



UNIVERSITY OF YORK: CHEMISTRY BLOCK C

Desk-based Archaeological Assessment

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October 2011

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Summary

This document is a desk-top study of the archaeological potential of the site of Chemistry Block C at York University which is scheduled for redevelopment. The study is based on relevant sources of evidence, including a desk-based assessment of the nearby Heslington East site and the results of extensive excavations at that site. Block C is located near the top of the York moraine and the study suggests that the moraine has been a routeway since earliest times and a focus for human activity, especially, but not exclusively agriculture. In the immediate area of Block C there have been two important archaeological discoveries: a Roman coin hoard and a suite of Anglian artefacts, possibly from a cemetery. In line with government policy on the historic environment as expressed in PPS 5 (2010) a field evaluation should be undertaken before redevelopment. Depending on the results further mitigation work may be required.

1. Introduction

1.1 This document is a desk-top study of the archaeological potential of the site of Chemistry Block C at York University which is scheduled for redevelopment. The site lies a little to the north of University Road and west of Innovation Way (SE626507; Fig.1).

1.2 The study is intended to:

- allow an informed view to be taken of the potential extent, survival, character and date of any archaeological deposits and features which may survive on the site;
- allow an informed decision to be taken on what mitigation strategy for archaeology might be appropriate in line with government policy on the historic environment as expressed in *Planning Policy Statement 5* (2010).

1.3 The study is based on:

- the desk-top study (Evans 2002) for the Heslington East site, 0.5km to the south-east of Block C (based on a search of the City of York SMR);
- the Heslington East excavation assessment report for work by York Archaeological Trust in 2008 (Antoni et al. 2009);
- secondary sources referred to in Section 6 below.

2. Geology and topography

2.1 The site lies at c.14.5m OD, immediately north of the crest of the York moraine which forms a ridge of raised ground running east–west across the Vale of York. The present Block C building appears to have been built on a level platform which at its southern end was dug into the slope of the moraine.

2.2 The solid geology of the area is Triassic Sandstone, but overlain in the area of Block C by boulder clay (Geological Survey of England and Wales 1909).

3. Archaeological and historical background

Prehistoric period

3,1 There are no certain prehistoric monuments in the immediate area, although c. 450m to the north-west of Block C, on Heslington Hill, stands Siward's How. This has been variously interpreted as a prehistoric burial mound (Elgee 1933), an early medieval burial mound (Ramm 1965) or even a late medieval mill mound (Short 1994). A scraper and a few flint flakes were recovered as surface finds in ground works immediately to the south-west of the mound, but they are undiagnostic as to date (Short 1994; Perring 1999). None was found in trenches south of the mound in 1997.

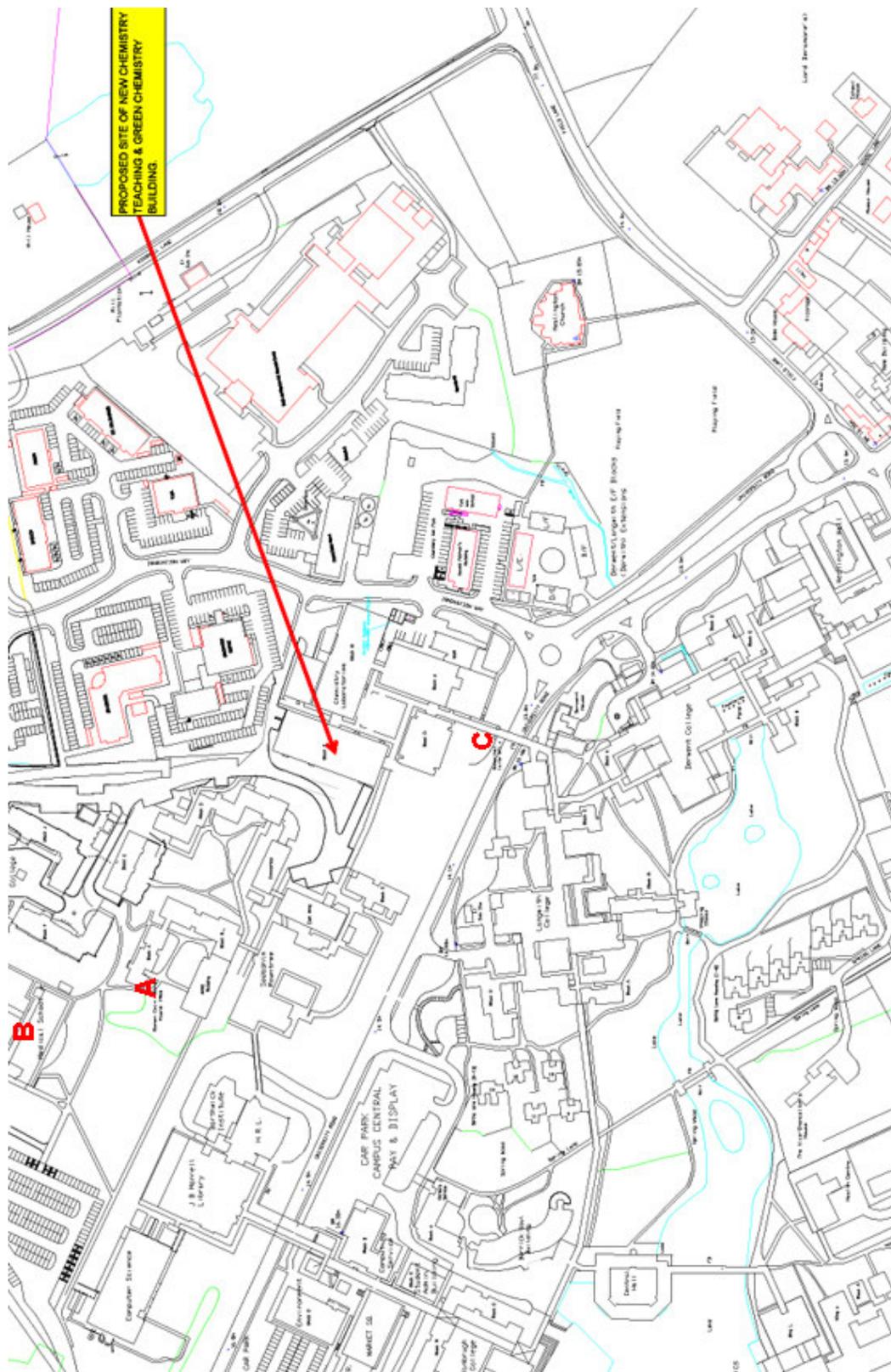


Fig.1 Site location. A = site of Roman coin hoard at Alcuin College, B = Medical centre (Anglian finds), C= site of Hesketh's Hospital

- 3.2 Archaeological investigations at Heslington East, also on the moraine, produced a number of features (ditches, pits, burials and wells) of Late Neolithic – Early Bronze Age date. A significant assemblage of flints from the site belongs largely to the same period. This evidence suggests the moraine served as a routeway across the Vale of York from an early date, and also as a focus for agriculture, settlement and religion-related activities.
- 3.3 In the mid-late Iron Age the slopes of the moraine at Heslington East site, on areas of sandy subsoil rather than directly on boulder clay, were occupied by a field system of a type characteristic of the region, composed of ditched enclosures.
- 3.4 Located c. 750m west of the Block C an earthwork, known as the Green Dykes, exists as a line of banks and ditches running north – south across the moraine. This is thought to be prehistoric, probably Iron Age.

Roman period (c. AD 71 – 410)

- 3.5 The Block C site lies between two main Roman roads, one approaching York from the west on the north side of the moraine, along the line of Hull Road (c.400m to the north), and the other approaching York from the south-east from the direction of Fulford Golf Club (c.1km to south-west at the nearest point). In addition a minor road or track may have run along the moraine forming a continuation of the cobbled track found in Belle Vue Street 1.5 km west of Block C (Ottaway 2011, 258-9). This would, perhaps, have headed towards the site of two Roman burials in stone coffins c.450m to the east of Block C, and a Roman farmstead and enclosure complex excavated at Heslington East, another kilometer further to the east.
- 3.6 A track along the moraine might explain the location of a hoard of 2795 mid-fourth-century Roman coins found during construction of Alcuin College, immediately to the north-west of Block C in 1966 (Carson and Kent 1971; Fig.1, A).

Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (c. 410 – 1066)

- 3.7 In an investigation, in 2003, immediately north-west of Block C, on the sites of a new University car park and medical school (Fig.1, B), sixth century Anglian pottery, an iron knife, metal working debris and two glass beads were found (Spall and Toop 2003). These finds presumably indicate either a cemetery and/or settlement in the locality. Further Anglian activity on the top of the moraine is suggested by a small suite of pottery and metalwork from Heslington East (excavations of 2010-11).
- 3.8 No evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian activity or settlement in the Block C area is known, although Heslington village and township probably had their origins in the ninth - tenth centuries.

Medieval period (1066 – c.1550)

- 3.9 Aerial photographs taken before the University development of the mid-1960s show the area around Block C as pasture in hedged fields. They also show very prominent ridge and furrow resulting from arable cultivation of the medieval open fields of Heslington before they were enclosed and converted to pasture.

Post-medieval and modern periods (c.1550 – present day)

- 3.10 The earliest reliable road map of Yorkshire, by Thomas Jefferys of 1775, shows the road from Heslington to York which is now University Road (immediately south of Block C), although it is likely to have an earlier origin.
- 3.11 Heslington Hall was built in the late sixteenth century. In 1608 Sir Thomas Heskith, its owner and Lord of the Manor, founded a hospital to cater for eight poor men and one woman. It was located immediately south of Block C, close to the junction of University Road and Innovation Way. The hospital appears in a late eighteenth-century view of Heslington Hall, but had been demolished by the time of the first OS map of 1853.
- 3.12 The hospital apart, the area around Block C remained as fields until the construction of the University and accompanying landscaping in the mid-1960s.

4. Survival of archaeological remains and research potential

- 4.1 The evidence reviewed above suggests that there was little human activity, other than agriculture, on the York moraine around the site of Block C until the construction of the university in the mid-1960s. However, deposition of artefactual material in various different contexts did occur in the immediate locality in the prehistoric, Roman and Anglian periods.
- 4.2 In light of the growing body of archaeological evidence for the early history of the York moraine on the east side of the city and especially from Heslington, any archaeological remains at Block C would potentially be of interest for the study of the use of the moraine and, in particular, might give some context to the Roman hoard and Anglian finds.
- 4.3 Whether any archaeological remains ever existed on the site of Block C or, if they did, whether they have survived the construction of the present Block C building is unknown. As the building has been made level by digging into the sloping ground, and has some substructures below floor level, any superficial finds scatters or shallow features are likely to have been lost. Deeper features such as pits and ditches, may, however, survive, albeit in a truncated form.

5. Mitigation of development impact

- 5.1 In order to determine whether any significant archaeological remains survive on the site of Block C it is recommended that, in line with government policy on the historic environment as expressed in PPS5, a field evaluation should take place following demolition of the present building.
- 5.2 The evaluation should involve a removal of any building debris and other overburden under archaeological supervision. Should it then appear that archaeological remains are likely to survive, a programme of selective excavation will be required to assess their character, date etc.
- 5.3 Depending on the results of evaluation, further mitigation may be warranted. This would either involve excavation before development or a watching brief during construction.

6. References

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