

## *Summer by the seaside*

### **Archaeological salvage works in Scarborough, 1999**

Archaeologists have become accustomed to developments that involve considerable destruction of their primary resource, or layers of archaeological deposits as they used to be called. In the normal run of things this is a process that happens with the planning consent of the local authority. Occasionally, however, a developer or contractor carries out works that are not only to the detriment of archaeological deposits but also carried out without these necessary consents. In some instances these works may even be in breach of orders put in place to protect the archaeology of a given site. Readers may be familiar with recent media coverage over the unregulated destruction of significant Viking age deposits at the Littlewoods site in York which ironically place over the same weekend as the highly successful Time Team excavations from York were being broadcast. Less well known, however, are events that took place in the North Yorkshire coastal resort of Scarborough earlier in 1999.

#### **Background**

The Scarborough site was located in the core area of the old town on a plot of partially open ground bounded by the streets of Cooks Row, St Sepulchre Street and Springfield. As this land was proposed for housing development an archaeological evaluation consisting of 11 small trenches had already been carried out by the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society (SAHS) on a part time basis over the period 1996-8. The results of this work demonstrated a build-up of several metres of medieval deposits, many of which were waterlogged and thus provided ideal conditions for the preservation of timber and other organic objects. Excavation showed the site was bisected by an old stream channel running east-west, the Damyot, the waters of which were subsequently diverted through a medieval culvert. In the southern part of the site stone walling from the long demolished medieval church of St Sepulchre was found, overlaying an earlier phase of probable timber buildings. The northern part of the site revealed a mass of waterlogged deposits within which more unidentified timber structures were evident. Medieval stone building(s) were subsequently built in this area. The SAHS report considered the excavation indicated the site was 'one of the most important archaeological sites in Scarborough' and that 'the remains merit long-

term preservation.' As a result of the proven archaeological significance of the site the Local Authority placed an order that insisted on archaeological deposits being considered within any overall development plan before building or demolition works could take place. Unfortunately this constraint was breached when in December 1998 two greenhouses and a large World War II air-raid shelter on the site were demolished. More unfortunately still, the rubble from these structures was neither stockpiled on nor removed from the site - but buried within two purpose dug machine holes!

As a result of the Local Authority's response to these illicit works, two members of the Trust's staff were despatched to oversee the mechanical re-excavation of the holes, both which were reputedly of a size around 1.5m x 2m. Proceedings started inauspiciously when on the first day the archaeologists were ordered off the site by the landowner. Fortunately this situation was quickly resolved and work re-commenced. Things got worse when after three days of machining the full extent of the first hole (Trench 1) became apparent; not 1.5m x 2m but 12m x 8.5m and up to 1.9m deep! The second hole (Trench 2), a relative tiddler by comparison, proved to measure some 9m x 4.25m by up to 2.12m deep. These trenches were of irregular shape and profile, thus presenting a multi-phase slice through the archaeology of the site. Although the cutting of the machine holes had caused considerable damage they did not penetrate to the levels of the deepest deposits present and so these at least remain intact. The Local Authority specification for archaeological works required only the cleaning up of the re-emptied holes, followed by their recording. This included detailed planning of the trench bases and the drawing of the sections. Accordingly, no archaeological excavation as such was involved. Nevertheless, examination of the remains present, including the elucidation of stratigraphic relationships, did enable a sequence of events to be established. Sadly, the only physical connection between the two trenches was at the uppermost levels and so the bulk of the archaeology of each trench can only be tentatively linked to that of the other.

## **Results**

### **Trench 1**

Evidence of the earliest activity reached in this trench, Phase 1, consisted of a discontinuous stretch of north – south aligned walling (part of which had been revealed in

the SAHS evaluation), associated at the southern extreme of the trench with a series of internal clay floors and a setting of hearth stones. It is possible that these structural remains, which are clearly part of a building, originally related to a major east-west aligned wall at the extreme north of the trench. This latter wall may well have had a prolonged life as it was certainly present in a later structural development.

Evidence for Phase 2 was comprised almost exclusively of traces of the robbing out of the Phase 1 north-south wall. 15th century pottery was recovered from deposits of this phase.

Large-scale building works mark the activity of Phase 3. The key elements of this consisted of a further north-south aligned wall that at its northern end was keyed into a more substantial major east - west aligned wall. Areas of contemporary cobbled surfacing, almost certainly of exterior usage, that overlay the robbed remnants of the Phase 1 wall and formed part of this development. In the western part of the trench a further area of cobbled surfacing along with a short stretch of stonework may also belong to this phase. The function of this stonework is not certain but it may represent an external stair support. Immediately west and north of Trench 1, two SAHS trenches uncovered further structural remains that may be associated with this phase. The northern trench contained a north-south aligned wall that seems likely to have related to the major east-west wall in Trench 1, immediately to the south. The second SAHS trench contained a further north-south aligned wall with an adjacent hearth. Collectively the phase 3 features appear to represent parts of a major building or perhaps more likely, a range of buildings, of 15th century or later date.

Robbing of parts of the walls of the Phase 3 building(s), probably during the 15th-16th centuries, forms Phase 4 within Trench 1 and suggests the virtual abandonment of the site. Subsequently (Phase 5) an extensive series of deposits composed largely of rubble and refuse were dumped across the site, which by this time appears to have formed little more than a waste-ground. During Phase 6 a deep topsoil developed over the site which, judging from early maps of the area, is likely to have functioned as a garden soil until the early 19th century.

## **Trench 2**

Whereas remains of occupation characterised the medieval deposits of Trench 1, an entirely different sort of activity was represented in Trench 2. The earliest deposits encountered were water-lain stream deposits within what is likely to have been the natural course of the Damyot beck. The uppermost of these Phase 1 deposits contained many well preserved organic materials, chiefly wood but also fragments of leather and textiles, in addition to pottery of 13–14th century date.

Phase 2 witnessed the human management of this watercourse. This was achieved by the construction of a sturdily built stone culvert which was protected on the south side, at least, by a clay and earth bank. A series of deposits, many predominantly of rubble, was also dumped into the old course of the Damyot. The presence of some water-lain deposits above this level within the old water-course indicates that some flow still occurred within the stream, though this may merely have been periodic excess flood water that was beyond the capacity of the culvert. This culvert is thought to have been constructed in the 15th century; a further stretch of it was exposed to the west within one of the SAHS trenches. Quite why the Damyot was culverted is uncertain. It may relate to land reclamation along its course or it may have been harnessed as a source of motive power. Alternatively, it could have been used for scouring/cleansing purposes within the Franciscan friary known to have existed to the west, though the full extent of this institution is uncertain.

Some robbing of stonework from the culvert took place in Phase 3 and seems likely to mark the demise of the artificial channel. As no evidence was found for further water-lain deposits it must be assumed that some alternative scheme of water management was in place elsewhere. The demise of the culvert is likely to have coincided with the 15th – 16th century abandonment of the building(s) immediately to the north in Trench 1. Extensive dumping of waste materials in the area of Trench 2 (Phase 4), together with the development of a deep topsoil (Phase 5), correlate directly with Phases 5 and 6 of Trench 1.

## **Summary**

In conjunction with the SAHS evaluation the recent work by York Archaeological Trust has revealed interesting aspects of the development of this plot of ground. In the northern part

of the site a major building or range of buildings was present. This is likely to have had a prolonged life and underwent a series of re-modellings. On the basis of wall thicknesses and the presence of a possible exterior stair foundation the building is likely to have been of more than one storey. Clay floors and hearths were present within the interior of the building whilst cobbled metalling formed exterior surfaces. The Damyot flowed immediately south of the building(s); initially within the bounds of its natural channel. This was subsequently constrained within a stone built culvert and attempts were made to infill its old course. At some point around the 15th–16th century both the buildings and culvert went out of use and were partially robbed. Immediately after this the site was used as a general dumping ground before being converted to as garden usage. Throughout the 19th–20th centuries the site was progressively built upon by a series of buildings.

Perhaps the most obvious question that arises from the archaeological works at the site concerns the historical ownership of the medieval structures that were found. Their size and quality of workmanship point towards high status and ownership/control by an institution or individual of some wealth. Whilst the identity of this authority is unknown, the date of structural demise, around the time of the reformation, does raise the possibility that the remains may once have formed part of the Franciscan friary.

Whilst the Trust's work has served to shed further light on this small part of Scarborough the cost in terms of archaeology destroyed has been high. The fact that in this instance the Local Authority responded positively may help to make such losses less common.