

To be A Jacobean North Wing, Or Not To Be ?

Excavations at Hazelwood Castle, North Yorkshire, 1997

In February 1997, York Archaeological Trust carried out a field evaluation at Hazlewood Castle, N. Yorkshire, to the west of and incorporating The Orangery, an existing standing building just to the north of the main castle. Following this a watching brief was carried out in November and December 1997 on the demolition of an 18th century wall, and the excavation of foundation trenches. Both archaeological investigations revealed important evidence for the survival of medieval and post-medieval structures and deposits.

The site lies on a high ridge of Permian magnesian limestone c. 3 miles south-west of Tadcaster and overlooking the Vale of Towton to the south-west. The castle dominates the surrounding countryside, and would have been an imposing structure throughout its history.

Hazlewood Castle was the residence of the 'Vavasours' from just after the Norman conquest until 1907. *Vavasour* was an Anglo-Norman term for a person who held lands under a mesne (intermediate) lord rather than directly from the crown, and in dignity ranked next below a Baron. Malger Vavasour is mentioned as holding land at *Ezelwoode* for William de Percy in the Domesday Book. In 1167 Sir Walter Vavasour founded a chapel on the site, but this and the manor were burnt down in 1265. Sir William le Vavasour however, was granted licence to crenellate in 1286, probably the core of the present castle, and construct a new chapel. The castellated manor is thought to have changed little until the 15th century when a tower was added to the north-west. In the 18th- century, the sixth baronet Sir Walter completely altered the castle adding the north and west wings, and internally renovating all of the original buildings. It has been suggested that his north wing was a renovation of a 17th century Jacobean building, built originally to provide suitable accommodation for King James I as he travelled north to Scotland in 1603. However the King did not stay at Hazlewood. No previous excavations are known from the site and the investigations hoped to elucidate the origin of the north wing, which was demolished in 1908, and to see if there were any medieval

precursors or other deposits. The evaluation consisted of two 3m by 2m trenches to the west of The Orangery, a 2m by 2m trench in the courtyard and a watching brief monitoring groundwork's and demolition within The Orangery.

Within Trench 1, the earliest deposits encountered consisted of a limestone footing (1006) and a limestone wall (1005). The wall was constructed of roughly squared limestone blocks with a core of limestone rubble sealed by a thick coat of plaster. It was aligned east-west and was thought to be a partition wall within the north wing, no dating evidence however was recovered. The limestone footing (1006) was only partially exposed under a later floor surface, and consisted of two roughly squared limestone blocks. It was difficult to tell whether it was contemporary with wall (1005), but both were thought to be broadly contemporary. An L-shaped brick wall (1002) was constructed on top of the limestone footing, this was thought to have been a brick range, or an internal room partition. A deposit (1008) probably a dump of waste construction materials utilised to raise the ground level, covered the base of the wall and the limestone footing and sand bedding (1007) was then laid down before a sandstone flag floor (1003) was constructed. The insertion of a roughly constructed brick fireplace (1004) within the L-shaped brick range, possibly in the 19th century, marked the final stage of building work within the trench. All the deposits were sealed by a thick dump of demolition and topsoil.

Within Trench 2 a construction cut (2016) truncated earlier deposits and contained wall (2002). This was aligned north-south and coincided with a section of wall jutting out of the south side of the 18th century building here termed the 'keep' (see Fig. 1). It was faced with roughly squared limestone blocks, with an internal cavity backfilled with mortared limestone rubble. The eastern face of the wall was sealed by a layer of plaster, but the corresponding western face was unplastered, suggesting that this was the outer face. The wall's construction cut backfill (2015) contained a fragment of medieval vessel glass which would suggest a late medieval date for its construction. It emerged the limestone wall (2002) was actually constructed in two phases, only visible when construction cut 2016 was excavated. Both walls were constructed in a similar fashion and were of similar dimensions but the relationship between the two walls was unclear.

A medieval garden soil (2005) had built up just west of the wall (2002), while to its east were a number of dumps of post-medieval date, later discovered to pre-date the construction of the north-wing. A bedding layer of sand and a sandstone floor then sealed all the deposits to the west of wall (2002), at a slightly higher level than in Trench 1. The eastern face of wall (2002), appears to show evidence of earlier plaster below the floor level, suggesting that the floor was a secondary insertion. Modern demolition and topsoil finally sealed the trench.

Trench 3, within the courtyard, proved to contain a number of service pipes which had disturbed archaeological deposits. A circular structure built of roughly hewn blocks of limestone was discovered in the centre of the trench, and was interpreted as a well of late medieval date. It had been backfilled with sands and gravel and covered by levelling deposits before being truncated by modern services. Finally, the whole trench was sealed by limestone rubble hardcore and tarmac.

The Watching Brief, which is still ongoing, has revealed much more information about the site's development. The earliest deposit seems to be a thin occupation layer, possibly 10th - 11th century in date, which covered the whole area to the north of the castle. Cutting through this were two large pits. One in the north-west corner, contained a primary deposit of charred grain which is yet to be analysed, overlain by a thin layer of burnt mortar and then a thick dump of limestone rubble which completely backfilled the pit. A second pit, backfilled with rubble and dump deposits, was also located. Both appear to be of 12th-13th century date and contain demolition materials which showed signs of burning.

A section of wall, thought to be of medieval date, was constructed to the west of these pits, but it was unclear whether it pre- or post-dated them. Butting onto it was a wall extension which had a foundation construction cut 0.42m deeper. This wall extension, originally seen in Trench 2, also overlay the rubble backfill of one of the pits. The difference in the depths of foundations would seem to suggest that the walls were built at different times and that the one with the deeper footing is a later addition. Further fragments of medieval vessel glass were recovered from the backfill of its construction

trench. It appeared to extend as far as the 'keep' before sharply turning to the east and forming its southern wall. This would originally have been the corner of a late medieval building or courtyard.

Another possible piece of wall very intermittent in nature, and only one course in height, was also located running out from the 15th century tower's north-eastern corner. It appeared to have been heavily disturbed and truncated by 18th to 20th century intrusions. Where it joined the tower there was no evidence to indicate that it was a later addition and it is therefore thought to have been at least contemporary with the tower and may indicate the presence of buildings to the north of it, possibly stables, or store rooms on the western side of a late medieval courtyard.

Prior to the construction of the 18th-century north wing the ground level in the north-western corner, overlying the medieval pit, appears to have been levelled up with dumps of garden soil, layers of cobbles and mortar, and dumps of ash, and clinker. These stratified layers may be the remnants of former courtyard surfaces, or floors for buildings against the western wall, the rest of the courtyard area having been cleared prior to construction. However, these deposits seem to have been localised within the area of the large pit, and may have just been dumped to level up the ground as the pit fill subsided in the early post-medieval period.

Two parallel east-west partition walls seem to suggest the construction of a major building on the site, the north wing, with deep foundations up to 0.5 m deeper than wall (4018). These partition walls divided the new building internally and utilised the medieval walls mentioned above. Unfortunately, again, no substantial dating evidence for their construction was recovered.

The medieval wall was then truncated at its southern end close to the 15th-century tower. Here a north-south wall and an east-west wall formed a new room (kitchen) adjacent to the 15th-century tower. This room incorporated the limestone footing for a brick range and the later fireplace seen in Trench 1. The wall, with a 0.60m deeper foundation than the medieval wall appeared to incorporate the two southern arches of

the 18th-century blind arcade fronting the present courtyard. During the demolition of the arches it became apparent that they had been added on after the rest of the arcade to the north had been completed. Perhaps this was a late 18th- or early 19th-century addition to the north wing, filling the gap between the 15th-century tower and an 18th-century arcaded building to the north.

Once the north wing had been completed with its new kitchen, a sand bedding deposit was laid down for a sandstone floor, and all the interior walls were plastered. Some of the walls showed signs that this floor was actually secondary, perhaps being laid when the brick fireplace was inserted, earlier plaster being discovered below the floor level. The north wing was demolished in 1908, and the rubble cleared from the site to make a summer patio. In the 1960s The Orangery was built and the ground to the west of it was levelled up with demolition materials. The whole area then became an area of lawn in front of a large fountain.

The investigations at Hazlewood Castle have been extremely productive in terms of revealing the structural sequence of the building of the north wing. Unfortunately the dating evidence is extremely poor, and it was difficult to tie the structural development into a tight chronology, but some conclusions may be drawn. Prior to any construction work on the site, the ground was possibly used as a yard, and a known dumping ground for waste construction/demolition materials within several large pits. A medieval courtyard wall was then constructed, which was later extended in the 15th century when the tower and other ancillary buildings were constructed to the north of the castle, and flanking the western side of the courtyard. In the 18th century these buildings were demolished to make way for the north wing, which was constructed in two phases reutilising walls of earlier date. The first phase involved the six arches at the north end of the site, and the second included the insertion of a new kitchen and two arches which completed the southern end of the arcade, possibly in the late 18th to the early 19th century. The sparsity of finds could argue for a 17th- century date for the first phase of construction of the north wing, but this interpretation was not favoured..

To be a Jacobean hall or not to be? The present excavations would seem to suggest that there was no Jacobean north wing. Further investigative study of the documentary evidence and the archaeological resource may lead to a more definite conclusion, and answer the chronological questions raised by the current excavations.