

# BEDALE, AISKEW AND LEEMING BAR BYPASS:

Prospect Archaeology and Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd have been commissioned by Wills Bros Ltd on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council to undertake a series of archaeological excavations ahead of the construction of the Bedale, Aiskew and Leeming Bar Bypass. The archaeological works were designed by and are being managed by Jacobs on behalf of NYCC.

The excavations represent the final phase of fieldwork of a programme of archaeological investigations which was required as part of the planning process for the road scheme before construction works could proceed. Several geophysical surveys have been carried out along the road corridor, followed by a series of trial excavations in areas highlighted by these surveys, and other means, as being of significant archaeological potential. Three sites can be classed as being of regional importance; Aiskew Roman villa, a substantial ditched enclosure, probably of late Iron Age date but continuing into the early Roman period, and an area on Leazes Lane where the new road scheme will cross the projected line of Dere Street.

Excavation of the villa began in early November 2014 and finished in April 2015. The area of the villa building and associated features which lay within the road corridor have now been fully investigated and recorded; the vast majority of the villa complex which lies outside of the road corridor is now protected as a Scheduled Monument. The excavation of the enclosure began in early January and was completed by April 2015. The process of post-excavation work is now underway and each category of artefact will be examined by specialists leading to the compilation of a post-excavation assessment report. Further analysis of the artefactual and archaeological remains will then take place ultimately leading to the publication of the sites. Initial observations for both sites are presented on the following posters.

The site at Dere Street remains to be investigated. However, it is suspected that the vast majority of the area where the new road crosses Leazes Lane was formerly investigated and recorded as part of the last phase of the A1 Dishforth to Leeming improvement scheme undertaken in 2009-10.



Location of the sites in relation to the Roman roads and sites in the vicinity



Aerial photograph showing enclosure during excavation, looking south-east

Aerial photograph of villa and surrounding area during excavation, looking south-east



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## The Aiskew Roman Villa

The Aiskew Roman villa is located on a ridge of higher land defined by Scurf Beck to the west, which flows southwards into Bedale Beck, a tributary of the River Swale, and Dere Street Roman road to the east. Dere Street was the main road running north from York up to Hadrian's Wall and into Scotland, and lies just over 1km to the east of the villa; the modern A1 follows the course of the road in this area. The major Roman town at Catterick is situated 10km to the north and Alborough Roman town is around 25km to the south.

Geophysical survey has identified a large winged corridor villa with associated buildings set within a landscape of enclosures and field systems leading to Dere Street to the east. The road corridor runs through the western extent of the villa and a triangular area of land was also stripped of topsoil to the east of the road corridor to better understand the villa complex. The villa was much better preserved than anticipated, with intact floor surfaces surviving just a few centimetres beneath the soil. It was therefore decided to only excavate that part of the villa and associated features which lay within the road corridor and the remainder is now protected as a Scheduled Monument.

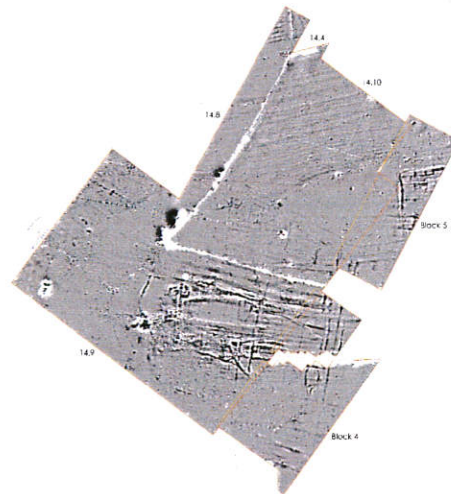
The masonry walls of the villa have been robbed at some date with the stones presumably used to build structures somewhere in the vicinity. Cobble foundations upon which the masonry walls were constructed did survive within deep foundation trenches demonstrating the substantial construction of this villa; these foundations would have supported a two-storey structure which would have been a prominent feature in the landscape, occupying this elevated position and visible from Dere Street to the east. Within the area stripped, a range of rooms are located on the east side of a 4m-wide north-south aligned corridor within which small areas of tessellated floor surface survive. An intact concrete floor surface in the room at the north-east end of the corridor had areas of painted wall plaster collapsed onto it, possibly when the villa was demolished.

A small square room with internal dimensions of around 4m was added on to the north-west side of the villa complex at some date; this lay within the road corridor and was fully excavated and recorded. This was a heated room as demonstrated by the remains of pilae stacks which would have supported a suspended floor, forming part of a hypocaust system. Hot air would have been drawn under the floor from a fire within an external stokehole identified on the north-west side of the room. Hollow wall tiles known as box-flue tiles would have been attached to the inside of the stone external walls and the hot air would have travelled up through the tiles and out of the building through vents. The internal surface of the tiles was covered in layers of plaster and the final layer was painted. The demolition debris excavated from this room contained large quantities of these wall tiles and painted wall plaster in many different colours demonstrating that this was a well-appointed room. It may have been used for entertaining and could perhaps have been a heated dining room.

The surviving remains of a heated room of the villa. Stacked columns of tile (pilae stacks) would have supported a suspended floor. Cobble wall foundations survive (right of picture), elsewhere the walls have been removed in antiquity

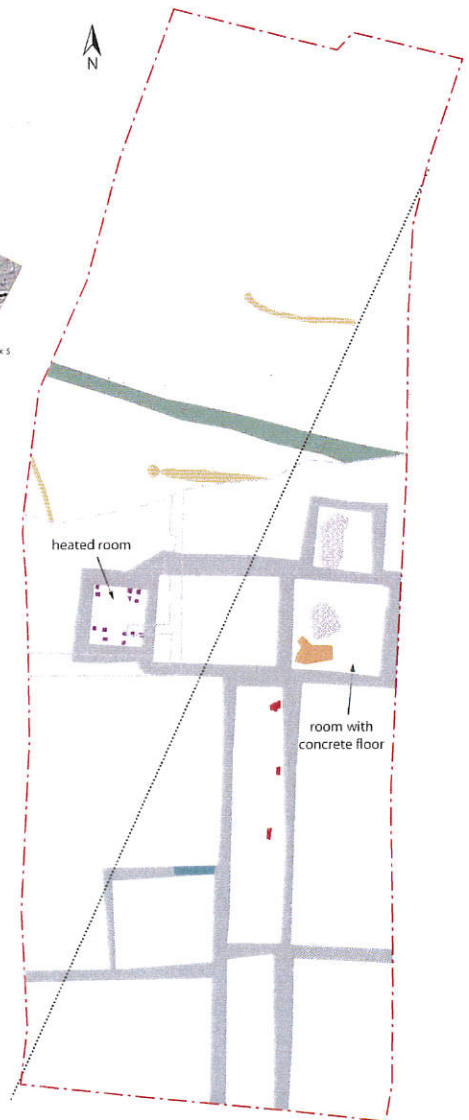


Pre-excavation aerial photograph of villa; room with concrete floor surface in right foreground and earlier evaluation trench in background (looking west)



Geophysical survey showing the villa buildings set within a complex of enclosures and field systems

Plan of the villa



# BEDALE, AISKEW AND LEEMING BAR BYPASS:

## Finds from the Aiskew Villa

Material recovered from demolition deposits across the building has provided information about construction techniques used at the villa. Both stone and ceramic roof tiles have been found as well as a variety of fabrics used for flooring; along with the in-situ areas of tessellated and concrete floor, fragments of polished concrete floor and brick floor tiles have been recovered. Quantities of painted wall plaster in many different colours include fragments that have been replastered and repainted with a new scheme, showing that some of the rooms were redecorated during the lifespan of the villa. Numerous iron nails of varying sizes would have been used for purposes such as to secure roof tiles and for the timber elements of the structure. Small quantities of window glass demonstrate that some of the rooms would have had glazed windows, but this was a valuable resource and much would have been removed for recycling.

The villa lies within a corridor of good agricultural land between Dere Street and the Pennines, with the nearby road providing easily accessible transport links to the major settlements at Catterick in the north and Alborough in the south, as well as smaller roadside settlements such as Healam Bridge. This was a mixed agricultural farm and its prime location evidently contributed to its success, allowing the inhabitants to grow rich. This is reflected not just in the construction of the villa itself with, for example, the elaborately painted walls which were redecorated over time, but also in the artefacts recovered. Personal items hint at the wealth of this villa and include jet beads and bangles, bone hair pins, and copper-alloy brooches and bangles. As with many rural sites in this region, coins were scarce, and it is likely that much of the economy was based on a barter system, with surplus agricultural produce being traded for goods.

The backfills of a large clay quarry pit and a boundary ditch adjacent to the villa have produced a wealth of artefactual remains which provide information about the lives of the inhabitants. Evidence for diet is provided by large quantities of animal bone, including butchered and burnt bone representing food waste. A very large quantity of shell - oyster, mussel, cockle, limpets and winkle - has also been found along with fish bones recovered from soil samples. Numerous iron tools include a cleaver for butchery, a kitchen knife with suspension loop and a long blade. Other items used for manufacturing and processing include quernstones for grinding flour and several pottery spindle whorls. The pottery assemblage includes Romano-British cooking vessels and mortarium for preparing food along with Romano-British finewares and imported samian. Fragments of amphorae would have contained oil, wine and other produce imported from across the Empire. Such imported pottery demonstrates the links between the villa, local markets and the wider Empire. Initial examination of the pottery suggests that the villa was in use during the 3rd century AD and into the late 4th century.



Painted wall plaster

Bone pins



Copper-alloy brooch

Box-flue tile with scoring to help adherence of plaster



Coin minted in Arles AD327



Iron knife with suspension hoop



Iron cleaver

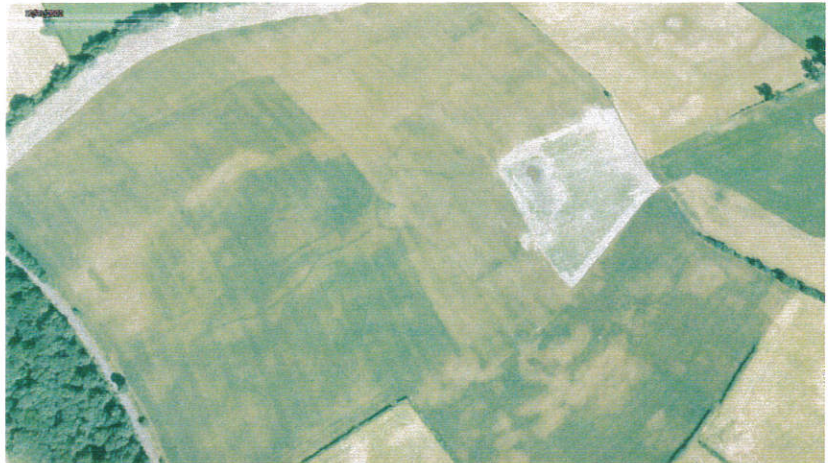
# BEDALE, AISKEW AND LEEMING BAR BYPASS:

## The Bedale Ditched Enclosure

The Bedale enclosure is a large ditched sub-square enclosure, identified as a cropmark on aerial photographs, which measures c. 50m north-south internally. It was subject to geophysical survey and trial trenching evaluation in 2009. Enclosures of this type, which generally contained at least one roundhouse, with structures often rebuilt over a considerable length of time, were in use in the region from the Late Iron Age and the local population continued to occupy many sites into the Roman period. The interior of the Bedale enclosure has been badly damaged by ploughing and no traces of features which may have been present survive.

Excavation has revealed a long sequence of occupation at the enclosure with the earliest phase, a narrow and deep ditch which may have contained a timber palisade, only surviving within the location of a later entrance along the east side of the enclosure. The subsequent phase saw the construction of a massive ditch, up to 6.80m wide and in the region of 2m deep, which silted up and was then recut as a narrower and shallower U-shaped ditch. A narrow entrance provided access on the east side of the enclosure. Two crouched burials were placed within the base of this latest phase of ditch, and following a period of natural silting, the ditch was then infilled during the early Roman period with material which contained large quantities of occupation material.

Following the infilling of the enclosure ditch, a double-ditched trackway was constructed leading from Bedale Beck in the south-west and running up to and around the enclosure. The west and north sides of the enclosure delimited part of this trackway indicating that the infilled ditches and internal bank survived as an earthwork feature.



The ditched enclosure seen as a cropmark on an aerial photograph taken in 2002, with ditched trackway leading up to the enclosure entrance from the south-west



Aerial photograph of the enclosure and ditched trackway after excavation, looking north-east



Enclosure ditch during excavation



Crouched burial in enclosure ditch

# BEDALE, AISKEW AND LEEMING BAR BYPASS:

## Finds from the Bedale Ditched Enclosure

The upper fills of the ditch contained large quantities of occupation debris much of which represents waste material from processing and manufacturing activities which presumably took place within the enclosure. A large regionally significant assemblage of animal bones has been recovered from the ditch; the high organic content of the ditch fill has resulted in the excellent preservation of the bone and antler. This includes cattle, sheep, pig and horse along with wild species such as red and roe deer. Bones from very young calves suggest that the settlement was involved in animal husbandry. Small quantities of fish bone and oyster shells attest to long distance trade. As well as evidence for butchery, the animal bone assemblage includes worked fragments and material indicative of waste from craft working. A beautifully preserved antler weaving comb has also been found in the ditch; such tools were used during the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods in textile production and are often decorated such as the Bedale example. Other bone objects include several fragments of serrated rib, a spindle whorl, a long spoon or spatula, a pin and a beautifully decorated handle.

The upper ditch fills have also produced plentiful evidence for metal-working suggesting that the settlement may have been engaged in such activity beyond a subsistence level. Copper-alloy working is evidenced by numerous scraps of copper alloy and fragments of ceramic crucibles which contain small globules of corroded copper alloy. Copper-alloy objects recovered from the ditch include several pins, brooches and a spatula. Iron working is also evidenced by hammerscale recovered from soil samples and fragments of slag and smithing hearth bottoms; numerous iron artefacts were also found.

Small quantities of handmade Iron Age tradition pottery have also been recovered from the upper fills of the ditch; such pottery is not closely datable as it was manufactured in this region over a very long period and continued to be manufactured during the Roman period. However, the enclosure was obviously in use into the Roman period as a small quantity of wheel-thrown Romano-British and imported samian pottery has also been recovered along with Roman period artefacts such as a copper-alloy intaglio ring, unfortunately without the gemstone.

The soil samples also produced charred plant remains, including barley and wheat grains. As is typical for the region, this settlement would have practised a mixed arable and pastoral farming regime. Quernstones, which would have been used to process the crops, have also been found in the enclosure ditch.



Section through east side of enclosure showing the organic upper fills of the latest recut



A concentration of animal bone in the upper fill of the ditch

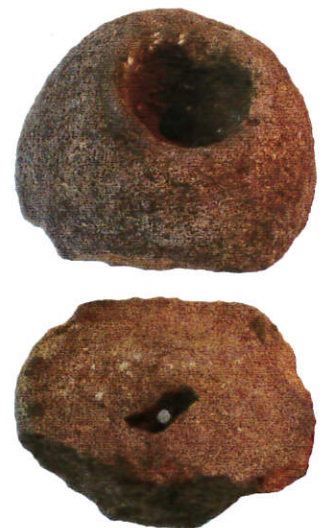


Decorated bone handle

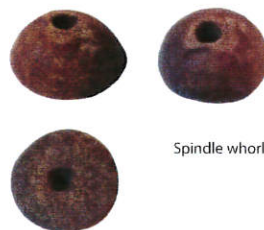
Antler weaving comb



Quernstone



Serrated rib



Spindle whorl