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**A63 SCOTT ROAD  
TO SELBY ABBEY,  
SELBY,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**

**1998 FIELD REPORT  
NUMBER 13**

**A63, SCOTT ROAD TO SELBY ABBEY,  
SELBY, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January and 1<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1998, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief during improvements to the A63 trunk road in the town centre of Selby, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 6142 3236) (Figure 1).

The ground works involved the excavation of several trenches for power cables to new traffic lights and bollards as well as the installation of new foul and surface water drains and their associated inspection chambers (Figure 2). All of the excavations were carried out by JCB or tracked Kubota mini digger under archaeological supervision.

The work was carried out for North Yorkshire County Council acting as agent for the Highways Agency.

Deposits were recorded on drawn sections at a scale of 1:20, with plans at 1:50 and 1:100 as well as being described on pro-forma context recording sheets. In addition, a series of 35mm monochrome photographs of the work was taken.

The finds and site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 1998.8.

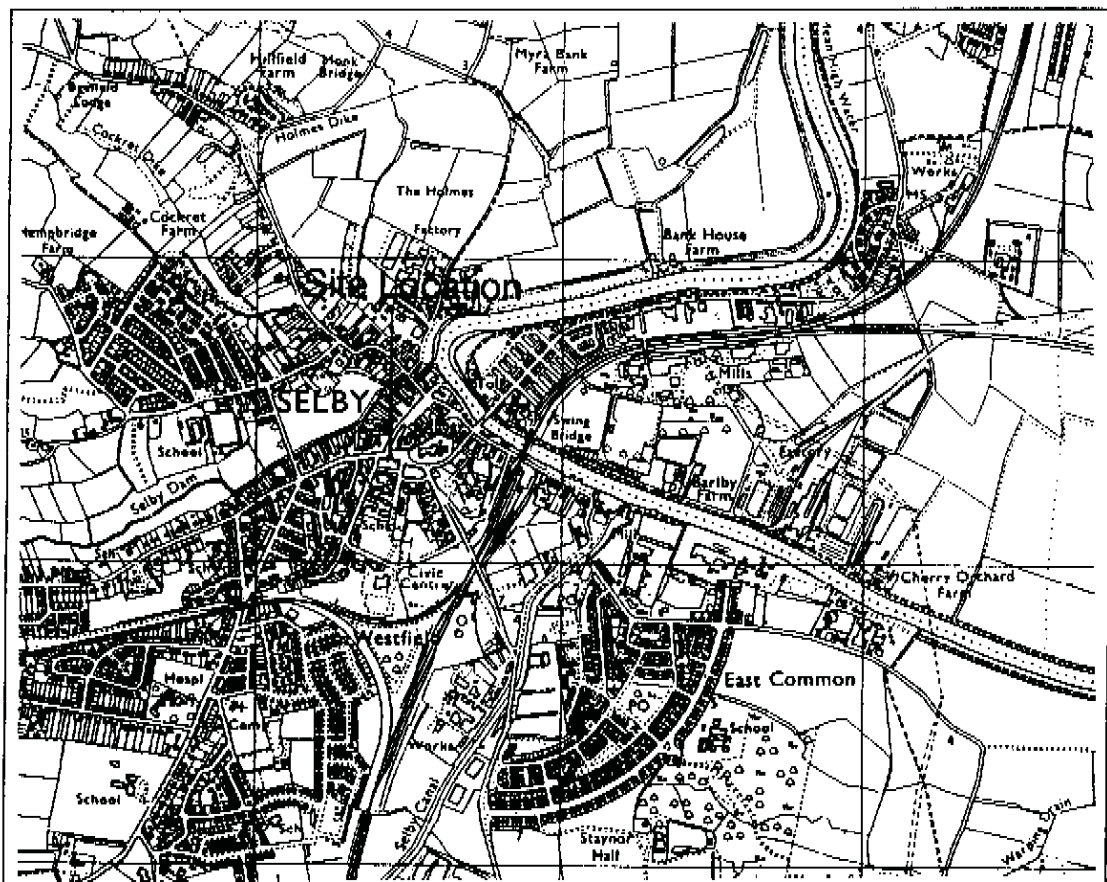


Figure 1 Site Location

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Scale 1:25,000

## **2.0 RESULTS**

### **2.1 Trench 1 (Figure 3: Plan 1, Figure 4: sections A and B)**

Trench 1 was located towards the eastern end of the scheme of works, spanning the A63, (Figure 2), was 10.0m long, 0.80m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m B.G.L. (metres Below Ground Level).

The earliest feature seen in Trench 1 (1004, Figure 3 : Plan 1, Figure 4 : section A), was located at a depth of 0.80m B.G.L., and continued beyond the base of the trench. This consisted of a substantial east-west aligned wall, 0.80m wide, constructed from large finely worked magnesian limestone ashlar blocks bonded with crumbly off white creamy mortar.

Directly above, and restricted to the south of wall 1004, was an extensive levelling deposit of demolition derived material (1005, Figure 3 : Plan 1, Figure 4 : sections A and B). This consisted of loose mid grey silty sand with inclusions of frequent small to large limestone fragments (some with traces of fine tooling), occasional small to medium tile fragments, small brick fragments and five sherds of pottery spanning the 15/17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was excavated to a depth of up to 0.20m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the trench.

This was sealed by a levelling deposit (1003, Figure 4 : sections A and B), consisting of friable dark grey sandy silt containing occasional small pebbles, charcoal flecks and small magnesian limestone fragments, which was up to 0.16m deep.

Overlying this was a further levelling deposit (1006, Figure 3 : Plan 1, Figure 4 : section A), of compact pale brown silty clay with inclusions of occasional small to medium machine made brick fragments and small un-decayed wood fragments which was excavated to a depth of 0.16m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the trench.

Stratigraphically above context 1006 was a deposit of compacted small pebbles in a matrix of loose pale brown silt sand, 0.18m deep (1002, Figure 4 : section A), which was interpreted as levelling/consolidation for a road bed.

This lay directly below a layer of dry mix concrete up to 0.20m thick (1001, Figure 4 : sections A and B), which was also thought to represent part of the make-up of the road bed for an earlier surface to the A63.

This was truncated by a trench (1008, Figure 4 : section B), 0.42m deep by 0.32m wide, which contained four plastic conduits and was back filled with a loose coarse dark brown silty sand (1007), with inclusions of hard-core and plastic fragments.

Context 1007 was sealed beneath the tarmac and its make-up deposits (1000, Figure 4 : Sections A and B), 0.38m deep which constitute the present day road surface of the A63.

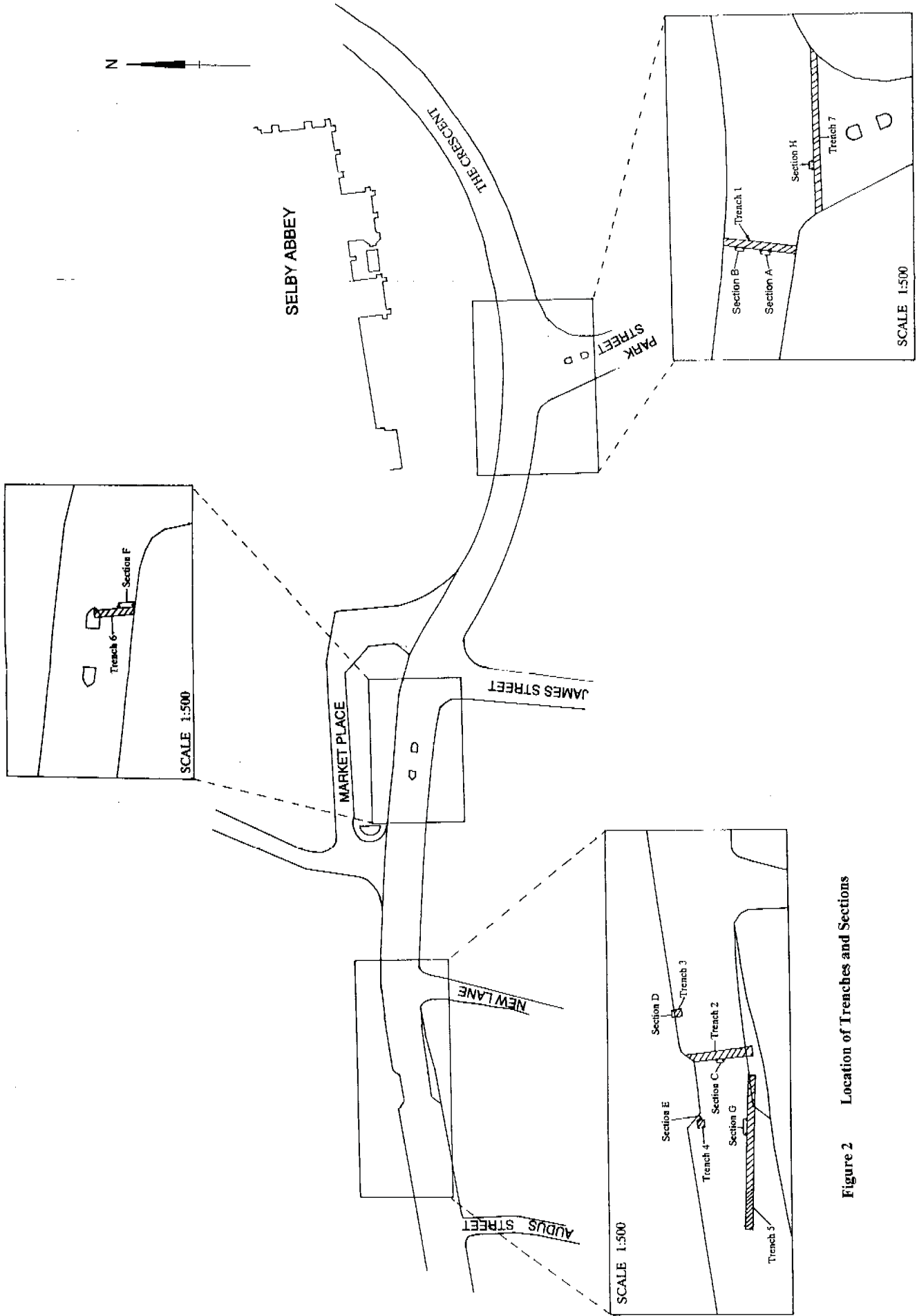


Figure 2 Location of Trenches and Sections

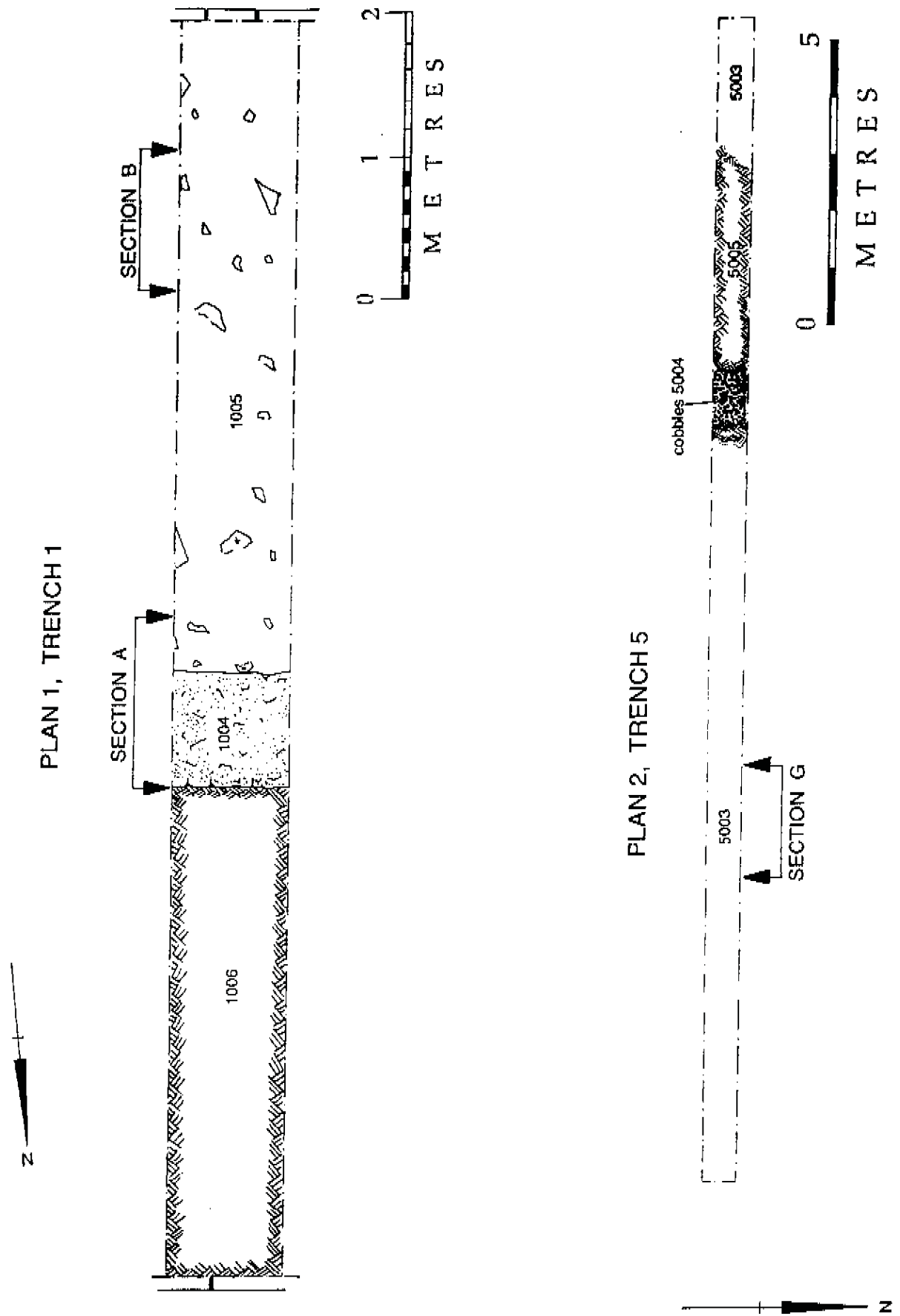
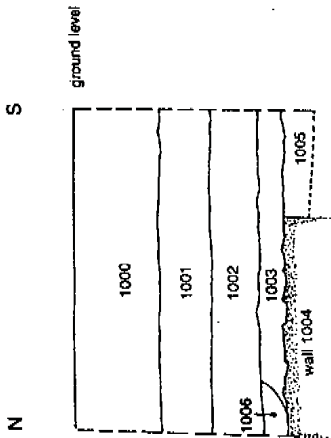
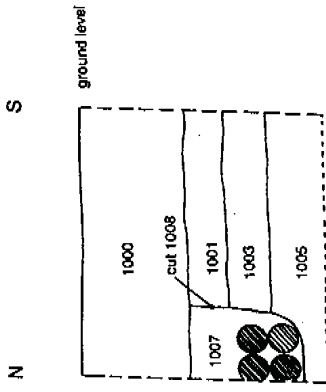


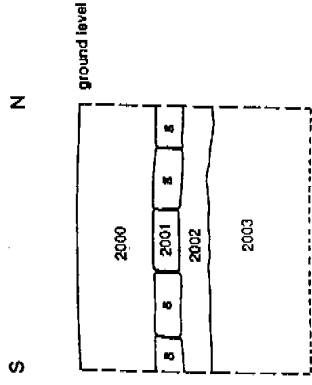
Figure 3 Plans showing Base of Trenches 1 and 5



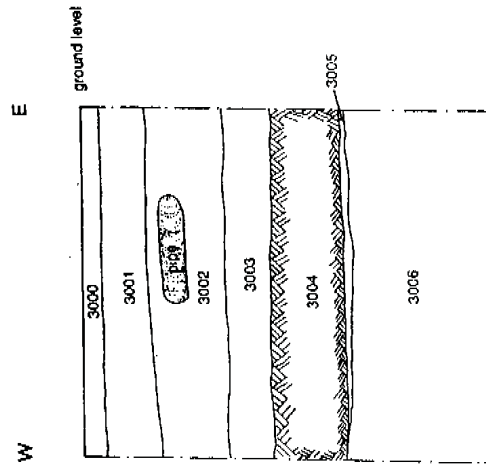
Section A, Trench 1, West facing



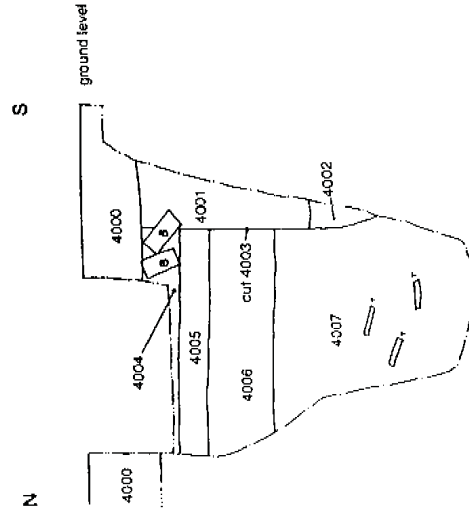
Section B, Trench 1, West facing



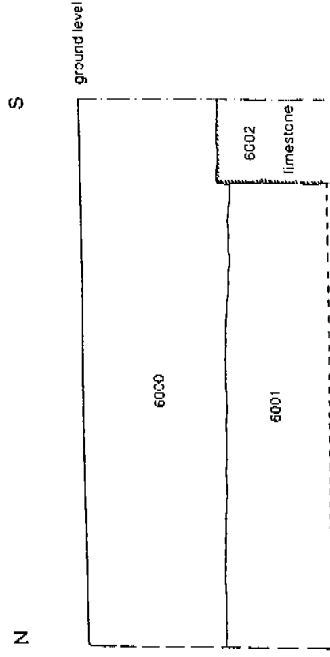
Section C, Trench 2, East Facing



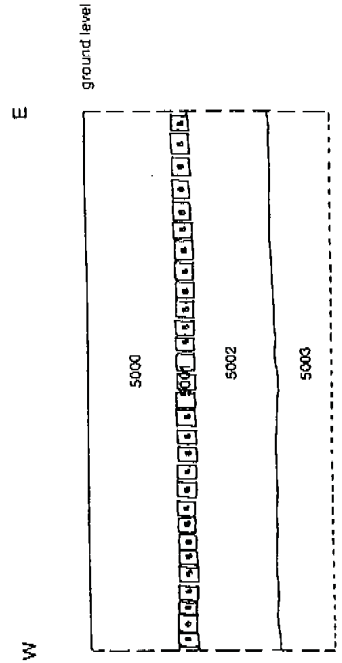
Section D, Trench 3, South facing



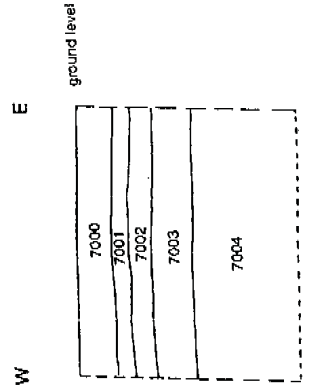
Section E, Trench 4, West facing



Section F, Trench 6, west facing



Section G, Trench 5, South Facing

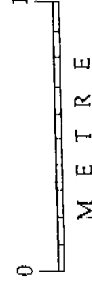


Section H, Trench 7, South facing

Figure 4 Sections A to H, Trenches 1 - 7

T = TILE

B = BRICK





## **2.2 Trench 2 (Figure 4, Section C)**

Trench 2 was located at the western end of the scheme of works, spanning the A63 between Audus Street and New Lane. It was 9.0m long, 1.0m wide and was excavated to a depth of 0.86m B.G.L.

The earliest deposit seen in Trench 2 was at 0.48m B.G.L. This consisted of a levelling deposit of loose mid orange sand (2003), with inclusions of frequent mid to dark grey sand patches and lenses, occasional small brick/tile fragments and small pebbles. It was excavated to a depth of 0.38m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the trench.

Sealing this was a further levelling deposit of loose mid grey silty sand (2002), which formed a bedding layer, 0.10m deep, for surface 2001. This consisted of brick paviors, one course deep, laid on edge in a stretcher bond which extended for the full width of the excavated area and probably represented an earlier surface, 0.09m deep, of what is now the A63.

Directly above this was the tarmac and its bedding layer, 0.30m deep, (2000), which forms the existing surface of the A63.

## **2.3 Trench 3 (Figure 4, Section D)**

Trench 3 was located approx. 7.5m to the north-east of Trench 2 (Figure 2), was 1.32m square and was excavated to a depth of 1.52m B.G.L.

The earliest deposit seen was at 0.1m B.G.L. and consisted of a black, highly organic, compacted plastic silty clay (3006), which was excavated to a depth of 0.54m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the trench. This deposit was difficult to interpret due to the small area exposed, but may have been a levelling deposit, a build up of organic material or alternatively, and more likely, the fill of a pit lying within the back yard of a medieval property. Pottery recovered from 3006 dated this activity to the 16/17<sup>th</sup> century.

Directly above 3006 was a deposit of decayed wood fragments (3005) only 0.04m thick, which may have represented a secondary fill in the pit or an attempt to seal and consolidate the underlying highly organic material.

This was sealed by a levelling or floor deposit of compact black mottled dark grey clay (3004) which had effectively raised the ground level by 0.28m.

Overlying 3004 was a compacted orange mottled mid to dark grey fine grained sand (3003), 0.18m deep that was similar to the bedding material for the brick paviors seen in Trenches 2 (2002), 4, (4006) and 5 (5002).

Context 3003 was sealed by a levelling or backfill deposit (3002), consisting of a compacted loose coarse light brown sand and gravel mix, 0.30m deep, containing a steel service pipe.

This lay directly below a levelling/bedding deposit (3001), of compacted loose off white hardcore, 0.20m deep, for the concrete paving slabs (3000), which form the present day ground surface.

#### **2.4 Trench 4 (Figure 4 : Section E)**

Trench 4 was located 15m to the west of Trench 3 (Figure 2), and was approximately 1.30m square and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.46m B.G.L.

The earliest deposit seen in Trench 4 was at 0.72m B.G.L. and was interpreted as a levelling deposit (4007), that consisted of a friable dark grey / black organic silt sand with inclusions of moderate small to medium tile fragments. It was excavated to a depth of 0.74m and was seen to continue beyond the base of the trench. The pottery recovered from this deposit dated it to the 15/16<sup>th</sup> century.

Directly above this lay a levelling deposit (4006) which consisted of compacted loose orange red sand, 0.24m deep. Context 4006 was sealed by a further levelling deposit (4005) of friable dark grey very fine silt, 0.10m thick, which, combined with 4006, constituted the levelling/bedding deposit for a surface of brick paviors (4004), 0.14m thick, which had been replaced with brick rubble and hardcore where damage had occurred.

This had been truncated by a 0.88m deep cut (4003), located against, and continuing beyond, the southern edge of excavation. The backfills of this cut, primarily, a friable black organic sand (4002), 0.24m deep, sealed by a loose black mottled orange red sand (4001), with moderate inclusions of stone, brick and concrete fragments, 0.72m deep, gave no indication as to its use. (The inclusions of modern material in context 4001 indicated that this was a modern feature and was in all probability a service trench). The tertiary fill of this cut, 4001, was sealed by a 0.22m deep deposit of compacted black tarmac (4000), that forms the present day road surface.

#### **2.5 Trench 5 (Figure 3; Plan 2, Figure 4; section G)**

Trench 5 (Figure 2), was located 6.50m to the south of Trench 4 and 3.0m to the west of Trench 2, was 21.0m long by 1.0m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m B.G.L.

The earliest deposit seen was located in the base of the trench, towards the eastern end of the excavated area, at 0.90m B.G.L. and consisted of a levelling deposit or surface of compact mid grey silty clay (5005, Fig. 4; Plan 2), with inclusions of occasional charcoal flecking.

Directly above and towards the eastern limit of this context was a linear north – south aligned 1.0m wide spread of small to medium pebbles (5004), which had been bedded on to the surface of 5005. (Context 5004 may represent the remnants of a more extensive metallated surface, an alley way between two properties or a light foundation intended for a sill beam or curtain wall. Whatever function this deposit was put to will not be fully understood as the nature of the excavation revealed only a small area, rendering any interpretation difficult)

This was sealed by an extensive levelling deposit of a loose grey mottled mid orange sand (5003, Figure 3; Plan 2, Figure 4; section G), which was excavated to a depth of 0.20m and was seen to continue beneath the base of the trench.

Directly above context 5003 was an extensive deposit consisting of a loose dark grey sand (5002), that represented the 0.30m thick bedding deposit for a surface of brick pavements (5001), 0.08m thick, laid one course deep on their longest sides in a stretcher bond.

This surface was sealed by a compact black tarmac (5000), that forms the present day road surface, 0.32m deep.

## **2.6 Trench 6 (Figure 4; Section F)**

Trench 6 was located across the southern half of the A63, approx. 10m to the west of James Street (Figure 2), was 5.0m long, 1.0m wide and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.92m B.G.L.

The earliest feature seen was at 0.52m B.G.L. and comprised of a large east – west aligned block of limestone (6002), 0.39m deep x 0.29m wide x 0.52m long. This was situated against, and ran into, the southern limit of excavation where it had been partially truncated by the construction cut for the kerb to the public footpath that lay immediately to the south. The east-west alignment of the wall to which 6002 was bonded was traceable only as mortar adhering to the upper faces of the underlying courses of masonry.

The northern face of 6002 was sealed by a levelling deposit consisting of a compact mid grey brown clay silt (6001), which was excavated to a depth of 0.38m and was seen to continue beneath the base of the trench.

This lay directly beneath the concrete and tarmac, 0.55m thick (6000) which forms the present day road surface.

## **2.7 Trench 7 (Figure 4; section H)**

Trench 7 was located approx. 10.0m to the south east of Trench 1, situated across the junction between Park Street and The Crescent, (Fig. 2), was 22.0m long, 1.0m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 0.84m B.G.L.

The earliest deposit seen was at 0.43m B.G.L. and consisted of a levelling deposit of friable dark grey sandy silt with inclusions of occasional flecks to medium limestone fragments, brick fragments and charcoal flecks. It was excavated to a depth of 0.41m and was seen to continue beneath the base of the trench.

Directly above this was a levelling or make-up deposit consisting of compacted sand and gravel (7003), which included small to large limestone fragments, 0.14m thick.

This was sealed by a 0.10m thick deposit of compacted brick rubble and small stone chippings (7002), which formed the 'bed' for a compacted dark brown tarmac road surface (7001), 0.07m

thick, which lay directly beneath black tarmac (7000), that forms the present day road surface 0.12m thick.

### 3.0 Pottery

#### 3.1 Context Listing

| Context Number | Number of sherds | Date  |
|----------------|------------------|---|
| 1005           | 5                | 15 <sup>th</sup> – 17 <sup>th</sup> century   |
| 3006           | 3                | 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> century |
| 4007           | 11               | 15/16 <sup>th</sup> century Humber wares      |
| 5003           | 1                | 15 <sup>th</sup> century                      |

This small assemblage was too mixed to be of any more than general use in dating the deposits from which it was recovered.

### 4.0 Conclusions

Natural deposits were not encountered in any of the trenches.

The earliest feature observed in Trench 1 consisted of a substantial partly demolished limestone wall (1004). This may represent remnants of the Abbey precinct boundary wall or a building located within the precinct. It is uncertain when demolition took place as no dating evidence was recovered from an extensive demolition deposit (1005), which was dumped against the eastern face of the wall, raising the ground level to the top of the surviving wall stub.

Deposit (1005) may relate to the demolition of the Abbey precinct during the Dissolution of the Monasteries (early 16<sup>th</sup> century), or, as is more likely, the building of The Crescent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which also brought about alterations to the street plan of the surrounding area. Any partially demolished structures, such as wall 1004, that were encountered during the preparation of the ground would have been demolished further and reduced to a suitable formation level.

Context 1003, sealing 1005, may represent an initial dump of material which was used to level the area in readiness for construction to take place. The later date for this phase of demolition would seem more likely as all the deposits overlying context 1003 proved to be modern in date and had removed any evidence for surfaces earlier than the current tarmac surface of the A63.

Context 7004 (Trench 7) may also indicate that the area was levelled prior to alterations to the street plan as this was also sealed by modern deposits relating to the formation of the road bed and surface of the A63.

A similar sequence of events occurred in Trench 6 where a partially robbed wall (6002) was observed. The orientation and position of the surviving masonry suggested that this was the northern wall of a building which had originally fronted on to a predecessor of the A63. The

lack of demolition material in levelling deposit 6001 suggested that the building had been robbed of useful stone which was re-used elsewhere rather than being broken up in situ and used to level the surrounding area. The deposit sealing 6001 proved to be modern in date and related to the make up and surfacing of the A63.

Further structural evidence was observed in Trench 5 where dumps of clay or an existing clay floor (5005), had been used to provide a bed for a foundation raft or cobble surface (5004). The narrow linear plan of the surviving cobbles suggested that this may have been a light foundation for a sill beam or curtain wall within a clay floored building. It is also possible that the cobbles represented the metalling of a narrow path or the remnants of a more substantial cobble surface, possibly a court yard, to the rear of a property fronting on to a forerunner to the A63.

In Trench 3 the earliest deposit encountered proved to be highly organic (3006), and was interpreted as the back-fill of a pit, perhaps a cess pit. This was sealed by a thin layer of decayed wood (3005) which may be the secondary fill of the same pit or an attempt to seal and consolidate the pit fills before a clay floor (3004) was laid. Alternatively 3004 may represent a levelling deposit which was also used to seal the highly organic material.

A similarly organic material was observed in Trench 4 (4007) which, due to the more mixed appearance and lack of structuring within the deposit, was interpreted as dumps of organic material used to raise and level the ground surface.

Both contexts 3004 and 4007 were sealed by a extensive levelling deposit of orange sand (3003 and 4006), which was also observed in Trenches 2 (2003) and 5 (5003). With the exception of Trench 3 all were sealed by a deposit of a dark grey sand (2002, 5002 and 4005), which probably represented the same episode of sand deposition. The colour change may have been due to chemical contamination leaching through the overlying surface of brick paviers (2001, 4004 and 5001) which were bedded on the sands mentioned above. The size and type of pavior used suggested a 19<sup>th</sup> century date for this surface.

The brick surface may have originally extended over a much wider area but had been truncated or removed by modern activity such as the excavation of service trenches (1008, 3002 and 4003) or alterations and repairs to the surface of the A63.

**5.0 List of Contributors**

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Watching brief           | Damien Hind, Michael Andrews, Bryan Antoni |
| Report and illustrations | Bryan Antoni                               |
| Editor                   | David Brinklow                             |