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Archaeological Watching Brief

BRIGHT STEELS

NORTON

An Archaeological Watching Brief at Bright Steels, Norton, North Yorkshire.

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Figure 1. Site Location, Scale 1:2500.

Introduction

This report sets out the results of an archaeological Watching Brief on groundworks carried out during the extension of a factory building at Bright Steels, Wood Street, Norton-on-Derwent, North Yorkshire (SE 79567131).

Attention had been drawn to the archaeological significance of the site through Planning Control by the Archaeology Section of North Yorkshire County Council. The archaeological significance of the site lies in its location adjacent to the assumed line of the Norton to Settrington Roman road, and within a more general area of Romano-British activity (described and discussed below). Accordingly a Watching Brief condition was put on the site, with MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. being contacted by Bright Steels to carry out the necessary archaeological work.

The site lay in an open space, formerly occupied by a terrace of cottages, surrounded by Bright Steels' workshops to the east south and west, and bounded by Wood Street to the north. The underlying natural deposits were glacial sands and gravels. The site was level with the existing ground surface at c.24.6m AOD.

Observation, recording and excavation was carried out by the writer (M R Stephens) in April-May 1994. Thanks are due to the contractor, A & D Sturdy for their help and cooperation, and to P A Ware for comments on the Romano-British pottery. All work was funded by Bright Steels Ltd.

Figure 1 was produced under licence from the Ordnance Survey, under licence number AL 50453A, with permission from the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, (c) Crown Copyright.

Methods

Each of the trenches, which comprised twelve stanchion pits, two foundation trenches and a machine pit, were excavated in a series of spits under close archaeological supervision by a JCB excavator using a toothless bucket on the rear actor. Sections and plans were drawn where necessary, and a photographic and written record compiled.

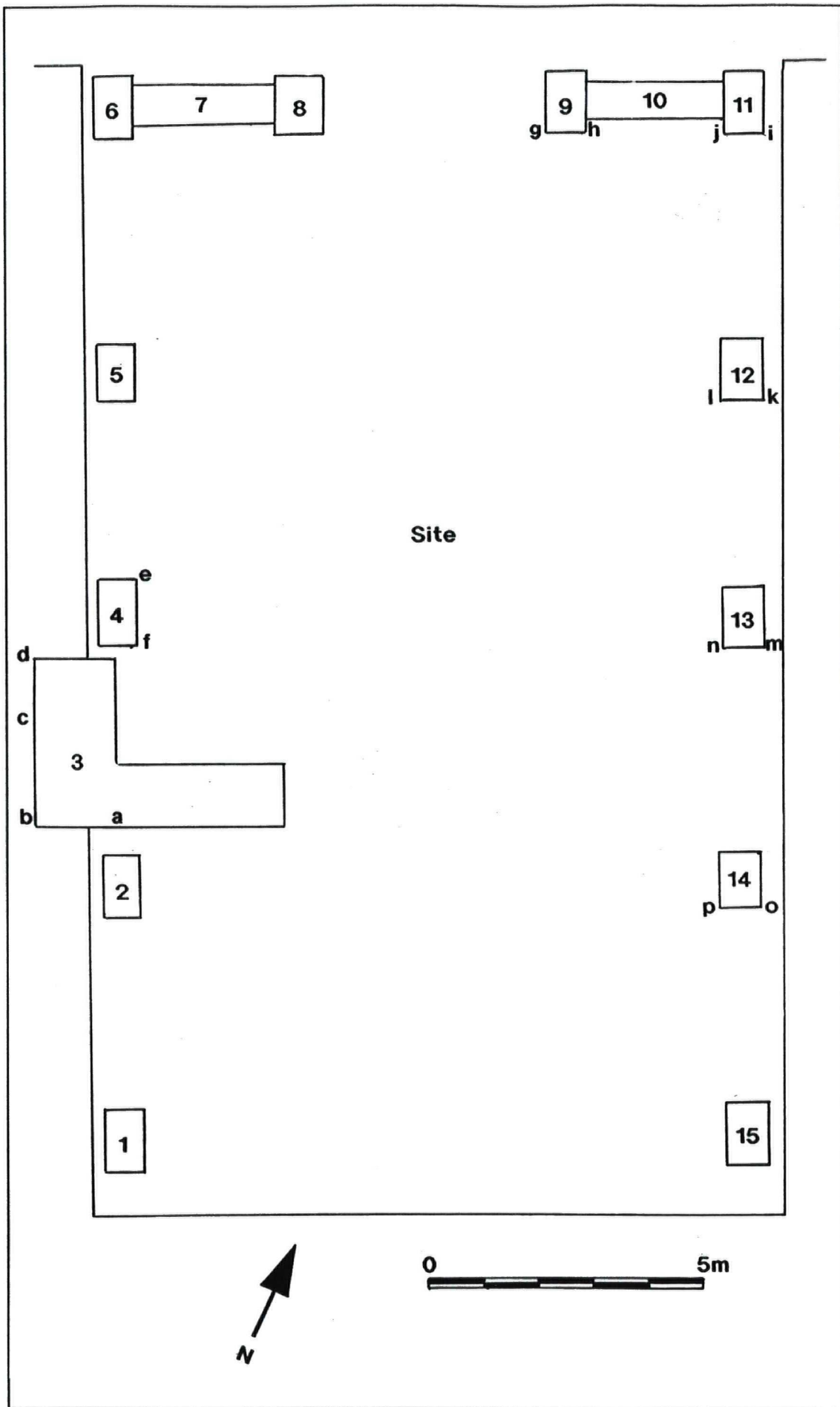


Figure 2. Plan of Trenches. Scale 1:100.

Results

A recent topsoil, context 1, was removed from the southern part of the site by machine. This area equates with the gardens of cottages shown on the OS 6" and 1:2500 maps, which were constructed in the second half of the last century and demolished c.1975. Context 1 was absent from the northern part of the site, ie. the area which had been occupied by the former buildings. The shallow footings of the cottages were cut into a 0.5m deep layer of yellowish-brown sandy silt, context 2, but crucially did not penetrate through the base of the layer to affect the archaeological deposits beneath. Context 2 was continuous across the entire site, and contained sherds of the Romano-British and post-medieval periods (Appendix 1).

Of the fifteen excavated trenches, nine showed archaeological deposits, trenches 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

Trench 3 (Figs. 2 and 3)

Trench 3 was L-shaped in plan. The western part of the trench measured 1.75m x 2.5m in size, and was excavated to depth of 1.1m below the finished level. The eastern part was 2.5m x 1.2m in size and was excavated to depth of 0.5m below the finished level, ie. not deep enough to reach archaeological deposits.

A feature, cut 33, was present along the western part of the trench. This feature was at least 2m in length from north to south, and was 0.4m deep with a steep-sided profile. The fill was an homogeneous dark greyish-brown sandy silt, context 32, which contained two sherds of Romano-British pottery, one each of greyware and calcite-gritted ware (Appendix 1). Context 32 was cut away along its northern side by a linear feature, cut 31 (see below). As only a 0.20m wide strip of this feature was present in the excavated area, interpretation of it is difficult; the feature could represent a pit or a linear feature.

1.5m west of cut 33, the fills of a north-south aligned ditch, cut 27, were cut by a later ditch on a similar alignment, cut 26. The lowest observed fill of cut 27, context 22, was a deposit of brown silty sand, with the fill above consisting of paler silty sand, context 21. There were no finds.

Ditch cut 26 cut into context 21 on the feature's western side. The ditch was 1.1m wide at the top, and 0.85m deep. The profile was V-shaped, with the edges falling at c.60 degrees towards the base, which lay beneath the excavated level. The lowest fill, context 20, was a brown silty sand which contained a single calcite-gritted sherd (Appendix 1). Context 19 overlay 20 and consisted of dark yellowish brown silty sand with small gravel inclusions. A stone-free deposit of similar silty sand, context 18, overlay 19, and contained a rim sherd from a late 3rd century Crambeck greyware jar (Appendix 1). The uppermost observed fill, context 17, was a very dark greyish-brown sandy silt, which was truncated by a modern cut dug to receive concrete for a floor. Context 17 was cut by the east-west ditch, cut 31.

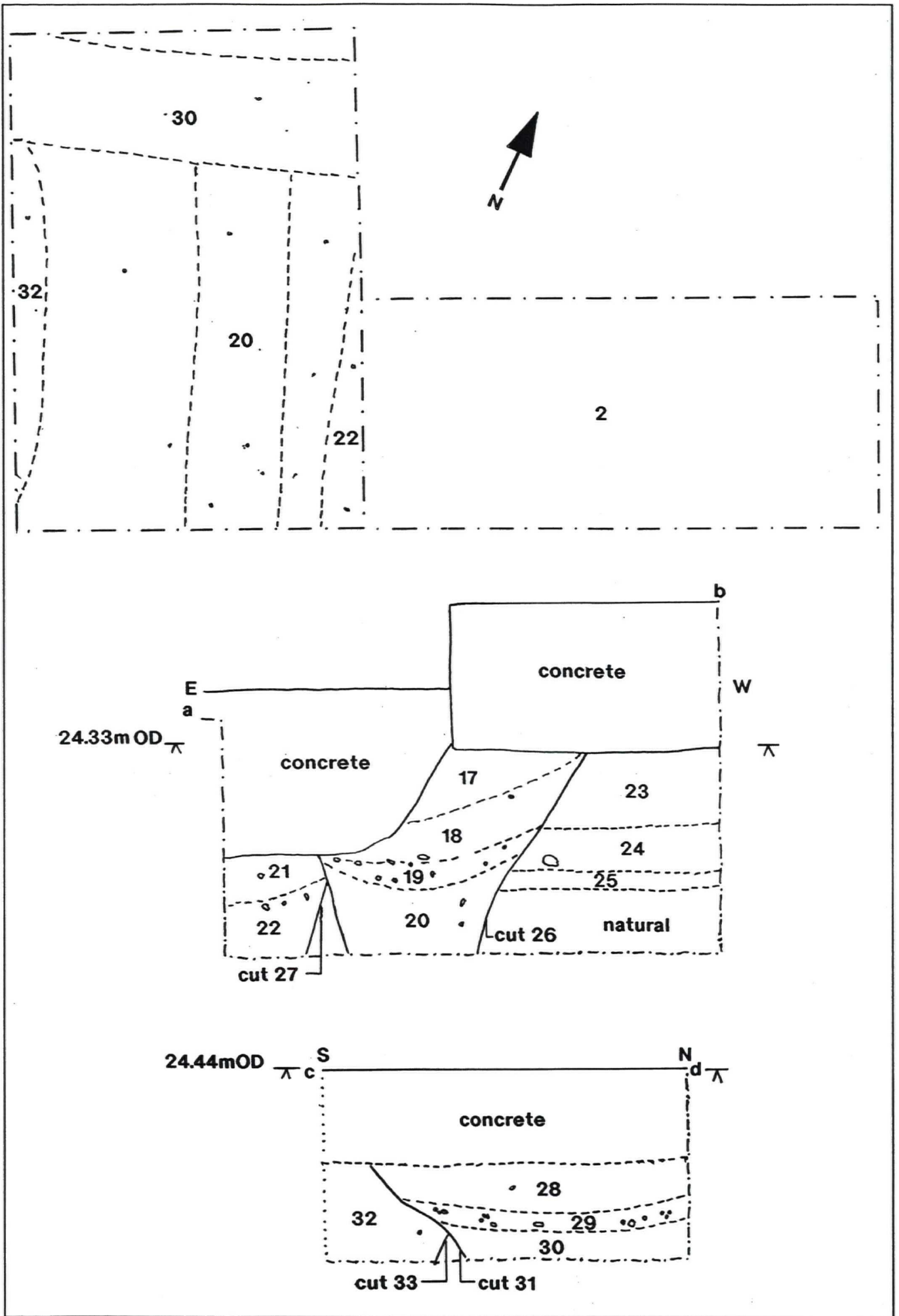


Figure 3. Plan and Sections of Trench 3. Scale 1:20.

On its western side, ditch cut 26 cut through three separate deposits, contexts 23, 24 and 25. The earliest of these contexts was context 25, a brown silty sand, c.0.07m in depth. Context 24 overlay 25 and consisted of yellowish brown silty sand to a depth of 0.16m, containing a base sherd of a late 2nd / early 3rd century jar (Appendix 1). A 0.32m deep layer of brown sandy silt, context 23, overlay 24 in turn.

The east-west ditch cut 31 was 1.5m wide at the top. The profile was slightly stepped along the southern edge; the top of the northern edge and the base were not visible in the excavated area. The lowest observed fill was a brown silty sand, context 30. Context 29, a dark yellowish brown sandy silt with frequent gravel inclusions overlay 30, with similar, but largely stone-free, material situated above.

The excavation of Trench 3 therefore showed that a pit-like feature, cut 33, had been cut by a later ditch, cut 31. Two earlier ditches, cut 27 and its probable re-cut 26, were at c.90 degrees to the east-west alignment of cut 30. A considerable amount of earlier activity is suggested by the deposition of contexts 23, 24 and 25, all earlier than cut 26, and which can be tentatively dated by pottery found within 24 to the late 2nd / early 3rd century .

Trench 4 (Figs. 2 and 4)

Trench 4 was situated c.1m north of Trench 3, and measured 1.7m north-south and 0.8m east-west. The trench was 0.6m deep and showed four archaeological deposits. The lowest deposit was a dark brown silty sand, context 9; finds from this context comprised sherds and animal bone. Context 8 overlay 9 and comprised a 0.14m deep deposit of yellowish brown sandy silt with limestone rubble inclusions. Context 7, a deposit of brown sandy silt of similar depth was above 8. 7 was overlain by dark greyish brown sandy silt, context 2.

It is likely that the deposits revealed in this trench represent the upper fills of one of the north-south ditches observed in Trench 3, and presumably the latest example. However, the shallowness of this trench, compared to that of Trench 3, makes further interpretation difficult.

Trench 9 (Figs 2 and 4)

Trench 9 was situated at the northern edge of the site and measured approximately 1.3m x 0.7m. The excavation of Trench 9 showed the presence of a number of archaeological deposits.

The earliest deposit was a layer of yellowish brown sandy silt, context 9. Context 12 overlay 9, and consisted of a 0.10m deep layer of yellow silty clay with occasional oolitic limestone fragments. Context 2 covered 12.

Other than stating that contexts 12 and 13 represent Romano-British activity, interpretation of the deposits in Trench 9 is problematic. However, context 7 would appear to equate to the probable road surface observed more clearly in Trenches 10 and 11.

Trench 10 (Figs. 2 and 4)

Trench 10 was a foundation trench 0.6m wide and 2.2m long east-west, and was contiguous with Trench 9. Excavation in this trench involved the removal of context 2 at which point contexts 15 and 16 became visible. Context 15 consisted of closely-packed rounded flint and limestone gravel (2-10 cm in diameter) in a matrix of dark yellowish brown silty clay. Context 15 contained five pottery sherds, including single sherds of decorated samian and colour-coated ware (Appendix 1).

Context 15 was not continuous over the entire extent of the trench, for a deposit of largely stone-free fine sandy silt, context 16, was present in the north-east corner of the trench.

Context 15 would appear to be represent a road or yard surface. Similar material to context 16 was seen to lie below the pebble surface in Trench 11 adjacent to Trench 10 on the eastern side; it is therefore likely that the south-west margin of 16 represents the intended north-west edge of the pebble surface.

Trench 11

Observations in Trench 11 reflected those of the adjacent Trench 10. Contexts 15 and 16 were common to both trenches and were therefore assigned the same context numbers. In this trench, context 16 existed as a deposit of dark yellowish brown fine sandy silt, at least 0.20m deep, and was clearly shown to lie below 15. In Trench 11, context 15 was a 0.1m deep deposit of closely packed oolite and flint gravel. Context 14 overlay 15, and comprised yellowish silty clay with a depth of 0.12m. 14 was covered by context 2.

Trenches 12, 13 and 14 (Figs. 2 and 4)

Trenches 12, 13 and 14 were situated in the south-east part of the site. The trenches were approximately 1.3m long north to south. Trench 12 was c.0.9m in width; Trench 13 c.1.0m and Trench 14 c.0.75m. The stratigraphy of the three trenches was broadly similar, therefore the trenches will be considered together.

The base of Trench 13 was occupied by a deposit of (?natural) reddish-brown silty sand, context 11.

A deposit of oolitic limestone rubble was present in the bases of Trenches 12 (context 6) and 14 (context 4) and above context 11 in Trench 14 (context 10).

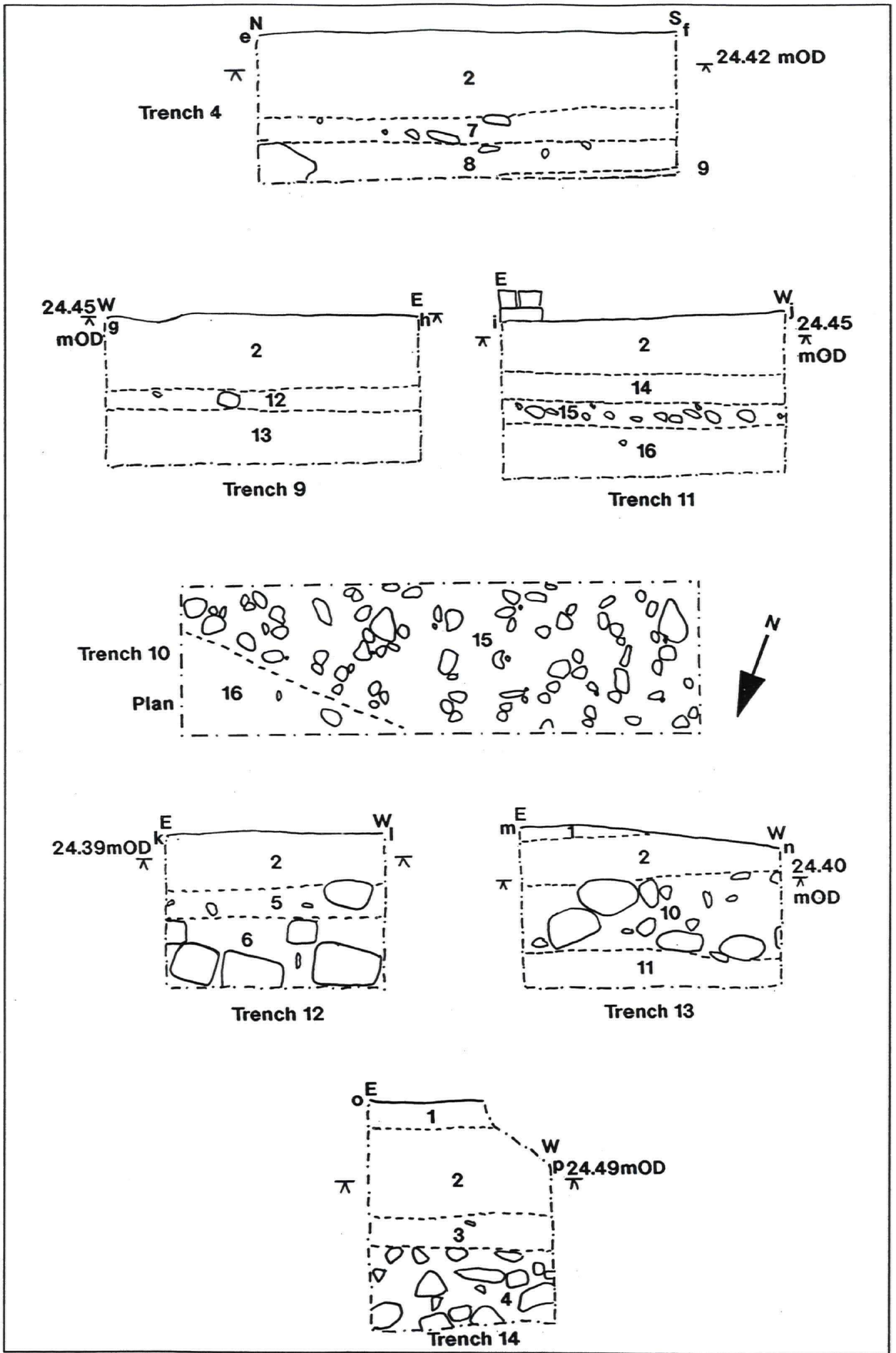


Figure 4. Sections of Trenches 4, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14; Plan of Trench 10. Scale 1:20.

Context 4 contained ten Romano-British sherds, ranging in date from the 1st to the third centuries. Context 6 contained two Romano-British greyware sherds. The rubble deposits were at least 0.35m deep and consisted of fairly closely packed limestones up to 0.25 x 0.20 x 0.15m in size.

In Trenches 12 and 14 the rubble was overlain by a 0.15m deep deposit of yellowish brown silty sand (context 5 in Trench 12; context 3 in Trench 14). Context 2 overlay contexts 3 and 5, and the limestone rubble (context 10) in Trench 13.

The rubble deposits, contexts 4, 6 and 10 would appear to represent the bases or floors of one or more Romano-British buildings (discussed more fully below). It is likely that the rubble deposits observed in the three trenches are segments of the same contiguous deposit, which would give a north-south length of at least 11m.

Discussion and Conclusions

It can be seen from the results of the Watching Brief that three different categories of feature were revealed at Bright Steels: a gravel/small stone surface, oolitic rubble deposits and cut features, ie. ditches and a possible pit.

The gravel/stone surface observed in Trenches 10 and 11 (context 15) exactly coincided with the line of the Malton to Settrington Roman road sketched onto R H Hayes' 6" map (Hayes 195-) and also with the published figure in Robinson (Robinson 1978, fig. 6d, no. 295). Hayes also encountered this road in Saw Mill Yard, Eastfield Estate and Norton Lodge Farm, all in the parish of Norton (Hayes 1988). The Saw Mill Yard and Eastfield sections contained amounts of limestone rubble in their make-up, whereas the Norton Lodge Farm section was composed largely of gravel. The gravel/stone surface observed at Bright Steels would seem to be comparable with the Saw Mill Yard and Eastfield sections of the Roman road in that it was composed of both gravel and larger limestone pieces. Notwithstanding that only a small expanse of the gravel/stone surface was revealed at Bright Steels, it would seem safe to equate it with the Norton to Settrington Roman road, and therefore confirm the published line for this road in the immediate vicinity of the corner of Wood Street and Beverley Road. From the small assemblage of pottery recovered, the road surface would appear to date from the late 1st / early 2nd century

The deposits of limestone rubble recorded in Trenches 12, 13 and 14 are comparable to similar features observed elsewhere in Norton, and interpreted as building bases or floors. A paved floor uncovered in the garden of St. Peter's vicarage, Langton Road, was 4.8m x 4.25m in size and assigned a 4th century date (Hayes, 1988, 89). Area A at the Eastfield site had a limestone paved 'floor' measuring 6m x 4.8m; drystone walls on the eastern and western margins strongly suggested that this surface formed the floor of a building (*ibid.* 66-8). Another Hayes' site, Howe Road, had a rough limestone paved area (Hayes and Whitley, 1950). Finally, oolitic paved surfaces were observed during a Watching Brief at Grove Cottage, Norton (Stephens, 1990).

Hayes interpreted the limestone surfaces as dwelling / building floors, and this interpretation seems entirely acceptable, especially where the surfaces were bounded by walls and covered by 'occupation' debris. Although no walls or occupation deposits were observed to be associated with the small expanses of limestone rubble surfacing at Bright Steels, it would remain reasonable to interpret them as floors for dwellings or other structures. Little dating evidence was recovered from the Watching Brief; 1st / 3rd century sherds were recovered from context 6, implying a date in or after the 3rd century for the deposition of the rubble surface in Trench 12.

The cut features encountered in Trench 3 seemingly represent a phase of north-south aligned boundaries that were cut into earlier deposits and later replaced by a ditch on an east-west alignment. The pit-like feature, cut 33, contained 2nd / 3rd century sherds. The latest of the two north-south ditches contained a late 3rd century sherd, and 2nd / 3rd century sherds were recovered from one of the deposits

that it cut through. Although no datable material was found in the east-west ditch, it presumably was cut after the 3rd century.

To summarise, the findings of the Watching Brief at Bright Steels confirmed the location of the Norton to Settrington Roman road and strongly suggested the presence of a building or buildings to the south of the road. Ditches on the western part of the site, probably datable to the 3rd century, superseded, earlier, apparently 2nd century, activity, which had taken the form of a possible pit and the build-up of several deposits. The post-Roman history of the site involved the accumulation of a colluvial layer (context 2), followed by the construction of a row of cottages in the 19th century, and ultimately the erection of the present factory extension.

The preservation of the Romano-British deposits was good, sealed as they were beneath the colluvial layer. This degree of preservation has implications for other sites in the area, for it can be assumed that Romano-British deposits may be well preserved where they have not been affected by later intrusions such as cellars.

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Appendix 1 – Finds Catalogue

Context No	Description
2	6 Norton Greyware sherds, incl. 1 early 2nd century jar rim 1 shallow dish rim sherd, ?Norton 3 R-B calcite gritted body sherds 3 Crambeck parchment ware sherds, incl. 1 4th century painted platter rim sherd 1 3-4th century Crambeck greyware flanged bowl rim sherd 2 Post-medieval sherds, incl. 1 rim 3 animal bone frags.
4	1 body sherd beaker, Rhenish import, 1st century 3 R-B calcite -gritted body sherds 1 R-B greyware body sherd 1 Black-burnished (BB1) jar rim sherd, 1st-2nd century 3 joining sherds, Crambeck greyware flanged bowl rim sherds 2nd-4th century 3 animal bone frags.
6	2 R-B greyware body sherds 3 animal bone frags.
15	1 decorated Samian body sherd, Central Gaul, late 1st-early 2nd century 1 colour-coated body sherd, ?southern source, early 2nd century 1 greyware miniature jar rim sherd, late 1st-early 2nd century 2 R-B greyware body sherds
18	1 Crambeck greyware jar rim sherd, late 3rd century
20	1 R-B calcite-gritted body sherds
24	1 Black-burnished (BB1) base sherd (formed into a lid) 1 Norton greyware body sherd 1 calcite-gritted body sherd
28	1 brick frag.
32	1 Norton greyware jar base sherd, 2nd-3rd century 1 body sherd, gritty greyware fabric, source ?Norton

Appendix 2 – Context List

Context No	Trench	Description
1	General	Modern topsoil; 10 YR 3/2, sandy silt
2	General	Colluvium; 10 YR 4/2, silty sand
3	14	Deposit; 10 YR 6/4, silty sand
4	14	Deposit; oolitic limestones, 10 YR 6/4 sandy silt matrix
5	12	Deposit; 10 YR 6/4, silty sand
6	12	Deposit; oolitic limestones, 10 YR 6/4 sandy silt matrix
7	4	Deposit; 10 YR 4/3 sandy silt
8	4	Deposit; 10 YR 5/4 sandy silt
9	4	Deposit; 7.5 YR 3/3 silty sand + limestone frags.
10	13	Deposit; oolitic limestones, 10 YR 6/4 sandy silt matrix
11	13	Deposit; 7.5 YR 3/3 silty sand
12	9	Deposit; 2.5 Y silty clay
13	9	Deposit; 10 YR 4/1 sandy silt
14	11	Deposit; 2.5 Y 5/3 silty clay
15	11	Deposit (?road surface); flint/oolite gravel, 10 YR 4/1 matrix
16	11	Deposit; 10 YR 5/3 fine sandy silt
17	3	Fill of 26; 10 YR 3/2 sandy silt
18	3	Fill of 26; 10 YR 4/4 silty sand
19	3	Fill of 26; 10 YR 4/4 silty sand + flint gravel
20	3	Fill of 26; 10 YR 4/3 silty sand
21	3	Fill of 27; 10 YR 3/3 silty sand
22	3	Fill of 27; 10 YR 4/3 silty sand
23	3	Deposit; 10 YR 3/3 sandy silt
24	3	Deposit; 10 YR 5/4 silty sand
25	3	Deposit; 7.5 YR 5/4 silty sand
26	3	North-south linear cut
27	3	North-south linear cut
28	3	Fill of 31; 10 YR 4/2 sandy silt
29	3	Fill of 31; 10 YR 4/2 sandy silt + limestone/flint gravel
30	3	Fill of 31; 10 YR 5/3 silty sand
31	3	East-west linear cut
32	3	Fill of 33; 10 YR 4/2 sandy silt
33	3	Cut (?pit)