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YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

**THE WHITE HOUSE,  
10 CLIFTON,  
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2002 FIELD REPORT  
NUMBER 4**

**THE WHITE HOUSE,**

**10 CLIFTON,**

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**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

**WATCHING BRIEF**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In January 2002 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief to the rear of The White House, 10 Clifton, York, during the machine excavation of foundation and drain trenches for a new development. The trenches revealed deposits of natural origin and a probable ploughsoil overlain by 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century demolition material. In-situ human remains were discovered and partly removed from two areas. Pottery suggested that these remains dated from the Roman period and that they came from a large Roman cemetery known to lie in the area.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

During January 2002 York Archaeological Trust maintained an archaeological watching brief during ground works for a development to the rear of The White House, 10 Clifton, York, (NGR: SE 5973 5265), (Figure 1, Site location map). These works entailed the machine excavation of a number of foundation and service trenches and were carried out on behalf of Mansell Construction Services Ltd. Prior to this, a number of modern structures in the area were demolished and clearly modern levelling deposits, mainly of brick rubble, were removed by machine. The site had been the subject of a previous watching brief in 2001 (Johnson 2001 b, 25) when the drilling of a single borehole was observed and recorded. The archaeological watching brief followed a standard City of York Council specification.

All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 2001.8437.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The watching brief entailed recording any deposits, features, or structures encountered in the works. These notes, including measured sketches, were entered into a site notebook and processed into a form where they could be used for the preparation of this report during February 2002. The location of all drawn sections and areas of interest were measured in and initially indicated on a copy of the architects drawings of the foundations before being transferred to a large scale Ordnance Survey map. The site was visited at regular intervals until the completion of the ground works. A total of three sections (Figure 2) and two plans were drawn up from the site notes and these are described in Section 5 of this report.

## **3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The drift geology of the area is of Boulder Clay above Warp and Lacustrine Clay with sand and gravel that overlies a solid geology of Bunter and Keuper Sandstone, (Geological Survey 1967). After the demolition of the modern structures and initial ground clearance the site was roughly level at a height of approximately 15.2m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum).



0 50 metres

BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY DIGITAL MAP DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO17FG. LICENCE NUMBER A110018343

Figure 1 Site location

#### **4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

**4.1** The site lies immediately north-east of a major Roman road (RCHM road 6), the course of which is almost mirrored by the alignment of the existing roads of Bootham and Clifton (RCHM 1962, 2-3). Throughout the Roman period the site lay well outside the defences of the Legionary Fortress. A number of contemporary cemeteries and isolated burials have been discovered to either side of road 6 in the general vicinity, the nearest being at 3 Clifton and the Grange Hotel (YAT Gazetteer Sites 160 and 161 respectively). Traces of further Roman roads have been located south-west of road 6 not far distant, though the true course and extent of these remain uncertain (Johnson 2001 a, 1). Probable occupation debris, in the form of 2<sup>nd</sup> century pottery, was found at this site during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1931.

**4.2** There is no archaeological data from the immediate locality pertaining to the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods.

**4.3** Throughout the medieval period the site appears to have remained beyond the urban limits of the city, though the road of Bootham/Clifton continued as a significant routeway as it had done since Roman times. The presence of medieval buildings along the Clifton frontage of the White House may be considered a possibility though there is no conclusive evidence to confirm this.

**4.4** Post-medieval cartographic sources from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards suggest the presence of a building at the site on the Clifton street frontage throughout much of this period. Parts of the existing building, a grade II listed building of considerable architectural merit, contain early 18<sup>th</sup> century fabric with later alterations. Land to the rear of the frontage is most likely to have been used for gardens or orchards though the presence of structures, at some point in this time, cannot be ruled out.

**4.5** Modern activity in the area includes the structures to the rear of 10 Clifton. These are believed to date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and were demolished prior to the commencement of the construction of the new development. A previous watching brief on the site (Johnson 2001, 25) indicated extensive modern levelling and dump deposits across the site.

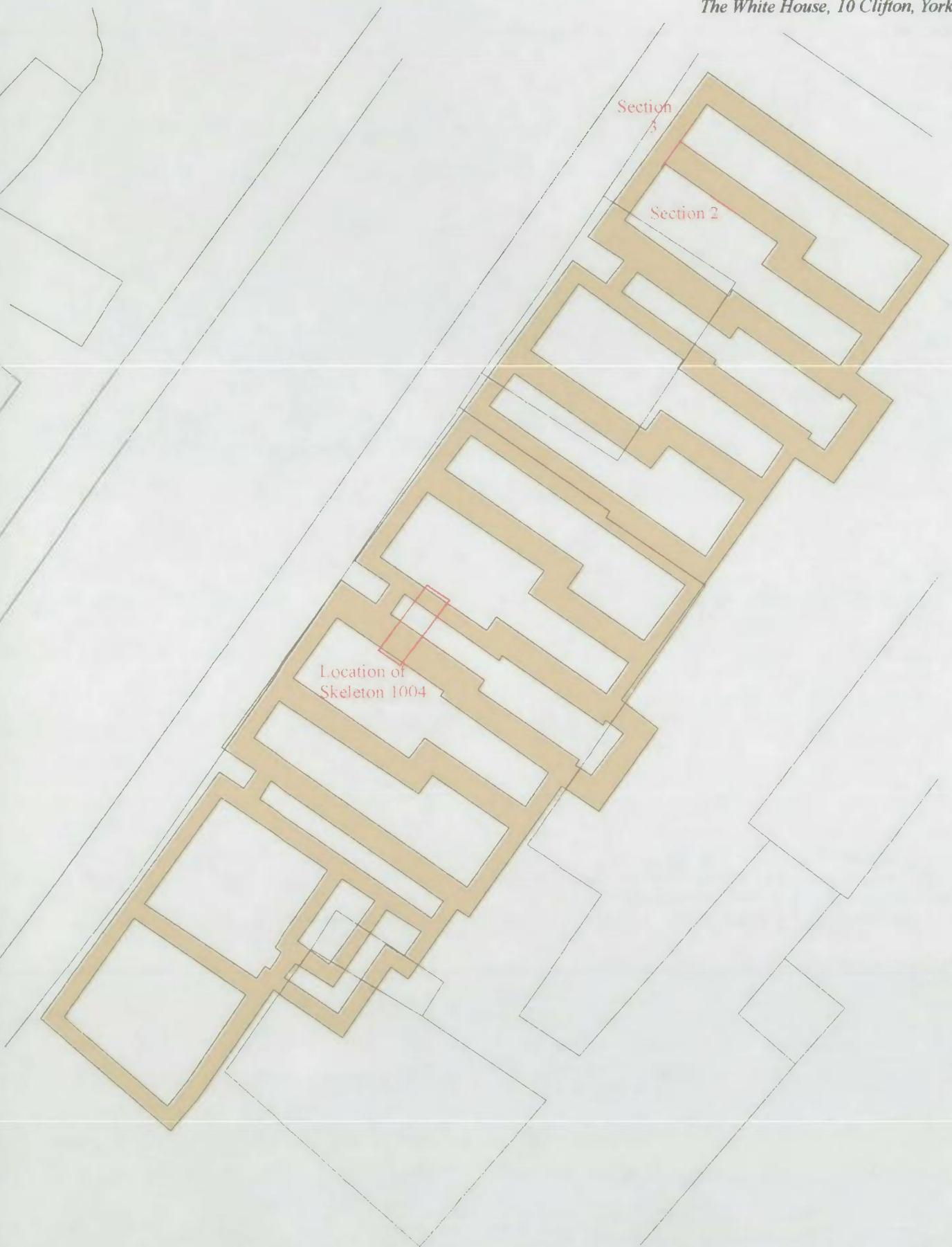


Figure 2 Location of site works and drawn sections

## 5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

### 5.1 Section 1 (Figures 3 and 6)

5.1.1 The lowest deposit seen in this section, at c.1.3m Below Ground Level (BGL), c.13.9m (AOD), was gravelly mid orange-brown silty sand (1007) which was probably the natural sub-soil. Overlying this, towards the south-east end of the section, was mid orange-brown silty loam (1006). This was not investigated but may have been the backfill of a feature. Sealing 1006 and 1007 was a layer of mid orange silty clayey sand (1005) which may have been a dump or possibly a levelling deposit. Above 1005 was mid greyish-brown silty loam (1001) with patches of orange silty clayey sand. Within this deposit were the disturbed remains of an adult human burial (1004) aligned approximately north-east to south-west. Parts of this burial appeared to have been disturbed in the distant past and some of it had been removed by the machine-cut foundation trench of the new development. It appeared to have been a supine inhumation with the head to the south-west. Parts of two femurs and a skull were noted but left in-situ. Context 1001 probably filled a grave which was not dug out but observations suggested that it was c.2.3m long and 0.6m wide. One piece of pottery, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century was found within 1001.

5.1.2 Sealing the grave was a c.0.5m thick deposit of friable mid greyish-brown silty loam (1003) which may have been a ploughsoil. Above this was a 0.9m thick layer of friable mid brown silty loam (1002) also thought to be a ploughsoil. Overlying this was a mid grey silty loam (1000) with moderate amounts of mortar, brick, tile, and clay. This was interpreted as a relatively modern dump or levelling and formed the modern ground surface at the time of the digging of the foundation trenches. The top of this deposit lay at c.15.2m AOD. A small quantity of unstratified pottery was recovered from the deposits above natural in this area and were all dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

### 5.2 Section 2 (Figure 4)

5.2.1 The earliest deposit in this section, at c.0.95m BGL, c.14.25m AOD, was mid orange-brown sandy clay (2003), believed to be natural. Overlying it was soft mid brown slightly clayey loam (2001) which was probably a ploughsoil. Towards the base of 2001 human remains (2002) were seen in section. Part of an articulated arm or leg and a possible kneecap were seen but not removed from the section. The size of these remains indicates that the burial, thought to be in-situ, was that of a young child or baby. No evidence for a grave cut was recovered. The uppermost deposit in this section was a dark grey loam (2000) with some brick and tile which formed the current modern ground surface at c.15.2m AOD.

### 5.3 Section 3 (Figure 5)

5.3.1 In this section the earliest deposit was mid orange-brown clayey sand (3008) lying at c.14.2m AOD, c.1m BGL. This deposit was probably natural in origin. Overlying 3008 at the north-east end of the section was dark brown clay loam (3006) which may have a build-up deposit created by ploughing. Above 3008 in the south-west part of the section was a 0.5m thick layer of loose dark brown loam (3007) interpreted as a ploughsoil. Context 3006 was overlain by a clean dark brown slightly clayey loam (3004), possibly another ploughsoil. Deposit 3007 was sealed by a dark greyish-brown loam (3005) again thought to be a ploughsoil.

5.3.2 Contexts 3004 – 3007 were all cut by a linear trench (3003) probably aligned roughly south-east to north-west. It was c.0.5m wide and probably c.0.7m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. Within this trench was the remains of a mortared brick wall (3002) c.0.25m wide sitting on a foundation of mortared brick one course thick. The foundation ran the full width of the trench and the gap between wall 3002 and the north-east edge of trench 3003 had been backfilled with a mid olive-brown mortar. Wall 3002 appeared to be flush with deposits 3005 and 3007.

5.3.3 The uppermost deposit in this area, sealing 3001, 3002, 3004, and 3005 was a mixture of brick rubble and dark grey loam (3000) and was probably a levelling deposit or dump of modern date. Context 3000 formed the current ground surface at c.15.2m AOD.



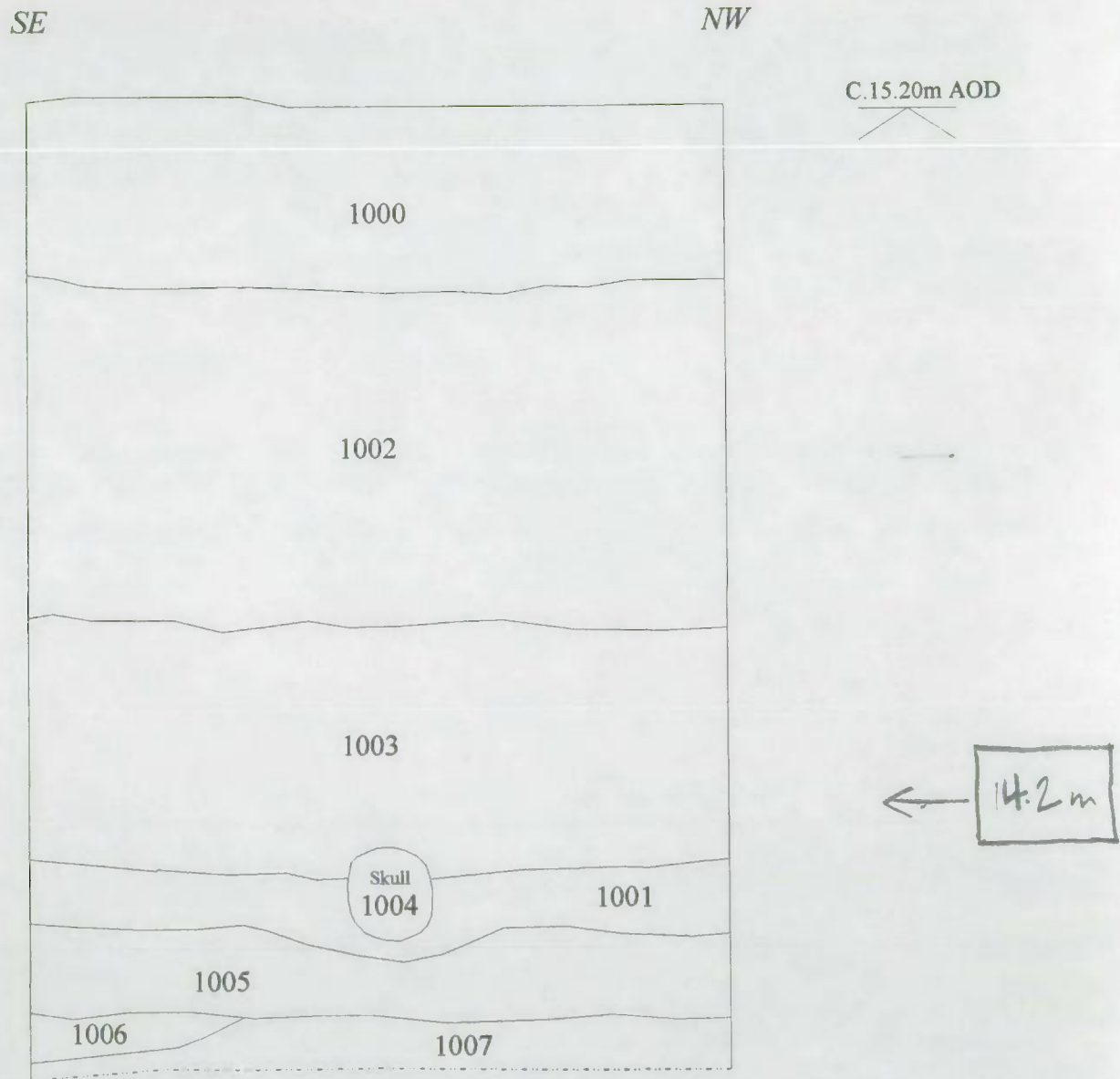


Figure 3 Section 1, north east facing.

0 0.5 metre

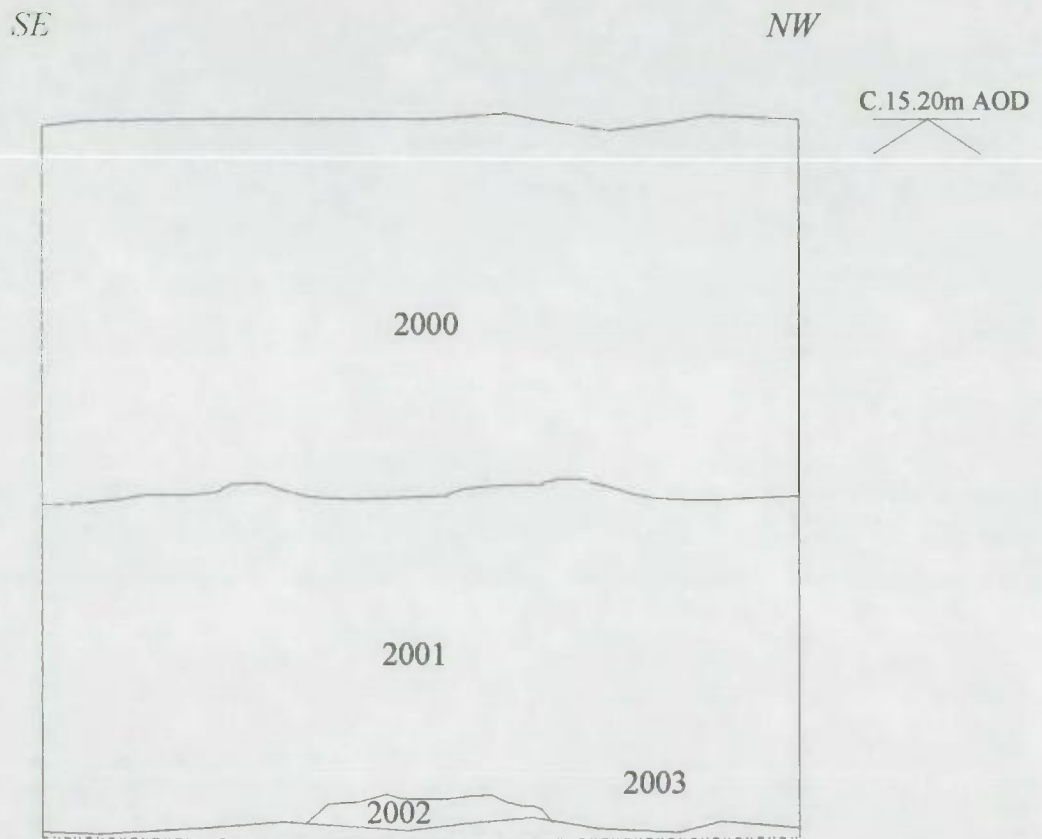


Figure 4 Section 2, north east facing.

0 0.5 metre

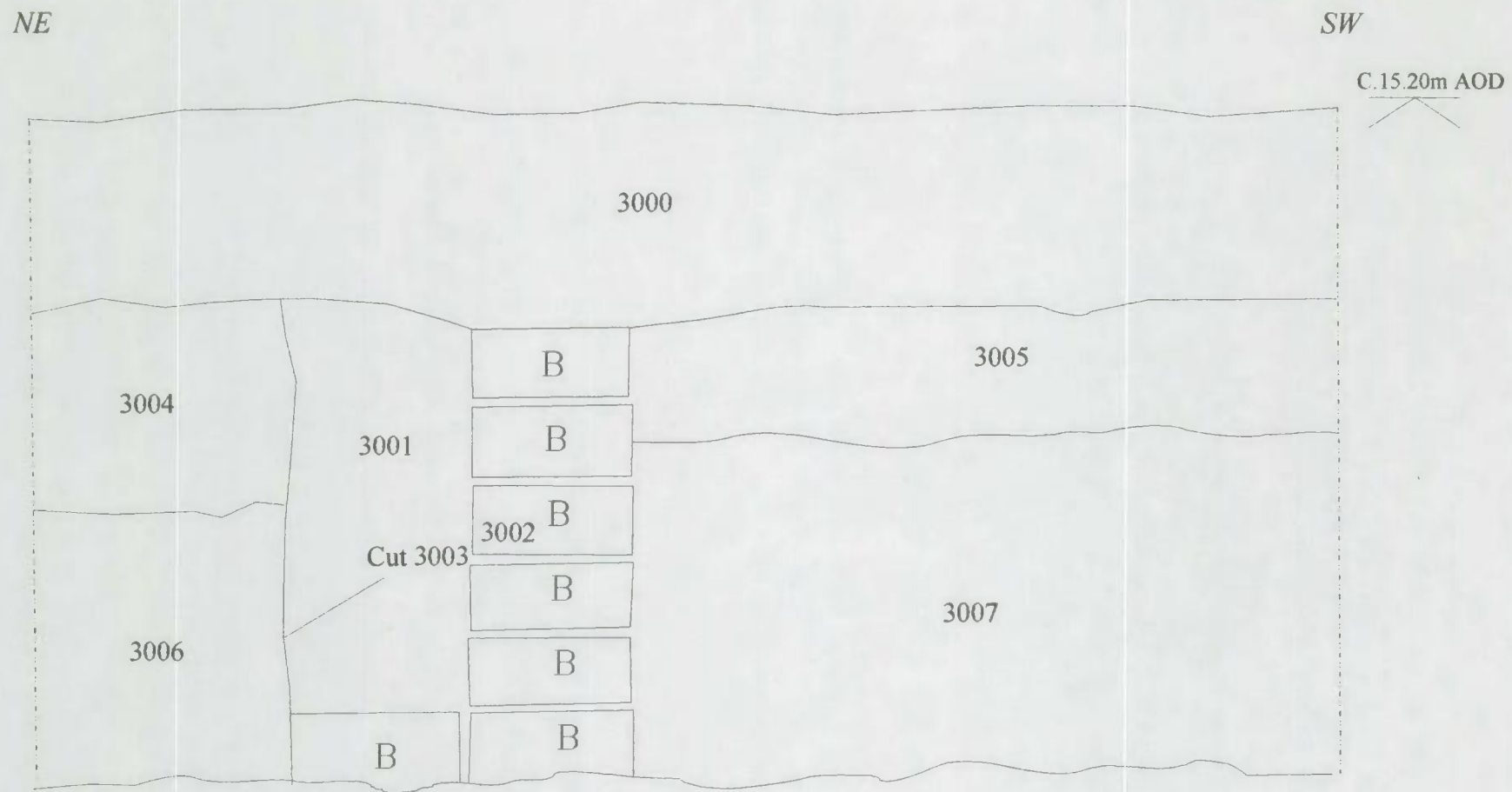


Figure 5 Section 3, north west facing.

0 0.5 metre

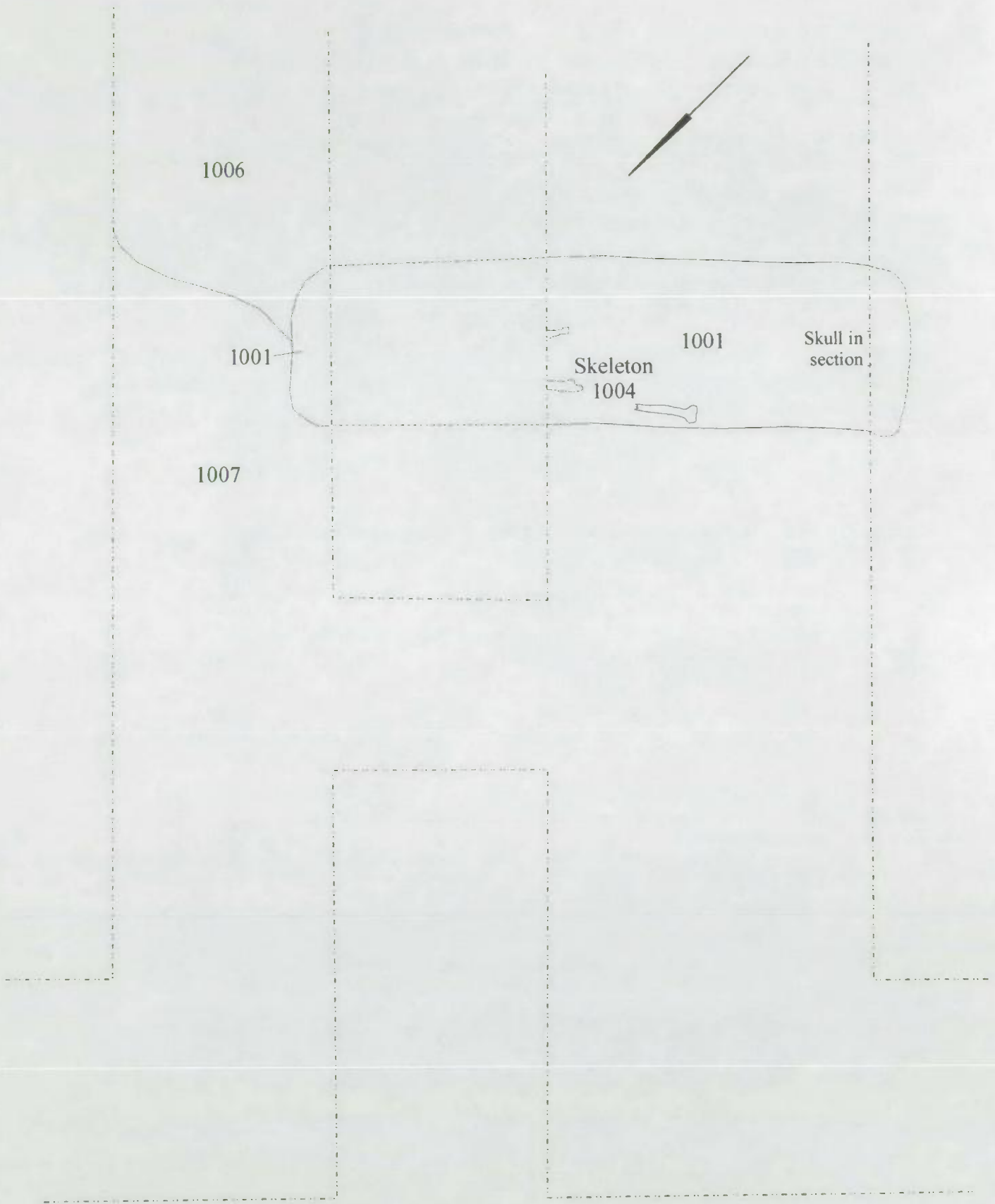


Figure 6 Plan of Skeleton 1004

0 1 metre

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND PERIOD ANALYSIS**

This watching brief recovered evidence for at least two burials on the site both covered by a thick deposit of probable ploughsoil. No features or stratified deposits of archaeological significance were recorded above these burials which may have been disturbed in antiquity by agricultural activity in the area. Considerable damage had also been done by post-medieval and modern building activity in the area but there is little doubt that the present site lies above an ancient cemetery.

### **6.1 Prehistoric and Roman (pre 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

There was no evidence of any type for any activity on or close to the site during the prehistoric period but this is not unusual in this area of York. The stratigraphic position, the pottery evidence, and the location of the site immediately adjacently to the main Roman road to the north all point to the burials belonging to the Roman period, possibly to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century. A major Roman cemetery is known in this area of York and the burials almost certainly are within this cemetery.

### **6.2 Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

There was no definite evidence of any type recovered from this site to suggest any occupation or other form of activity in the immediate area belonging to either period.

### **6.3 Medieval (11<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

The evidence for this period was limited and unconfirmed but the thick clean loams above the burials should, on the basis of other observations in the general area, be of this date. No pottery, or other finds, of the period was recovered from any of the trenches dug.

### **6.4 Post-medieval (16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries AD)**

There was no evidence for this period from the excavated trenches but it is possible that any such evidence was destroyed during modern building activity on the site.

### **7.5 Modern (19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries)**

Evidence for this period was recovered from all three trenches. It was mainly in the form of demolition deposits but the structural features identified in Trench 3 almost certainly belong to this period.

## 8. LIST OF SOURCES

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## 9. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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