

39 HOLGATE ROAD, YORK

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

> 1999 FIELD REPORT NUMBER 5







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INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

In January 1999 York Archaeological Trust excavated two trenches on the site of the former Holgate Motors premises at 39 Holgate Road, York. A watching brief was undertaken later in the same month to observe the initial ground works associated with development.

In Trench 3, excavated towards the street front, under modern deposits was a thick deposit almost certainly representing medieval agricultural activity. Two features, one a probable medieval pit, were associated with this activity. Below the agricultural activity were burnt surfaces representing industrial use of the area in the Roman period. Deposits of Roman date were also recorded from this trench.

Trench 4 produced evidence of modern and possibly post-medieval activity overlying thick deposits of probable medieval plough soil. No Roman features or deposits were identified in this trench.

The watching brief produced further evidence for Roman and medieval activity in the area and also part of the ground plan of what is believed to be the remains of St Catherine's Hospital.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 11th and 15th January 1999, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological excavation in advance of the construction of new flats at 39 Holgate Road, York (NGR SE 5945 5119) (Figure 1). This work was undertaken to satisfy a planning condition imposed by the City of York Council following an archaeological evaluation and bore hole survey (Johnson 1998, YAT 1998 Field Report Number 39), and a series of trial holes all carried out in 1998 (Johnson 1998, YAT 1998 Field Report Number 69).

The excavation was carried out in accordance with a specification supplied by John Oxley, Archaeologist for the City of York Council. This report also includes the results of a watching brief undertaken after the excavation when re-development of the site commenced. All records of the excavation and watching brief are currently stored with the York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:1998.332.

All works were carried out on behalf of K.W. Linfoot Plc, the site developers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The excavation consisted of two trenches (Figure 2) each nominally 4 by 4m. Since this excavation followed on from previous work on the site the trench numbering was continued for this investigation making the trenches in this phase of work Numbers 3 and 4.



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Figure 1. Site location

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100m

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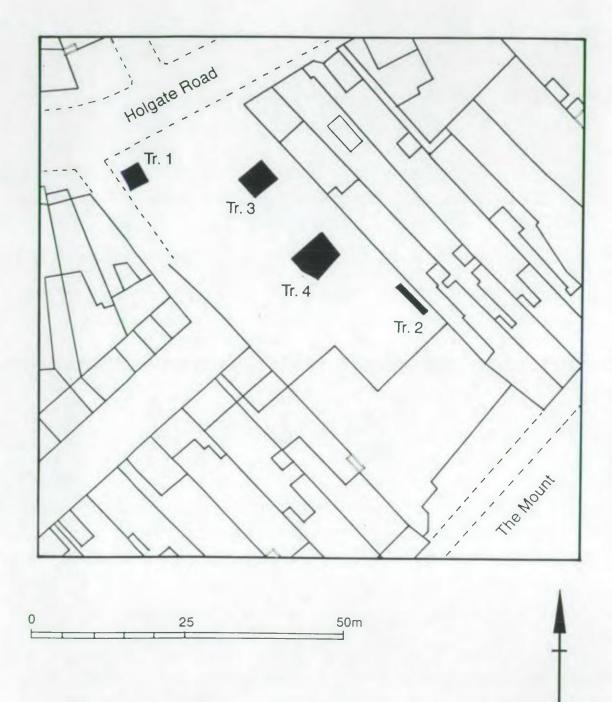


Figure 2, Trench location plan

Trench 3 was located on the site of Trial Pit 2 and was located to investigate a cobbled surface found in the base of the trial pit. Deposits were removed by machine under archaeological supervision to a depth of c.1.20m below ground level (BGL), c.12.80m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). After cleaning and recording of the sides and base of the trench excavation by hand was to commence. This was to cease at c.12.61m, the formation level in this area for the development.

In Trench 4, on the site of Trial Pit 4, the deposits were excavated by machine to a depth of c.1.80m BGL, c.13.20m AOD. This was c.0.10m below the formation level in this area but was necessary to ensure that any features cut into natural were identified. As with Trench 3 after machining the sides and base of the trench were cleaned and recorded. Any features observed cut into the natural were to be excavated and recorded after which no further work was to take place in this trench.

Recording followed the procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust Context Recording Manual (1996). One standing section of each trench was drawn at a scale of 1:10 and deposits and features within the trenches were recorded as single context plans at a scale of 1:20. Colour photographs were taken of the drawn sections and any significant archaeological contexts. A number of general record photographs of the site were also taken.

3. TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The site is located approximately 1km west-south-west of the city centre and is bounded by Holgate Road on the north and St Catherine's Place on the east and occupies an area that extends from the Holgate Road frontage some two thirds of the way to The Mount. The ground surface sloped distinctly from south-east to north-west, and to a lesser extent from east to west. The fall on the south-east to north-west axis, in the area of the lane adjacent to the north-east boundary of the site, was in excess of 3.2m from the top end of the lane to the pavement on the Holgate Road frontage (a distance of some 50m).

The drift geology of the site is of sand, gravel and boulder clay above a solid geology of Bunter and Keuper sandstones laid down in the Triassic period some 225 million years ago (Geol.Surv. 1967).

4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

This background to the site has been compiled using easily accessible historical sources, from the results of previous archaeological investigations, and from cartographic evidence.

The earliest cartographic evidence of the 17th and 18th centuries indicates that land in the vicinity of the site along Holgate Road was occupied by fields and gardens. There is no evidence to suggest that this was not also the case in the post-Roman and medieval periods. The nearest known areas of occupation in the medieval and post-medieval periods were properties fronting onto The Mount a short distance to the south-east. Amongst these properties was St Catherine's Hospital, originally an institution for the care of lepers, that is known to have been in use by 1333 (VCH, 1961). The 1852 Ordnance Survey map shows the area to be mainly open ground but with a number of structures in the south-east part of the site away from the street frontage. This map also shows what appears to be a lane forming the north-east boundary to the site.

Evidence of Roman activity in the vicinity of the site is extensive. A major Roman road (RCHM road 10), known in places to be in the region of 10m wide, lies under the buildings on the north-west side of The Mount and follows an alignment virtually parallel to that of Tadcaster Road and The Mount. An extensive Roman cemetery is also known to occupy areas close to the site. Richly furnished burials and a number of important sculptured memorials signify the high status of this cemetery. One of the most remarkable cemetery finds from Roman York, a tile and stone burial vault, is still to be seen in the cellar of 104 The Mount. A further Roman road (RCHM road 9) is known to have lain to the north-west of RCHM road 10. Although it cannot be conclusively proved, it is likely that this road followed an alignment to the north-west of the stretch of Holgate Road closest to the site (RCHM, 1962).

The locality around the site did not become residentially developed until the 19th century, during the course of which the area was progressively built up and became a suburb of the expanding city of York. It has already been noted above that St Catherine's Hospital was originally sited on The Mount. In 1652 this hospital was rebuilt on a site off Nunnery Lane but was further relocated in 1837 to newly built brick premises on Holgate Road, within the boundaries of the site under discussion. These premises comprised four connected buildings that together formed an "H" shaped plan. These buildings survived well into the 20th century. 19th and early 20th century maps describe St Catherine's as an almshouse for aged widows.

The morphology of the proposed development plot can be seen to relate directly to amalgamations and divisions of the property boundaries depicted in some detail on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1852.

5. THE EXCAVATION

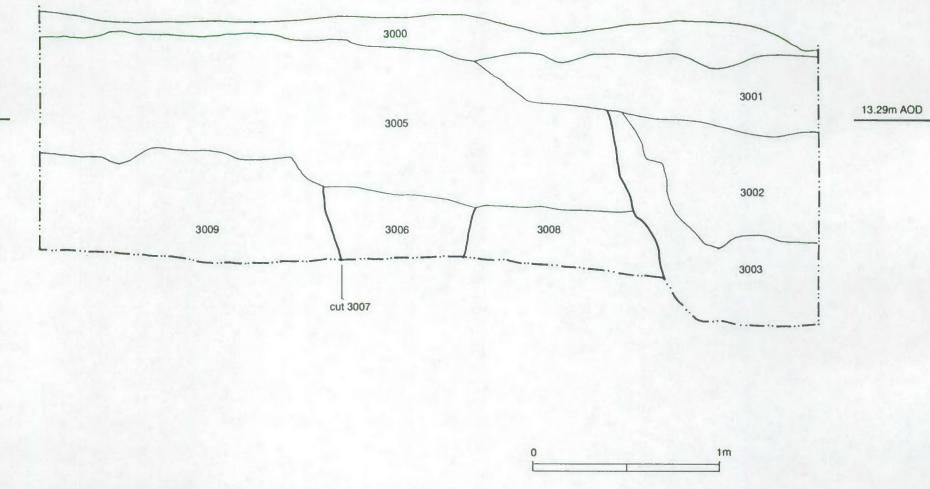
5.1 Trench 3 (Figure 3)

5.1.1 The earliest deposit recorded in this trench, at c.12.30m AOD was a dark greyish-brown silty sandy loam (3025) seen only in the side of a later pit. Overlying 3025 was a c.0.10m thick layer of yellow sand (3020) with patches of light brown silt. This was only seen in the northern corner of the trench and its full extent was not identified. Overlying 3020 was a patch of friable mid brown clayey sand (3015) which contained some patches of ?burnt reddish-brown clayey sand. Apparently cut into 3020 and 3015 were four parallel grooves (3021-3024). The longest was c.0.70m long and all were c.0.05m wide and c.0.03m deep. Above 3020, and possibly 3015, but only recorded in the western corner of the trench, was a mixed layer of light brown silty sand and mid greyish-brown silty loam (3019). Over 3019, and covering the southern and central parts of the trench was a spread of mid brown sandy loam (3018) containing occasional small cobbles.

5.1.2 Cut into 3018 was a roughly oval feature (3017) measuring c.1.9m by 1.5m. It was c.0.25m deep with gently sloping sides. Only the north-east half of this feature was excavated. It was found to contain four fills the lowest of which was a mid yellowish-brown burnt silty sand

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(3016). Above this was a hard but brittle layer of dark red burnt clay (3013). Sealing this was a thin, generally c.0.02m, layer of black silty loam (3011) containing much charcoal. The uppermost fill was a loose light yellowish-brown silty loam (3010). This context yielded five small pieces of pottery dating to the $2^{nd}/3^{rd}$ centuries. At the same stratigraphic horizon, and c.1.0m to the north-east, was a roughly oval setting of cobbles in a firm mid brown clay (3014). It measured c.1.20m by 0.50m and was no more than c.0.10m deep. Parts of the centre of this feature had been burnt a mid pinkish-red colour and pink burnt sand lay below the upper clay and cobbles. One piece of Roman pottery, a sherd of grey ware, was recovered from this feature.

5.1.3 Partly sealing 3014 and 3017 and occupying the south-west half of the trench was a mid brown sandy loam (3012). This layer produced 42 pieces of pottery, 41 of them Roman dating from the late 1st century to the 4th century, and one piece of 12th century splashed ware. Stratigraphically above 3012 were two deposits which together with all later contexts were seen and recorded in section only. The first was a compact light orange-brown silty loam (3009). North-east of this was a compact light orange-brown silty loam (3008) identical to 3009. Cutting 3008 and 3009 was a feature (3007) possibly aligned north-west to south-east although it was not traced within the trench despite thorough cleaning of the trench base. It was c.0.80m wide and at least 0.35m deep with very steeply sloping straight sides. The single fill identified was a compact mid greyish-brown silty loam (3006).

5.1.4 Sealing cut 3007 was a layer of loose mid greyish-brown loam (3005), up to c.0.75m thick, containing very occasional pieces of limestone and tile. Cut into 3005 was a pit (3004) most of which lay beyond the limit of excavation. It was at least 1.15m across and 1.0m deep with a near vertical south-west edge. Two fills were identified. The lower was a clean mid to dark greyish-brown sandy loam (3003) and the upper a compact orange clay (3002) with occasional small cobbles. Pottery from 3003 indicated a 12th century date for the backfilling of the pit.

5.1.5 Pit 3004 was sealed by a layer of loose dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (3001). Above this was a loose very dark grey to black loam (3000) containing slag, clinker and pieces of tile. This formed the modern ground surface at a height of c.13.70 to 14.00m AOD. Four sherds of pot from 3000 were dated to the $11^{\text{th}}/12^{\text{th}}$ centuries.

5.2 Trench 4 (Figure 4)

5.2.1 The earliest deposit in this trench, at c.13.20m AOD, was a very pale brown silty sand (4025) with patches of mid brown sandy silt. This was believed to be a natural deposit. Above it was a spread of dark orange-brown sandy loam (4024) containing occasional flecks of mid brown sandy clay. This was sealed by a very dark greyish-brown slightly silty sandy loam (4023) which contained a few pebbles and flecks of charcoal. Overlying 4023 was a layer of mid brown sandy clay loam (4022) containing a few cobbles. Above this was a mid brown silty sandy loam (4021) with a very few charcoal flecks. Over 4021 was a layer of mid to dark brown friable clayey silt (4020) which was up to c.1.10m thick.

5.2.2 Cut into the top of 4020 was a mortared brick wall (4010) aligned approximately southeast to north-west. Butting this wall to the north-east was a cobble spread (4009). South-west of the wall, but not butting it, there was a spread of brick and tile rubble (4019) above which lay three probably contemporary deposits. They were; cobbles in very dark grey loam (4009), a spread of light greyish-brown mortar (4016), and a hard white mortar (4018). Partially overlying 4016 was a very dark brown sandy silt (4008) and also a loose brown sandy loam (4015). Above 4018 there was a black silt (4017). Above 4015 was a pale brown sandy clay (4014) which lay below a mid brown sandy silt (4013). This was sealed by a spread of black ash and charcoal (4012). This was partially overlain by a dark grey loam (4011) containing occasional flecks of white mortar. Possibly contemporary with 4011 was a brown mortary silt (4007). Above contexts 4007 and 4011 was a brown silt (4006) with some brick rubble which may have filled a shallow cut or depression (not numbered) c.0.75m across and c.0.15m deep.

5.2.3 Overlying 4006/7, 4011/2 and 4017 was a layer of white mortar fragments and grey silty loam (4005) which contained occasional fragments of brick and tile and was up to c.0.40m thick. Above it was a dark brown silt (4004) with a few pieces of tile. This was below a mixture of cream mortar and tile fragments (4003). Sealing 4003 was a deposit of very dark brown silty loam (4002) which contained much brick rubble. Cutting 4002/3/4/5 in the south-west corner of the trench was a probable modern service trench (4001) which may have been aligned south-east to north-west. No pipe or cable was noted within this trench which had been backfilled with a loose black ashy loam (4000) containing cobbles. Apart from a piece of Roman grey ware the pottery from this backfill was of the 19th century.

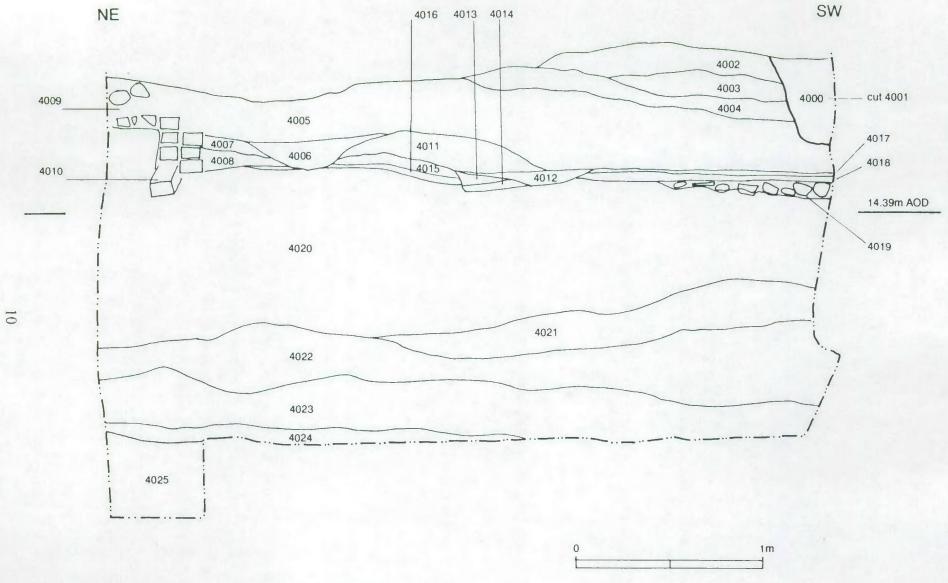


Figure 4, North-west facing section, Trench 4

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6. THE WATCHING BRIEF (Figure 5)

A watching brief was undertaken on the site between 19th and 22nd January 1999 as the ground was reduced in level by machine in preparation for building work. This operation encompassed virtually the whole width of the site and extended back from Holgate Road for a distance of up to 30 metres.

Along the north-east side of the site a line of fuel tanks encased in concrete were not removed although four fuel tanks buried in the ground on the street frontage in the north corner of the site were. The area occupied by these tanks measured c.6.25m by 3.00m. Leakage from one of them, at least, had contaminated its immediate surroundings but since they penetrated up to c.0.75m into the natural sub soil all stratified archaeological deposits had been destroyed at the time of their insertion earlier this century. A trench with a maximum width of c.1.5m was machined out along the north-west side of the tanks in the north-east part of the site in order to establish the extent of the concrete encasing them. This trench had a maximum depth of c.2.5m and removed any stratified deposits surviving in this area.

Substantial remains of a brick building were observed in the north-west part of the site apparently occupying most of the angle formed by Holgate Road and St Catherine's Place. The tops of the walls lay just 0.15m below the modern ground level and were between 0.35m and 0.40m wide. Wall A, of which only the south-east face was visible, was constructed of bricks 0.05m thick and 0.22m long. The base of this wall was located some 1.37m below the existing modern ground level. Wall B, of which only parts of the north-east face were visible, only went down to c.0.90m below the modern ground level. Wall C was between 0.45m and 0.50m deep and was made of bricks 0.22m long and 0.11m wide. Just to the north-west of Wall C, and clearly an internal feature, was a well which was constructed of unmortared bricks measuring 0.24m by 0.11m by 0.075m, and which had an internal diameter of c.1.0m. A large block of concrete was machined out from a position just north-east of Wall D but it is uncertain whether this was part of the building or a more recent intrusion associated with the garage buildings.

A 1.5m length of Wall E, one brick wide and aligned approximately north-east to south-west, was located in the lower formation area. This appeared to be part of a small, possibly square, structure which is believed to be more modern than the structure represented by Walls A-E and may relate to the garage facilities which until recently occupied the site.

Over the site as a whole, machining reduced ground level to about 13.30m AOD. The deposits removed, referred to as 5001, were largely of friable greyish-brown clayey sand and were up to 1.40m in depth. Three features were observed during the machining. The first was a group of large animal bones, including ribs and skull fragments, which were probably lying in or close to the base of a pit of unknown dimensions cut from a higher level. The second feature consisted of a small cobble spread measuring c.0.45m north-south and c.0.35m east-west. Although no cut was apparent the cobbles could have represented the packing for a large posthole. A rather larger area of small cobbles, measuring c.1.0m north-south by up to 0.40m east-west, appeared to form a surface at c.13.24m AOD and were designated 5002. During the examination of this feature pottery of Roman and medieval date was recovered.

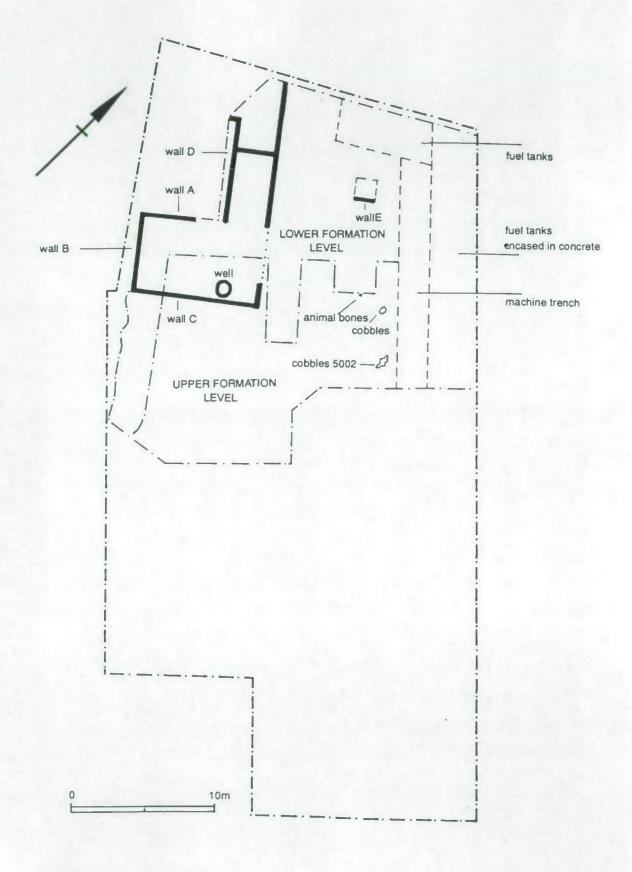


Figure 5, Structures and features observed in watching brief

On the frontage with Holgate Road the ground was further reduced to a lower formation level of c.12.60m AOD. Machining stopped just above the natural deposits over much of the area and no cut features were observed in the area exposed. A very small area, less than 1m square, of natural deposit was exposed in the north corner of the site. It consisted of a firm light yellowish-brown slightly clayey sand. Close by, and c.0.10m higher, a layer of slightly greyish light brown clayey sand containing small cobbles up to c.0.05m across was observed. A piece of Roman pot and a fragment of Roman roofing tile were recovered from the lower formation deposits. Towards the north-west part of the lower formation area, and some 1.15m below modern ground level, was a deposit of firm but crumbly grey clayey silt with a little brown mottling. This differed from the sandy natural deposits on the other side of the site and may represent a change in natural or may relate in some way to the brick building recorded towards the north-west corner of the site.

7. FINDS ASSESSMENT

7.1 Pottery

Context	No of sherds	Date	Description
3000	4	11/12 th	Gritty ware and splashed ware
3003	4	R; 12 th	Fragment of colour coat; splashed
3010	5	Roman	2 nd /3 rd - small pieces
3012	42	R; 12 th	41 Roman ranging in date from late 1 st /early 2 nd to 4 th , small sherds; 1 splashed ware
3014	1	Roman	Grey ware
4000	8	R; 19 th	Small Roman grey ware sherd, 19 th century large pancheon sherds and tin-glazed earthernware
Lower formation	1	Roman 1 st - 3 rd	1 Roman grey ware
Upper formation	11	Roman; 11 th -14 th	6 Roman 1 st -3 rd , 1 gritty ware, 3 York Glazed/Brandsby ware, 1 ?14 th
5002	10	Roman; 11 th -13 th	2 Roman, 3 gritty ware, 5 slashed ware

Summary:

The assemblage of 99 sherds demonstrates that Roman deposits were present on the site from quite an early date through to near the end of the Roman occupation; there is no evidence of subsequent occupation until the 11th century. Limited amounts of 12th, 13th and possibly 14th century material was recovered which is of a domestic character and comprises well-known local types. Post medieval and modern material was present in context 4000.

7.2 Flint

A patinated flint or chert blade (sf 24) was recovered from context 3012.

7.3 Fired clay

A tobacco pipe stem (sf27) was recovered from context 4000.

7.4 Copper alloy

Two fragments of copper alloy (sfs 22 and 23) were recovered from context 3012.

7.5 Iron and slag

Slag (21) was recovered from context 3012. An iron nail (sf 20), and two iron bars (sfs 18,19) were recovered from the same context.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

8.1 Context 3000

Preservation:	fair
Angularity:	spiky
Colour:	fawn
Pig:	1 humerous fragment - dog gnawed
Bird:	2 shaft fragments, 1 probably a chicken femur fragment
Rat:	1 tibia shaft
Unidentified:	2 fragments
Weight:	28g

8.2 Context 3003

Preservation:goodPig:1 canine - femaleMedium mammal:1 rib fragmentWeight:5g

8.3 Context 3010

Preservation:fair?Dog:1 vertebra fragmentUnidentified:2 fragmentsWeight:6g

8.4 Context 3012

Preservation:fairAngularity:battered/spikyColour:fawnRoot etching noted on some fragmentsCow:1 metatarsal fragment - split longitudinally, 1 first phalanxSheep/goat:1 metatarsal (measurable)Medium mammal:6 shaft fragmentsLarge mammal:1 shaft, 1 rib and 1 phalanx fragment

Unidentified: 1 fragment

Weight: 82g

8.5Context 4000Preservation: fairUnidentified:1 fragmentWeight:1.5g

9. CONCLUSIONS (including period by period analysis)

Although not plentiful the ceramic evidence does point to Roman and medieval activity in the area. The nature of the Roman deposits and features recorded may suggest small scale industrial activity, possibly metal-working. It is of interest that the date range for the pottery recovered seems to span most if not all of the Roman period although some of the pottery may be derived from re-worked deposits originating elsewhere.

The evidence for the medieval period does not apparently extend beyond the 13th century but this may be due to modern or post-medieval truncation of the relevant deposits. The pottery suggests that the possible agricultural layer 3005 in Trench 3 should belong to the 11th/12th century or earlier. The single sherd of splashed ware in 3012 is likely to be intrusive given the stratigraphic position of the layer and the number of Roman sherds recovered.

There was no pottery recovered from either trench or the watching brief which could be dated to the post-medieval period but this again could be due to the destruction of deposits of this period. Certainly the modern demolition of the garage buildings and clearance of the area had lowered the general ground level to some extent.

9.1 Prehistoric and Roman (pre 1st - 5th centuries AD)

Evidence for prehistoric activity is normally absent from the walled city and its immediate environs and would not be expected in this location even if the trench had been much deeper. Roman deposits and features were located in Trench 3 but even after thorough cleaning none could be positively identified in Trench 4. The Roman activity in Trench 3 appeared to be industrial in nature which would be in keeping with the location of the site, close to the Roman civil settlement but not close enough to present a fire hazard.

9.2 Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5th - 11th centuries AD)

There was no suggestion of any Anglian activity from the trenches but a sprinkling of finds of the period from the general area suggest that some activity took place between the 5^{th} and 9^{th} centuries. There was also no evidence for the Anglo-Scandinavian period from these trenches but this is not unusual since occupation of this period tends to be concentrated closer to the Rivers Ouse and Foss. Blossom Street is believed to have been a principal thoroughfare in the period and it is possible that some Anglo-Scandinavian activity might be encountered at the south-east end of the site closest to Blossom Street.

9.3 Medieval (11th - 16th centuries AD)

The site produced some evidence for medieval activity, apparently of an agricultural nature. No substantial medieval structural remains would be expected in this area which lies approximately half way between the walled city and the medieval hamlet of Holgate. The cobble spread, 5002, recorded during the watching brief appears to belong to this period although its function is uncertain.

9.4 Post-medieval (16th - 18th centuries AD)

No definite dating evidence was recovered to indicate post-medieval activity in the immediate area but since the site lies adjacent to Holgate Road it is reasonable to expect some activity of the period. The brick structure encountered in Trench 4 and the adjacent lane are clearly shown on the first Ordnance Survey map of the area, published in 1852, and it is possible that it belongs to the period although the documentary evidence suggests that the area only became developed during the 19th century.

9.5 Modern (19th and 20th centuries)

The structure mentioned above could be 19th century and certainly predates the use of the site as a garage since modern petrol tanks cut through the associated lane to the north-east of Trench 4. Very little else could be ascribed to the period apart from the uppermost deposits in both trenches which were modern topsoils, highly disturbed during the site clearance works. The brick building recorded in the north-west part of the site during the watching brief is almost certainly part of St Catherine's Hospital constructed on this site in the early 19th century.

10. LIST OF SOURCES

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York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. It can manage projects, provide professional advice and monitor archaeological works to ensure high quality, cost effective archaeology. Its staff have a considerable depth and variety of professional experience and an international reputation for research, development and maximising the public, educational and commercial benefits of archaeology. Based in York its services are available throughout Britain and beyond.





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