
YORK CASTLE MUSEUM CONCOURSE.

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
OSA REPORT No: OSA10WB02.

June 2010.

OSA

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Report Summary.

REPORT NO: OSA10WB02

SITE NAME: York Castle Museum Concourse

COUNTY: York

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: SE 6055 5140

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TIMING: Fieldwork: April-May 2010
Post excavation & report preparation: May-June 2010

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PERIODS REPRESENTED: 19th century, ? medieval or post-medieval ?

Table of Contents.

1.0 Abstract	3
2.0 Site Location and Description	5
3.0 Planning Background	5
4.0 Archaeological Background	5
5.0 Methodology	6
6.0 Results	7
7.0 Discussion and Conclusions	8
6.0 Bibliography	8
8.0 Appendix 1 ~ List of Contexts	9
9.0 Appendix 2 ~ Archive Index	9
10.0 Appendix 3 ~ Plates	11

List of Figures.

Figure 1. Site Location (NGR SE 6055 5140).....	4
Figure 2. Plan of trenches monitored showing location of wall foundation (204)	6

List of Plates.

Plate 1. Trench 1, looking northwest.....	11
Plate 2. Trench 1, deposit (104) looking southwest.....	11
Plate 3. Trench 2, foundation (204).....	12
Plate 4. Trench 3, looking southwest.....	13

1.0 Abstract.

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by On-Site Archaeology Ltd. as part of the York Castle Museum Concourse Project, during the hand excavation of service trenches. The excavations involved the removal of an existing internal stone-slatted and concrete floor and excavation of trenches to a maximum depth of 0.90m below existing ground level.

Although existing services had truncated archaeological deposits in specific areas, archaeological deposits and features were observed within each of the trenches. The most significant feature was a rough limestone rubble wall foundation, recorded in the base of a trench. This foundation was aligned north south and is likely to represent a building pre-dating the early 18th century construction of the Debtors' Prison.

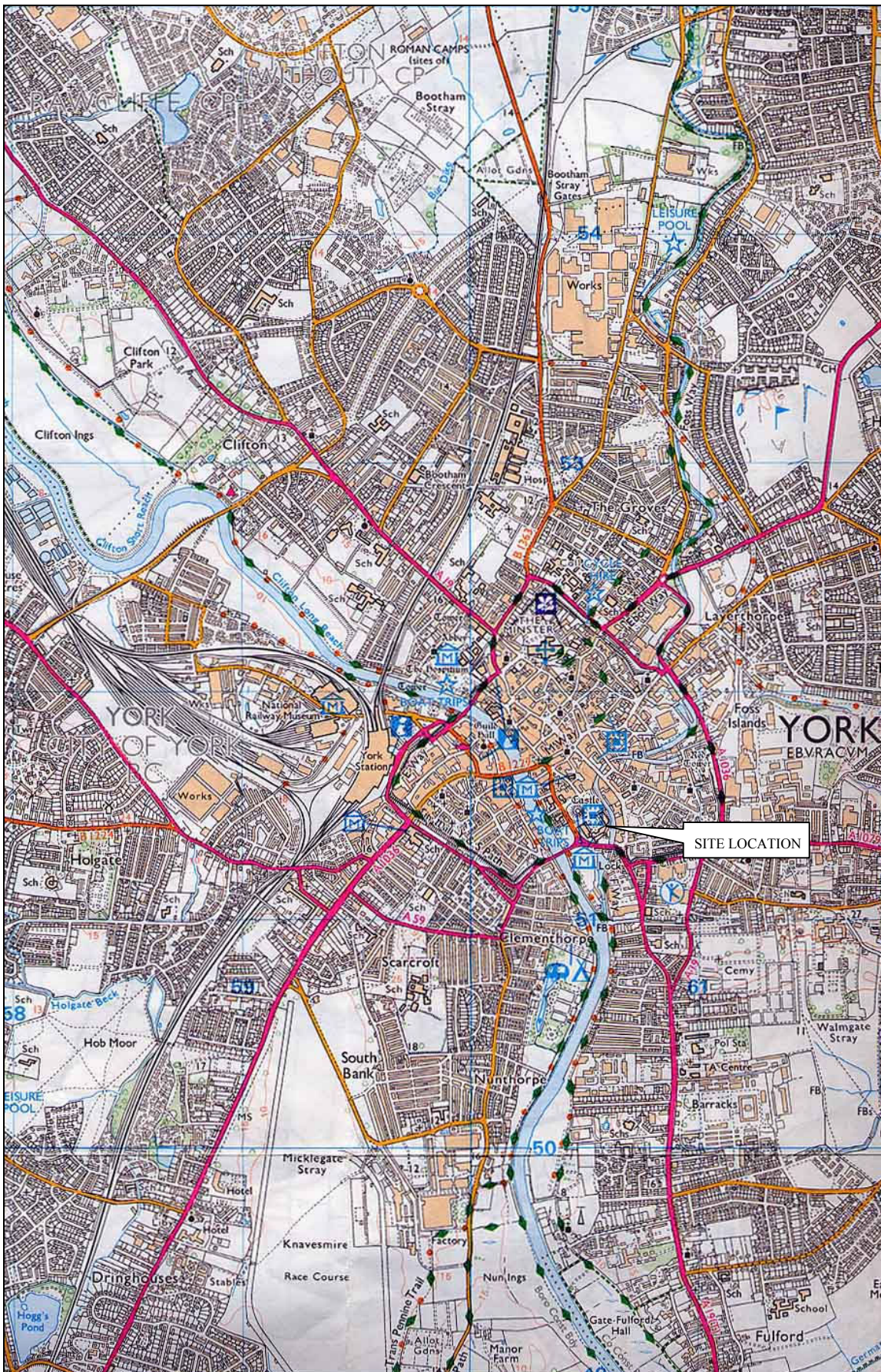


Figure 1. Site Location (NGR SE 6055 5140)

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2.0 Site Location and Description.

The site is located at NGR SE 6055 5150 (see figure 1). It comprises the existing single storey entrance building and concourse between the Female Prison and the Debtors' Prison. Ground level is at about 10m AOD.

3.0 Planning Background

Planning applications were submitted to the City of York Council (App Nos: 08/02565/LBC and 09/02258/ LBC) for these works. As the site lies within a Scheduled Ancient Monument, English Heritage advised that the works required Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent, which has been obtained.

4.0 Archaeological Background.

York Castle (National Monument Number 13275) occupies an area where there are significant deposits which relate to Roman, Anglian, and medieval occupation. In the Roman period, this area appears to have been used for an inhumation cemetery. The exact history of the development of this cemetery and its full extent are not known. There have been several inhumations discovered in this area. These are both coffined and uncoffined. There are stone, lead, and wood coffins. It is possible that a Roman road runs across the site and may cross the Foss behind the Castle Museum. The postulated line of this road does not run through the area currently under consideration.

The area appears to have been used in the Anglian period. There is an important find of a bronze hanging bowl from Castle Yard although the exact find spot is not known. However, it might have come from a grave. If so, then the Roman cemetery might have continued in use in the Anglian period. This appears to have been the case at the Mount and Heworth Roman cemeteries.

There is little archaeological evidence that relates to this site in the Anglo-Scandinavian period prior to the construction of York Castle in the late eleventh century. However, the area is likely to have been extensively exploited as it is recorded in the Domesday Survey that the construction of the castle led to the destruction of one of the seven shires of the city. It is possible that the line of Nessgate continued across this area. This would have had buildings fronting onto it with tenements running back from the road

York Castle was first constructed in 1068 by William I. It was destroyed by the Danes in 1069 and the castle was duly rebuilt. It had extensive water defences.

York Castle enjoyed an extended life as a prison and courthouse complex. The present courthouse and prison buildings (the latter now the Castle Museum) were built between 1701 and 1780. These were augmented in 1826 by a large new prison building and battlemented perimeter wall; this prison was a large radial structure, which occupied the castle car-park area.

5.0 Methodology.

The watching brief involved the archaeological monitoring of three hand dug trenches excavated to accommodate a new manhole, a connecting drain pipe and to repair an existing, blocked drain. The locations of these trenches are shown on Figure 2. Additional very shallow trenches were excavated for other services, but as these did not penetrate the existing concrete floors, they were not treated as archaeological interventions.

Standard *On-Site Archaeology* procedures were followed throughout the watching brief. These involved the completion of a written description for each deposit, structure or cut encountered, along with plans and/or sections drawn to scale. A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained.

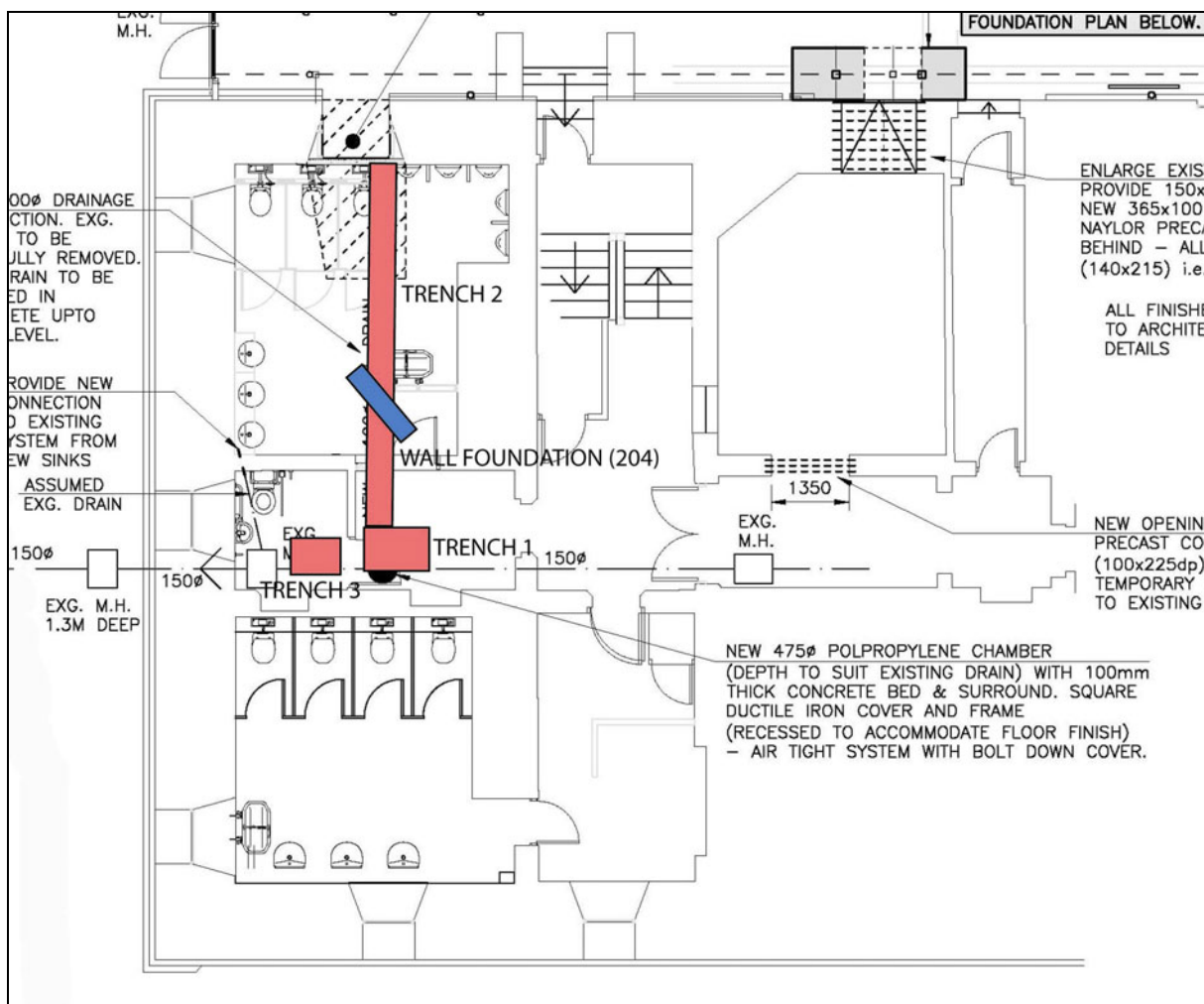


Figure 2. Plan of trenches monitored showing location of wall foundation (204)

6.0 Results.

Trench 1.

This trench was excavated for the construction of a new manhole, to link into an existing drain pipe. The trench was a maximum of 1.00m x 0.70m in plan and 0.85m deep. It was excavated almost entirely within the backfill of the existing drain trench (Plate 1), although the earlier sequence of deposits was revealed in the side of the pipe trench cut and this was recorded.

The earliest deposit encountered was a firm mid reddish brown silty clay (104), which contained occasional small pebbles and fragments of animal bone, but no other inclusions or datable artefacts (Plate 2). This deposit was recorded from the base of the trench, with a maximum thickness of 0.75m, so its upper surface was recorded at a depth of only 0.10m below the modern ground level. It was sealed by a thin (0.05m) layer of loose, pale yellow sand (103), which formed a bedding layer for the flagged floor (100) within this room. Although the floor appeared to be a single continuous layer it had clearly been lifted at some point in the recent past for the insertion of the existing drain (101)/[102]. The drain clearly cut the floor bedding layer (103) and its backfill was sealed by the stone flags. The existing drain is a 9-inch plastic pipe and therefore dates to the later 20th century.

Trench 2.

This trench was excavated for the laying of a new drain pipe between the new manhole (see Trench 1 above) and an existing manhole to the northeast. The trench was approximately 7m long, 0.40m wide and 0.60m deep.

The earliest archaeological features recorded were only exposed in the base of the trench, at a depth of 0.60m below the modern ground level. These comprised a possible occupation layer and a wall foundation (see Figure 2 for the location of this foundation). The foundation (204) consisted of unbonded, rough limestone rubble, a maximum of 200mm across. This appeared to cross the full width of the trench on an approximately north south alignment (Plate 3). To either side of the foundation was a layer of mid reddish brown sandy silt (203) containing flecks of mortar and charcoal.

The foundation and associated deposit were sealed by a 0.40m thick layer of mid reddish brown sandy clay silt (202). This was sealed by 0.10m of coarse sand and brick rubble (201) that formed the make-up for the current 0.10m thick concrete floor (200).

Trench 3.

This trench was excavated within the baby changing room in order to repair an existing drain. The trench was 1.10m x 0.70m in plan and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.90m. The northwestern part of the trench was entirely occupied by an earlier manhole and deposits associated with its construction, whilst the northeastern part of the trench was occupied by the

existing blocked drain. A sequence of earlier deposits was recorded in the southwest edge of the trench (Plate 4).

The earliest deposit recorded was a dark reddish brown clay with occasional flecks of charcoal (306), which was a total of 0.30m thick and extended below the basal limit of excavation. This was sealed by 0.40m thickness of dark brown clay sand silt (305) with occasional small pebbles and flecks of charcoal. This deposit survived to within 0.20m of the modern floor surface from which level the extant brick manhole (304) had been constructed. The manhole and drain backfill (303) were sealed by the bedding (302) for the current stone flagged floor (301).

7.0 Discussion and Conclusions.

All of the trenches revealed a comparable sequence of archaeological deposits, although due to the lack of any artefacts it is not possible to confirm the degree of contemporaneity of these deposits. The thick homogenous soil deposits found in all three of the trenches do not appear to represent deposition within the Debtors' Prison, within which the trenches are all located. Therefore they must pre-date its construction at the start of the 18th century. These deposits therefore are likely to represent dumping or garden soils within the pre-18th century castle.

Trench 2 also revealed remains that pre-date this soil horizon. The wall foundation is of particular interest, as its alignment is clearly different to the organisation of the castle buildings at the start of the 18th century. Although only a very small segment of the foundation was exposed it is likely to represent a building within the castle, either dating to the medieval, or post-medieval period. The lack of any dating evidence again precludes more conclusive interpretation. It is significant to note that the remains of buildings pre-dating the early 18th century survive within 0.60m of the current internal floor level. Any future intrusive groundworks, of similarly shallow depth, either within the castle or in the immediate vicinity may therefore expose further remains.

All of the deposits and features post-dating the archaeological deposits clearly relate to the interior of the castle in its current layout, either representing 20th century drainage (in Trenches 1 and 3) or the most recent floor surfaces (in all three trenches).

6.0 Bibliography.

English Heritage (1992). Extract from English Heritage's Record of Scheduled Monuments
York Castle: motte and bailey castle, tower keep castle (including Clifford's Tower),
and site of part of Romano-British fort-vicus and Anglian cemetery.

On-Site Archaeology (2010). York Castle Museum Concourse. Method Statement for an
Archaeological Investigation

8.0 Appendix 1 ~ List of Contexts.

Context no.	Description	Thickness
Trench 1		
100	Flagged floor	0.05m
101	Loose brick and limestone rubble and sand with a 9 inch plastic pipe	0.80m+
102	Vertically sided service trench cut	0.80m+
103	Loose pale yellow sand	0.05m
104	Firm mid reddish brown silty clay	0.75m
Trench 2		
200	Concrete floor	0.10m
201	Coarse sand and rubble make-up	0.10m
202	mid reddish brown sandy clay silt (loam)	0.40m
203	mid reddish brown sandy silt	?
204	Rough limestone rubble n-s wall foundation	?
Trench 3		
301	Flagged floor	0.10m
302	Loose cinder bedding	0.10m
303	Dark brown clay sand silt (manhole backfill)	0.70m+
304	Brick manhole	0.80m+
305	Dark reddish brown sandy clay silt	0.40m
306	Dark reddish brown clay silt	0.30m

9.0 Appendix 2 ~ Archive Index.

9.1 Drawing Register.

Drawing no.	Description	Scale	Initials	Date
1	Trench 1 sketch plan	NTS	GB	070410
2	Trench 1 sketch section	NTS	GB	070410
3	Trench 2 sketch plan	NTS	TPR	090410
4	Trench 3 sketch plan	NTS	BMC	110510
5	Trench 3 sketch section	NTS	BMC	110510

9.2 Photographic Register.

Frame no.	Description	View	Scale	Initials and date
Digital download 070410				
1-3	Tr 1 following lifting of floor	SE	0.5m	GB 070410
4-7	Tr 1 following lifting of floor	NW	0.5m	GB 070410
8-18	Tr 1, fully excavated	NW	0.5m	GB 070410
19-26	Tr 1, fully excavated	SW	0.5m	GB 070410
Digital download 090410				
1-4	Tr 2, foundation 204	NE	-	TPR 090410
5-8	Tr 2, foundation 204	SW	-	TPR 090410
9-14	Tr 2, foundation 204	NE	-	TPR 090410
15-19	Tr 2 with pipe laid	various	-	TPR 090410
Digital download 110510				

1	Location shot of toilet door	-	-	BMC 110510
2-3	Tr 3, general view	NW	0.5m	BMC 110510
4	Tr 3	NW	0.5m	BMC 110510
5-7	Tr 3	SW	0.5m	BMC 110510
8-9	Tr 3	SE	0.5m	BMC 110510

10.0 Appendix 3 ~ Plates.

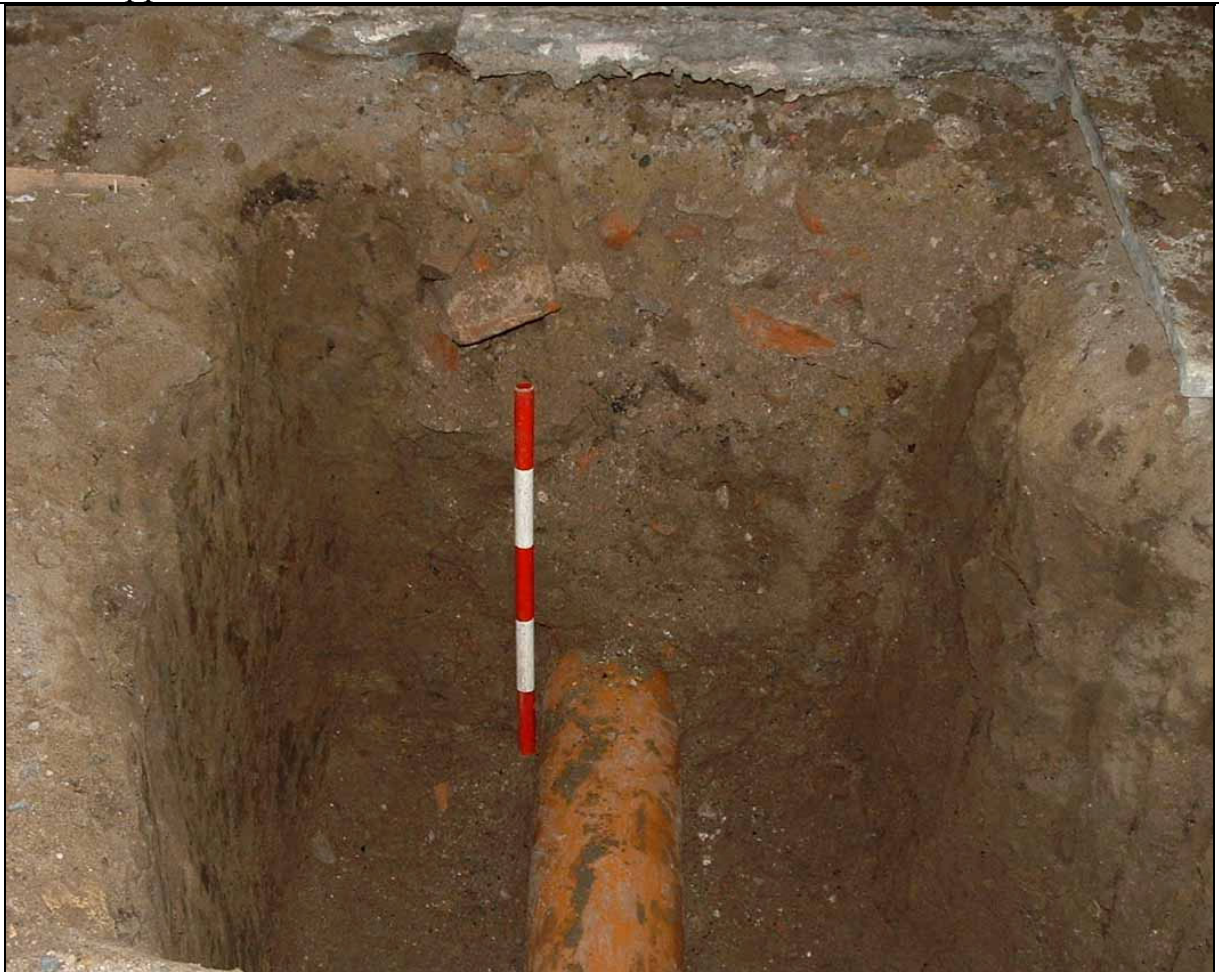


Plate 1. Trench 1, looking northwest



Plate 2. Trench 1, deposit (104) looking southwest



Plate 3. Trench 2, foundation (204)



Plate 4. Trench 3, looking southwest