

West Street, Castleford
Archaeological Watching Brief

June 1995



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

7-17 West Street, Castleford

Archaeological Watching Brief

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief during the redevelopment of 7-17 West Street, Castleford has recorded Roman deposits and structural remains dating to the late 1st early 2nd century AD. The discovery of occupation evidence, some 250m to the west of the forts, challenges the notion that the civilian settlement was solely situated to the south-west of the forts, close to the Roman road.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the former site of 7-17 West Street, Castleford (SE 424 257). The work was carried out by West Yorkshire Archaeology Service on behalf of Allen Tod, Chartered Architects, in April 1995.
- 1.2 The site (Fig. 1) was being developed for bungalows for the disabled. The works involved the emptying of the infilled cellars of the former terraced houses and the excavation of trenches for the new foundation walls. All the excavation works were carried out by mechanical means and archaeological works were restricted to cleaning the trench sides and bases and minor investigative excavations for clarification.

2. Archaeological background (Fig. 1)

- 2.1 From the early 1970s redevelopment in Castleford has created occasional opportunities for archaeological investigations into the town's past. Details of these findings have been published elsewhere (Sumpter, Abramson and Tomson 1984; Abramson 1988; Abramson 1990). Summary details of the town's history are provided below.
- 2.2 Castleford was established in around AD 70 as the Roman fort and settlement of *Lagentium*. A second, replacement, fort was constructed in about AD 86 and continued in use until about AD 100. The fort lay roughly in the area delineated by Albion Street, Aire Street, Carlton Street and Bradley Street. The associated civilian settlement, or *vicus*, seems to have continued in use into the 2nd century and has, up until now, mainly been located along the line of the Roman road to the south-west of the forts.
- 2.3 By the mid-3rd century Castleford seems to have been refortified, though on totally different lines to the earlier forts. To the south of the later fort a number of human burials have been found which might imply an abandonment of the former civilian settlement in this area.

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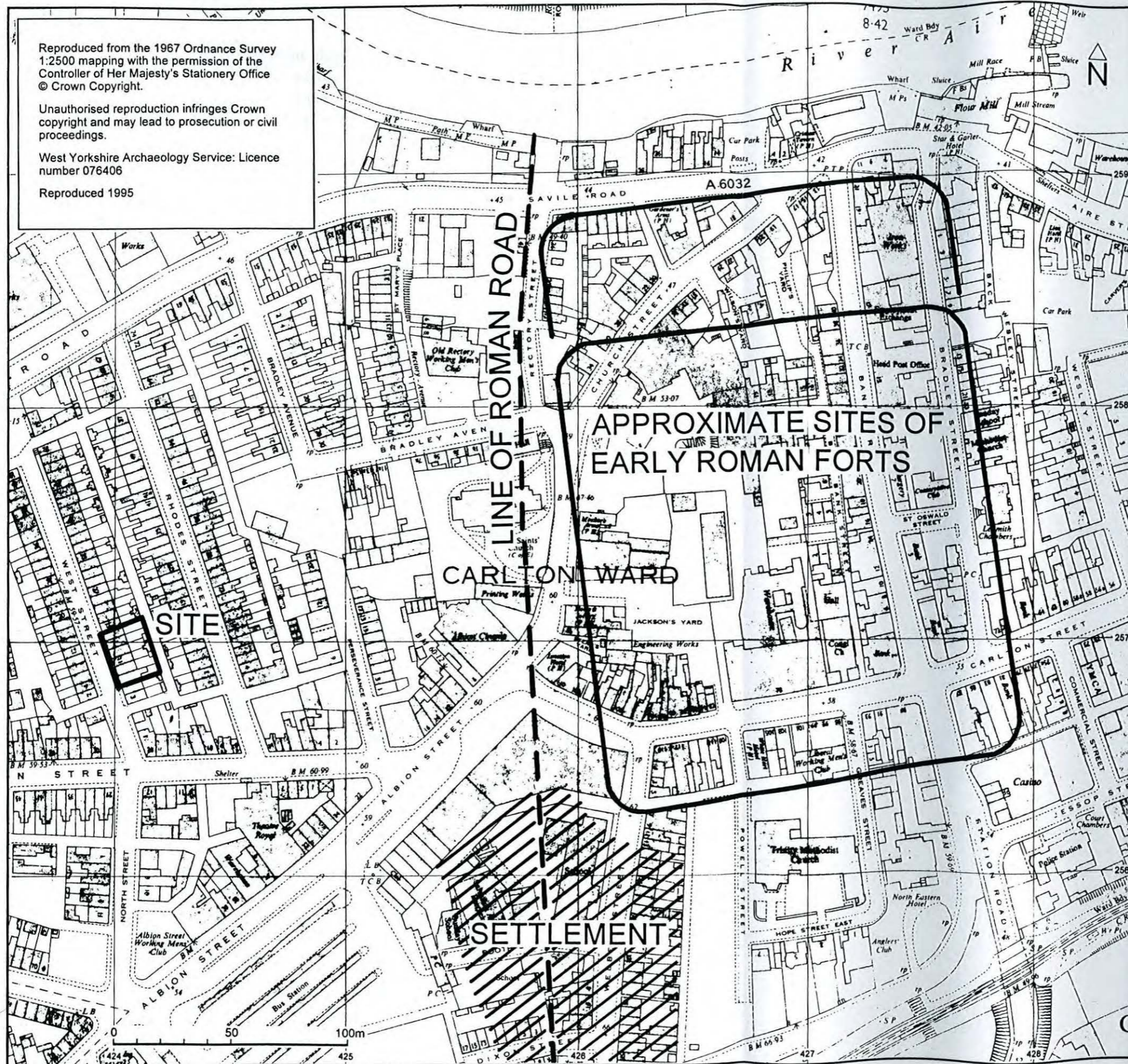


Fig. 1. Site location map with respect to previously known layout of Roman Castleford.

- 2.4 Work in the vicinity of the present development has been restricted to two brief investigations in 1990. During the development of 4-34 West Street, on the opposite side of the road to the present development, a number of deep pits and ditches which were believed to be of Roman date were revealed, though no associated structures or deposits were identified (Abramson 1990; PRN 3413). A subsequent investigation by watching brief at 2 Castle Street failed to identify any archaeological activity on the site. (Abramson 1990; PRN 3411)

3. Methodology (Fig. 2)

- 3.1 The topsoil from the site was removed by a bulldozer and the cellar excavation and foundation trenches subsequently carried out by a JCB with back acter. The foundation trenches were all between 0.6-0.8m wide and excavated to depths of up to 1.5m.
- 3.2 The former cellars covered an area of about 20m by 3m and were almost entirely emptied and its revetting wall collapsed inwards.
- 3.3 Archaeological investigations took the form of cleaning samples of the trench section faces in order to locate archaeological deposits. Once the presence of these had been established enough cleaning and excavation was carried out in order to obtain an understanding of the nature and extent of the deposits. Records mainly took the form of schematic section drawings, supported where appropriate by photographic evidence.

4. Results (Figs 3 and 4)

- 4.1 The standard non-archaeological depositional sequence on the site (i.e. the natural sequence overlain by more recent landscaping) was determined to be as follows:

<u>Depth m</u>	<u>Description</u>
0.0-0.3	Rubble/soil makeup
0.3-0.5	Former turf line
0.5-1.0	Mid-brown loam
1.0- ∞	Natural yellow clay

The above sequence was determined in the south-eastern corner of the site where there were no apparent archaeological deposits.

- 4.2 The most obvious archaeological horizon was a black layer composed of ash and charcoal, with occasional fragments of burnt bone within it, lying above the natural clay. These layers, between 10-20cm thick were found in a seemingly continuous spread across the north-western part of the site, where it was numbered [06], [07] and [09]. Similar concentrations of black, ashy material [12], [13] and [15] were discovered at the south-western end of the site where [15] apparently filled a ditch. It was apparent that these deposits of ashy material were, in places, composed of more than one layer (sometimes interleaved with red clay) and were probably the result of more than one phase of activity. Although the concentrations were limited in their extent eastwards, it

was possible to plot stratigraphically contemporaneous deposits as containing high contents of ash and charcoal derived from the burnt deposits (Fig. 3; sections 1-5).

- 4.3 The highest concentrations of black, ashy deposits were situated in the same areas as the remains of rubble limestone foundations [01], [11] and [16]. However, in all cases it appeared that the wall foundations had been cut into, or deposited on top of, the black material and were certainly not contemporary with it.
- 4.4 The structural foundations were composed of small, fist-sized pieces of magnesian limestone. These truncated remains, up to 30cm in height, were located along the western side of the site, though they could be partially traced eastwards for distances of up to 5m (Fig. 3; section 3).
- 4.5 A further wall foundation of sandstone [3]/[4] was observed in section running north-south in the southern half of the site, roughly through the middle of the development (Fig. 3; sections 4 and 5). Perhaps significantly, no archeological deposits were observed to the east of this alignment in the southern part of the site.
- 4.6 The nature of the deposits above the black ash horizon and the truncated remnants of wall foundations were, in places, difficult to interpret. This was partly due to the drying out of the upper section faces. In the southern half of the site they seem to have been overlain by a sterile homogeneous loam. However, in the northern half of the site a similar type of overlying soil [8]/[17] contained considerable amounts of charcoal, building debris and small stones, as well as a quantity of pottery (Figs 3 and 4).
- 4.7 Two other discrete archaeological features, probably pits, were also identified during the work. Feature [5] had cut through the black ashy deposits but, judging from its contents, was probably of Roman date. Most of the pottery recovered from the site came from this pit, including the fragmented pieces of a ceramic Roman roof tile. Feature [2] seemed to be cut (irregularly) from the former turf line and post-dated the Roman deposits. Its fill, a grey, clayey loam, yielded a small fragment of pottery which is possibly of medieval date.
- 4.8 Catalogues of the numbered archaeological contexts and the finds recovered from them are provided as Appendices 1 and 2.

5. Dating evidence

- 5.1 The clearest indication of the date of occupation of the site has come from the 35 sherds of Roman pottery recovered during the work. The pottery from the burnt deposits and the subsequent structural remains all seem to date to the late 1st-early 2nd century AD. Some late 3rd or 4th-century wares were also recovered from the general demolition deposit [17] overlying the northern half of the site.

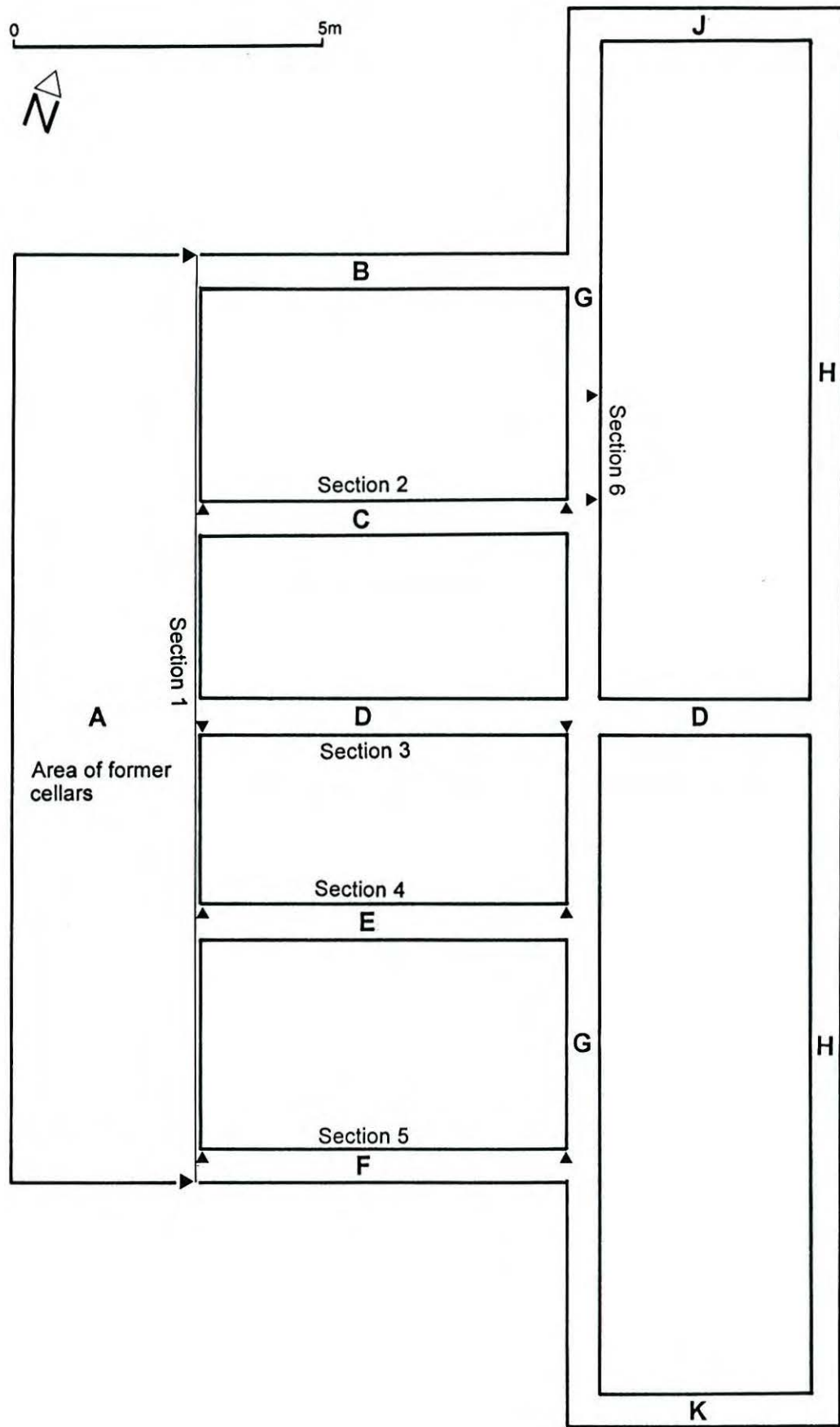
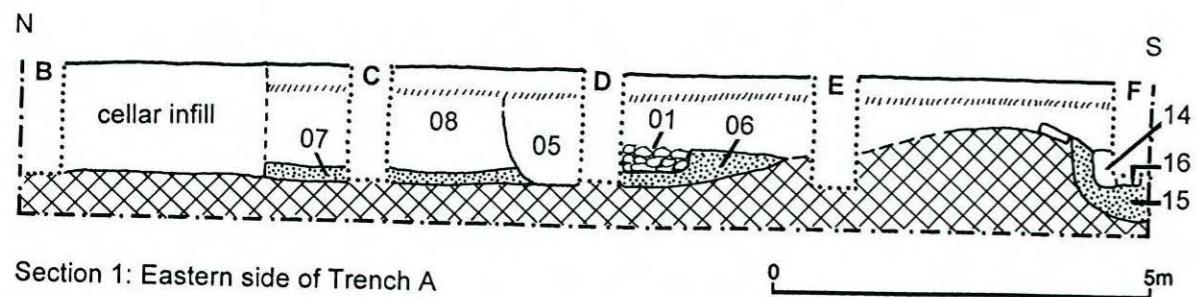
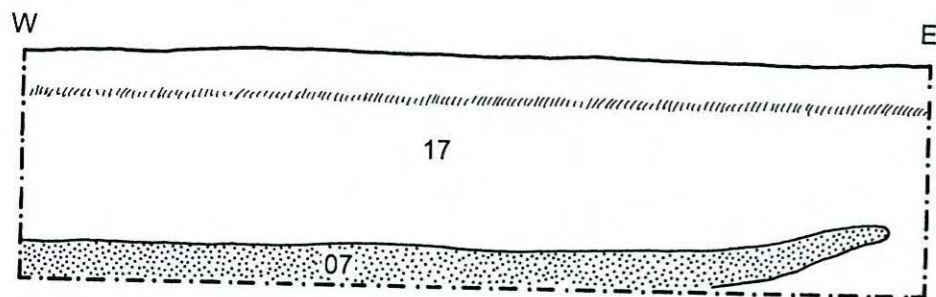


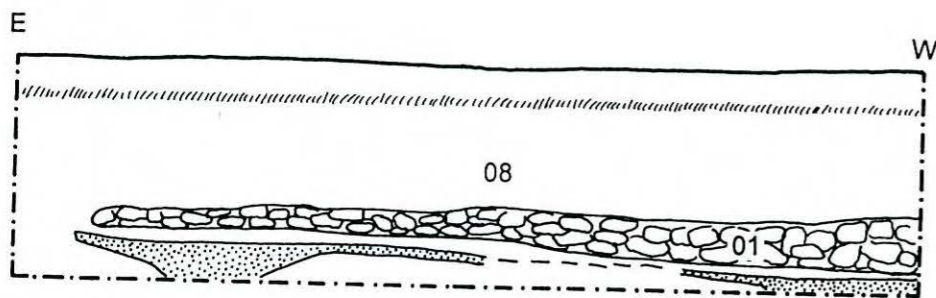
Fig. 2. Plan of trenches A-K and positions of sections 1-6.



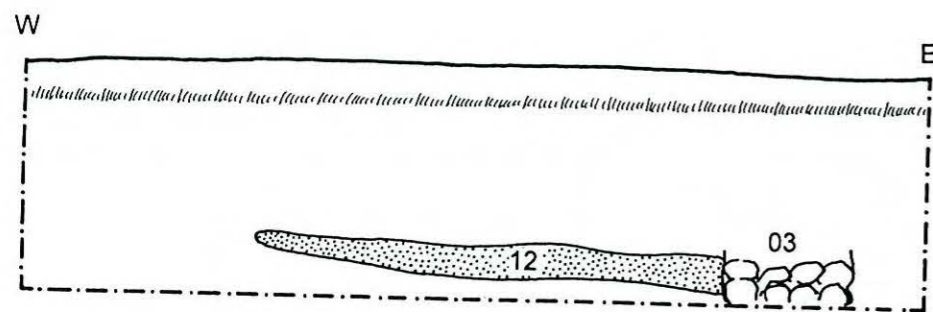
Section 1: Eastern side of Trench A



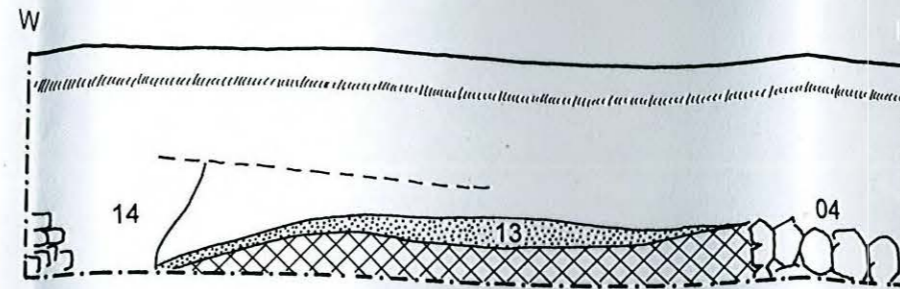
Section 2: Northern side of Trench C



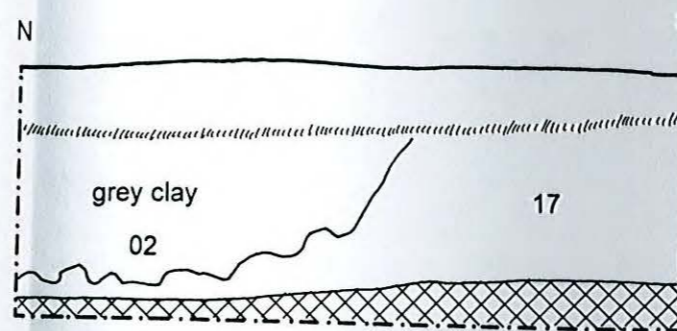
Section 3: Southern side of Trench D



Section 4: Northern side of Trench E



Section 5: Northern side of Trench F



Section 6: Eastern side of Trench G showing Feature [02].







-  Pre-Victorian turf horizon
-  Wall foundation
-  Burnt ashy deposit
-  Natural clay

Fig. 3. Schematic sketch sections 1-6

Fig. 3

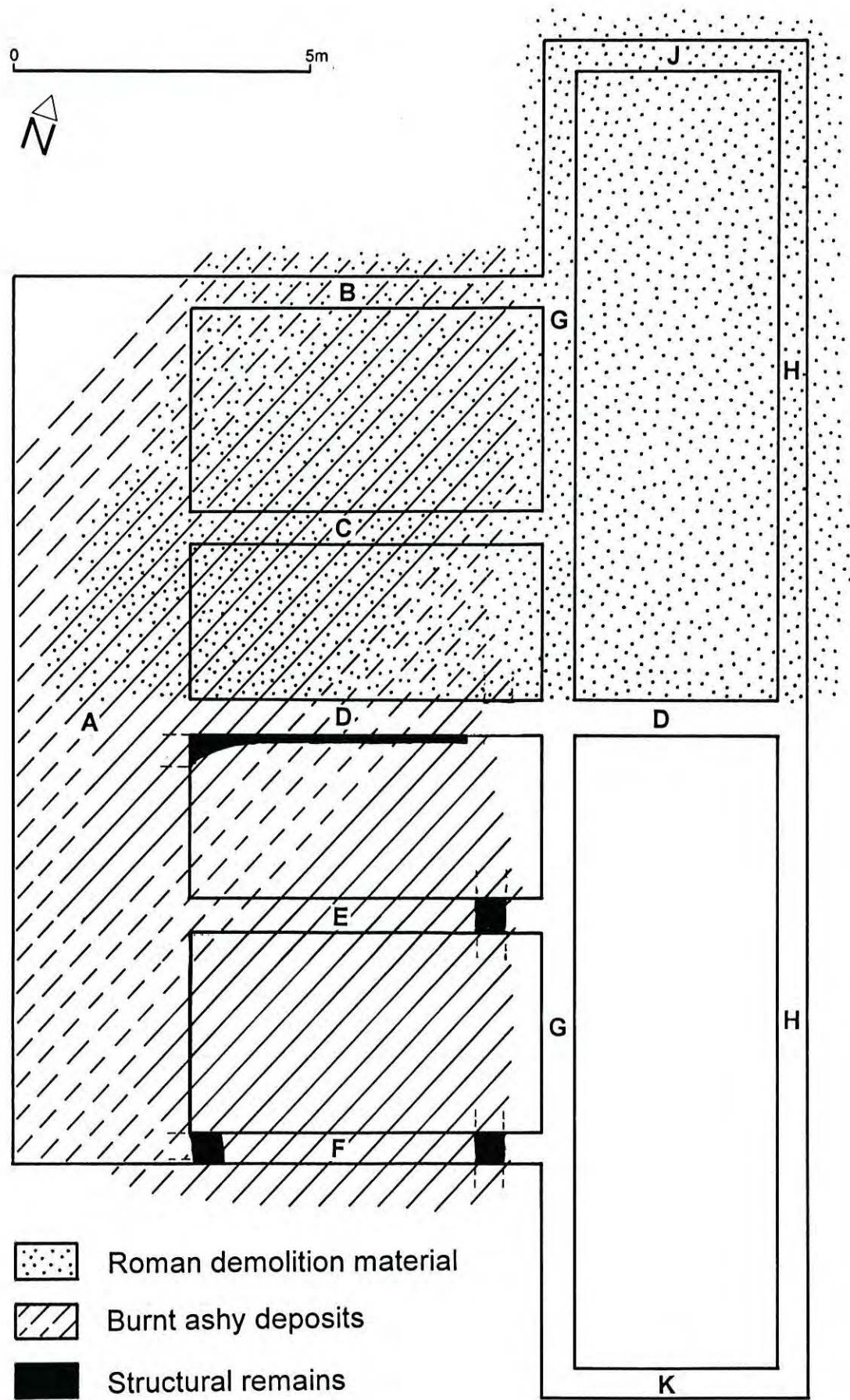


Fig. 4 Plan of ground disturbances showing location of structural remains with respect to the perceived extents of the burnt ashy deposits and that containing the demolition debris.

6. Discussion

- 6.1 The foundation trenches for new buildings on this part of West Street have provided, for the first time, tangible structural evidence for the Roman settlement in this part of Castleford. Until now the only substantial evidence for the civilian settlement has been found to the south-west of the forts, in the vicinity of Welbeck Street, seemingly focussing upon the line of the north-south Roman road. The recent West Street discoveries now suggest that settlement in the late 1st-early 2nd century AD was far less focussed; the evidence pointing to the settlement extending up to 250m west of the early forts.
- 6.2 However, the density of settlement in this area remains uncertain. The dark, ashy deposits and the truncated remains of the wall foundations were found in the western side of the site, with little or no archaeology extending to the east of Trench G and the sandstone wall foundation [3]/[4]. Nevertheless the Victorian cellars would seem to have removed significant areas of Roman archaeology to the west of the site.
- 6.3 How discrete a pocket of occupation this site, and that found on the opposite side of the road, forms is difficult to assess. Certainly there were areas to the south and east of the present site and to the south of 4-34 West Street, which showed no evidence at all of archaeological activity of any period. Investigation has only been on a small scale in this part of the town but it is beginning to add significantly to our understanding of Roman Castleford's spatial development.

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Report: Ian Roberts BSc MIFA
Illustrations: Michael Fossick HDFA MAAIS
Pottery identification: Dr Peter Rush (Univ. of Bradford)
Word processing: Alison Whawell

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Postscript

In June 1995 observations during ground works for a new parking area, immediately to the north of the above site, recorded the existence of a dark soil horizon about 0.3m below the modern ground surface. No datable finds were recovered.

Appendix 1

West Street, Castleford 1995 (WES95)

List of Context Descriptions

Context	Description
01	Limestone foundation material in side of Trench D.
02	Feature filled with grey clay in side of Trench G.
03	Sandstone foundation material at the east end of Trench E.
04	Sandstone foundation material at the east end of Trench F.
05	Pit fill as seen in Section A, between trenches C and D.
06	Dark, ashy deposit into which foundation material of 1 is set. Lies above natural clay. (Becomes less ashy and more clayey to north where lies below [17] in places - but stratigraphically same.)
07	Dark, ashy deposit above natural at corner of Trench C in Section 1.
08	Layer above dark, ashy deposit [09] in Trench D. Below [01] same as [17].
09	Isolated feature/depression containing black, ashy material and charcoal. Below [01] in Trench D.
10	Not used.
11	Limestone foundation material at the western end of Trench E. Seemingly associated with a possible foundation trench showing as brown clay against the natural yellow.
12	Black, ashy deposit seemingly butting up to foundation material [11]. Overlying an orange-grey, loamy clay - presumed natural.
13	Black, ashy deposit seen in section of Trench F. Cut at western end by foundation trench for [13] and at eastern end by cut for Foundation [04].
14	Foundation material revealed in western end of Trench F. Limestone rubble in brown, loamy clay. Foundation trench is cut into what appears to be earlier ditch, filled with grey and black ashy material [15], as seen in Section 1. This black material could be same as [13] but not physically demonstrated.

- 15 Grey-black, ashy fill to ditch seen in Section 1 at western end of Trench F. Cut by foundation trench for [6]. Has number of black charcoal bands around edges and much burnt bone in fill throughout.
- 16 Foundation material of limestone rubble.
- 17 Deep deposit, up to 0.5m, of mid-brown clay loam containing much charcoal, building debris etc as flecks (and small stones). Identified in the north-eastern quarter of site initially, but found to extend across northern half of the site. In places it seals the dark reference band of black ashy material that seems to pre-date the wall foundations.

Appendix 2

West Street, Castleford 1995 (WES95)

Catalogue of Artefacts

Context	Description
01	Grey ware pottery sherd from a jar with pointed barbotine dot decoration, of late 1st or 2nd century date. Also a very sandy, oxidised sherd of probable similar date.
02	Undateable coarse, pink pottery sherd, possibly medieval.
05	Thirteen sherds of pottery, including four from rusticated jars. Probably late 1st to early 2nd century date although similar jars continued to be produced at the South Yorkshire potteries into the mid-2nd century and products from there do occur at Castleford.
05	Eight joining pieces of Roman ceramic roof tile.
05	Eight fragments of animal bone.
05	Two pieces of daub.
05	One iron nail.
06	Two sherds of pottery, neither of which is really dateable. An oxidised sherd with the white slip is likely to be 1st or 2nd century.
08	Three sherds of pottery, including one from the rim of a Drag. 35 terra sigillata bowl, probably South Gaulish and of late 1st century date.
08	Two joining fragments of Roman vessel glass.
12	Rim sherd from a rusticated jar, of late 1st or early 2nd century date.
12	One piece of daub.
13	Two sherds of pottery, including a grey ware jar rim of probably late 1st to early 2nd century date.
15	Grey ware pottery sherd of uncertain date.
17	Seven pottery sherds, including the battered rim from a Dales Ware jar of the late 3rd or 4th century.

17 Two fragments of animal bone.

Unstratified - Three grey ware pottery sherds, including a jar rim and a jar base of probable late 1st to early 2nd century date.

Unstratified - Two iron objects.

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Other finds: Kath Keith