

**North Bridge Project – Archaeological Post-Excavation  
Assessment Askews Print Shop Site, Church Way, Doncaster:  
Submission for Undertaking Phase 1**

by

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On behalf of

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## **The Askews Print Shop Site: Background**

Excavations at Askews Print Shop, Doncaster, were carried out in 1994 and post-excavation work began immediately, only to cease through lack of funds in 1995. The records and physical archive for the excavations now reside mainly at Doncaster Museum and South Yorkshire Archaeological Services, Sheffield, although some records and finds are at present unlocated.

As part of a wider project to archive and, hopefully, publish the results of archaeological investigations in the North Bridge area, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council wishes to complete the post-excavation work on the Askews Print Shop site. This work has been put out to tender in two phases.

Phase 1 consists of the construction of a Research Archive, to be deposited at Doncaster Museum, together with the production of an Updated Project Design for the production of a published report on the excavations, for inclusion in a monograph covering both past and current excavations in the North Bridge area.

Phase 2 consists of the production of the report on the excavations and their finds.

This submission covers only Phase 1 of this project.

## **Archaeological Results**

The excavations produced a well-stratified sequence of deposits spanning the Romano-British to the early modern periods and have been summarised by Steve Webster (Webster 1996). The site provides further evidence for the sequence of defences at Doncaster and in particular uncovered a stretch of Roman defensive wall and Roman and later defensive ditches.

## **Proposed methods of assessment**

Sites such as the Askews Print Shop site can produce valuable information on diet and economy, since ditches were often used for the dumping of refuse, and a policy of soil sampling was carried out on site, thus providing a yardstick with which to compare finds and ecofacts (mainly animal bone and shell) recovered by hand.

It is common, however, for defensive ditch systems to be periodically recut and redesigned and these works can lead to the wholesale digging away of deposits, including previous ditch fills, and their re-deposition. Furthermore, spoil from elsewhere was sometimes used for such backfilling operations, leading to the inclusion of finds in the site strata which are both chronologically and geographically divorced from their original context.

A considerable amount of work has already taken place on the site stratigraphy, finds and ecofacts but before any further work takes place it would be sensible to establish not only the site narrative (as required by MAP2 (1991) but also the site formation processes, or taphonomy.

To do this requires dividing the post-excavation analysis programme into several stages, here called Modules.

- Module 1: Mobilisation
- Module 2: Location and Collation of archive
- Module 3: Checking and Cataloguing of archive
- Module 4: Production of an outline Site Interpretation
- Module 5: Assessment of finds and environmental evidence
- Module 6: Production of an Updated Project Design
- Module 7: Production and Deposition of Research Archive

Following preliminary setting-up work (Module 1: Mobilisation) and the establishment of the location and condition of the records and the physical archive (Module 2) and their integrity (Module 3) a preliminary phasing structure would be created and dates assigned through the spot-dating of datable artefacts (Module 4). At this stage it may be possible to limit the amount of further study of certain classes of material if, for example, deposits could be demonstrated to contain large quantities of redeposited material for varying dates and origins. Furthermore, certain types of finds and environmental analysis rely on site stratigraphy to guide their approach to the material and their assessment would therefore not be able to begin until a clear idea of the date and interpretation of the strata from which they were recovered is available. There are some grounds for considering that this last phase, Module 5, is actually best seen as the first stage of Phase 2. However, if, for some reason, Phase 2 was not to take place then one of the aims of Phase 1, to produce a Research Archive, would not have been achieved.

For many classes of material, an initial assessment of the finds is no quicker than a full catalogue and report and it is therefore proposed in this bid to combine the assessment and study of these materials into a single operation within Module 5.

### ***Aims and objectives***

The principal aim of Phase 1 is to produce an Updated Research Design which includes the following information:

1. The location of all parts of the archive
2. The nature, current state and integrity of the archive
3. Work required to complete analysis of each part of archive to the standard of the Museum of London guidelines (1998).
4. Discard and retention strategies

5. Recommendations for work in Phase II with justifications

### Sampling, discard and retention strategies

It is proposed to study all the finds and ecofacts from stratified deposits, excluding those which are deemed to be redeposited and containing material of mixed dates and origins. The decision as to which material to study will be taken following the completion of Module 4. None of the classes of material recovered seems to be sufficiently large to warrant the use of a sub-sampling strategy but it may well be that individual specialists propose methods of analysis which vary according to the stratigraphic status of the material (eg stratified versus residual pottery). Such proposals will be included and justified in the Updated Project Design.

The need to undertake destructive sampling of artefacts may arise during Phase 1. If so, a list of proposed items to sample together with justification for the sampling will be include in the Updated Research Design.

For each class of material a disposal policy will be established following discussion with the relevant specialist and Doncaster Museum. There is no point in retaining material unless a potential exists for its further study or educational use. If material is identified for discard this will be carried out in accordance with Doncaster Museum's finds dispersal policy. This may, for example, mean that material is offered to museum school services or to other museums before being disposed of.

## Proposed Work Programme

### Module 1: Mobilisation

There are a number of tasks required in order to start the project. They include discussions with SYAS (Task 1.1) and with Doncaster Museum (Task 2.2) to arrange for the transfer of site archive. Then, it may be informative to contact members of the original site and post-excavation team, to establish whether they still hope any relevant parts of the archive and, if so, whether they would be willing to pass these over (Task 1.3). Finally, it will be necessary to appoint an environmental archaeologist and to make preliminary contact with potential specialists for some of the finds categories (Task 1.4).

### Module 2: Location and collation of archive

It seems that the only relevant archive material held by SYAS is digital and could be transferred by post (Task 2.1). Doncaster Museum, on the other hand, hold paper records, photographs, the finds, unsorted residues from sieving and unsieved GBA (general biological assessment) samples. All of these will need to be moved to Lincoln (Task 2.2). There is also the possibility that Task 1.3 will reveal other parts of the archive which will need to be collected, either in person or by courier. The total quantity of records or finds is unlikely to be large (Task 2.3). Finally, the paper records need to be photocopied for security and the photocopied set can then be returned to Doncaster Museum so that the originals and security copy are not held in the same place (Task 2.4).

### **Module 3: Checking and cataloguing of archive**

Once all of the available archive has been assembled, the post-excavation team will construct a new Access 2000 database and a digital research archive. All of the information held on paper records will be transferred to this database (Task 3.1). This will include 894 context sheets, bulk finds record sheets, the list of boxes and their contents made by Doncaster Museum and other lists and tables held in the archive in the 'Specialist Reports' binder. Some of this information will be redundant but should still be recorded as a record of the site post-excavation history.

The next stage is to take the original site plans and section drawings and to make scanned copies of these. This will both act as a security measure and allow the site drawings to be digitised so that they can be held in a GIS (Task 3.2).

Some of the box contents are not listed by context in the Doncaster Museum list and in any case it is good practice to check off the contents of each box against this list. Any new information will then be added to the database (Task 3.3).

Once all of this information is in the database the various lists can be collated and any discrepancies highlighted. If necessary, the various records can then be checked to ensure that all the information is to hand and is consistent (Task 3.4). A small amount of time has been included in the budget to correct this data, or to document the discrepancies if it is not clear which record is at fault (Task 3.5).

A final task included in this module is the production of x-radiographs of the metal finds and a conservation assessment of the finds, to ensure that they are stable and, if not, to stabilise them. Finds have already been separated into those requiring x-ray and the rest and it is unlikely that a second assessment would change this division. X-radiographs are required before metal finds can be assessed and are also required for archive deposition (Task 3.6).

### **Module 4: Production of an outline Site Interpretation**

The post-excavation assessment of the finds and stratigraphy has been divided into two stages, Modules 4 and 5. Module 4 consists of the construction of a site matrix (Task 4.1) and the spot-dating of all finds which can be dated independent of their stratigraphic context. These include pottery (Task 4.2), clay pipes (Task 4.3), glass (Task 4.4) and other finds (Task 4.5). Once provisional *TPQs* are available for each context which produced finds, these can be added to the site matrix and the stratigraphy divided up into blocks (Land Use Blocks, or LUBs) representing discrete events or processes, such as the digging of a ditch, the initial silting or its deliberative infilling (Task 4.6). These blocks can then be divided into phases and periods, probably similar or identical to those used in the interim report on the excavation (Task 4.6). This information can then be used to produce phase plans which will be required by finds and environmental specialists in order to visualise the physical layout of the site and how it changed through time (Task 4.7). An outline site narrative will be required to help specialists understand the site stratigraphy (Task 4.8.)

## **Module 5: Assessment of finds and environmental data**

Once the site has been phased and each context assigned to its phase and given an interpretation, this information can be combined with the data collected in Module 3. At this stage, it may be possible to omit certain finds and sampled for further study. The remainder, however, will be submitted to finds and environmental specialists. In the case of the pottery and certain other classes of finds this will require a second, more detailed examination of finds which will already have been viewed as part of Module 4. Allowance has been made for the time required to physically select finds and print out relevant lists and extract information into spreadsheets and databases, according to the systems used by the specialists (Task 5.1). The residues from the GBA samples processed as part of the initial site post-excavation programme will require sorting, omitting any samples from contexts which have proved to be poorly stratified (Task 5.2). The remaining, unprocessed GBA samples will be sieved and sorted as part of the same task. Assessments will be required for Roman pottery (Task 5.3), post-Roman pottery (Task 5.4), animal bone (Task 5.5), lithics (Task 5.6), clay pipes (Task 5.7), burnt clay and daub (Task 5.8), coal and charcoal (Task 5.9), brick and tile (Task 5.10), plaster and mortar (Task 5.11), worked stone (Task 5.12), shell (Task 5.13), worked bone and/or antler (Task 5.14), human bone (Task 5.15), lead artefacts (Task 5.16), coins (Task 5.17), copper alloy artefacts (Task 5.18), iron artefacts (Task 5.19), industrial residues (Task 5.20), glass (Task 5.21), and coprolites (Task 5.22).

In some cases an assessment or report has been written as part of the original post-excavation programme. In the case of the lithics, human bone and coprolites it is unlikely that any further specialist work will be required but time has been allowed for the editing of these original reports into the same style as the remainder.

## **Module 6: Production of Updated Project Design**

As the various specialist reports are completed they would be copy edited to ensure a consistent house style, including numbering of figures and tables and adding references to a consolidated bibliography (Task 6.1). There is likely to be information within each specialist report which has an impact on the dating or interpretation of the stratigraphy and time has been allowed to update the site narrative and modify the computer database (Task 6.2). Following this, the updated project design will be written, following the outline given in the tender document (Task 6.3). Costings will be prepared for Phase 2 (Task 6.4) and finally the UPD and costings will be printed and collated (Task 6.5).

## **Module 7: Production and Deposition of Research Archive**

Phase 1 will itself have generated a physical and electronic archive. The electronic archive will be documented to the ADS standard (Task 7.1) and deposited with the ADS (Task 7.2). Where finds have been selected for retention they will be re-boxed, if required, and labelled (Task 7.3). The archive will then be returned to Doncaster Museum for permanent storage (Task 7.4).

## Timetable

The main participants in the project could start on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003. The longest route through the project work programme shows that Kate Steane's contribution would be both the longest and the most critical, amounting to c.90 days. Furthermore, only a small proportion of this work could be done by other staff and so it is not possible to shorten the critical path in that way.

In addition, slack time has to be built into the work programme to take account of external specialists' work programmes, which are usually highly unpredictable. Allowing 2.5 days per week slack time gives an end date to the project, if started at the beginning of March, of mid October 2003.

## Facilities

The project will take place at the AVAC offices in Lincoln. These consist of a suite of rooms in an office block shared only with other archaeological bodies (Lindsey Archaeological Services, Darling & Precious). The rooms are secure, with adequate lighting and served by a computer network with PCs in every room. The plans will be housed in a flat plan chest.

## Collection and return of archive

The records and finds will be collected from Doncaster and Sheffield and taken to Lincoln for the duration of Phase 1. They will be transported by van and accompanied by an AVAC or PCA employee. On completion of Phase 1 (unless PCA is awarded the contract for Phase 2), the finds will be returned to Doncaster. The archive at that time will be organised in accordance with the Museum of London standard (1998).

## Security Arrangements

The site records and finds form an irreplaceable resource for the study of Doncaster's past. Every attempt will be made during this project to protect the records from loss or damage.

The A4 context records will be photocopied and the inked-in site plans and section drawings will be scanned and saved on CD-ROM in TIFF format. *See Module 3 Task 2.*

The finds will be housed in a secure, alarmed premises in Lincoln during assessment or sent to specialists either in the company of an AVAC or PCA employee or using a trusted courier service (AMTRAK).

## Curriculum Vitae

The following personnel would take part in Phase 1 of the project:

**Alan Vince (AGV)** worked for the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London, from 1980 to 1987, latterly as the finds publication officer in charge of publishing finds from DUA excavations.

This included the publication of several monographs of medieval finds including shoes and pattens, knives and scabbards, textiles and dress accessories. From 1987 to 1995 he was the post-excavation manager, latterly Assistant Director, of the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit. Publications from this project include a volume of site reports for the Wigford suburb (2001) and several publications in press. He is also a pottery specialist concentrating specifically on Anglo-Saxon and later pottery, including that from South Yorkshire.

**Dave Watt (DW)** was illustrator at the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit from 1986 to 1996 and is currently a freelance illustrator.

**Hilary Cool (HC)** was a finds researcher at York Archaeological Trust after which she worked as a freelance finds specialist working mainly on Romano-British finds and, in particular glass.

**Jane Cowgill (JC)** was a finds researcher at the Museum of London from 1982 to 1987 and then a finds researcher at the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit. She is currently specialising in the freelance study of metallurgical residues and ironworking.

**James Rackham (JR)** has worked as an environmentalist at the University of York (where he set up the Environmental Archaeology Unit), the University of Durham and the Museum of London (where he was in charge of the ). He has published extensively on environmental archaeology, and in particular animal bones. He currently runs his own Environmental Archaeology consultancy.

**Kate Steane (KS)** worked as a site stratigrapher and post-excavation officer at the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit and is the editor and principal author of the Wigford volume. She has recently completed the post-excavation and publication preparation for Launceston Castle, for English Heritage, to be published as a Society for Medieval Archaeology monograph.

**Maggi Darling (MJD)** has worked as Roman pottery researcher for the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit from 1973 until 1996. Following this she set up a consultancy with Barbara Precious (Darling and Precious) and has completed numerous assessments and publications of Roman pottery, including material from Doncaster.

## Recommendations for conservation and further processing

A conservation assessment of the metal and glass artefacts needs to be carried out to establish whether they are stable and in adequate packaging. Any resulting work can take place in Phase 2. In addition, it is not possible to assess the iron artefacts without access to x-radiographs and for this reason radiography needs to be carried out in Phase 1, Module 5 (so that artefacts from unstratified or heavily mixed deposits can be excluded). *See Module 3 Task 6.*

A similar line of reasoning leads to the proposal to process the GBA samples in Phase 1. They will contain small animal bone and potentially also artefacts of various kinds which need to be assessed in



Phase 1. However, it may be possible to discard some samples unprocessed after the completion of Module 4, once their stratigraphic context has been assessed. *See Module 5 Task 2.*

## Museum Display

Certain items may have been removed from the site archive for display in Doncaster Museum, such items will have been clearly marked with a proxy card in the box from which they were taken.

It has been established that if items on display are required for study, illustration or photography then Peter Robinson is willing to take them off display. AVAC undertakes to provide adequate advance notice of any such requests.

## Health and Safety Policy

Both PCA Lincolnshire and AVAC have written Health and Safety Policies which can be examined on request to their respective offices.

## Bibliography

HBMC (1991) *Management of Archaeological Reports*. English Heritage.

Museum of London Archaeology Service (1998) *General Standards for the preparation of Archaeological Archives deposited with the Museum of London*, Museum of London, London.

Steane, K. (2001) *The Archaeology of Wigford and the Brayford Pool*, Oxbow Books, Oxford.

Webster, S. (1996) "Excavations on the site of Askews Print Shop, Church Street, Doncaster." in C. Cumberpatch, J. McNeill, and Whiteley, eds., *Archaeology in South Yorkshire 1994-1995*, Sheffield, 32-39.