

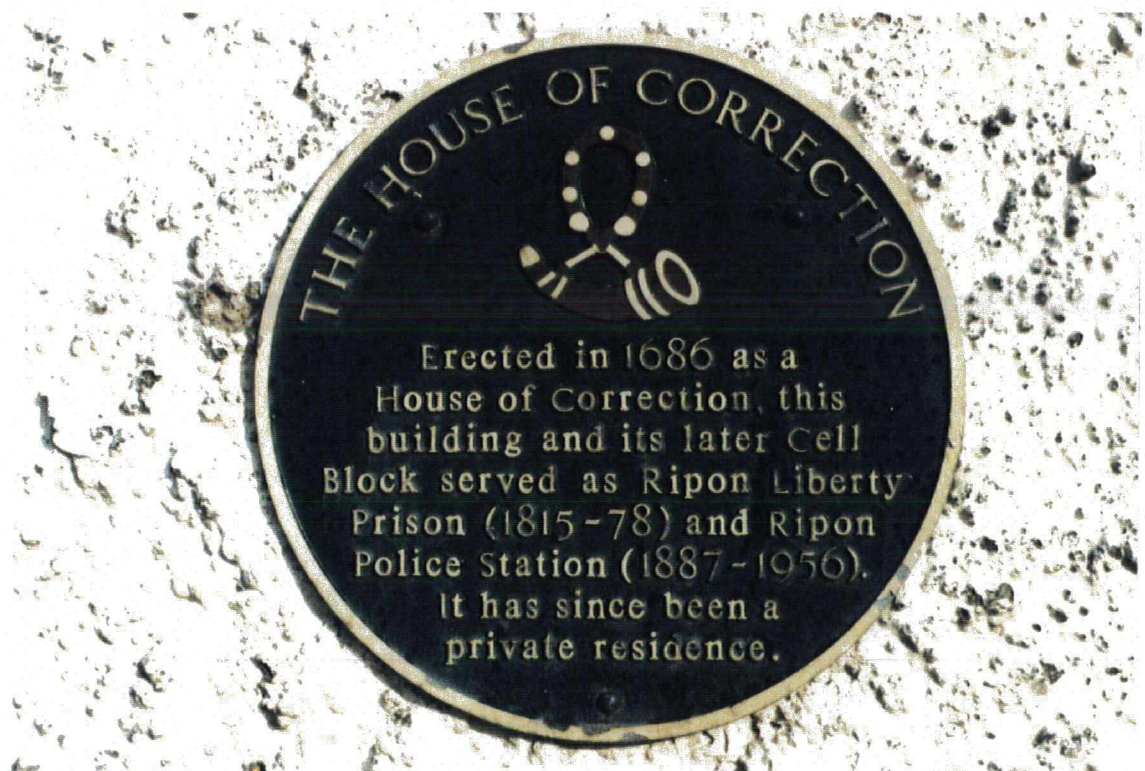
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NYCC HER	
SNY	11947
ENY	4164
CNY	
Parish	6031
Rec'd	17-06-94

MARCH 1994

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Kevin John Cale



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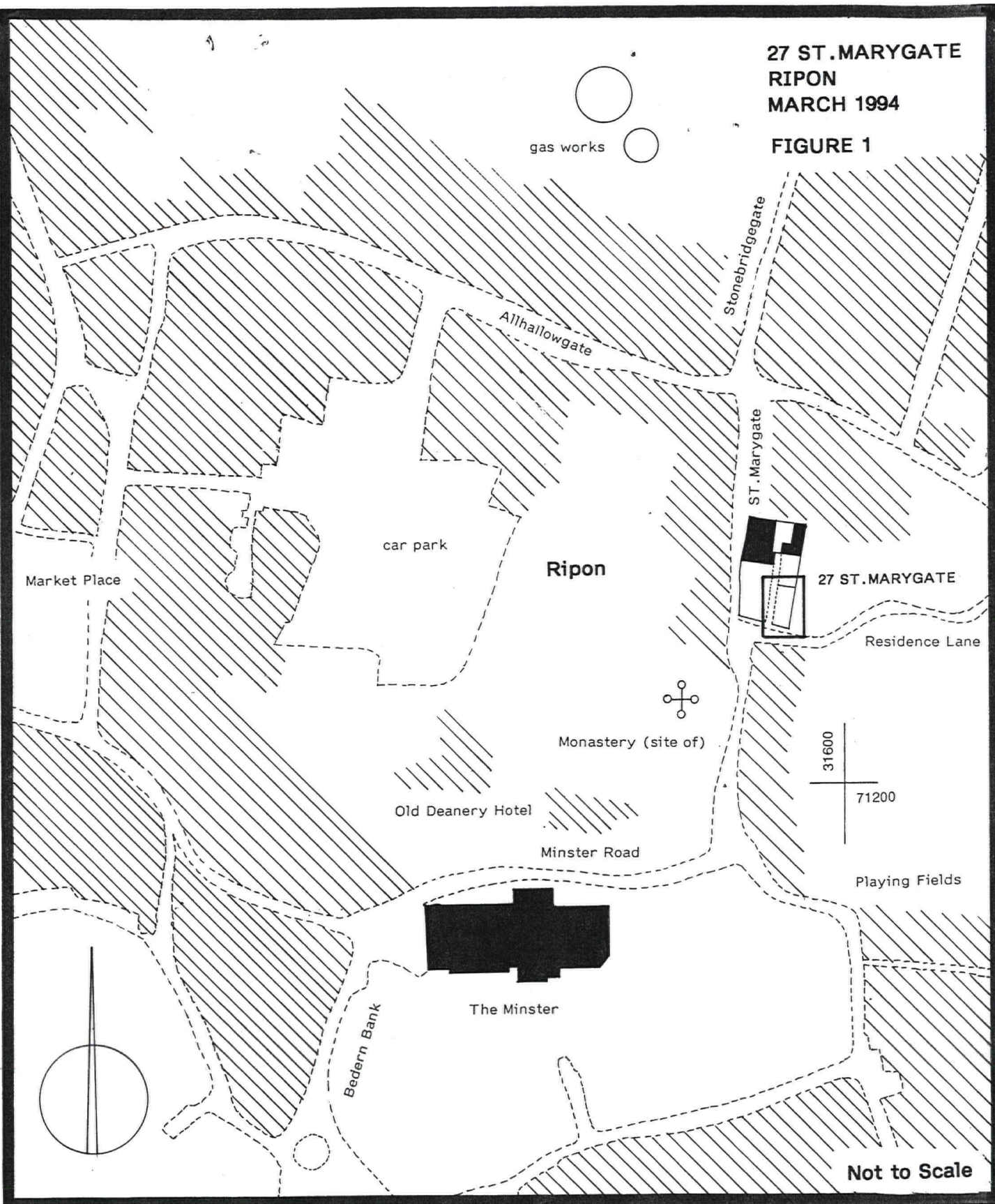
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SITE LOCATION PLAN



27 ST.MARYGATE
RIPON
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

MARCH 1994

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the excavation of a soakaway and foundation trench's that were located within the gardens of the House of Correction, 27 St.Marygate, Ripon. These works were undertaken in advance of the construction and replacement of a domestic garage.

The desk top study indicated that the gardens that were formerly the yard of the Old Prison and Police Station had a high potential to contain archaeological remains associated with the early medieval settlement within Ripon.

A site inspection prior to the commencement of works indicated that the gardens had been well cultivated and there was little indication of the sites former use, however it was noted that the fabric of the boundary wall to the property indicated that a number of outbuildings had at one time been keyed into the wall.

The watching brief was undertaken on Tuesday 8th March and was concluded on the same day, during which time a twenty three meters of trench were machine excavated.

The trench excavations revealed that the ground levels in the south eastern corner of the garden had been heavily disturbed. It was revealed that this disturbance was largely the result of the excavations made in advance of the construction of a modern, subterranean, concrete chamber, the area of which occupied up to a quarter of the entire footprint of the proposed garage. In those areas of the trench that had not been disturbed by the installation of this feature a number of buried walls and wall foundations were identified, these structures were 18th and 19th century in origin and are the remains of a yard wall and ancillary outbuildings associated with the former Police Station.

INTRODUCTION

In March 1994 Clive Ekin Building Services instructed Kevin John Cale, Archaeological Consultant, to maintain an archaeological Watching Brief during the ground disturbance in advance of the construction of a garage.

Mr. N. Campling, Archaeological Officer, North Yorkshire County Council had informed Mr. Ekin in 1993 that due to the location of the proposed works it would be necessary to place an archaeological condition on the proposed ground disturbance and as such it was recommended that a watching brief provision should be maintained throughout the trench excavation.

These works were undertaken in order to replace and enlarge an existing garage which occupies the same site, this prefabricated structure had been constructed on a concrete raft within the south eastern corner of the walled gardens.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction and Background History

Ripon is one of the earliest documented towns in North Yorkshire and with its Saxon monastery and pre-Conquest urban traditions it is of regional, if not national, importance. Bede records that in c.657 a monastery was founded here by Eata and was granted 30 households which were already in existence. The origins of the settlement at Ripon may date back to the 5th Century or even earlier into the Roman period, though evidence for Roman occupation is sketchy. Eata's foundation was re-established by Wilfrid in c.670, who built at least one church, possibly two, and accompanying ecclesiastical buildings in Ripon which formed the basis of the later medieval religious centre in the town.

The lay settlement at Ripon seems to have flourished in the Saxon period, and traditionally Ripon was granted municipal rights and privileges in 886. The post-Conquest town expanded also and became the centre of a thriving woollen industry in the medieval period.

Saxon and Medieval Settlement

The position of the settlement mentioned by Bede is not known, nor is the site of the earliest monastic establishment fixed with any certainty. The crypt of the present Minster is of the Saxon period, and is generally regarded as being a surviving part of Wilfrid's church. However, the site of Ladykirk, on St Marygate to the north of the Minster, also has very early associations and it has been postulated that either Eata's or Wilfrid's, or even both, monasteries were here. The Chapel of St Mary, mentioned in 1228, may be the same as Ladykirk, and Leland in 1546 saw 'exceedingly ancient' work within the fabric of Ladykirk.

Excavations at the Old Deanery and Deanery Gardens, adjacent to the site of St Mary's Church, revealed medieval, possibly 12th Century, timber buildings as well as later structures and medieval inhumations, and also a demolition layer below medieval cobbles which contained a 7th Century brooch and may have been from a pre-Conquest structure. There have been numerous finds of Saxon material from Ripon, including coins, combs and cross fragments, and these are mainly concentrated in the area to the east and north of the present Minster.

A document of 1228 gives the crossroads of Stonebridgeway and Allhallowgate as the centre of the town of Ripon, before the development of the Market Place area. Stonebridgeway, also called Heregate, is referred to as a royal road, and seems to have been one of the most important streets of the early town.

Settlement was concentrated in the area north of the monastery precinct in St Marygate and Stonebridgeway and that this is likely to reflect the pre-Conquest area of settlement is backed up by the finds of pre-Conquest objects in the area.

Whether occupation continued uninterrupted in this part of the town throughout the medieval period is unknown. It is possible that as the new centre to the west around the Market Place was developed, the Stonebridgeway / St Marygate area became a backwater. There may then have been expansion back into the area in the 15th Century as the town developed with the growth of the woollen trade.

Previous Excavation

There have been a number of small scale excavations and numerous evaluations and watching briefs in the town, but unfortunately the publication record is not good and evidence of what has been found is rather sketchy.

A number of finds of prehistoric material are recorded from Ripon, but the precise location of most of these is unknown. There are also reported finds of Roman material, notably tesserae from Ailey Hill and from Ladykirk. No Roman structures are known, but it is possible that the settlement has its origins in the Roman period as a staging post or small civil settlement.

The most commonly recorded finds in Ripon are graves, all apparently Christian and associated with several different cemeteries. Ailey Hill, traditionally viewed as a barrow or motte, proved on excavation to be a natural mound but contained a number of burials. A gravel pit on Allhallowgate near the supposed site of a church contained numerous skeletons, one interred with a cross. There were burials under the site of Morrisons supermarket, located to the immediate east of the Market Place.

Excavations at Ladykirk in 1955 found part of a cemetery as well as a medieval tenement and 19th Century rubbish pits. A 1963 excavation further south near Low St Agnesgate revealed a continuation of the same cemetery and medieval structures dating from the 12th to the 15th Century.

The Old Deanery was excavated in 1975 and revealed more burials, associated with either the Minster or Ladykirk, with 12th century timber buildings and an early 14th Century stone building.

The Deanery Gardens nearby, excavated in 1978, also contained inhumations apparently from two different medieval cemeteries.

This site contains the best excavated evidence so far recorded for the pre-Conquest settlement, in the shape of the 7th Century brooch already referred to, found stratified in a layer of mortar and stone fragments which lay beneath a cobbled area which was in its turn cut by several medieval rubbish pits. The lower levels of the site contained no pottery which may in itself indicate a pre-Norman date, and the fact that some of the pits contained human skeletal material, presumably from earlier burials, this also suggests a long history for the site.

An evaluation and watching brief recently carried out at 6 Stonebridgeway revealed no significant features or deposits of archaeological interest. It would appear that this site had been subject to a high level of modern disturbance related to the demolition of 18th Century structures and the installation of a prefabricated office unit. It is suspected that the successive layers of sands that were underlying this demolition rubble had been brought onto the site in an attempt to make up the ground level in association with the 18th Century development.

27 St. Marygate

As discussed above, the area around the crossroads of Stonebridgeway and Allhallowgate may have been the pre-Conquest settlement area, and it is mentioned in the early medieval period as being the centre of the town. The focus of this settlement moved westwards when the Market Place was developed in the later medieval period, but there were a number of ecclesiastical foundations in the area, to north, south and west, and there was settlement here by the 15th Century.

The present structure occupying the site was erected in 1686 as the city's House of Correction, during the early 19th Century the building formed part of Ripon's Liberty Prison (1815 -78) and then during the later 19th Century functioning as Ripon Police Station and was maintained as such until 1956, and thereafter the property became a private residence with adjoining gardens.