

NYCC HER	
SNY	11971
ENY	4183
CNY	
Parish	5063
Rec'd	20/06/96

4/6 HIGH STREET  
SKIPTON  
NORTH YORKSHIRE  
SE 398994 451876

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

for

MR. & MRS. D. GOLDIE

FEBRUARY 1996

Kevin John Cale

May 1996

## **CONTENTS**

<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SITE DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF EXCAVATIONS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>38</b>

### LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	SITE LOCATION PLAN	4
FIGURE 2	THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKIPTON	7
FIGURE 3	SITE PLAN	12
FIGURE 4	PLAN OF 17TH & 18TH CENTURY BUILDING	32
FIGURE 5	DECORATED LATE MEDIEVAL SPINDLE WHORL	36

### LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

PLATE 1	General shot of the study area as viewed from Water Street	14
PLATE 2	Vertical shot of the drainage culvert, feature E	14
PLATE 3	The lower courses of a 17th century building and related cobble surface, features H and I	27
PLATE 4	A cobble yard surface with drainage culvert, feature D	27
PLATE 5	An 18th century wall, feature F	30
PLATE 6	An 18th century hearth, feature G	30

4/6 HIGH STREET  
SKIPTON  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

FEBRUARY 1996

SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the construction of an extension to a retail unit that fronts onto the northern extent of Skipton High Street.

The desk top study indicated that the area proposed for development had a high potential to contain archaeological remains associated with Skipton's early medieval defences.

The watching brief on the hand excavation of strip foundations revealed a stratified sequence of yard surfaces and facilities.

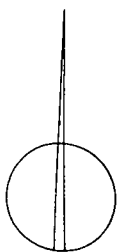
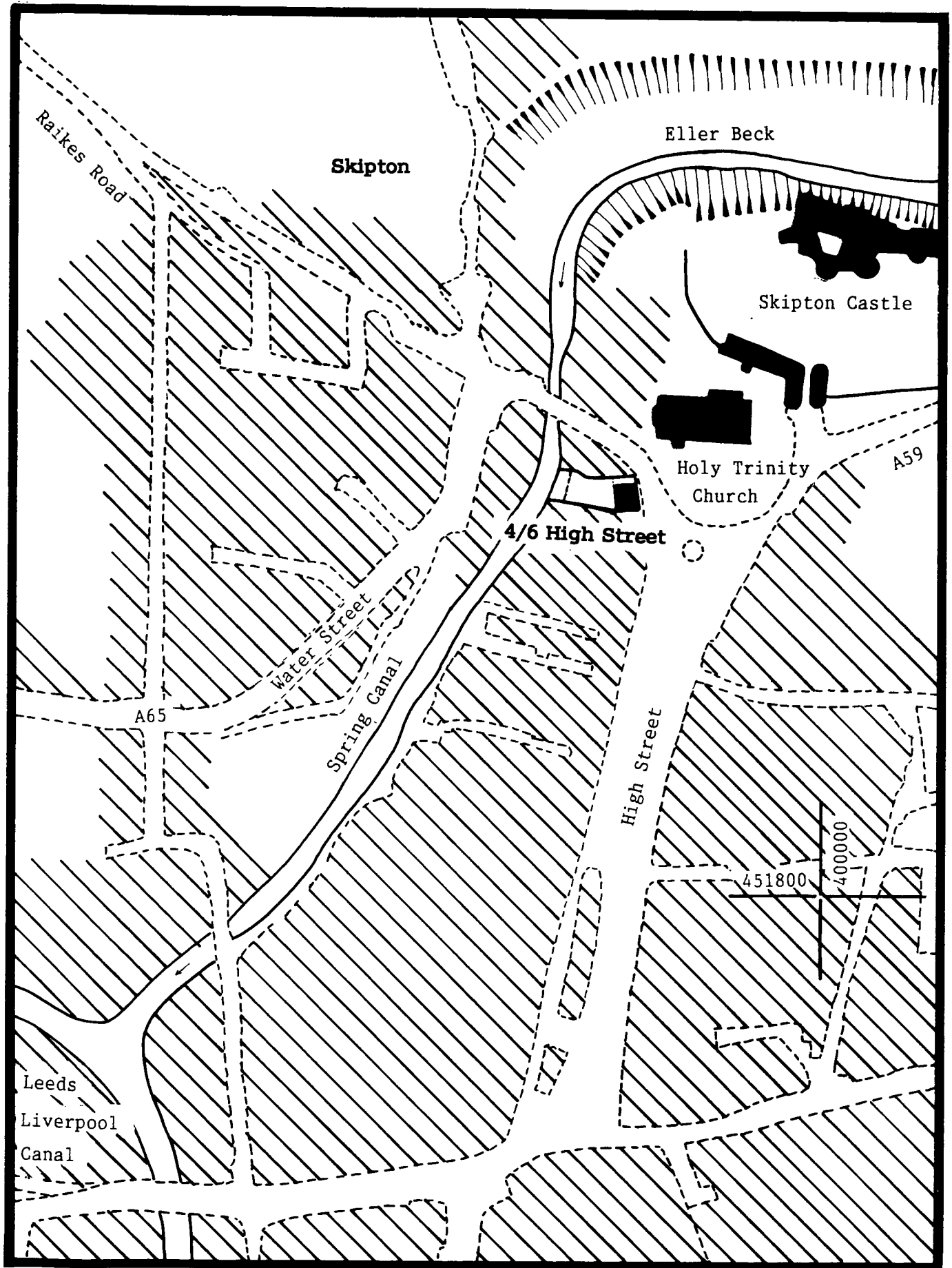
The earliest activity identified on the site dates to the late 17th century when the south western quadrant of the study area was occupied by a sandstone building and adjoining cobbled floor surface. The planform and situation of this structure would suggest that it continued into the adjacent yard area to the south, this would indicate that the size and shape of the property parcels to the rear of the street frontage have altered over time.

It would appear that this building was extant throughout the 18th century and various modifications were made to the structure prior to it's demolition during the early part of the 19th century.

Thereafter the site was landscaped and the ground levels within the study area were considerably raised, addressing the fall in slope. The nature of this overburden would indicate that it was redeposited sub soil and as such may well been associated with disposal of spoil from the excavation of the cellars beneath 4/6 High Street. The site was subsequently disturbed during the installation of services during the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century.

FIGURE 1

LOCATION PLAN



## **INTRODUCTION**

In February 1996 Mr.D.Goldie instructed Kevin John Cale, Archaeological Consultant to carry out an archaeological watching brief on ground disturbance associated with the construction of an extension to a retail unit, on a site situated to the rear of 4/6 High Street, Skipton, North Yorkshire.

The County Sites and Monuments Record contains no references to archaeological remains on or adjacent to the site of the proposed development. However, previous archaeological investigations undertaken within Skipton would suggest:-

- i. the likelihood for the preservation of stratified archaeology associated within the medieval and post medieval burghal plot's that were likely to have occupied the site.
- ii. that this property parcel is situated on the line of the early medieval civil defences.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **The Early Medieval Settlement:**

The earliest documentary references to Skipton appear within the Domesday Survey of 1086 where the settlement is recorded as Scipton. This confirms the presence of a small pre conquest anglo-scandinavian settlement, the place name a Scandinavian variant of the Anglo Saxon for sheep farm.

The exact site of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement has not been accurately established although archaeological evidence has leant support to the most suitable topographical location for this settlement on Skipton Rock i.e on the area of rising ground that is contained to the north and west by a natural ravine, a site that is presently occupied by the grounds of Skipton Castle and Holy Trinity Church.

### **The fortification:**

During the 11th and 12th century it would appear that the settlement began to prosper and develop largely as a result of the militarisation within the town this was dominated by the fortification of the Skipton Rock Site by the Romille family.

The size, form and nature of this fortified site is not known, however, it has been speculated that this may have initially taken the form of a timber or stone castle structure strategically located to benefit from the defensive and offensive advantages afforded by the Castle Rock site, to the south where the terrain does not lend itself naturally to fortification it is likely that this was improved by the construction of a large curvilinear ditch.

It has been suggested By D.Williams, Medieval Skipton, 1981 that the defended enclosure may have contained the site of the early civilian settlement of Skipton.

The ditchline has been the focus of previous archaeological excavation and research. A small section of the structure was excavated by H.Bates and it was revealed that this feature was a substantial earthwork measuring upto 9 metres wide and 2 metres deep with a flat based V shaped profile. A clay rampart bank was identified to the western side of the ditchline, it was revealed that the rampart supported a sequence of timber palisades and stone walls.

The structure has been approximately dated to the 12th century and remained extant into the late medieval period. The extent and line of the entire structure has not been accurately determined but it is suspected that it had a curvilinear planform and was situated to the immediate south of the existing perimeter walls of the combined churchyard and castle grounds. This configuration would project these defences into the study area.

**The church:**

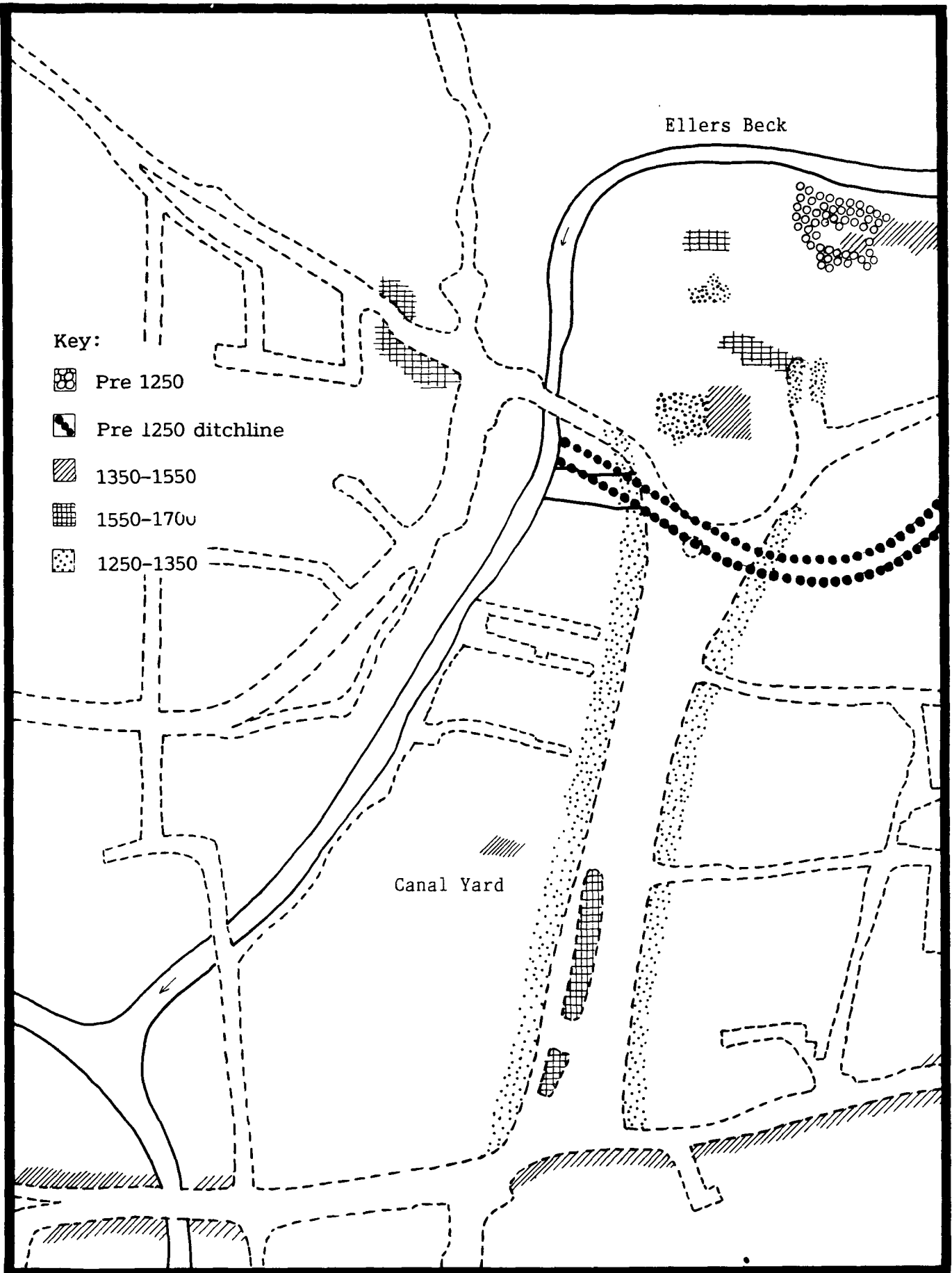
Holy Trinity church is situated within this defensive enclosure and as such also benefits from the elevation and conspicuous aspect. The earliest documentary references to the structure date to the early 12th century. The existing structure dates to the later medieval period and therefore the form, size and fabric of this early church can not be determined.

**The 13/14th Centuries:**

This was the period that resulted in the development of both the secular and the ecclesiastical aspects of the settlement, Skipton was referred to during this period as a borough, a title implying an improved constitutional position.

FIGURE 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKIPTON



Not to Scale

Based upon map within Medieval Skipton, D.Williams



### The Castle:

It was during this period that the castle was rebuilt in stone with an inner and outer bailey, the entire fortification was contained by a curtain wall. The strength and impregnability of this fortification was proven during the Scottish Incursions, during 1318 the Scots sacked the civilian settlement at Skipton but the Castle remained largely undamaged.

### The Church:

During the early 14th century a programme of works were undertaken on the Holy Trinity Church which involved the reconstruction in stone of the chancel, tower, together with the north and south aisles. The remains of this building work were identified during an archaeological watching brief in 1979 when the remains of timber site hut were exposed together with the remains of a more substantial structure that is suspected to have been the site of the vicarage.

### The Commercial Centre:

The growth of a commercial centre at Skipton resulted from the 13th century acquisition of the right to a weekly market and upto two fairs per year. This stimulation to trade and commerce within the settlement resulted in the deliberate layout of High Street which was designed with a dual function as a thoroughfare and as a market place. Archaeological Excavations within Canal Yard in 1975-76 confirmed a 13th century layout for the medieval burgage plots to the rear of those properties fronting the High Street.

It is likely that the existing property parcels to the rear of the street frontage date from this period, however, the street frontage itself has been largely redeveloped. Evidence of a timber framed medieval building, dating to this period, were exposed during renovations to the Red Lion Public House in the 1950's and during 1981. Observation of these works revealed that the initial building to occupy the site was set back from the existing street frontage.

### The Late Medieval Settlement:

During this period the settlement expanded rapidly as a result of stimulated trade and traffic generated by the market status of the town.

### The Castle:

During the late medieval period further building works were undertaken on the Castle but these were largely concerned with alterations and construction works to improve the domestic accommodation within the castle and it would appear that these were made at the expense of the maintenance on the military aspects of the structure.

### The Church:

During the late 15th century a further programme of works were undertaken on the Holy Trinity Church resulting in extending the structure and maintenance work.

### The Commercial Centre:

By the late medieval period the nucleated development around the High Street had been well established and whilst it would appear that this area of settlement continued to evolve with a number of the timber framed buildings being replaced by stone structures, ribbon development was taking place along the principal communication axis leading into the town such as Swadford Street and Newmarket Street. Further encroachments were made on the surrounding open field system.

## SITE DEVELOPMENT

Prior to the development of this site during the medieval period it is suspected that the site may have been traversed by a large, curvilinear ditch, the exact line of this early medieval structure has not been accurately determined but there is reason to believe that it's western extent terminated within the study area.

From the stratigraphic sequence of archaeological deposits identified during a programme of archaeological excavations on a similar property parcel at Canal Yard (D.Williams, 1975-6), a site that shares a similar situation and form, the following patterns of development can be suggested.

It is likely that the study area was developed during the medieval period as a burgage plot adjacent to the High Street, the eastern extent of these plots being occupied by large, timber framed properties. The yard area to the rear of these town houses would have supported a number of ancillary buildings such as a stable or barn, kitchens, latrines and a possible well with open cobble areas and cultivated gardens. It was noted by D.Williams that the outbuildings were separated from the house by a distinctive gap, it is likely that this was an intentional design feature in order to minimise the threat of fire spreading from the detached kitchens to the house.

Whilst it is likely that the planform of the medieval burgage plots were retained, the internal area of these sites continued to develop.

From the early cartographic sources of Skipton it would appear that during the early 19th century the yard area to the rear of 4/6 High was larger than the existing unit, with the southern boundary shifting to the south, and the north western boundary shifting to the north, during this period vehicular access could be afforded into the yard from the south east corner.

By the mid 19th century the yard area had contracted to it's present form, size and appearance.

#### **SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION**

The town of Skipton:

Skipton is situated within the suburban township of Skipton, on the confluence of a number of shallow valleys on the hinterland of the Pennine uplands.

The town is situated on the interface between the millstone grit geology of the uplands and the late glacial lake deposits of the low lying plain to the south east.

The market town is bisected by Eller Beck a minor tributary of the River Aire. The old town centre is situated on a prominent rise, approximately 114 metres above sea level, benefiting from a commanding aspect overlooking the flood plain of the River Aire. This area of rising ground is contained to the north and west by a steep sided wooded ravine, that channels Eller Beck.

The study area:

The study area is located on the western side of the High Street within close proximity to the site of Holy Trinity Parish Church and the grounds of Skipton Castle. The yard area is situated to the rear of a three storey, sandstone built, early 19th century town house, with a stone slate roof and twin brick stacks. The ground and first floors of this building are utilised as a commercial unit, presently occupied by Goldies Outfitters. The property is attached to properties of a similar period. Whilst the street frontages are 19th century in origin, it is evident that the adjoining yard areas and ancillary buildings are largely 18th century in origin. It is highly likely that these property parcels reflect the medieval lay-out of the town.

The yard:

The sub rectangular yard space, measures approximately 34 metres in length and 16 metres wide. The yard is contained to the east by the 4/6 High Street, to the north by a 2.2 metre high sandstone yard wall, to the west by a sandstone retaining wall adjacent to Spring Canal, to the south the yard is contained by a high sandstone wall that exceeds 4 metres in height, the western extent of this structure forms the gable elevation of a two-storey terrace of ancillary buildings known as Mount Pleasant and situated to the rear of 8 High Street.

The yard is accessed via a ground floor doorway within the west facing elevation of 4/6 High Street, and via a narrow covered walkway that affords pedestrian access from the High Street and runs adjacent to the northern elevation of the building.

The ground levels within the eastern and central areas of the existing yard slope on a very gentle gradient towards the west, at it's western extent the ground falls away steeply into the cutting of Spring Canal, the slope has been terraced and the west facing aspects of which are stone revetted.

The proposed development site is situated within the eastern extent of the yard.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The preliminary desk top study conducted by Ms.V.Fiorato, Deputy Archaeological Officer, North Yorkshire County Council indicated that the site had a high potential for the survival of archaeological remains. It was felt that the proposed development might disturb archaeological remains associated with the early medieval civil defences and the later medieval and post medieval burghal plots.

It was felt that there was a need to maintain an archaeological watching brief on ground disturbance in advance of this proposed development. The brief of works outlining the level of archaeological provision was recommended by the Deputy Archaeological Officer.

The watching brief condition made provision for an archaeologist to be present on site, to witness the excavation processes, allowing the archaeologist a reasonable length of time to satisfactorily record any archaeology encountered. By following this procedure it was hoped that information could be compiled to establish the presence or absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological features or deposits which might exist within the area affected by the proposed works. With the consent of the landowner a metal detector was to used to recover any artifacts from spoil.

Following the clearance of the site, the ground disturbance would fall into two phases:

i. The excavation of test holes

The initial phase of works would relate to the hand excavation of three small test holes situated adjacent to the base of the existing southern yard wall, these were excavated for the benefit of the Architect and Structural Engineer so as to determine the load-bearing properties of the sub soil.

ii. The excavation of the strip foundation trenches

The second phase of ground disturbance relates to the hand excavation of the strip foundation trenches, a total of four trenches were excavated within the eastern extent of the existing yard.

### SUMMARY OF EXCAVATIONS

#### The excavation of the test holes

The trial holes were excavated prior to the arrival on-site by the archaeologist, however, these excavations were left open for inspection.

A buried cobble yard surface (Feature A) was exposed within Trial Hole No.1 this structure butted to the lower courses of a buried, partially dismantled wall (Feature B). The cobble surface slightly post dates the wall but both are contemporaneous, both features pre date the foundations of the southern boundary wall of the existing yard, indicating that they had formed structural elements of a pre 1832 yard layout, unfortunately no stratified, datable finds were recovered from above or below these features.

No archaeological features were identified within Trial Hole No.2 it would appear that the deposits encountered within this test hole had been displaced during the construction of 19th century cellars beneath 4/6 High Street.

No archaeological features were identified within Trail Hole No.3.