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INTERIM REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION OF LAND OFF CLEVELAND STREET,
DONCASTER, SOUTH YORKSHIRE.

JULY 1992

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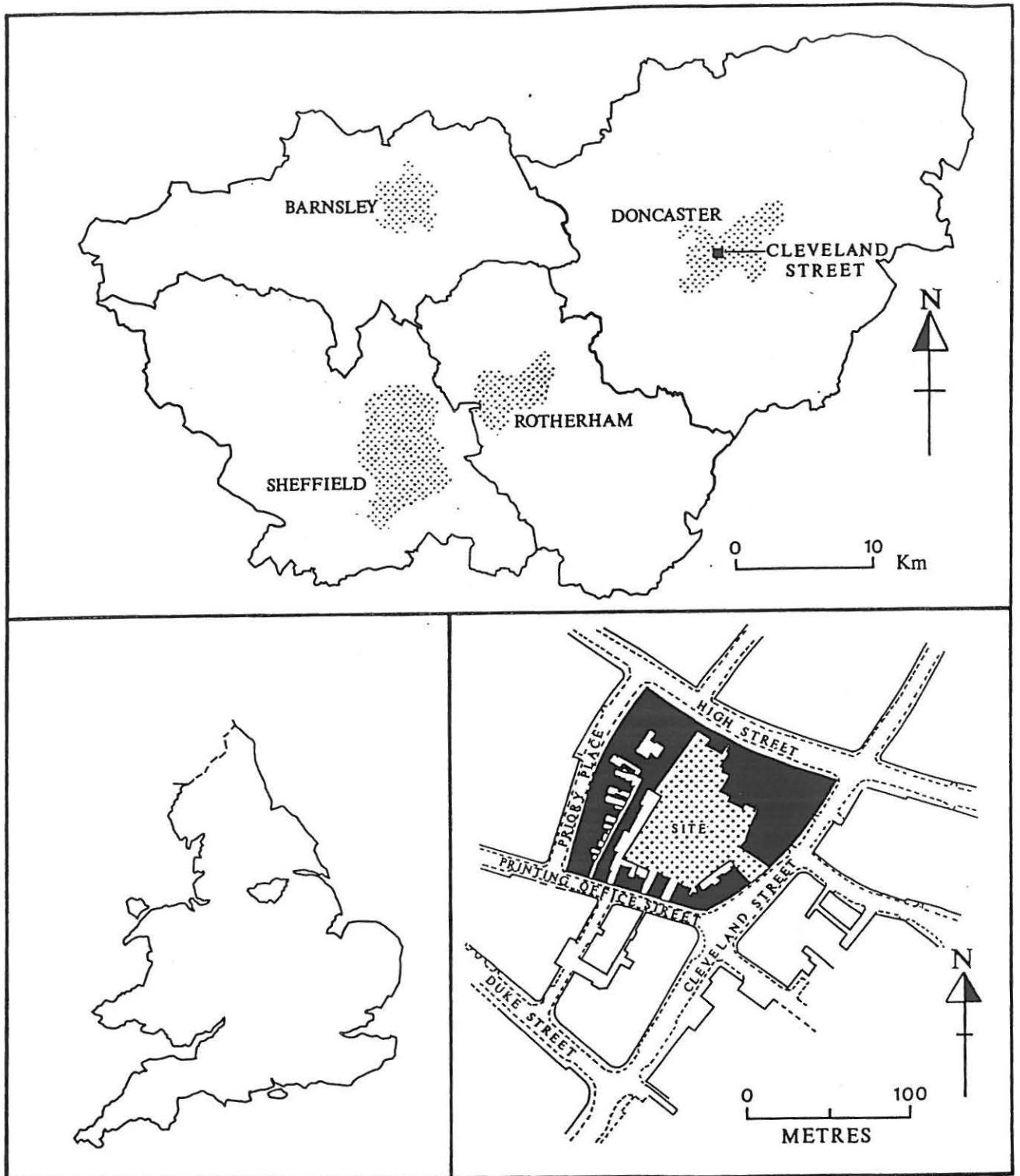


Fig. 1 Site Location

SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on a central site within Doncaster, prior to its development as a retail centre (fig. 1). Four trenches were excavated to reveal a series of Roman and Medieval features. This is an interim report on the results of the evaluation with recommendations for further archaeological excavation on this site.

INTRODUCTION

The area now referred to as the Cleveland Street car park is bordered by Cleveland Street, High Street, Priory Place, and Printing Office Street. It is owned by Frogmore Investments Limited and is currently operated by National Car Parks. Frogmore Investments were granted outline planning permission for a covered retail shopping centre on 6th October 1986 (ref. 86/33/0842). This permission was renewed on 16th October 1989 (ref. 89/33/2609).

In view of the archaeological importance and potential of the site, a condition of the permission was that an archaeological evaluation should take place. This was to investigate the nature and extent of any archaeological features within the area, and to evaluate the implications of the proposed building work on them. Proposals for protecting or recording the archaeology could then be put forward prior to the development. The work was to be carried out by an approved archaeological organisation in accordance with the Code of Practice and Agreement published by the British Archaeologists and Developers Liaison Group.

SITE DESCRIPTION

As can be seen in fig. 1, the car park occupies an open area of land behind the buildings fronting onto the surrounding streets. There is access at three points onto Printing Office Street and at one point onto Cleveland Street. Successive Ordnance Survey maps show that the site had been entirely developed by the 1930's. The open space that exists now was created by the demolition of these buildings.

The superficial geology consists of glacial and river lain sands and gravels. These are overlying bunter sandstone, which is believed to start at a depth of 10 metres.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

Prior to the archaeological evaluation, the importance of the site in understanding medieval Doncaster was considered to be very significant. It is within the medieval town ditch, which is believed to have followed the line now formed by Printing Office Street and Cleveland Street (fig. 2).

The site lies wholly within, and forms a significant part of the land occupied by the medieval, Carmelite friary. The number of friaries in medieval England has been estimated at 189. The most numerous of these were Franciscan and Dominican, with only 41 being Carmelite. This discrepancy is particularly noticeable in northern England, where this type of friary is more rare than in the south. Up to the present time there has been very little archaeological investigation of such sites. The existence of archaeological remains of such an institution in northern England would, therefore, represent a monument of some regional importance.

Traditionally, the friary was believed to have been established by John of Gaunt, but the date for this is not known. The first written record for the friary is from 1346 when a Roger de Baukewell made certain bequests in

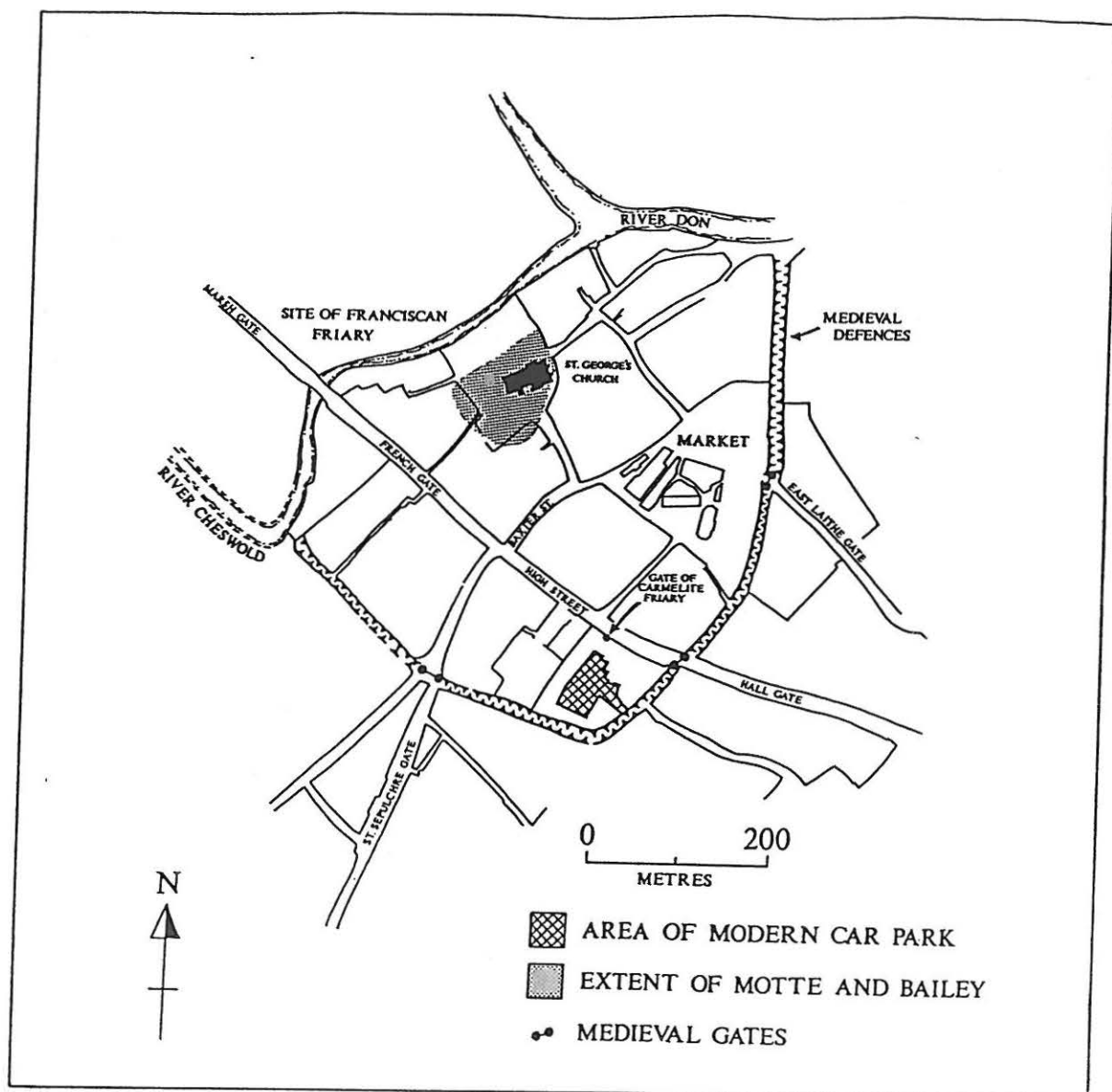


Fig. 2 Site Location Within Medieval Doncaster

his will and instructed that he be buried in the friary church. The friary must, therefore, have been established sometime before this date. Historical sources mention a number of buildings within the grounds of the friary. These include a gatehouse looking onto High Street, opposite Scot Lane. There were also gardens and orchards within the grounds, quite possibly in the area of concern with this evaluation.

By the late 18th century, the buildings of the friary had largely been demolished, including the church and gatehouse. Subsequent construction work has revealed subsurface remains of buildings and burials, on the line of Priory Place and on land to the west. In 1976 the demolition of the Subscription Rooms in High Street, opposite Scot Lane allowed archaeological investigation of this site known to be adjacent to the location of the gatehouse (Buckland 1989). This revealed a road leading from, and perpendicular to High Street. This road appeared to have been originally constructed during the first half of the 12th century, making it a primary feature predating the establishment of the friary. There was also a building fronting onto the road that was interpreted as stabling or storage space for the friary. Adjacent to this was a well and a malting oven.

The site is outside of the area of the Roman fort and known area of civil settlement. There was, however, reason to believe in potential for recovering some Roman material in the evaluation. Three ditches which were interpreted as civil settlement defensive ditches were excavated at Sepulchre Gate in 1976. These were located on an orientation which could have taken them across the edge of the site. Also, the site of the Subscriptions Rooms produced some Roman finds and small features.

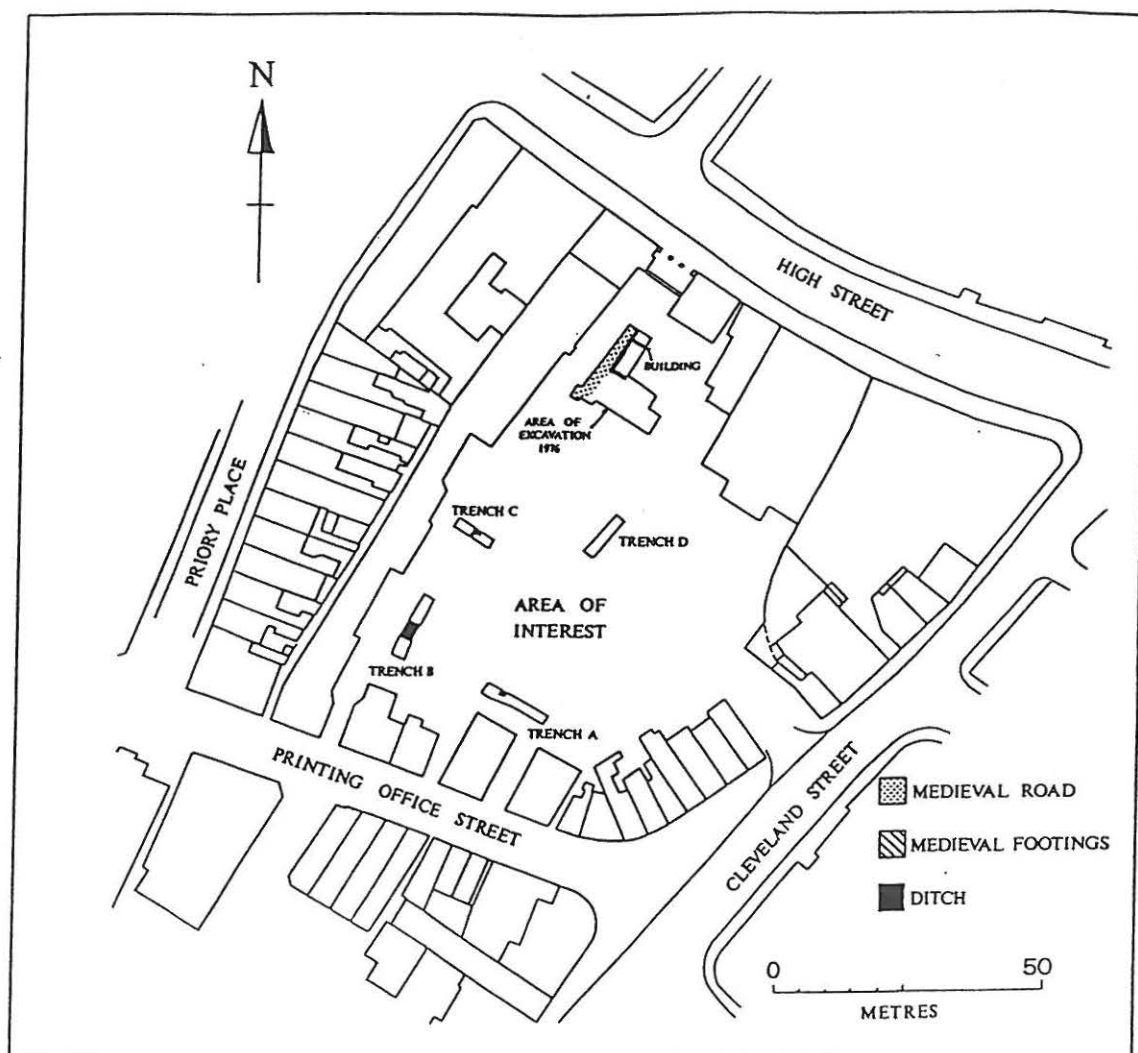


Fig. 3 Trench Location Plan

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was carried out by staff of the South Yorkshire Archaeology Service from 20th April to 3rd July.

In order to accommodate the needs of the evaluation to the continued use of the site as a car park, it was decided that it would be carried out as a phased operation. This meant designating three areas of the site to be investigated. Trenches were excavated in each area in turn, so that the minimum amount of land would be occupied at any one time (fig. 3).

A total of four trenches were excavated by hand and machine. A Case excavator, with a toothed bucket, was used to remove the concrete surface from the area of the trench. Where necessary, a hydraulic ground breaker was used to prepare the surface. A ditching bucket was then used to excavate the trenches down to the uppermost archaeological levels. All subsequent excavation was carried out by hand, to ensure accuracy and avoid damage to the archaeological deposits. The archaeological features were excavated to record full structural details. Any datable material, such as pottery, was recovered for later analysis.

Normal recording procedures were followed with all features being photographed and drawn to scale in plan and section. Context sheets were written for all structures, cuts and deposits.

RESULTS

Trench A (13.5m by 2m)

Trench A was excavated by machine to a depth of about 1 metre, except for the central part, which contained a modern structure. Beneath the concrete surface, there was modern rubble to a depth of 1.1 metres. This directly overlaid a series of silty clay post-medieval deposits, which existed to a depth of 1.7 metres. The undisturbed, natural sandy clay was found at a depth of 1.9 metres, together with the archaeological features which had been cut into it.

Excavation in the north-western half of the trench revealed a number of post-medieval pits. It was realised that the post-medieval deposits were too deep to fully remove by hand, in the time available. As a result it was decided to dig a 1 metre wide slot trench to ascertain the nature of the stratigraphy. This revealed a linear feature (136), which appeared to be on a roughly east-west axis. It is cut into the natural and contains two fills in the excavated portion. The upper of these is an orange/brown silty sand containing some small, rounded pebbles. The lower fill was lighter in colour and sandier in composition, with fewer pebbles. Only the edge of the feature was found in the trench, so that the full profile could not be determined. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the excavated depth of 1 metre is less than the true depth of the feature. The edge is straight, with a gradient of approximately 1 in 1, to a depth 0.9 metres below the top of the cut. It then levels out to form a shelf with a width of 0.25 metres. At the top of the cut were two stakeholes (139 and 141). These consisted of a small, central cut surrounded by an area of fill material forming a larger feature. They appear to be from stakes, in place before the ditch was cut. After the ditch cut had been made behind them, they could have been pulled out, causing the wider area of, apparently, fill material.

The ditch was sealed by a layer (134), which contained five sherds of locally manufactured pottery, probably dating to the 13th century. This demonstrates that the deposit did not accumulate before this time.

In the south-eastern half of the site was a series of five medieval pits (147, 149, 153, 156 and 158) and a narrow ditch (151), cut into the natural. They contained brown and grey/brown sands with varying degrees of clay content.

These features were all sealed by deposit 133 in which six pottery sherds were found. They were similar to those from 134 and probably also date from the 13th century. Datable finds were also recovered from the fills of the pits concerned. That of pit 147 contained two sherds of pale, finely gritted ware, dated to the 12th or 13th century. Pit 149 contained a single body sherd of glazed gritty ware, difficult to date but probably from the 13th century. There was also a silver long cross penny (fig. 4). This can be far more accurately dated and has firmly been identified as mid 12th century, providing a *terminus post quem* for the feature. This means that the deposit cannot have accumulated before this time. In general it seems likely that the pits date from around the 12th century, with the later deposit accumulating to seal them from the 13th century.

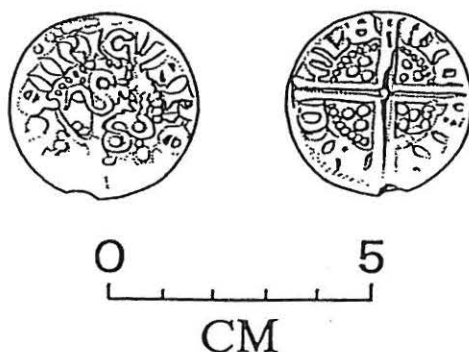


Fig. 4 Silver Long Cross Penny c. 1250 AD

Trench B (13m by 1.7m)

Trench B was machine excavated to a depth of approximately 1.1 metres. A series of shallow, post-medieval pits and gullies were found at this depth and identified as probable garden features (203, 205, 209, 214, 216, 218, 244 and 245). One of them (216), contained a jetton which has been dated to c. 1580 (fig 6). Below these features is a light orange/brown clay sand (222), which directly overlies the natural. It appeared as a rather mixed layer, probably due to being reworked as a garden or orchard soil. This is reflected in the broad range of dates of the pottery recovered. However, while the earliest is Roman and latest 15th century, the bulk is from the 13th or 14th century.

Once this deposit had been removed a number of features were found cutting into the natural. The largest of these is the ditch 226. This has a width of 3.2 metres at the surface, from which the sides slope down evenly at a gradient of 1 in 1. Because of the depth of the trench it was not possible, for safety reasons, to fully excavate the section of the ditch. However, given the width at the surface and the gradient of the sides, it seems likely that depth could be estimated as at least 1.5-2 metres. The upper deposit is a dark brown silty clay (227), upto 15cm in depth, which overlies a series of lighter brown sand deposits. The pottery from both of these cuts was also mixed, with the Roman and Medieval periods both represented. The Medieval material was from the 13th to 14th centuries, which may be the most diagnostic, as the Roman appeared to be residual. There are a number of structural and spatial similarities between this cut and the ditch cut (136), found in trench A. They both have largely light brown sandy fills and a straight edge with a gradient of 1 in 1. It is therefore possible to suggest that they are two parts of the same ditch.

Cutting 226 on the north-eastern edge was a later cut 225. The upper fill of this cut (223), consisted largely of a mixture of subangular blocks of limestone and weathered mortar material. Also mixed in is some dark brown silty clay which suggests that the layer may be a rubble fill, rather than a mortar bonded wall.

To the north-east of ditch 226, and parallel to it is a rubble filled ditch 1.5 metres wide and cutting into deposit 222. It is directly overlying a cut into the natural. There was insufficient time to investigate this potentially interesting feature and so it is impossible to properly interpret it, at this stage. It may have been a foundation cut into the natural, containing wall footings, which were removed from a later robber cut, backfilled with rubble.

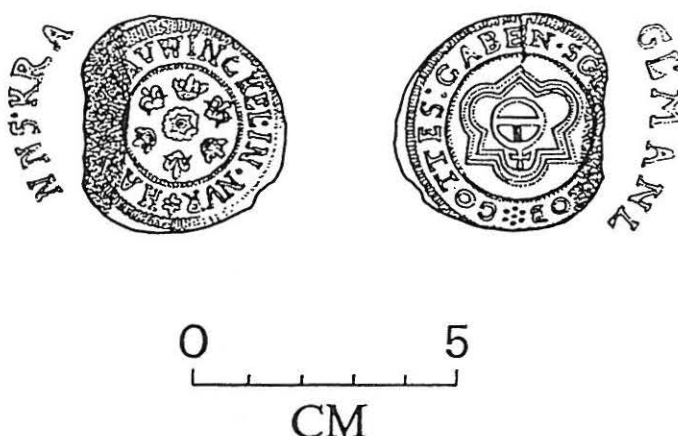


Fig. 6 Jetton c. 1580 AD

Trench C (8m by 1.7m)

Trench C was machine excavated to a depth of 1.1 metres. The upper half metre of the material removed was modern rubble, with the rest being brown, silty sand. The upper archaeological level was visible at a depth of 1.1 metres. It consisted of a series of sand and clay sand layers, cut by rubble filled features. At the north-western end of the trench, cut 337 crossed the corner of the excavated area, on a north-east to south-west alignment. The fill

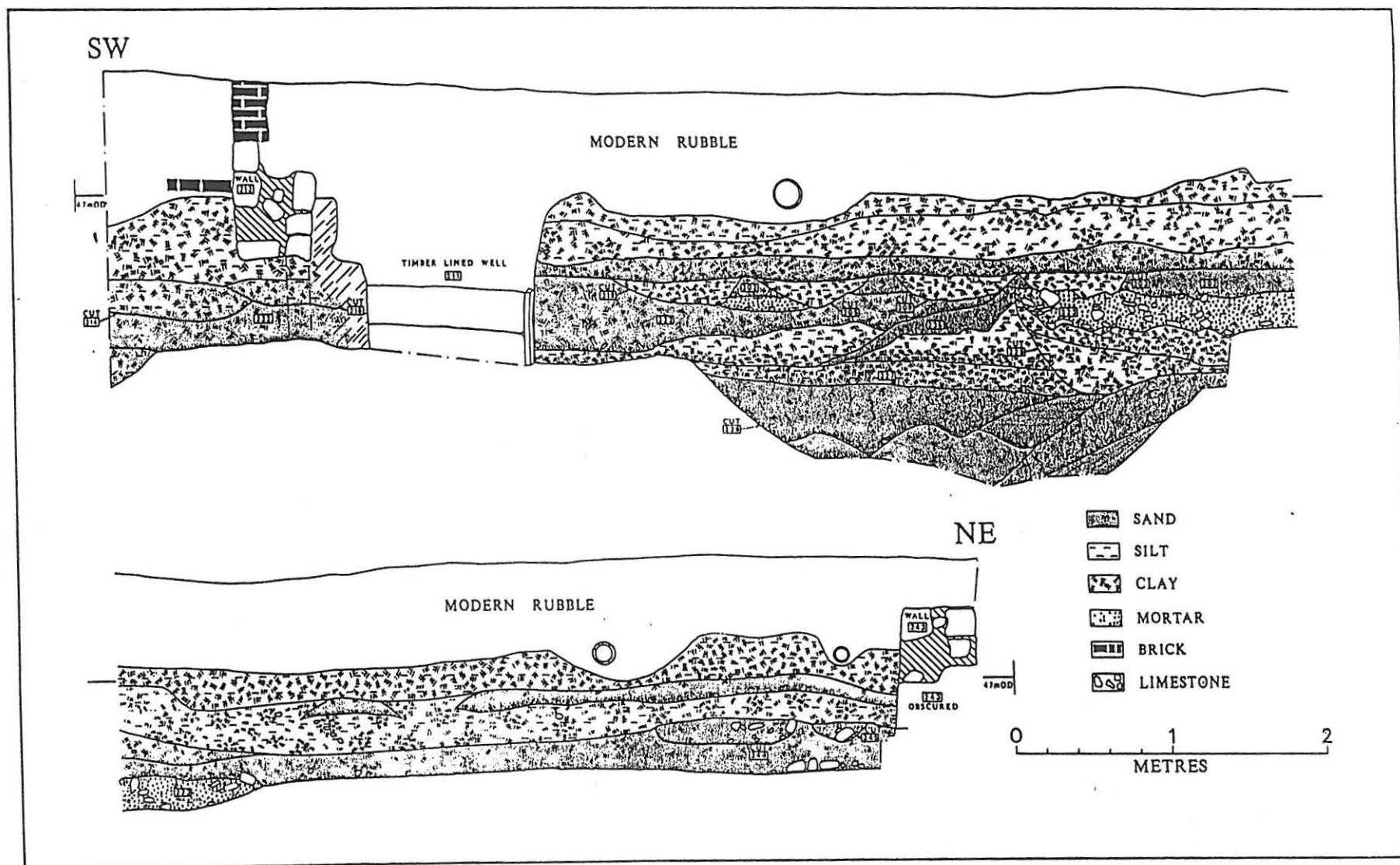


Fig. 7 Trench B. South-East Facing Section

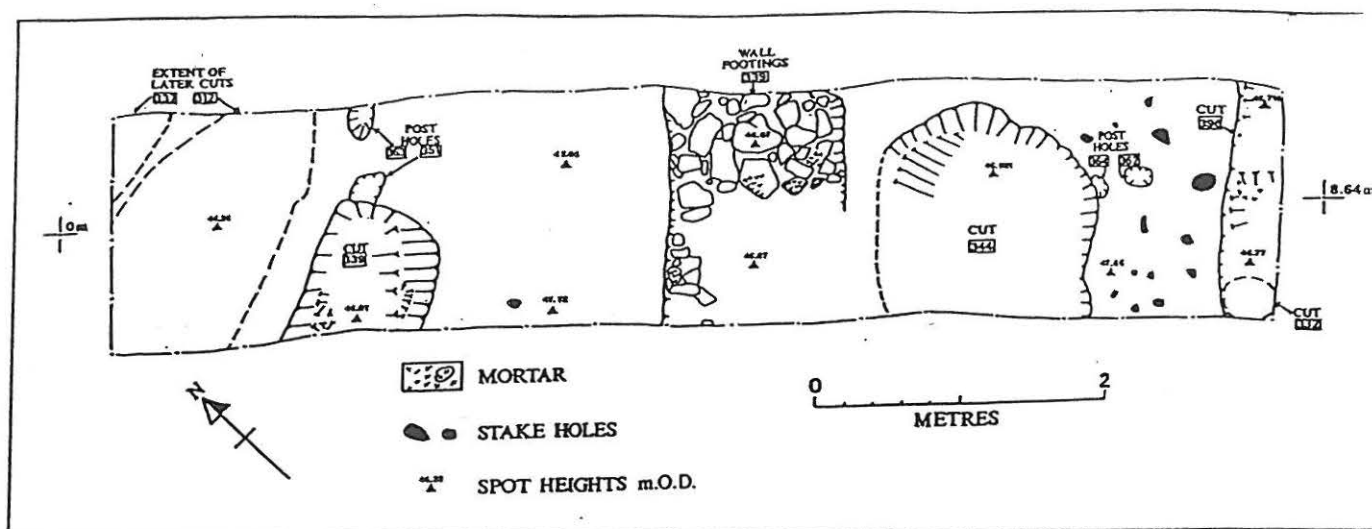


Fig. 8 Trench C. General Plan

consisted of a dark, yellowish brown sandy gravel, containing a fairly high proportion of angular limestone fragments, of upto 20cm diameter. This is one of three similar linear, cut features in this part of the trench, all on the same alignment. Directly to the north-east is cut 312, a steep-sided linear feature with a flat base. It is upto 1.2m wide at the surface and has a depth of 30cm. The fill is very similar to that of 337, though with a somewhat smaller amount of limestone. The third cut, 339 is 1.1 metre wide and 60 cm deep, with a sharp break of slope and steep sides.

In the south-eastern half of the trench is a further, larger rubble filled feature (344). This appeared to be roughly circular in plan, although the edge was unexposed in one section. It has a maximum width of 1.75 metres. The fill of this cut was unclear in excavation, being difficult to distinguish from surrounding fills and deposits. It was cut into 320, and possibly through an earlier rubble filled feature, 345. Cut 344 is filled by a dark brown silty sand, with angular limestone fragments of upto 20 cm in diameter. The surface of the fill has been truncated by a later, linear cut (310), with a very similar fill.

Against the south-east section of the trench is a linear feature, or series of features. Two cuts, 396 and 314, are visible in the section, though it is unclear whether they represent separate episodes, or a continuation of one. Three separate fills are present, the upper, and larger one being a dark brown sandy gravel, with some limestone fragments and pebbles. Within the linear feature is a post-hole cut (332), with smooth, vertical sides. It is no longer clear at which layer this post hole was cut, as it has been truncated from above.

The cut features, 344 and 396 have been provisionally interpreted as robber trenches, dug to remove existing walls and footings. This is partly as a result of the rubble nature of the fills, which may represent deliberate backfilling with the unusable stone.

Adjacent to cut 344 is a foundation cut (400), which was found to contain a set of wall footings. The south-western part had been truncated by a later cut, so the footings were not extant throughout. There were two remaining courses, with a brown silty sand between them, consisting of angular limestone blocks, of upto 40 cm in length. It seems likely that the stone present was reused from an earlier construction. This was deduced from the presence of, what appears to be residual mortar on some of the blocks, apparently unrelated to the bonding of the construction. The upper course of stones was bonded by clay.

Also, cut into the same level as these features are a number of post and stakeholes. These are concentrated to the south-east of feature 344, where there are 15.

The pottery found in most of the deposits was mixed, with both Roman and Medieval material. The fill of pit 344 was the exception to this, which contained only 13th to 14th century pottery.

Trench D (9m by 1.7m)

Trench D was machine excavated to a depth of 1.3 metres, removing a series of dark grey silty clay layers. This revealed a mid red/brown clay sand (503), which is cut by a number of archaeological features. Upon excavation it was found that this layer contained a Roman pottery assemblage, all locally manufactured. The largest of these cut features (512) is a subrectangular pit with a length of 1.6m and width of 1.2m. The sides have a sharp break of slope and a gradient of 3 in 1, while the base is level, but studded with stones. The mixed fill of the pit suggests it's use for refuse disposal. There was a series of thin layers, some being sandy, while others were more ashy, containing burnt stone and charcoal. Also present, was a noticeable layer of lightly burnt clay, suggesting some in situ burning or the disposal of hot refuse. With the exception of a single deposit (513) the fill of this pit contained only Roman pottery. 513 was, though, the upper fill and may be a later, intrusive cut. Also of interest is the presence of whetstone of Norwegian origin. This is not particularly unusual for Doncaster, but provides further indication for trade links with Scandinavia. Below 503 was a further clay sand layer (508), which contained sherds of imported, decorated Samian ware, dated to the mid 2nd century.

To the south-east of this feature is a square cut post-hole, containing a central, square cut post pipe. It's width at the surface is 48cm, with steep sides to a depth of 40cm. There are also four other post-holes in the trench, smaller and more shallow. In the south-western corner of the trench is the edge of a cut (548). It appeared to be the edge of a pit, undercut in places and with a mid brown clay sand fill. It contained a relatively large amount of bone fragments, suggesting it's use as a rubbish pit.

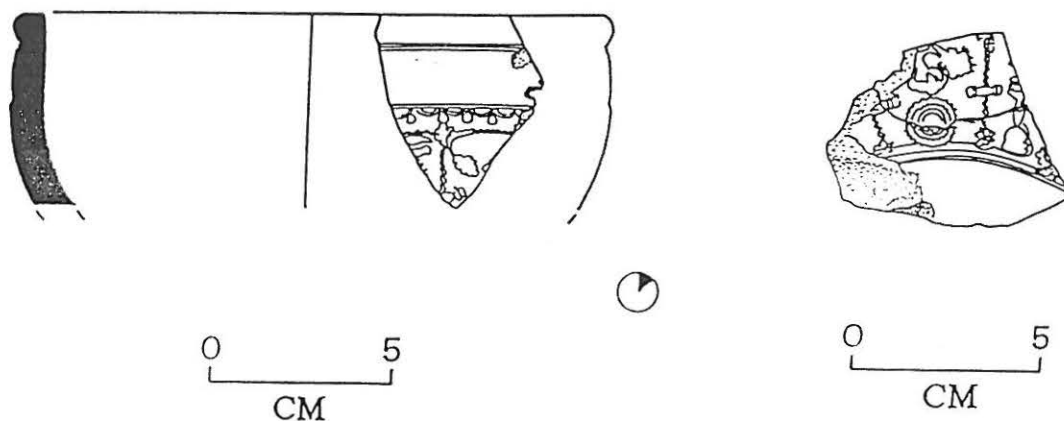


Fig. 10 Decorated Samian Ware c. mid 2nd Century

DISCUSSION

The evaluation has established the nature of the stratigraphy in the site and that there is archaeology surviving at a known depth. The uppermost archaeological levels have been dated to the late medieval/early post-medieval period, and are located at a depth of 1-1.5m below the present ground level. The undisturbed natural soil is at 1.8-2m below ground level. The earliest archaeological features are cut into this.

A large ditch was located in trenches A and B (136 and 226), cutting across the site on an east-west axis. It was not possible, under the conditions of the evaluation, to determine the full course, profile and date of the ditch. Further excavation would be required for this.

The evidence of trench C established the existence of some sort of walled structure, including surviving stone footings (339). Further evidence was provided by the existence of what appear to be robber trenches, where stone has been removed. However, a single trench cannot provide a sufficiently clear picture to show what this represents. Again, further excavation is required for clarification.

In addition to these major elements of evidence there were a number of pits, small ditches and post-holes found throughout the area investigated, including a group of five medieval pits in trench A. These are a more general indicator of occupation within the site. They also demonstrate the survival of all sizes of archaeological features.

It is also worth noting that the pottery appears to be, on the whole, well stratified with little mixing of the different periods. This is useful, as it provides a good opportunity to establish a firm chronology for the development of land use within the site, from the Roman to the late Medieval period.

Doncaster was a centre of some regional importance in the Roman and Medieval periods. However, the archaeological investigation of the town has been limited to small scale excavations, seriously restricting an understanding of its development. The site of this evaluation is an important one, central to modern Doncaster and within the medieval town ditch. This makes it important that no building work destructive to the archaeology, should go ahead before archaeological investigation takes place. Damage to the archaeology of the site would be caused by any ground disturbance to a depth of 1-1.5m or below. It is also likely that construction work would cause damage at a greater depth through compaction of deposits, unless measures were taken to prevent this.

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