FORMER BUS DEPOT;
NAVIGATION ROAD
YORK

A Report on an
Archaeological Watching Brief

by Gareth Dean
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NAVIGATION ROAD,
YORK.

A REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIF

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List of Abbreviations

BGL Below Ground Level

References to sites in the York Archaeological Trust Gazetteer (www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/gaz/index.htm) are given in the form 1989.8.
Fig. 1  Site location

Fig. 2  Borehole locations
ABSTRACT

A watching brief was maintained on eight boreholes at the former Bus Depot, Navigation Road, York. Seven of them were located within the building and one outside at the rear. The deposits recorded within the Bus Depot consisted largely of brick rubble. One borehole produced a silt deposit which may be associated with water lain or marshy deposition and in another there was diesel contamination.

1. INTRODUCTION

The York Archaeological Trust monitored the excavation of eight boreholes at the former Bus Depot, Navigation Road, York (NGR SE 6090 5164; Fig 1) between the 2nd September and the 10th September 2003.

The work was carried out for Wimpey Homes Yorkshire Ltd. All records are currently stored by the York Archaeological Trust under the museum accession code YORYM:2003.295.

2. METHOD STATEMENT

Eight boreholes were monitored for archaeological deposits at the former Bus Depot in Navigation Road, York of which seven were located within the building and one outside at the rear. Once the natural subsoil was encountered, no further observations were made. In the raised area at the rear of the Bus Depot a void existed below the present concrete surface 1.55m - 1.8m deep.

The natural subsoil consisted of dark grey brown clay, mottled with light brown patches with sand laminations. Above this all the boreholes contained a clay sand silt deposit with large quantities of brick rubble and mortar inclusions. However, at the base Borehole 5 also produced a wet silty sand that may be associated with waterlain or marshy deposition. The borehole data were used to produce a series of north–south and east–west profiles across the depot. Recording on site was by means of a watching brief note book. All depths are given as Above Ordnance Datum (OD), but measurements were dependent on visibility within the boreholes and should be treated as approximate rather than absolute depths.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The boreholes were monitored because it was thought possible that information relating to the history of the Navigation Road area would be revealed. Navigation Road itself lies within the medieval fortifications that surround the Walmgate area. It runs north-west / south-east and joins Walmgate, a street of medieval origin at its south-east end. At its north-west end Rosemary Place joins Navigation Road to Foss Islands Road at the medieval Red Tower.

Previously there has been only limited archaeological work within this area of York. However, there is some evidence for Roman activity. The Roman road from Brough
approaches York from the east (RCHMY1, 2) and has been identified in Lawrence Street and in front of Walmgate Bar and may turn to follow the line of Walmgate (Brinklow 1986, 87). In 1827, a stone coffin was found behind one of the inns on Walmgate and in 1892, a lead coffin was found under the street (RCHMY1, 87). Excavations at 118-126 Walmgate (1979.8), on the corner of Walmgate and Navigation Road produced some Roman pottery and also within the walls, in Speculation Street, a group of post-holes were dated to the Roman period (On Site Archaeology 2002).

For the Anglo-Scandinavian period the excavations at 118-126 Walmgate (1979.8) produced a large wattle-lined pit or well of 9th – 10th century date. In the late 11th century the River Foss was dammed to create a moat around the newly built Norman castle and had the effect of creating a large pool on the east side of the city, often referred to as the King's Pool or King's Fish Pool (RCHMY2, 137-8). The possible northern limits of the King's Pool were defined in a borehole survey outside the city walls at the Council Depot, Foss Islands Road (Johnson 1999).

It is the medieval period the earliest reference to a street name for what is believed to become Navigation Road appears in 1145-51 when it is referred to as Bretgate, or street of the Britons. In 1251 this was changed to ‘little’ Bretgate to distinguish from the more important Bretgate, now Jubbergate and Market Street in the city centre (RCHMY5, 167). The only known medieval building in the area not on the Walmgate frontage is St Margaret’s church first mentioned in 1177-81 (VCHY, 386), and lying to the south-east of the bus depot. The medieval period also saw a steady reclamation of land from the King’s Fish Pool either through natural silting or deliberate dumping of material. Excavations at 76-82 Walmgate (1987.33) uncovered medieval infilling of the King's Fish Pool. A series of boreholes in Rosemary Place (MAP 1994) identified silt deposits from the Kings Fish Pool.

By the 16th century Walmgate was one of the poorest wards in the city (Palliser 1979). The area is depicted in an extensive series of maps from the 17th century onwards which allows an overview of its development up to modern times. From John Speed’s map of c1610 it is clear that the land between the Walmgate street frontage, and river Foss and the edge of the Pool was open land divided into plots. A lane is depicted roughly on the alignment of Navigation Road extending from Walmgate to St Margaret’s church. A succession of later 17th century maps (Archer 1680, Jacob Richards 1685 and Horsley 1697) show little change in this area except that the lane is extended to the Foss. There was a steady reduction in the size of the King’s Fish Pool and some alterations in the field boundaries north-east of Walmgate. A map by Francis Drake shows by 1736 Foss Island had formed and was surrounded by the waters of the Foss and the Tang Hall Beck. Buildings were still concentrated on the Walmgate frontage.

By the 19th century the Walmgate area accommodated tenements for poor families and was made worse by an influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s. By the 1890s the area was getting a reputation for poor health. Two Acts of Parliament were passed in 1890 and 1909 to improve the condition of housing for the working classes. Areas of land were bought outside the city walls for new housing and the slums in the Walmgate, Navigation Road and Hungate areas began to be cleared (Nuttgens 1976). The canalisation of the Foss in 1753 had a big impact on this area and gave Navigation Road its present name.
The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1852 shows the area north-east of Walmgate had been partially filled with houses with a linen factory on the west side of Navigation Road. The area that became the bus depot had a row of buildings around a courtyard with an open area behind them to the east. In 1875 the plot of land at the corner of Navigation Road and Paver Lane was developed for the Ebor Glass Works. The plan of the original buildings shows that the adjacent land to the north was referred to as Mr Smith's Cottages. The plot of land behind the cottages is referred to as Stone Yard. By 1909 the Ordnance Survey map shows that the plot referred to as Mr Smith's cottages has been taken over by the Ebor Glassworks but retains the layout of cottages shown on the 1852 map. The glass works changed its name several times through the 1920s and finally closed in the 1930s. On the 1937 Ordnance Survey map the land that had formed Mr Smith's cottages has been cleared and a small industrial unit is shown within the confines of the original corner plot of the glassworks. In 1938 the Pullman Bus Company brought this piece of derelict land and a new garage was built. The present bus depot building first appears on the 1948 edition of the Ordnance Survey map.

4. THE WATCHING BRIEF

4.1 Borehole 1

Borehole 1 was located at the front of the Bus Depot 5m away from a redundant fuel tank. Natural (1003), firm grey brown clay, laminated with sand bands was located at 7.2m OD. Directly above this was a 0.10m thick layer of diesel-contaminated clay silt (1002). Overlying this was a firm, dark grey brown clay silt (1001) with brick, brick rubble and mortar inclusions 1.5m thick. This was sealed by 0.22m of concrete that formed the present ground surface (1000).

4.2 Borehole 2

The natural was a firm, grey brown clay (2002) at 6.5m OD. This was overlain by firm, dark grey brown clay silt (2001) with brick, brick rubble and mortar inclusions 2.4m thick sealed by 0.22m of concrete (2000) of the present ground surface.

4.3 Borehole 3

The natural (3002), firm grey brown clay with some sand lamination was located 6.7m OD. Overlying this was deposit a deposit of firm, dark grey brown silt sand (3001) with brick rubble and mortar inclusions 2m thick. In this borehole it was noticed that the main concentration of large brick rubble material appeared to be in a layer 0.42m thick directly below the present ground surface with the inclusions of brick and mortar becoming smaller below this depth. The present ground surface was concrete (3000), 0.20m thick.

4.4 Borehole 4

Soft, grey brown natural clay (4002) was located at 7m OD. Directly above this was the firm dark grey silt sand with brick rubble and mortar inclusions (4001) 1.6m thick sealed by 0.2m of concrete that formed the present ground surface.
Fig. 3  Borehole profile 1 (north-south)
Fig. 4  Borehole profile 2 (east-west)
Fig. 5  Borehole profile 3 (north-south)
4.5 Borehole 5

Borehole 5 was located on the raised area 1.75m high, at the rear of the building. A void, 1.55m deep, existed below the 0.2m thick concrete (5000) of the present ground surface. Depths for this borehole were taken from this concrete ground level.

The firm, grey brown clay with laminated sand bands (5003) was located at 6.5m OD. This was overlain by approximately 1.1m of soft, grey, sticky clay silt (5002) with some organic inclusions that may represent a waterlain deposit, perhaps within a natural hollow. Directly above this was firm, brown clay silt sand (5001) with frequent brick and rubble inclusions 1.5m thick. This deposit formed the ground surface at the base of the void of the raised area.

4.6 Borehole 6

Borehole 6 was also located at the rear of the Bus Depot on the raised area. In this borehole the void beneath the present ground level was 1.8m deep. Depths for this borehole were taken from the present concrete ground level (6000) that is 0.2m thick.

At 7.2m OD the firm dark grey brown clay natural (6002) was located. As in the other boreholes this was overlain by firm brown clay silt sand (6001) with frequent brick and rubble inclusions. The brick rubble inclusions appeared to become less frequent in this deposit as it got closer to the interface with the natural (6002).

4.7 Borehole 7

The natural firm, dark grey brown laminated clay (7002) was located at 5.9m OD. This suggests a sharp drop in the ground level towards the river. Overlying this was firm, dark grey brown silty sand (7001), with frequent brick inclusions 3.0m thick. Although unclear at what depth, there did appear to be a general reduction in the size and frequency of brick rubble and mortar inclusions in this deposit. Directly above this was the present ground surface, 0.2m thick concrete (7000).

4.8 Borehole 8

Borehole 8 was located outside the rear of the Bus Depot in an area not covered by concrete, 3m from the wall of the building and 4m from the boundary wall of the depot.

Natural, dark grey brown clay (8002) with laminated sand bands was identified at 8.5m OD. This was overlain by 2m of dark grey brown silty sand (8001) with frequent brick rubble and mortar inclusions. This was sealed by a thin band of clinker and soil 0.05m thick that formed the present ground surface.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The borehole survey suggests that below the present concrete ground surface of the Bus Depot there are modern deposits of brick rubble up to c. 0.42m thick and is presumably
associated with the demolition of either the cottages or buildings associated with the glass works shown on the Ordnance Survey prior to the construction of the Bus Depot. The change in the deposit with fewer brick rubble and mortar inclusions may be the original ground level prior to the redevelopment of the area and may be a relict soil.

The profile of the natural clay from the boreholes suggests a gradual fall in ground level from east to west. Borehole profiles in a north-south direction suggest a much more uneven profile, with a ridge of higher ground in the centre of the Bus Depot, a sharp drop in the north-west corner shown in Borehole 7, and a high point in the north-east corner in Borehole 1. This uneven ground surface may be due to areas where material has been dug out, perhaps associated with the demolition of buildings prior to the construction of the Bus Depot, or associated with the construction of the Bus Depot itself.

The borehole survey would suggest that the Bus Depot does not lie within the Kings Fishpool. The possible waterlain deposit in Borehole 5 may be due to a variation in the natural ground surface which has trapped water as it was not identified in any of the other boreholes.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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