FORNLEIFAEFTIRLIT Á LÓÐ VESTURGÖTU 18, REYKJAVÍK. FRAMKVÆMDARANNSÓKN

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF DEVELOPMENT-RELATED MACHINE EXCAVATION AT VESTURGATA 18, REYKJAVÍK

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FORNLEIFASTOFNUN ÍSLANDS SES

Front-cover photo shows the excavation area during machine-excavation. Facing north-east.
Photo: Nikola Trbojević

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Samantekt

Hér eru birtar niðurstöður fornleifaeftirlits vegna framkvæmda á lóð Vesturgötu 18 í Reykjavík. Verkið var unnið af Fornleifastofnun Íslands að beiðni Mannverks. Framkvæmdasvæðið er um 126 m^2 og var þar bílastæði þar til nýlega en vitað var að á þessum slóðum var matjurtagarður á 19. öld (Guðmundsdóttir 2003, bls. 16) og 19. aldar kotið Rimma eða Hjalli (Isaksen 2011, bls. 117). Þegar svæðið var opnað og jarðvegur fjarlægður komu í ljós leifar steinsteypts mannvirkis og enn eldri leifar öskuhaugs. Mannvirkið var um 0,5 m undir yfirborði og er umfang þess um 64 m^2, eru þetta leifar veggja og steinsteypts gólfs. Veggleifarnar er um 0,5 metra háar og grjót er í undirstöðum norðausturhorns og suðausturhorns. Austurveggur kom allur í ljós við könnunina um 7 m langur og um 0,45 m hár en suður – og norðurveggur ná út fyrir rannsóknarsvæðið, undir Norðurstíg. Lengd suður-og norðurveggja eins og þeir sýndu sig var um 8 m og um 0,5 m há. Þessi bygging er ekki talin eldri en frá miðri 20. öld enda fundust í leifunum állagnir og plast. Ekki er alveg ljóst hvað bygging þetta var. Öskuhaugur, sem er eldri en steinsteypta mannvirkið, kom í ljós á suðausturhluta svæðisins. Öskuhaugurinn samanstendur aðallega af móöskulögum og var nokkurra sentimetra þykkur. Í því fundust nokkrir gripir s.s. gler, leirker og þakflísar úr steini en alla þessa gripir má tímasetja til seinni hluta 19. aldar til fyrri hluta þeirrar 20.

Introduction

During the period from August 2 – 8th 2016, archaeological monitoring of development-related machine-excavation was carried out at Vesturgata 18, 101 Reykjavik, at the location which was until recently used as a parking lot[1] (Figure 1). The aim of the monitoring was to identify and record eventually uncovered archaeological features inside an area of ca. 126m^2. The monitoring was carried out by Nikola Trbojević of Fornleifastofnun Íslands, following an agreement and close correspondence with development company Mannverk[2], and it was authorised by the staff of Minjastofnun Íslands[3]. Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir of Fornleifastofnun Íslands recorded the site with total station.

Figure 1. Location and extent of the excavation area.

The archaeological monitoring at this location was initiated owing to information about archaeological remains in the neighboring vicinity of the site (i.e. downtown Reykjavík) as well as solid assumptions about remains of cultural heritage at this location. In particular, the information available in the existing survey-reports and accompanying references indirectly suggested that unearthing of this area could bring to light remains of the 19th century structure described as *matjurtagarður* (Guðmundsdóttir 2003, p. 16). In addition to this, there was also a logical assumption that the excavation of this site would provide some more information about the farm Rimma (also known as Hjalli), mentioned to have existed at this location in the 19th century (Isaksen 2011, p. 117).

[1] Corner of Norðurstígur and Vesturgata streets.
[2] www.manverk.is; e-correspondence (21.07.2016)
[3] www.minjastofnun.is; e-correspondence (26.07.2016)

Results

Machine-excavation of a ground floor layer and underlying sandy/stone/waste deposit revealed an extensive modern concrete-built architectural feature which occupied most of the site, and only insignificant remains of archaeologically valuable, yet unstructural midden deposit that contained extensive peat-ash (Figure 2); the peat-ash deposit was identified in the south-east corner of the excavated area and can be roughly dated to late 19th / early 20th century.

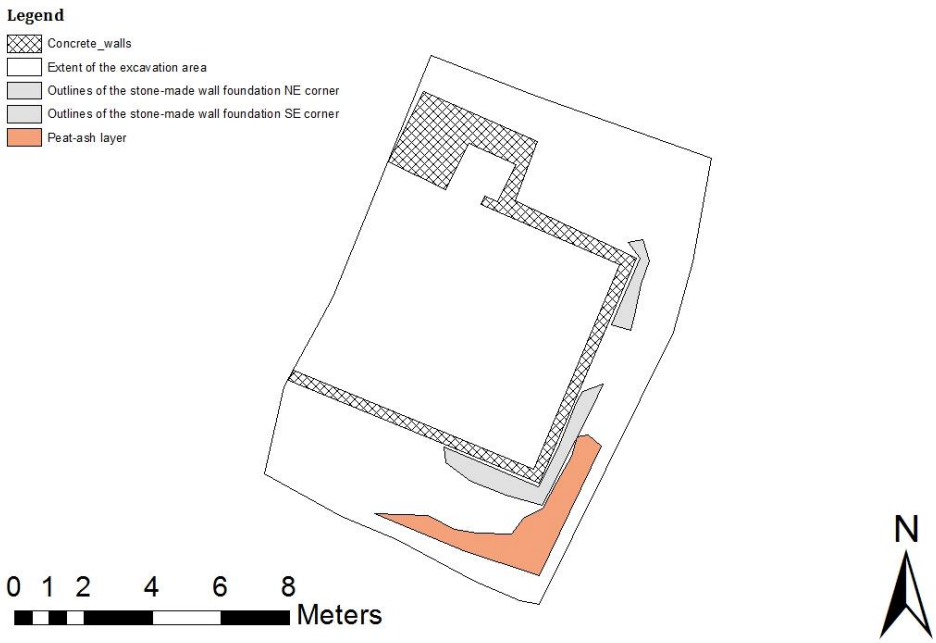

Figure 2. Extent of the excavation area and features identified in the ground.

The concrete-built feature[4], whose walls were occasionally supported by stone foundations (in its north-east and south-east corners), was identified at the approximate depth of ca 0.5 m (Figures 3 and 4). It covered an area of ca. 64 m^2 and it was most likely used as a cellar of a building set at this location. The excavation revealed the eastern, southern and northern walls of the feature. The eastern wall of this feature was completely uncovered and was ca. 7 m long and ca. 0.45 m high. The southern and northern walls extended beyond the limits of the excavation area (stretching under the present-day street of Norðurstígur). Those walls were both ca. 8 m long and ca. 0.5 m high. Judging upon the material used for its building and wide-spread presence of modern-material infrastructural features (remains of aluminium-made pipes and plastic artefacts) – this feature may be dated to the mid- to late-20th century. The existing and available documents do not provide any further information about the origin and/or type of the concrete-built building that existed at this location.

[4] With concrete walls enclosing concrete-made floor.

Figure 3. Concrete-built feature. Facing north.

Figure 4. Concrete-built feature. Facing east.

The machine-excavation at this location also revealed remains of peat-ash rich midden deposit, positioned at the approximate depth of 0.8 m in the south-east corner of the area. The deposit, occasionally only few centimetres thick, contained patches of turf-debris, charcoal remains and few finds (yellow brick, animal bones, glass, roof-slate stones and ceramics). The artefacts can be dated to late 19th / early 20th century and hence associated with the abovementioned features assumed to have existed at this location. It appears obvious that this midden deposit extended over larger area in the past; unfortunately, it was heavily truncated and disturbed by the foundation of the

mentioned concrete-made building. This layer appeared to be the only archaeologically-valuable layer at the site (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Peat-ash rich deposit in the south-east corner of the area. Facing south.

Further removal of the mentioned concrete-built feature revealed no archaeological features. The machine-excavation uncovered only natural-ground layer and bedrock which excluded the need for any further archaeological monitoring and/or research at the site (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Excavation area after removal of the stone-built feature. Facing north-west.

Concluding remarks

The development-related machine-excavation at Vesturgata 18, 101 Reykjavík, conducted by Mannverk revealed no substantial and/or structural archaeological features which would imply initiation of any extensive archaeological research.

Appendix: Finds register

Find number	Unit/layer	Material	Type	Quantity	Weight (g)
2016-56-1	Peat-ash layer	Ceramic	Vessel	6	33
2016-56-2	Peat-ash layer	Bone	Animal bone	2	17
2016-56-3	Peat-ash layer	Clay	Brick	1	800
2016-56-4	Peat-ash layer	Glass	Vessel	1	7
2016-56-5	Peat-ash layer	Stone	Roof slate	3	71

Bibliography

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