earliest deposit was a very clean mid brown silty-clay (context 100 1) which is interpreted as a natural deposit. The upper surface of this was checked thoroughly to recover any artefacts and to assess if any features of archaeological interest were present. Several sherds of very modern pottery were observed, but not retained, and in addition two clay pipe stems were recovered. There was no sign of any archaeological features. The natural clay was sealed by topsoil (1000) which was up to 0.20m thick.

2.2 Stripping of Area 2

This area was situated in the north-east corner of the junction improvement scheme area just to the north of the A1036 slip road. It was overgrown with long grass prior to machine clearance. The area was stripped to a depth of 0.40m below the present ground surface, and measured c.150m long and c.20m wide.

The earliest deposit consisted of natural clay (1001) very similar to the natural deposits described in area 1. This was sealed by 0.10m of crushed brick and limestone hard-core (1003) for a former tarmac road surface (1002). Between 0.05m and 0.20m of topsoil (1000) sealed the former road surface. No evidence for archaeological deposits was recovered. The tarmac surface is believed to be the original slip road from the A64.
2.3 Drainage trench and landscaping - Area 3

This area was situated between the entrance to Pike Hills Golf Course and the western end of the A1036 slip road. The work involved checking out the existing services, renewing the roadside drain and a small amount of landscaping. Observations in this area showed that the area had been disturbed by the construction of the A64 and much of the western end was embanked during the construction of the A64. The renewal of the roadside drain along the northern side of the A1036 revealed nothing other than road construction and disturbance deposits. No evidence of archaeological deposits was located.

2.4 Test-pits in Area 4

Area 4 was located between areas 2 and 3 on the northern side of the A1036 slip road. The work here consisted of monitoring three test-pits which were hand dug between the slip road and the cycle path. All of these were dug to c.0.50m below the present ground level and produced evidence suggesting that the area had been disturbed by modern road construction activities. Natural clay (1001) was sealed by thick layers of tarmac (1004), roadstone (1005) and modern dump deposits (1006) before a thick layer of topsoil (1000) sealed the area. No evidence of archaeological deposits was found.

2.5 Road make-up in Area 5

This area was situated directly opposite the entrance to Pike Hills Golf Course on the south side of the carriageway. Within this area, roughly cut small limestone blocks c.0.25 x 0.20 x 0.20m were observed to have formed a road make-up layer less than 0.10m below the base of the modern tarmac surface. The layer of stone was seen covering a width of c.6m and was exposed in patches for a length of c.1km. There was no wear on the blocks of stone and no packing material around them. They had not been used as a surface but had evidently been laid as a make-up layer for the modern road.

3. FINDS ASSESSMENT

No finds were collected on site as everything observed related to the modern disturbance of all areas by construction work adjacent to and relating to the A64 and its slip road (A1036).

4. CONCLUSIONS

All areas which were monitored were disturbed by modern construction activity relating to the construction and maintenance of the A64 and its slip road the A1036. All deposits appeared to truncate and seal natural clay. No evidence of archaeological deposits was located.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As the watching brief covered all of the works associated with the present junction improvements no further work is necessary. Any future work, especially between the cycle path and Pike Hills Golf Course on the north-side of the A1036 slip road should be monitored for evidence of the Roman road.

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6. LIST OF SOURCES


7. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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