

August 2000

ROSE COTTAGE
MELKINTHORPE
CUMBRIA

Watching Brief Report

Rose Cottage, Melkinthorpe
Cumbria

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Storey Institute
Meeting House Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1TH

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SUMMARY

A watching brief was undertaken by Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) on 10th June 2000, at Rose Cottage, Melkinthorpe (NGR SD 49637032). The work was commissioned by Stephen Wild and was intended to record archaeological deposits impacted by the construction of a bungalow to the rear of Rose Cottage.

The watching brief uncovered no structures or features of an archaeological nature but did identify a number of medieval pottery sherds, although these were within the top soil. The presence of the ceramics indicates medieval activity at or in the vicinity of the site, but could have been spread onto the area as a result of the night-soiling of fields and this does not necessarily indicate the presence of any structural features within the extent of the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Stephen Wild, for commissioning and supporting the work, also to Stephen Taylor for supplying and operating the mechanical excavator.

The watching brief was undertaken by Peter McNaught. The report was written by Peter McNaught and the final drawings were produced by Emma Carter; the report was edited by Jamie Quartermaine and Rachel Newman. The project was managed by Jamie Quartermaine.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 In June 2000, at the request of Stephen Wild, Lancaster University Archaeological Unit (LUAU) undertook an archaeological watching brief at Rose Cottage, Melkinthorpe, Cumbria (NGR SD 4960 7030), during the groundworks for the construction of a bungalow.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.2.1 **Location:** the site lies at the centre of the medieval village of Melkinthorpe, on the western edge of the Eden Valley, some 6km south-east of Penrith and 4km east of Lowther. Melkinthorpe is one of the three townships of Lowther parish, the others being Hackthorpe and Whale (Whellan 1860).
- 1.2.2 **Geology:** the study area is close to the north bank of the River Leith, a tributary of the River Eden. The river valley cuts through typical stagnogley soils of the Clifton Association [711n] derived from reddish till drift geology (Lawes Agricultural Trust 1983). The solid geology below Melkinthorpe comprises Lower Permian sandstones, the Penrith Sandstone (Inst Geol Sci 1980; Arthurton *et al* 1978, 135-9, 186-8, and 302-5).

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1.3.1 The layout of the village is generally indicative of a planned nucleated settlement, which typically are thought to have a medieval origin. Such settlements have been thought to be deliberate plantations by landlords, intended to attract free tenants to the area, in an attempt to create a settled society (Taylor 1983, 134), although this part of England was not securely incorporated into the kingdom until the twelfth century. Roberts, in his description of the village, notes the basic pattern of a north-west/south-east axial street, mirrored to the north-east by a secondary lane, Back Lane. The land to the rear (north-east) of Back Lane forms a rectangular furlong, which retains evidence of ox-ploughing in the aratral, reversed 'S', configuration of the extant field boundaries (Roberts 1993, 131). There is also evidence, in the form of earthworks, for the village having extended further to the north-west, into the study area. The village itself is recorded on the Cumbria Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) as a shrunken medieval village and there are unclassified earthworks at the western edge, within the extent of the Scheduled Monument (SM 32822/01), which may also relate to the shrinkage of the settlement.
- 1.3.2 Melkinthorpe does not appear in *Domesday Book*, since this does not cover much of Cumbria, and the first reference to the name of *Melcanetorp* is in 1150, with variants of the name present from 1195 onwards (Smith 1967, 183). The name in all its variants means 'Melkan's hamlet' and contains a personal name element which may be either Irish, as in 'Maelchon', old Irish 'Maelcian' or Old Welsh 'Malican' (Smith 1967, 183) rather than a Norse personal name. Despite the lack of earlier documentary evidence, the topographical form of Melkinthorpe was

possibly established by the late eleventh century. The nature of the documentary sources indicates that the manor of Melkinthorpe was of average size when compared to the other manors in Lowther parish. In 1415, the parish paid a 1/15th of the tithes as subsidy to Henry V to finance the French campaign; Lowther was valued at 13s 4d, Quale (Whale) at 17s, Hackthorpe at 18s and Melkinthorpe at 15s (Curwen 1932, 333). It, however, had a low evaluation in the nineteenth century when Whellan gave the rateable value of the parish as £4,400 18s 3d, of which Melkinthorpe was rated at only £364 2s 5d, whilst Hackthorpe was valued at £1,939 10s and Whale at £ 481 4s 6d (Whellan 1860).

- 1.3.3 There are no known structural remains from the medieval period within the village. Melkinthorpe Hall was at least sixteenth century in date and has been described as a '*little low mean looking building*' (quoted by Curwen 1932, 329); it was still inhabited in the 1860s, but it has now been demolished with only a fine barn remaining (*op cit*, 330). The RCHME (1936) inspection of the village noted only a limited number of buildings of interest (11-17), the oldest of which appear to date to the seventeenth century and contain some panelled doors and corbelled fireplaces. From the seventeenth century the extent of the village was similar to that at present. The Hearth Tax Roll of 1669-1672 identified a total of 11 houses with a single hearth and a further six houses which were exempt (Curwen 1932, 333). By the time of the Window Tax, exacted between 1766 and 1825, 16 were recorded as having up to seven windows, and hence were charged the minimum tax of three shillings. Only one house contained seven windows, that of John Graham (Lows 1995); the location of this house was unspecified.
- 1.3.4 By the mid nineteenth century, the cartographic evidence illustrates that the development of the settlement was static; there has been little change taking place within the village layout from 1837 onwards (WDRC/8/64).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 WATCHING BRIEF

2.1.1 A watching brief was maintained during the stripping of the topsoil. This was carried out in order to identify and record any deposits and features exposed, during the groundworks for the proposed dwelling. It was undertaken in accordance with a verbal brief compiled by the Assistant Archaeologist of Cumbria County Council. An area measuring 16m by 16m was stripped using a tracked excavator using a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision. Where appropriate, the nature of exposed deposits and their relationships to other deposits were clarified by manual cleaning. Both the stripped surface and the material excavated were monitored for the presence of displaced artefacts.

2.2 RECORDING

2.2.1 Recording was by means of the standard LUAU context recording system, with a watching brief record and supporting registers and indices. A full photographic record in colour slide and monochrome formats was made, with scaled plan and section drawings of the trenches as appropriate.

2.3 ARCHIVE

- 2.3.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with current IFA and English Heritage guidelines (*Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2nd edition 1991).
- 2.3.2 The paper and digital archive will be deposited in the Cumbria County Record Office (Kendal). The finds will be deposited at Penrith Museum.

3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 MACHINED AREA

- 3.1.1 Prior to excavation the area being developed was part of the large lawned garden to the rear of Rose Cottage (Fig 2). The footprint of the house platform measured 16m by 16m, and was cut into a very slight slope running from the rear of Rose Cottage north-eastwards to just beyond the eastern edge of the house footprint.
- 3.1.2 The turf and the thin dark brown topsoil which covered the whole area were removed to a depth of 0.1m. The underlying subsoil consisted of an orange-brown silty clay which contained fragments of angular bedrock. The area was excavated to a depth of 0.36m, at which depth the orange-brown silty clay was still exposed.
- 3.1.3 Two linear features were exposed during the watching brief. These were both part of the drainage relating to Rose Cottage and the garden. The first was a drain carrying rainwater from the roof of the cottage to the end of the garden where it enters a small beck, the second was a land drain inserted by the present owner to alleviate an area prone to localised flooding within the garden.
- 3.1.4 Although no features of an archaeological nature were encountered during the watching brief, a number of medieval pottery sherds were recovered all from the topsoil (*Section 3.2*).

3.2 FINDS ANALYSIS

- 3.2.1 A total of 22 fragments of pottery was recovered from the topsoil. Of which two were modern and require no further discussion, and the remainder were of medieval date. The material was relatively well preserved, with a number of large fresh fragments, especially the more robust parts of vessels, for example handles, but with some body fragments which were somewhat abraded.
- 3.2.2 A range of fabrics was represented, principally a gritty incompletely reduced fabric with thin green glaze, probably of thirteenth to fourteenth century date, but with gritty orange and beige fabrics represented by one or two sherds of each. The latter may represent marginally earlier material, but still would not be out of place in a thirteenth century context. Similarly, a single fragment of fully reduced Silverdale ware implies some activity continuing into the later part of the medieval period. It is of interest that the majority of the fragments derive from jugs, with only a few tiny sherds of cooking pots; this preponderance, with six large fragments representing four handles, may have implications for the status of activity on the site. Both rod and strap handles are represented, the former quite ornate, and again likely to date from the thirteenth century.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPACT

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 Rose Cottage dates from the seventeenth century and was built upon the street, with originally a farm building and associated yard to the rear. Beyond the yard is an area of linear arataral-shaped fields, reflecting the enclosure of a former open field. If the conventional layout of medieval villages accords here it would be expected that any medieval croft would have been set against the street frontage and thus potentially would have been within the area of the present Rose Cottage. The present watching brief area, being set behind the cottage, would, in terms of this model, be within the area of associated yard or toft, which was set between the croft and Back Lane to the rear (Roberts 1993, 131-3). The lack of structural evidence within the area of the watching brief is therefore not particularly unexpected, although numerous outbuildings and rubbish pits are likely to have been within the toft. The presence of medieval pottery is equally to be expected, dug into areas that were cultivated with other rubbish as part of the manuring process.
- 4.1.2 Structural evidence for simple timber buildings, however, can be both slight and localised, and the negative evidence from a machine-excavated watching brief can not be regarded as definitive evidence that there were no structures in the immediate vicinity. An example of the fragility of such sub-surface evidence was demonstrated by the excavation of two putative building platforms, adjacent to the street frontage in Melkinthorpe (at NGR NY 554 253). Their topographic form and location were archetypal indicators of former crofts but despite very careful and systematic excavation no structural elements were revealed (LUAU 2000). Taking into account the reservations arising from this negative evidence, it can be tentatively suggested that the most likely scenario is that there were no medieval or later structures within the extent of the proposed new build.

4.2 IMPACT

- 4.2.1 The watching brief did not identify evidence for any structures or relict elements of former structures within the extent of the study area that would be affected by the construction of the residential development. However, the identification of significant amounts of medieval pottery within the topsoil indicate medieval activity within the environs.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1 Site Location Map

Fig 2 Watching Brief Site Plan

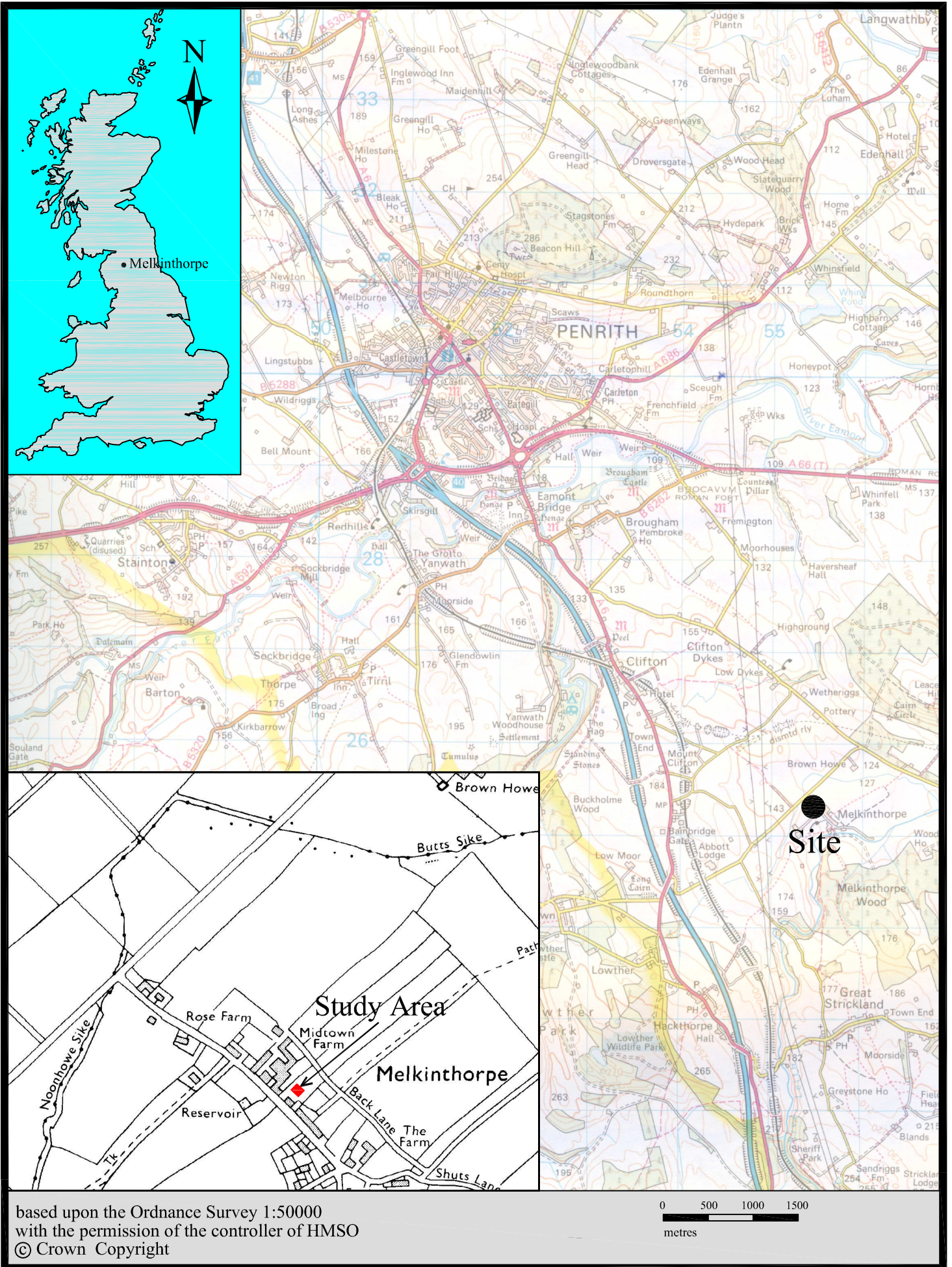


Fig 1 : Melkinthorpe Study Area Location Map



LANCASTER UNIVERSITY
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT
 STOREY INSTITUTE
 MEETING HOUSE LANE
 LANCASTER
 LA1 1TT
 TEL: 01524 848666

PROJECT:
ROSE COTTAGE
 Melkinthorpe,
 Cumbria

DRAWING No:
 2



DRAWN BY: EC
 DATE: 7/2000

LOCATION:


KEY

TITLE:
Watching Brief Site Plan

COMMISSIONED BY:
 Stephen Wild

Fig 2 Watching Brief Site Plan