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MILLTHORPE SCHOOL,
NUNTHORPE AVENUE,
YORK

REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF



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**MILLTHORPE SCHOOL,
NUNTHORPE AVENUE, YORK**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the 22nd March 2002 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) was called by building contractors to inspect a brick built vaulted chamber at Millthorpe School, Nunthorpe Avenue, York (NGR SE 5975 5074), during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new school classroom. The brick chamber lay under a grassed area surrounded on three sides by buildings, in the north-western corner of the school.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology was based purely on an observe and record basis as this was a chance find not predicted within the planning process. On arrival at the site it was clear that the vaulted chamber had been broken into on its northern side, and at its south-eastern corner. The vault was inspected, measured, photographed, recorded and an assessment of its date and function made. Sketches were made to position the vault in relation to the present school buildings. The remainder of the works were not monitored as the structure was thought to have been 19th century in date.

Site records are currently stored with YAT under the York Archaeological Trust accession code YORAT:2002.7.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The natural geology of the area is glacial sand and gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Sheet 71 1973). The topography was difficult to discern in the immediate vicinity due to heavy landscaping during the construction of the school buildings. It would seem, however that the vault lies on the top of a morainic ridge, which, prior to the erection of buildings within the area, would have overlooked the land to the north, south and east.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The only known archaeological finds from the vicinity were located in a watching brief carried out by YAT on Nunthorpe School Sports Hall (now Millthorpe School) in 1984 (NGR SE5975 5063). At a depth of 2.5m below the ground surface, redeposited human bones from disturbed burials and an organic silt were observed (Finlayson 1997). Millthorpe School is housed partially within a mid-Victorian villa known as Nunthorpe Court (Pevsner 1972, 259). It was designed in 1856 by J. B. and W. Atkinson for Colonel and Mrs. Meysey-Thompson. It became Nunthorpe County Grammar School for Boys in 1920. An assembly hall was added in 1925, new classrooms in 1927, a headmaster's house was built before 1932 and the school was further extended in 1938 (VCH 1961, 450), 1958, 1974 and 1984 (Buttery nd). It became Millthorpe School in 1985.

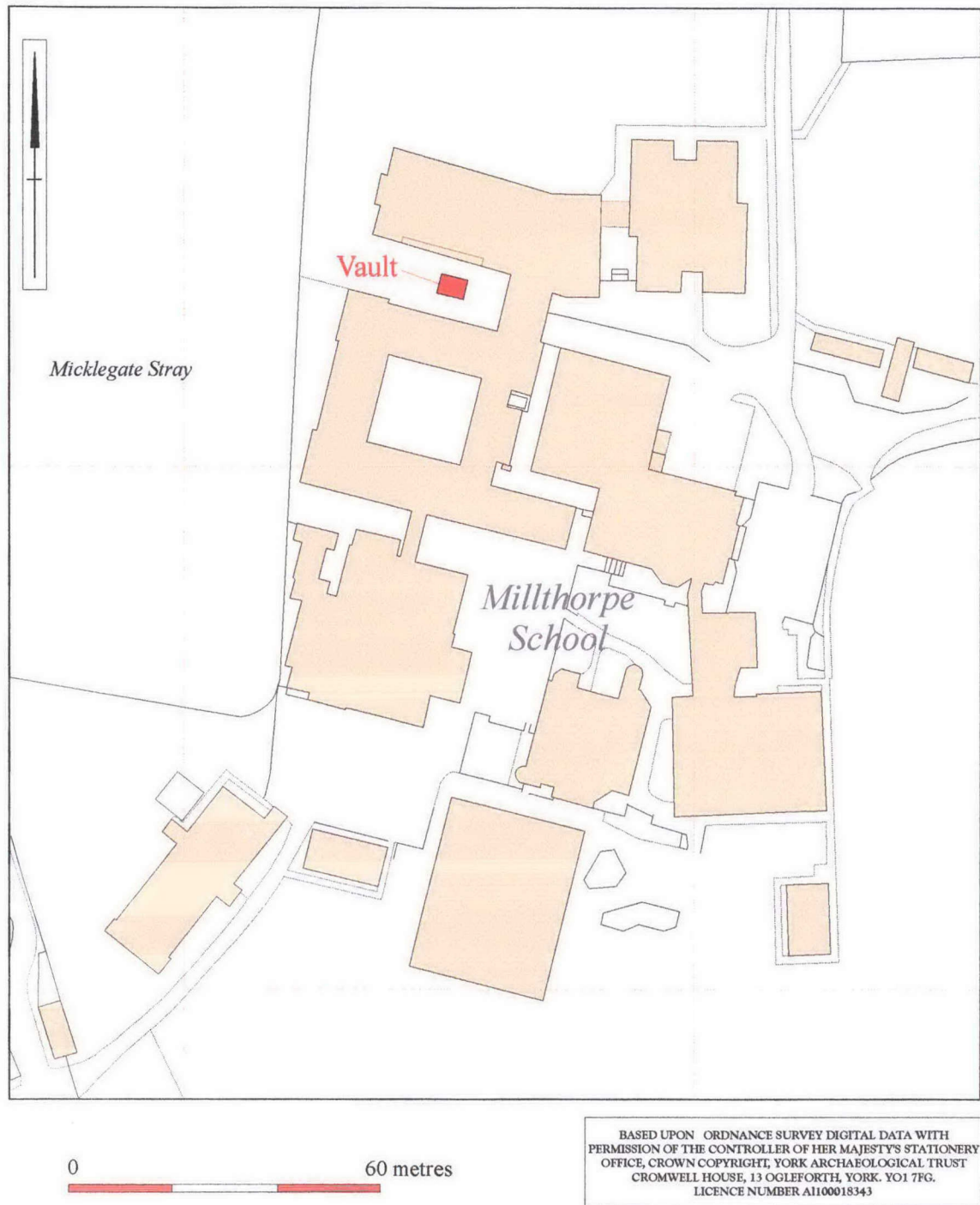


Figure 1 Location of brick built vault

5. RESULTS

The vaulted chamber was situated between the 1938 extension and a modern extension of the 1990s and was surrounded on three sides by school buildings, the only side that was open was to the north-west.

The chamber was built of brick, which was coated at both the north, west and east ends with cement on the inside, the rest being left uncoated. The brick size appears to be comparable with other Victorian ones measuring 220mm long by 109mm wide by 80mm thick, and bonded with hard grey cement. The roof vault was double with two arched roofs, running north-west to south-east, the middle section between the two arches being supported by a brick wall. The overall dimensions for the chamber was c.5m long by 3.55m wide by 1.83m deep. It was over 20 courses of bricks high. A lead pipe had been inserted into the south-eastern corner, and that and the fact that it was almost full of water when the building contractors broke into it suggests that it was built as a reservoir for the original house Nunthorpe Court, perhaps in the late 19th century, when cleanliness became fashionable.

The chamber appears to have been lined and capped with clay, to provide water tightness, and its construction cut was backfilled with mixed dumps of mid brown clay silt, construction debris, and ash. The area was sealed with a layer of topsoil.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The brick vault would appear to be of late 19th century date and associated with the original house Nunthorpe Court, perhaps being constructed for the purpose of storing rain water to supply the needs of the household with clean water. No significant archaeological deposits were recovered during the watching brief, and it was agreed with the engineer that the chamber could be mass filled with concrete.



Plate 1 Looking south-east across excavations



Plate 2 Top of exposed vaulted roof



Plate 3 Interior of vaulted chamber

7. LIST OF SOURCES

Buttery, D. (No date) *Nunthorpe Grammar School 1920-1985*. York.

Finlayson, R. (1997) *York Archive Gazetteer*, York Archaeological Trust.

Pevsner, N. and Neave, D. (1972) *The Buildings of England; Yorkshire: York and the East Riding*. Penguin Books, London.

VCH (1961) *A History of Yorkshire: The City Of York*. The Victoria History of The Counties Of England. Oxford University Press.

8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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