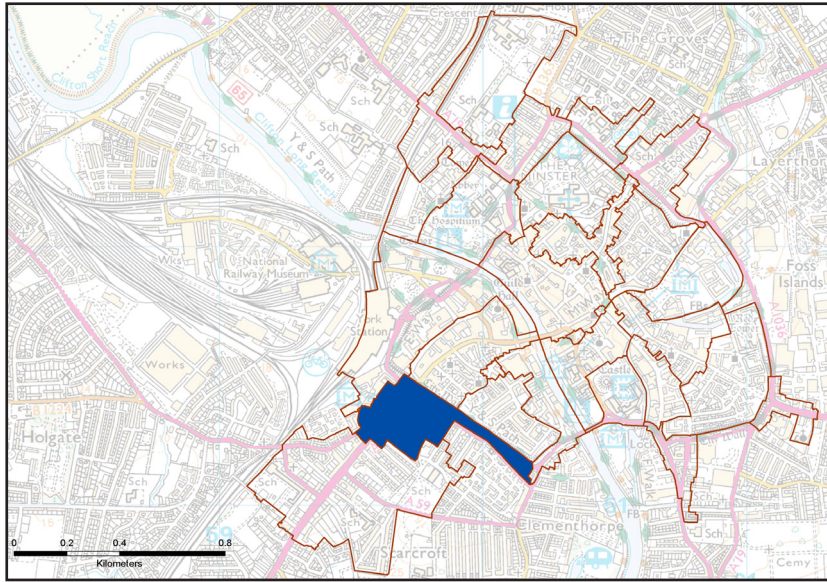


Character area 23: Blossom Street/Nunnery Lane



The location of the character area within the historic core.

Description

Blossom Street was one of the early suburbs outside the city walls and has historically always been an important route into the city whether by horse, electric tram or now bus and car. Today it has a busy mixed commercial character, culminating at a traffic-choked junction in front of Micklegate Bar. The historic character of the area is now fragmentary, with a row of handsome Georgian buildings counterpoised by 20th century development opposite

Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

Archaeological background

Roman

The Blossom Street area has been the principal route into the city from London and the south since the Roman period and perhaps earlier. The Roman road from Tadcaster (Calcaria) to York (MYO2033) has been recorded in several places within this area. It runs parallel with Blossom Street to the rear of the buildings on the north-west side. A second road presumed to link York with Alborough (Isurium) runs to the rear of the Odeon building and off towards Holgate. In 1991 the principal road was seen at a depth of c.1.5m below ground level during excavations at 14-20 Blossom Street (EYO16) overlain by substantial Roman deposits c. 1.0m thick. In another trench, Roman levels were identified at c.1.85m below ground level. This excavation also established that a deeper modern overburden was present at the street frontage than to the rear of the buildings. Investigation on The Crescent in 1981 (EYO3533) exposed a cobbled surface interpreted as road metalling at c.2m below ground level.

During the Roman period, extramural areas along roads were predominantly used for burying the dead and the Blossom Street area is no exception. A mixed, inhumation and cremation cemetery (MYO2203) has been identified along Blossom Street extending south-west from the medieval City Walls (and possible Civitas defences, to the Mount. On the south-east side of Blossom Street investigations during the late 1980s (EYO3208-16 & EYO4748) exposed remains of a 4th century inhumation cemetery (MYO3680) containing male, female and child burials. Evidence of two mausolea (tombs) which dated to an earlier period (MYO3678) were also uncovered. In the same area (35-41 Blossom Street), a ditched Roman enclosure (MYO3679) and pits dating to the early 2nd century of unknown function were identified. The five ditches may have formed part of a Romano-British field system associated with some form of roadside rural settlement. The ditches and pits were sealed by mid 3rd century refuse from the nearby civilian settlement. This may have been a deliberate act in order to raise ground level for cemetery use. The burials were located c.2.7m below ground level overlain by a thin layer of medieval plough soil and c.2.0m of a modern concrete inspection pit (EYO3208-10).

Excavations in the 1950s and 1960s (EYO2751), exposed evidence of the road surface and road side ditch, as well as cremation burials and stone buildings. Two trenches by L.P. Wenham in 1953 were re-opened in 2000 as part of an evaluation at 28-40 Blossom Street (EYO428). Roman deposits were encountered at 1.2m and 1.3m below ground level including possible plough soil deposits, a linear cut, cobble surface, pits and postholes. Further excavation at 28-40 Blossom Street in 2009 (EYO4317) failed to find the road. However it provided evidence for the agricultural nature of the landscape in the 1st century followed by rubbish dumping and levelling of the ground interspersed with periods of industrial and funerary activity.

Further south at East Mount Road (EYO187) a Roman pit or ditch was noted. 19th and 20th century cellaring and other disturbance had destroyed much of the archaeology in the area but the quantity of finds of Roman date suggest that this was a site of considerable activity during this period.

Anglian-Anglo-Scandinavian

From the 5th century onwards, this area probably reverted to agricultural land as the former cemetery to the north had been. Excavations at 28-40 Blossom Street in 2009 (EYO4317) concluded that 18th and 19th century development related activity had removed all traces of archaeology from the 5th to the 11th century. Some evidence of antler working was found. Investigations at 35-41 Blossom Street in the late 1980s produced some evidence of antler working which does suggest that some form of small rural settlement may have existed. However, the same excavation revealed a thick medieval plough soil (dated to the 13th century) directly overlying Roman levels.

Medieval

The name Blossom Street (recorded as Ploxwangate – ploughswain or ploughman in 1241) is indicative of the essentially rural nature of this area. At East Mount Road (EYO187), 1.1m thick medieval plough soils were recorded. The immediate approaches to Micklegate Bar were almost certainly built up with burgage plots by the later medieval period.

At 20 Blossom Street a medieval cobbled surface was recorded in 1994, while pits and other deposits were noted in the same area in 1991 (EYO16). Medieval rubbish pits and boundary ditches were found to the rear of properties at 35-41 Blossom Street (EYO3208-15 & 4748). These deposits also contained the base of an oven or kiln. Immediately outside the Bar lay St. Thomas' Hospital (1391) for the poor and travellers (demolished in 1862).

In the early 16th century if not before, a horse and cattle market was held outside Micklegate Bar, on and around St Luke's day. The presence of the market partly explains the width of the road today. Micklegate Bar (MYO2196-7) dates from the 14th century and forms part of the City Wall, along with Victoria Bar, which runs along the eastern end of this character area (MYO1715). Nunnery Lane was known as Bagergate in the mid 13th century derived from a Middle English word baggere meaning bag maker. Part of the Old Baile impinges on part of this character area on Price's Lane. It was later integrated into the city defensive circuit.

Post-medieval – Early modern

Blossom Street was the only area outside the walls to survive the 1644 siege of York, due in part to construction of a defensive fortification on The Mount to the south-west. The area outside the city walls was virtually all agricultural land until the late 18th- early 19th century. On Blossom Street, medieval buildings were gradually replaced and modified. Inns and other accommodation presumably increased. The area attracted wealthy families and merchants attested by high quality Georgian houses on the street and later villas further south on The Mount. There are a number of landscaped gardens illustrated on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map. Barstow's Hospital (1720) complemented St Thomas's Hospital and the Bar Convent, the oldest post-reformation religious foundation in Britain, dates to 1686.

Development in surrounding streets continued throughout the 19th century along side streets such as South Parade (post 1875), The Crescent (post 1875) and Queen Street (1840s).

By the 1880s a horse drawn tram service was in use, replaced by electric trams and subsequently by the widening of the road to create the traffic dominated street of today.

Visible character

Important historic gateway route into the city

Landmark City Walls, Micklegate and Victoria Bars run along the border of this character area

Busy, mixed, commercial character

Some original cobbled road margins survive

Predominant building height of three storeys

Fragmentary historic character

Sub surface character

Ove Arup Development & Archaeology Study Research Zone: 16

Deposit Depth (where known): Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggests archaeological deposits relating to the Roman-medieval periods across the Blossom Street area.

Roman cobbled surfaces (roads) were observed at levels varying between c.1.5m below ground level to c.1.85m below ground level.

Blossom St, burials are recorded as c.2.7m below ground level at 35-41 Blossom Street.

Period Survival: Significant Roman inhumation and cremation cemeteries outside the civilian town exist within this area. Medieval and earlier deposits predominantly relating to agricultural and horticultural land use are known throughout the vicinity. Post-medieval levels are often disturbed by more modern activity.

Interventions (recorded on HER April 2013): There are approximately 31 archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record (HER). Few of the interventions are recorded in any detail and a brief examination of some grey literature suggests several interventions are yet to be recorded in the HER. See Appendix 1 for a brief summary.

Significance

Overview: Blossom Street falls within the Extramural (south-west) zone as identified by Ove Arup in the Archaeology and Development Study just outside the Roman civilian settlement now bounded by the medieval city wall. The study identified the extramural area as containing Roman-medieval deposits, although there was insufficient data at the time to produce a likely depth of deposit.

Given the information available, substantial stratified Roman deposits relating to settlement, agriculture, burial and transport appear to survive at depths of c.1.5m and c.2.7m below ground level in places. The main feature of the Roman archaeology is the significant cluster of inhumation and cremation cemeteries. The nature of the medieval built environment remains unexplored although there are clear topographical indications of roadside development. The majority of the area was clearly part of the agricultural hinterland.

Designations: The site falls within the Central Area of Archaeological Importance and the Historic Core Conservation Area.

This area contains several architecturally or historically significant buildings as well as several Buildings of Merit such as The Crescent. There is one Grade I listed building (Bar Convent) and 44 Grade II listed buildings. The City Walls (Barker Tower to Baile Hill) are also Grade I listed and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM 30).

Streetscape components: Paving is a mixture of riven English Pennine Sandstone, pre-cast concrete flags (Marshall's Saxon paving principally), and asphalt. Carriageways are all asphalt. Riven natural stone flags survive on The Crescent and South Parade. Pre-cast concrete flags have been laid along Blossom Street. Moss Street and Nunnery Lane footways are all asphalt. This area contains contemporary street signage, late 20th century phone boxes and traffic signage, seating, bus stops and Edinburgh style waste bins.

Late 20th century-early 21st century street lighting is in use on the main thoroughfares, earlier examples can be found on side streets.

Blossom Street contains original cobbled margins now used as parking spaces. These cobbled areas on this main approach road to the city were once grassed areas used for cattle grazing on their journey into the city for market. They were replaced by cobbles in the 18th and 19th century to inhibit this practice as in other areas of the city such as Bootham.

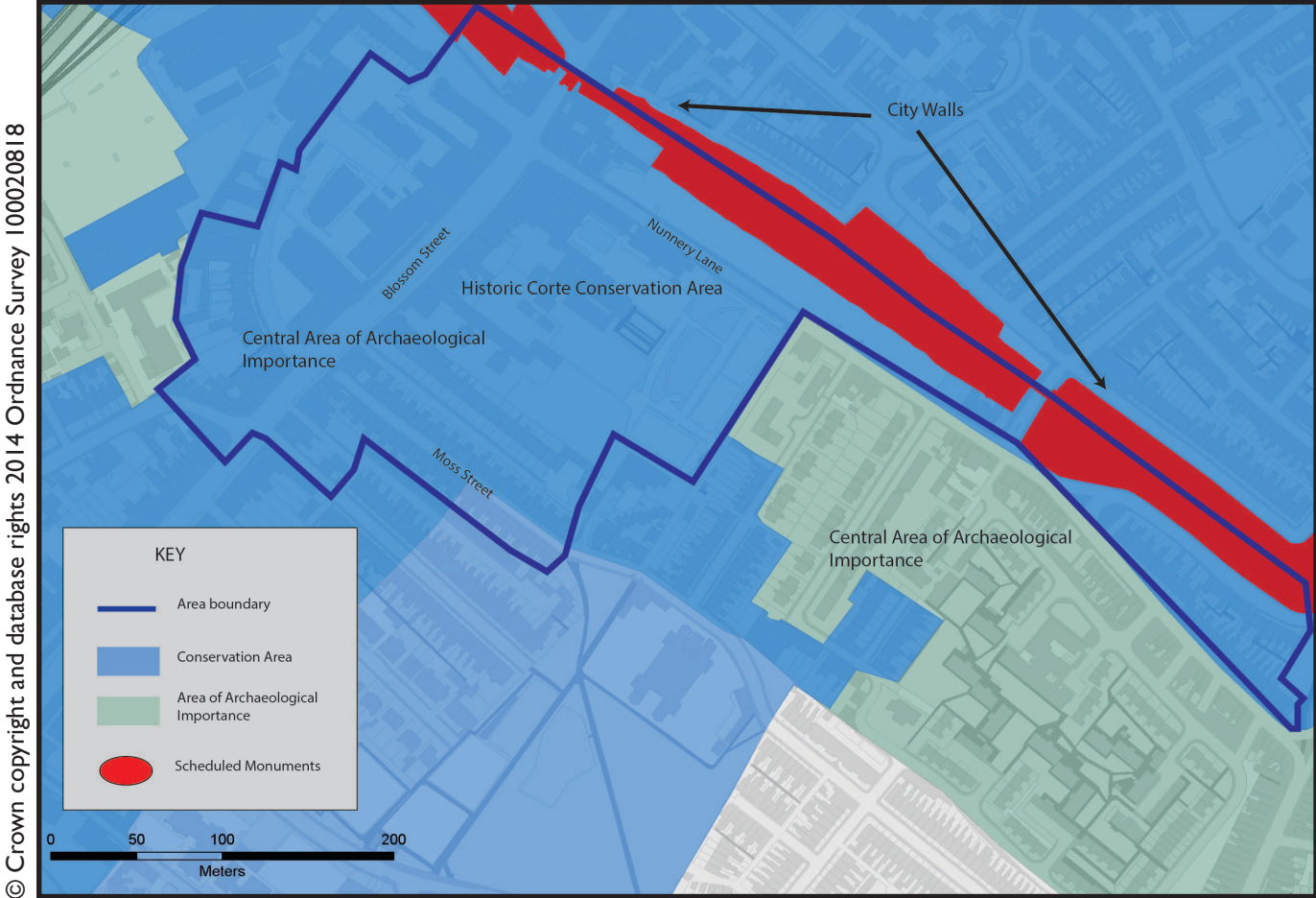
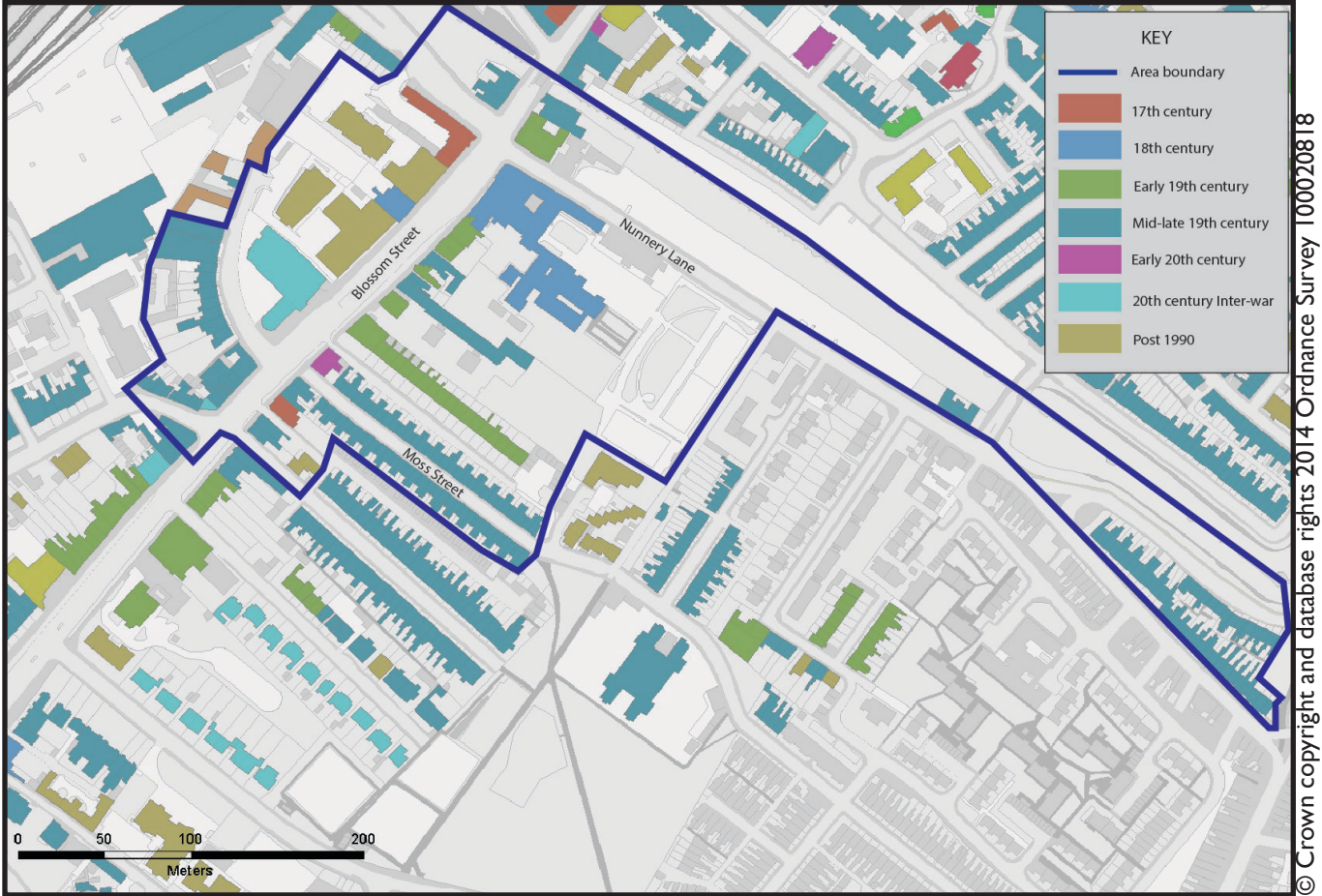
Figure ground map with built environment shown as white on black.





Above: Plan showing the heights of the buildings within this character area.

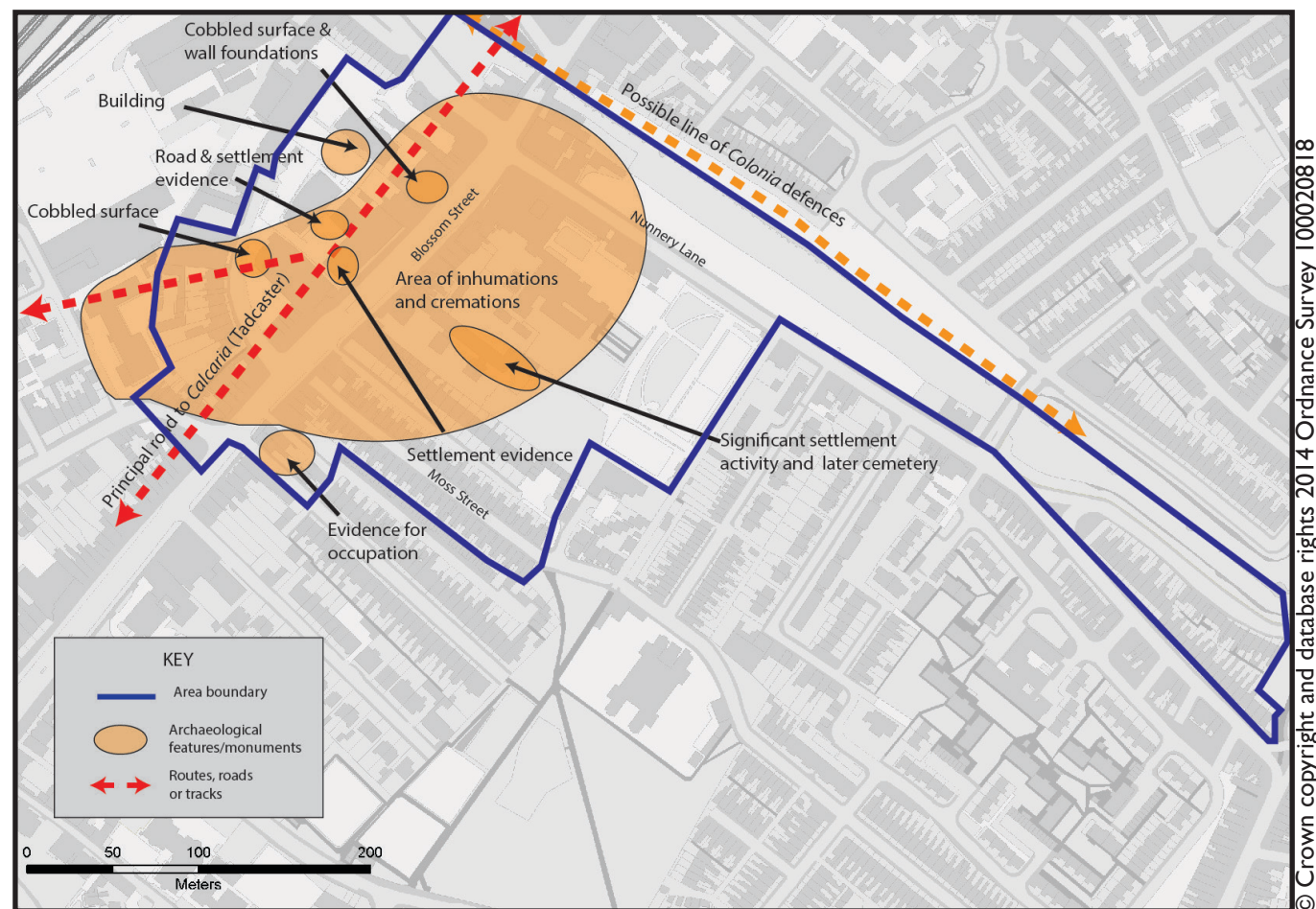
Below: Plan showing the construction dates of the buildings within the area.



Above: Plan showing designated heritage assets within this character area.

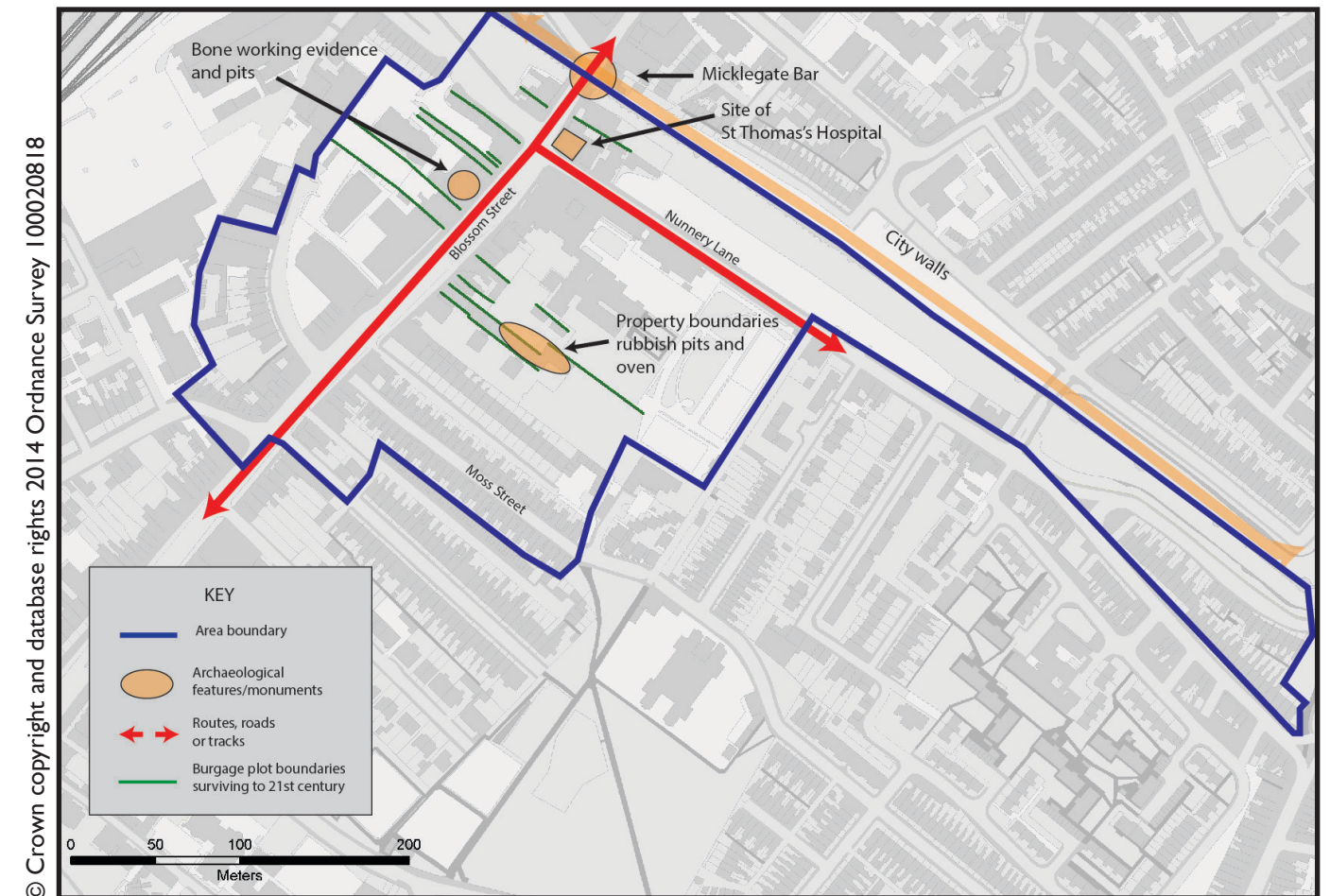
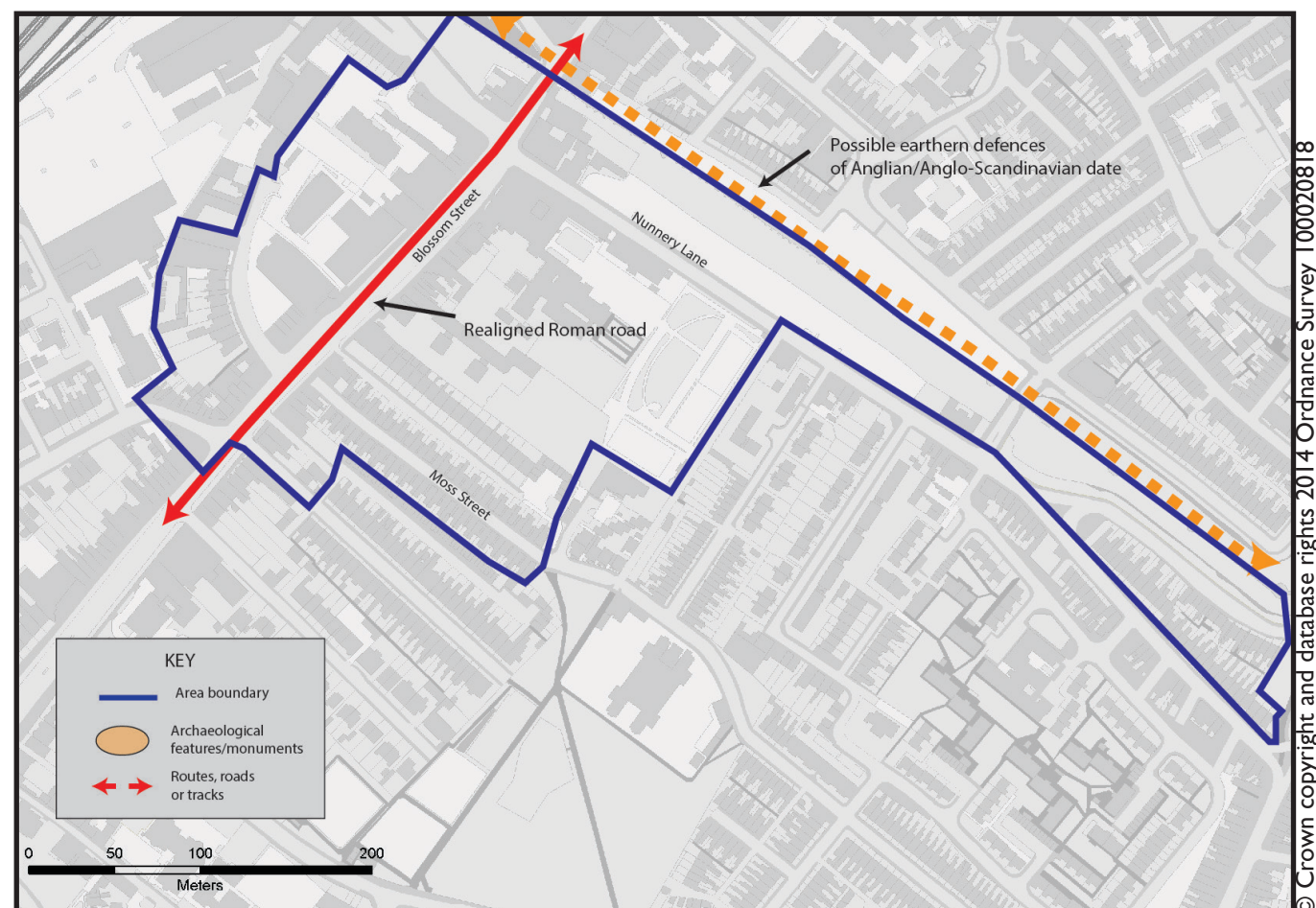
Below: Plan showing the Broad Type characterisation of the area. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan.





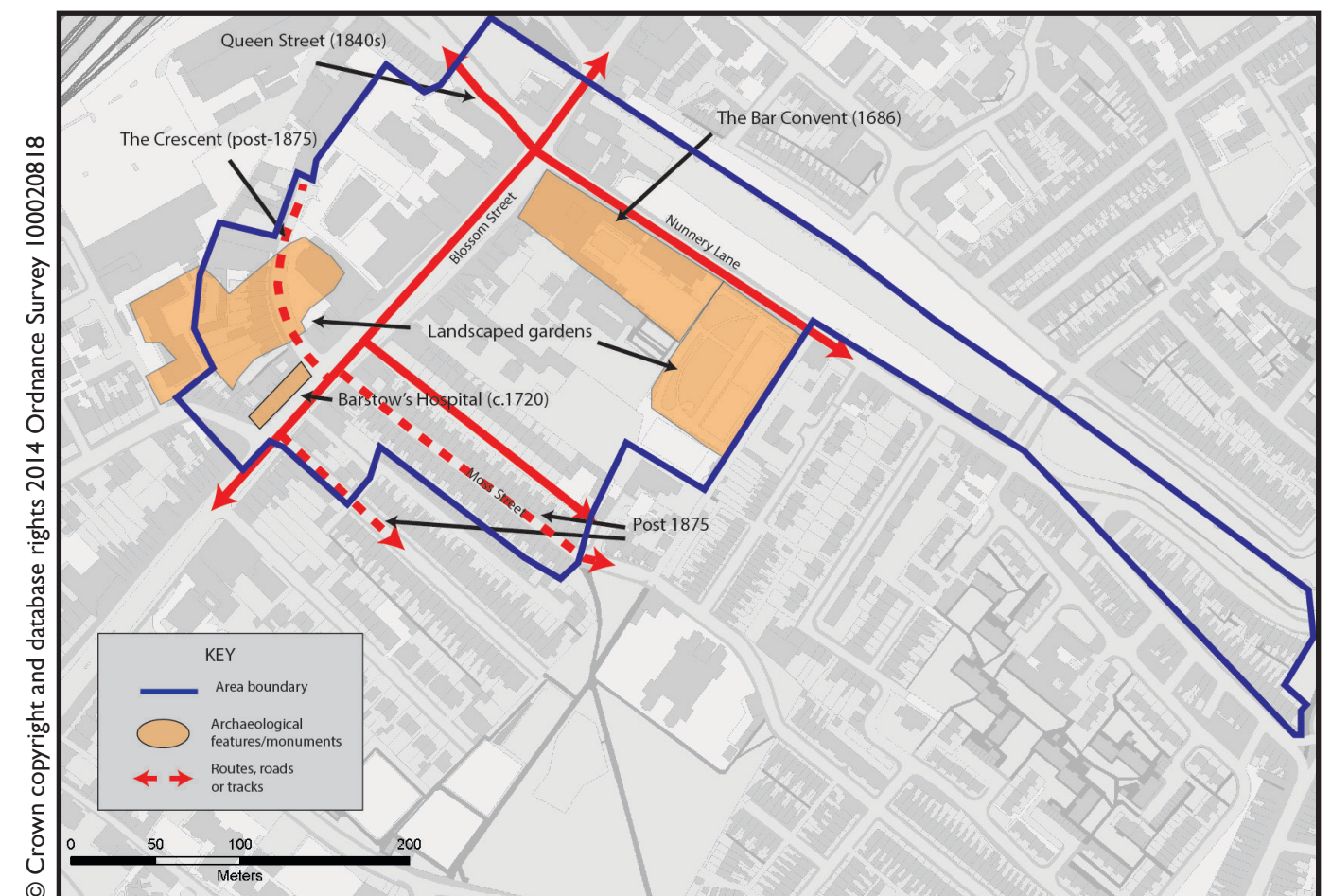
Above: The Roman landscape.

Below: The Anglo-Scandinavian landscape



Above: The medieval landscape.

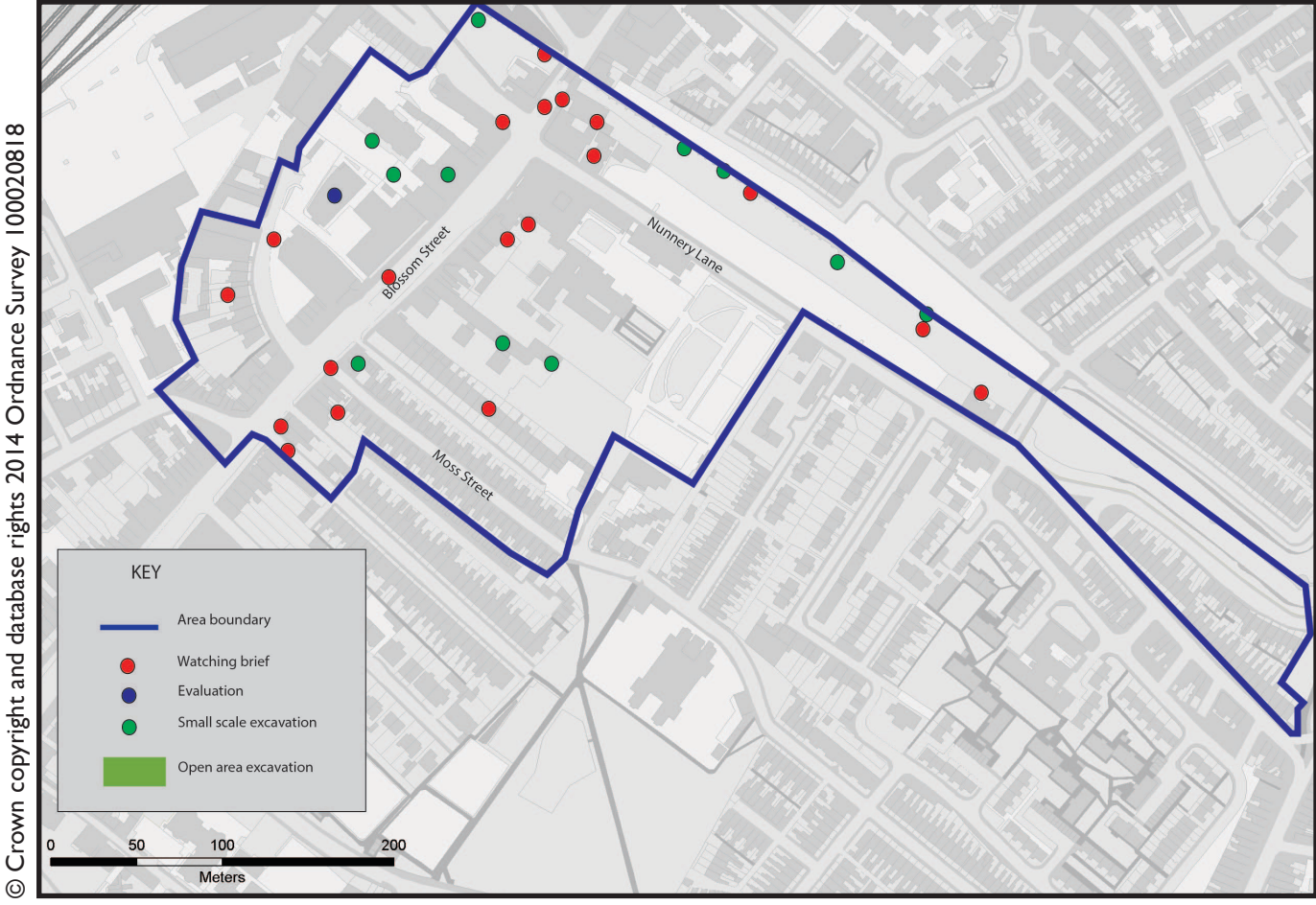
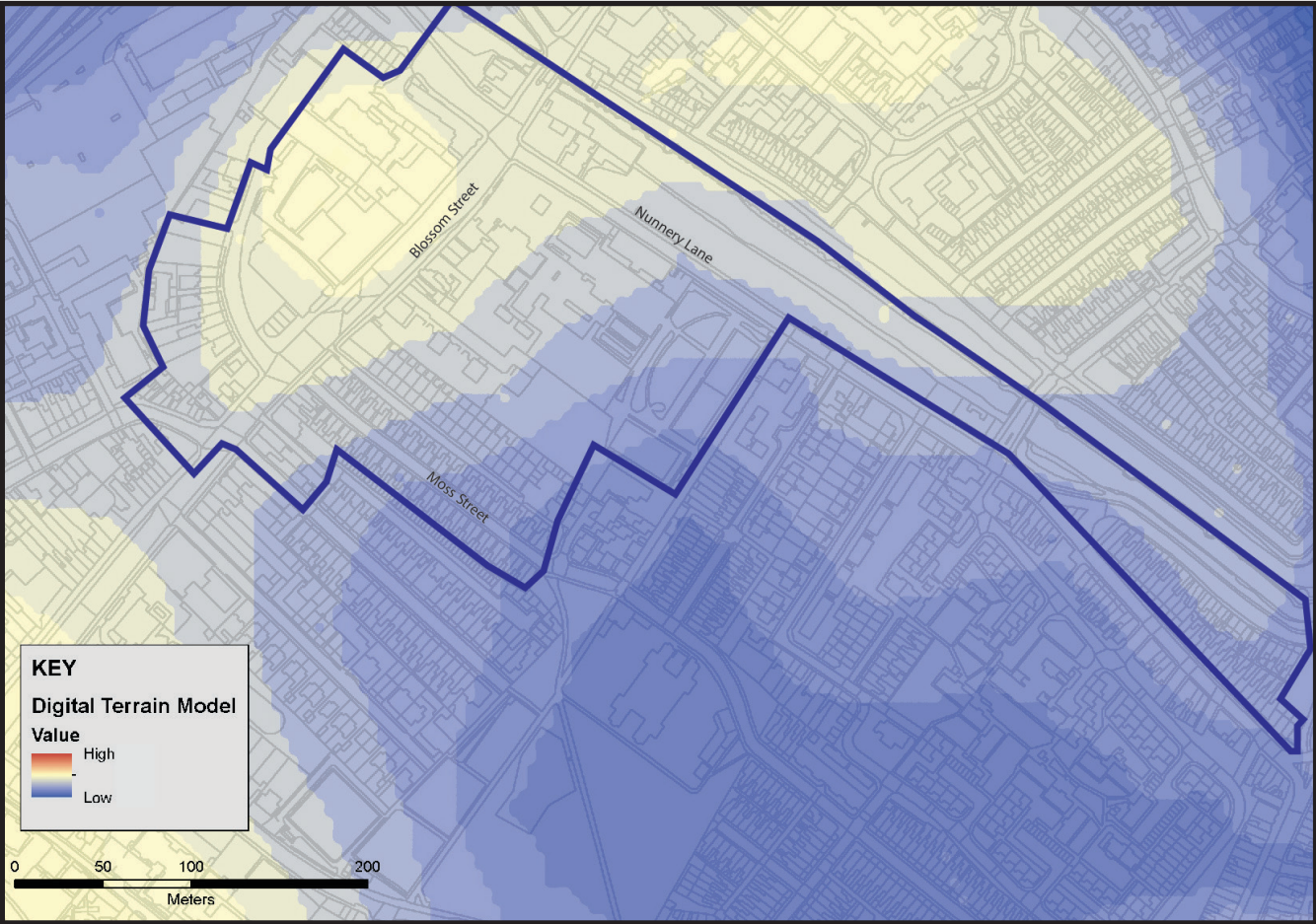
Below: The post-medieval landscape.



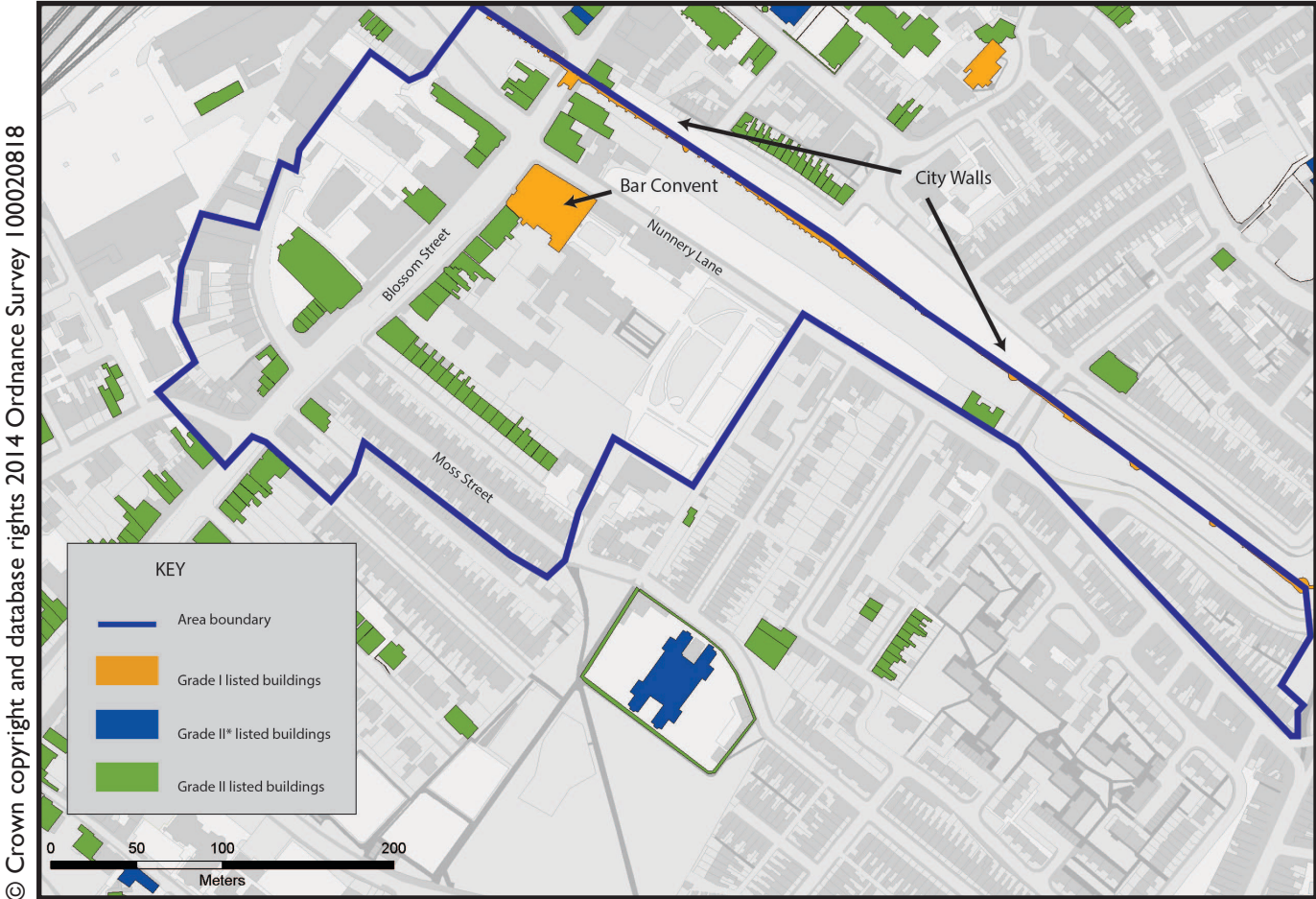


Above: The 1852 landscape.

Below: The general topography showing higher ground to the south of the railway station.



Above: The location of archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record.
Below: Location of listed buildings. Note the Grade I listed City Walls running along the Nunnery Lane border.



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York City Council Historic Environment Record

York City Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal- 23:
Blossom Street – Nunnery Lane

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