

**BOOTHAM SCHOOL, YORK**

**Report on an Archaeological Evaluation**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

On March 6th - 8th 1996 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by York Archaeological Trust adjacent to the Arts Block and Gymnasium at Bootham School (Fig.1, NGR SE59965/52495) on behalf of the architects Nicholas Associates. The excavation was occasioned by the need to determine the survival of archaeological deposits in an area scheduled for the construction of a new school sports hall.

The specification provided by York City Council required the excavation, in the first instance, of a trench 3m x 3m to a depth of 0.75m below modern ground level. This work was carried out by machine after which, by agreement with the City and the Architects, an area 1m wide on the north-east side of the trench was mechanically excavated to natural subsoil. This was reached at c.1.30m below modern ground level (c.11.00m O.D). A second area c.0.80m wide on the south-west side of the trench was hand excavated to natural. The work was carried out under the supervision of Patrick Ottaway.

Records and finds are currently stored with the York Archaeological Trust under the Trust and Yorkshire Museum accession site code YORYM 1996.196

## 2. DOCUMENTARY SURVEY

There is no documentary evidence for Roman, Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian occupation of the site. The earliest reference is to the street name itself which is probably of Anglo-Scandinavian origin and means 'at the booths' (Palliser 1978).

There is only fragmentary evidence for medieval property along Bootham (Raine 1955). The properties did not extend far from Bootham Bar, and then only on the north-eastern side as the space in front of the Abbey walls was contested between the Abbey and the City. The Abbot of Easby had a hospice in his Bootham property and various tenements were recorded in the late 12th century. Otherwise holdings along the street seem mainly to have been gardens, as mentioned in a 1332 will, tofts or fields.

The 1545 sketch map of York records 'howsis' along Bootham, although it indicates that they stop opposite Marygate. Speed's map of 1610 shows a continuous line of houses on Bootham which may extend as far as no.59 behind which the excavation took place. If the maps are correct then many new houses were built along Bootham towards Clifton in the Elizabethan era.

Maps by Archer (1680) and Richards (1685) show isolated properties along the north-east side of Bootham interspersed with gardens and orchards. During the 18th century Bootham became a fashionable area and was built up with large Georgian houses. In 1810 Todd's map shows a developed street frontage with ornate gardens behind.

### 3. THE EXCAVATION

3.1 The sequence of deposits from the earliest to latest, as recorded in the north-east section of the trench (Fig.2), was as follows:

7. Light brown mottled clay with occasional cobbles. The natural subsoil.

8. Compact grey-brown silty clay with occasional cobbles and charcoal flecks. Probably a natural soil accumulation. Equivalent to layer 3 on north-west side of trench (see 3.2 below).

5. Shallow cut 0.60m wide, 0.30m deep running north-east/south-west. Probably a small ditch which cut layer 8. This feature was hand excavated below the level of the natural ground surface.

6. Compact light grey silty clay with occasional pebbles. The infill of Cut 5.

9. Compact grey sandy silty clay with frequent cobbles, pebbles and occasional limestone fragments. The layer was at its thickest, up to 0.40m, at the north-west end of the trench. This is probably the make-up of a street or lane running north-east/south-west. Equivalent to layer 2 on the north-west side of the trench (see 3.2 below).

10. Compact light/mid-grey sandy silty clay with occasional cobbles, pebbles and charcoal flecks. Overlies 9. Equivalent to 1 on the north-west side of the trench (see 3.2 below).

11. Compact mid-grey sandy silty clay with occasional cobbles, pebbles, tile fragments, mortar and charcoal flecks.

12. Friable mid grey sandy silty clay with occasional brick and tile fragments and charcoal flecks.

13. Compact dark grey silty clay with frequent ash lenses, charcoal patches and pebbles, and occasional brick and tile.

14 Construction trench for a brick wall running north-east/south-west along the south-east side of the trench. The level from which it was originally cut is not known.

15. Foundation of brick wall. Composed of large hand-made bricks in white mortar.

16. Cut for a trench running north-east/south-west across the south-east side of the trench. This was dug in order to demolish Wall 15.

17. Friable light grey mortar with occasional brick fragments. The infill of Trench 16.

18. Compact mid grey silty clay with frequent mortar, occasional brick fragments and charcoal flecks. The infill of Trench 16, it overlay 17.

19. Modern brick and concrete rubble.

20. Tarmac.

**3.2** In the area excavated on the south-west side of the trench the following layers were hand excavated.

3. Compact grey brown silty clay with occasional cobbles. Equivalent to 8 (see 3.1 above). Overlay natural, possibly a naturally accumulated soil. Two deposit were samples taken (for details see below p.10) .

2. Compact grey sandy silty clay with frequent cobbles, pebbles and occasional limestone fragments. This layer overlay layer 3. Layer 2 was at its thickest on the north-west side of the trench. The make-up of a street or lane running north-east / south-west. Equivalent to layer 9 (see 3.1 above).

1. Compact grey sandy silty clay with occasional pebbles. Overlay 2 and is equivalent to layer 10 (see 3.1 above).

### **3.3 Summary**

The natural subsoil was overlain by a deposit (3, 8) which may have been a naturally accumulated soil (see report on samples below p.10). This was cut by a small ditch (5) running north-east/south-west which appears to have filled up before the laying of a deposit of cobbles and pebbles (2, 9) in the north-western half of the trench. This material probably formed the make-up of a lane or path running north-eastwards from Bootham. Above the surface of the lane a homogeneous grey sandy silty clay (1, 10-1) accumulated to a depth of up to c.0.60m. Pottery (see report below p.10) suggests that this deposit began to accumulate in the 13th - 14th century.

Although the evidence had been destroyed by the robbing trench, the foundation trench for a 19th century brick wall (14) had probably been dug into the top of the deposit numbered 1, 10-1. Deposits containing a certain amount of building material (12-3) may have been contemporary with the life of the wall. They were cut by the trench (16) dug to demolish the wall. Subsequently, modern rubble (19) and the tarmac yard surface (20) were laid down.

#### **4. FINDS**

The only finds retained from the excavation consisted of seven sherds of pottery from layer 1. These included a medieval redware jug rim and rod handle of late 13th/early 14th century date, four sherds of Brandsby-type ware of late 13th/early 14th century date, a single splashed ware sherd of 12th century date and a Roman grey ware sherd of 2nd or 3rd century date.

#### **5. DEPOSIT SAMPLES**

Two deposit samples were taken from layer 3 which was thought to be a naturally accumulated deposit over natural subsoil. It was thought, therefore, that scientific examination might give an indication of the local environment before human occupation.

##### **5.1 Summary**

Two General Biological Analysis samples of sediment ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Small numbers of poorly preserved plant remains of little interpretative value were recovered from the sediment samples.

No further work is recommended on the material currently available.

##### **5.2 Methods**

Both of the GBA samples were inspected in the laboratory; 3 kg subsamples were taken from each of the GBAs for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for their content of plant and invertebrate macrofossils. Notes were made on the quantity of fossils, their quality of preservation, principal taxa, and main ecological groups.

##### **5.3 Results and Discussion**

The results are presented in sample number order.

### **5.3.1 Context 3, Sample 1/T**

Moist, light to mid brownish grey, plastic, sandy clay silt with mm-scale burrows.

The very small washover was mostly charcoal (to 5 mm), coal and cinder (to 2 mm) with some plant detritus, very decayed seed coat of greater celandine (*Chelidonium majus* L.), modern moss shoots and many earthworm egg capsules. In isolation, the celandine seeds are of little interpretative value, though they commonly occur in urban deposits associated with standing stone structures, often with few or no other plant remains, as here.

The smallish residue consisted largely of sand, with some gravel (to 35 mm).

### **5.3.2 Context 3, Sample 2/T**

Moist, light to mid brownish grey, plastic, sandy clay silt with small and medium-sized (6 to 60 mm) pieces of rotted sandstone present.

The very small washover was, again, mostly charcoal (to 10 mm), cinder and a little coal (to 2 mm) with traces of elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* L.) seeds and many earthworm egg capsules; one larger lump of burnt material (to 20 mm) was amorphous in nature and may have been peat, bark, or perhaps a soft kind of coal.

The residue was similar to that from the subsample of sample 1, though traces of coal, charcoal and cinder (to 5 mm) were present and there were a few fragments of iron-concreted sand (to about 5 mm).

### **5.3.3 Recommendations**

This material offers little prospect for bioarchaeological interpretation of the mode of formation of the deposits; the few plant remains and the abundant earthworm egg capsules, if contemporaneous with the deposits, are not inconsistent with the excavator's interpretation of the layer as a buried soil, however. Further light might have been shed on the question of the interpretation of the layer had it been examined in the field by a pedologist.

Although the present material is unlikely to yield further information, if deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging or higher concentrations of charred plant material are exposed during development, every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

### **5.3.4 Retention and disposal**

The samples need not be retained.

### **5.3.5 Archive**

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

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Deposit Survival**

Although not substantial, deposits of medieval and possible earlier periods were well-preserved and subject to limited modern intrusion.

### **6.2 Period Analysis**

#### 1. Roman, Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian

No deposits which can be definitely ascribed to these periods were encountered. The deposit 0.10m thick (3, 8) immediately over natural and undated small ditch (5) may, however, be pre-medieval.

#### 2. Medieval

The make-up for a lane or path running north-eastwards from Bootham was probably of this date as pottery suggests that the deposit (1) immediately overlying it began to accumulate in the late medieval period. Since the earlier undated ditch appears to run along the line of the south-east edge of the lane it may also be medieval. Much, if not all of the homogeneous grey material (1, 10-1) up to 0.60m thick overlying the lane surface is probably late medieval.

#### 3. Post-Medieval and Modern.

A demolished brick wall and a c.0.30m thickness of deposits may be ascribed to these periods.

## **7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The only features of archaeological interest in the trench were a small ditch and cobbled lane. Although not datable on the basis of directly associated finds, they are most likely to be medieval. The surface of the lane at its highest point occurs at c.0.85m below modern ground level (11.40m O.D.). Foundations for the sports hall dug to a depth of 0.75m below modern ground level are not likely, therefore, to have any serious archaeological implications. Any ground works which go deeper than 0.75m (11.40m O.D.) should, however, be subject to archaeological monitoring.

## Contributors

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