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THE CROWN HOTEL, BOROUGHBIDGE

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
OSA REPORT No. 99EX01

National Grid Reference: SE 3962 6687

November 1999



OSA

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Report Summary

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PERIODS REPRESENTED: Medieval, Post-medieval, Modern.

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1.0 Abstract

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by On-Site Archaeology on behalf of Mr Richard Stables in the rear courtyard of the Crown Hotel, Boroughbridge. The excavation spanned the footprint of a proposed swimming pool intended to form part of a proposed leisure facility, and the work was undertaken to fulfil an archaeological condition attached to the planning application. The excavation commenced on 15th April 1999 and was completed on 7th May 1999. The aim of the excavation was to more fully examine the nature and sequence of any preserved archaeological deposits on the site which had previously been encountered during a small scale evaluation carried out in August of 1998.

A number of medieval features were encountered during the excavation, these comprising two ditches, which appeared to be parallel, and between them an alignment of post holes. It is assumed that these features represent medieval property boundaries. Above these remains were a number of post medieval dumps, pits and walls, possibly associated with the provision of stable accommodation.

The text of this report was prepared by David Tyler and the illustrations by Guy Hopkinson of On-Site Archaeology.

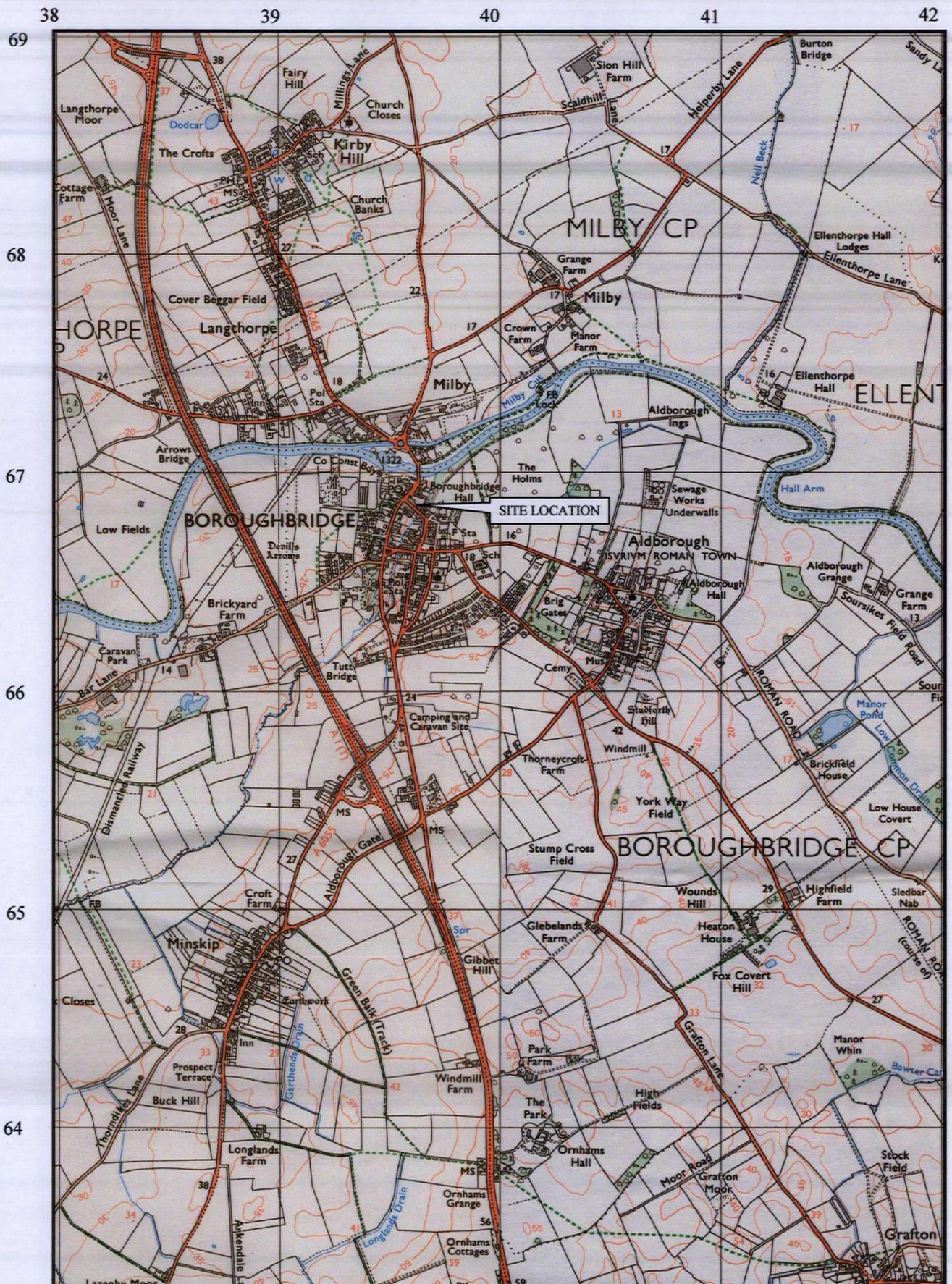


Figure 1. Site Location (NGR 3962 6687)

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2.0 Site Location, Geology, Topography and Land Use

2.1 Site Location

The site is located in the rear courtyard of the Crown Hotel (National Grid Reference SE 3962 6687) situated at the corner of Mynthurst and Fishergate in the centre of Boroughbridge (see Figure 1 for location). The site lies at approximately 14.40m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and is currently a garden courtyard and car park.

2.2 Geology

From the available information on the Geological Survey of England and Wales map (No. 62) the site is situated upon alluvium associated with the River Ure floodplain which overlies drift geology comprising silt and clay Glacial Lake Deposits. These deposits are founded upon a solid geology of the Sherwood Sandstone Group.

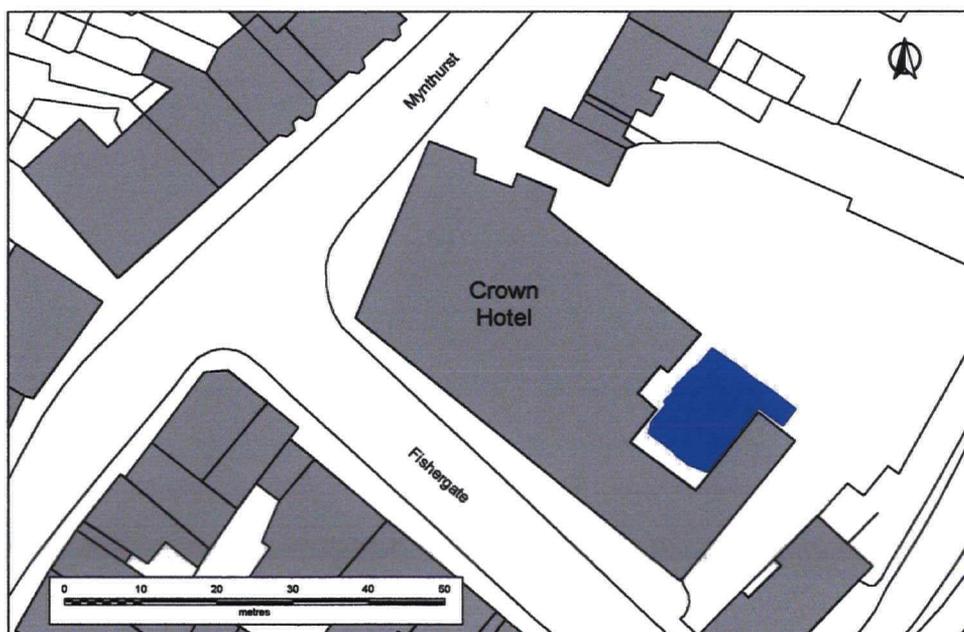


Figure 2. Trench Location (blue). Scale 1:1000.

3.0 Archaeological Background

3.1 *Archaeological Background*

The site is currently occupied by the Crown Hotel. This building has been developed and extended throughout the early modern period and given its location so close to one of the major north – south lines of communications on the eastern side of England, was no doubt a coaching inn of some importance in the past. A monumental fireplace of considerable antiquity still present within the Lounge Bar gives an insight into the status of the building. Remedial work in the 1970s uncovered structural remains which have been interpreted as indicating the presence of an earlier phase of buildings on the site, reputed to be that of a medieval manor house (Fiorato, *pers. comm.*). There is, however, no outstanding record as to the precise nature of the evidence that was uncovered at that time.

York Archaeological Trust are currently in the process of preparing a desk based assessment relating to proposed flood defence works in the vicinity of the town, and it is therefore proposed that the archaeological research they are undertaking should not be repeated here.

3.2 *Archaeological Potential*

The past history of the current settlement foci at Boroughbridge has not yet been extensively studied or understood. The limited knowledge of the site that is the subject of this evaluation would however indicate that this precise location has high archaeological potential for the medieval period.

Earlier periods are more problematic. Boroughbridge is not mentioned in the Domesday Book and in the current body of knowledge there is nothing to suggest that it was a focus of settlement in either the Anglian or the Anglo-Scandinavian periods. As for the Roman period the important settlement of Aldborough (*ISURIUM*) lies close by and it is assumed that the current core of Boroughbridge represents a shift away from that site, perhaps as a result of changes in the river regime or crossing point of the River Ure. Such an interpretation would suggest that Roman remains are unlikely at the Crown Hotel site.

The town of Boroughbridge lies within an area which is clearly of significance in the prehistoric period. An alignment of standing stones, known as the Devils Arrows, is located close to the town centre, less than half a kilometre from the site of the Crown Hotel. Recent archaeological work associated with residential development has shown that the stones are but the visible part of a complex Neolithic and Bronze age landscape. The presence of remains of prehistoric date must therefore remain a possibility at the Crown Hotel site.

3.3 *Previous Archaeological Work*

An archaeological evaluation comprising two trenches within the proposed development area was undertaken by *On-Site Archaeology* in August 1998 (Pearson 1998).

The evaluation indicated that deposits of (late) medieval date are present on the site within the footprint of the proposed swimming pool. The presence of deliberately laid flagstones in Trench 1 and (late) medieval deposits containing building demolition material in both trenches suggested that structural remains of similar date may survive within the immediate vicinity.

4.0 Excavation Methodology.

4.1 Objectives

The objectives of this excavation were:

- to recover, where possible, evidence relating to prehistoric occupation of the area.
- to determine the presence or absence of Roman, Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian occupation of the site.
- to determine the nature of medieval occupation of the site, with particular reference to the potential presence of the medieval manorial complex and, should it be present, its structural sequence.

4.2 Methodology

The excavation area measured approximately 13.60 x 8.10m and spanned the footprint of the proposed swimming pool. The overburden comprising building demolition material and domestic waste identified by the evaluation (Pearson, 1998) was removed by a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision to a depth of 1.00-1.20m below ground level (BGL). Post-medieval features exposed during the removal of the overburden were recorded and subsequently removed by machine. The overburden was removed to the top of significant archaeological deposits which were cleaned using hand-tools. Sections were then hand-excavated through a number of the identified archaeological features.

Due to adverse weather conditions (Plate 1 & 2), and following discussion with the assistant county archaeologist, North Yorkshire County Council, it proved necessary to alter the proposed methodology. This was primarily as a result of the difficulties encountered in using the 360° tracked excavator, which on a number of occasions became bogged down in the archaeological deposits. It was therefore decided to employ a 180° wheeled excavator fitted with a toothless bucket to remove further material in successive 0.10m spits down to a firmer and less disturbed level. The resulting surface was cleaned by hand and sections were hand-excavated through the archaeological features to establish their nature, extent and depth.

Initially features were sample excavated down to the formation level required for the proposed development, but following consultation with the structural engineer it was agreed that a number of the features could be excavated to their full depth below the foundation level of the swimming pool .

An area measuring 4.00 x 2.70m, situated to the northeast of the current hotel building, was stripped of modern material to a depth of c.0.50m BGL. The area was originally intended to be included within the excavation area. Subsequent alterations to the design of the swimming pool mitigated the need for further ground reduction.

Standard *On-Site Archaeology* techniques were followed throughout the excavation. This involved the completion of a context sheet for each deposit or cut encountered, along with plans and/or sections drawn to scale. Heights above Ordnance Datum (AOD) were calculated

by taking levels from a Temporary Benchmark (TBM) which was then tied in with an existing Ordnance Survey benchmark. A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained.

5.0 Results

5.1 *Natural Deposits*

The natural consisted of alluvial deposits [3036]. This was overlain on the northwest side of the site by waterlain deposits of sandy silt and pebbles containing occasional lenses of peagrit [3049].

5.2 *Medieval*

A number of features dating to the medieval period were encountered. Towards the northwest side of the site was a northeast – southwest aligned ditch [3021] (Plate 3 & 4), 13.60m long, 1.50m wide and 0.81m deep, cut into waterlain deposit [3049]. Two sections (I and II) were excavated to establish the nature and depth of the ditch prior to ground reduction to foundation level across the site. The depositional sequence within ditch [3021] was different in the two sections and these will be considered independently.

In Section I, 1.5m long, the primary fill comprised mid yellowish brown silty sand containing moderate pebbles [3035]. Overlying fill [3035] was a layer of mid brownish grey silty sand containing occasional pebbles and pottery, animal bone and metal [3020]. This deposit was sealed by a layer of dark yellowish brown silty sand containing occasional pebbles, a very small quantity of charcoal and pottery [3017].

In Section II, 1.85m long, the primary fill [3060] was very similar to fill [3035]. Overlying fill [3060] was a thin layer of mid brownish red clayey silt [3059] which in turn was overlain by mid brown sandy silt containing moderate pebbles [3058]. Layer [3058] was sealed by a layer of very similar material containing fewer pebbles [3057]. These were overlain by a two further deposits [3056] and [3055] comprising mid yellowish brown sandy silt containing no inclusions and moderate pebbles respectively. Sealing fill [3055] was a layer of mid yellowish brown sand containing occasional mortar flecks and pebbles [3054].

Ditch [3021] was cut to the southeast by a slightly-curvilinear ditch [3003] (Plate 3 & 5) measuring 13.60m long, 4.60m wide and 0.85 to 1.20m deep. Two sections, III and IV, were excavated through the ditch prior to ground reduction.

The basal fill in sections III and IV comprised mid brownish grey sand and gravel containing very frequent pebbles and pottery [3033]. This was overlain by mid brown slightly sandy clay silt containing moderate pebbles and occasional fragments of charcoal with pottery, bone and metal [3027] also evident in both sections.

In section III layer [3027] was sealed by a layer of mid reddish brown sandy clay containing occasional pebbles, flecks and small fragments of red sandstone, very occasional charcoal flecks and very rare flecks and small fragments of mortar [3026]. This was overlain by mid greyish brown sandy silt containing occasional limestone fragments and pebbles, and very occasional flecks of CBM, mortar and charcoal [3002].

In section IV layer [3027] was sealed by a layer of mid to dark brown sandy silt containing flecks and fragments of mortar, charcoal, coal, CBM and mammal bone [3034].

A row of nine postholes, spaced 1.00 to 1.50m apart, was situated between ditches [3003] and [3021] and arranged along the same alignment. The postholes comprised cuts [3023], [3028], [3038], [3040], [3042], [3044], [3046], [3047] and [3048] filled by [3022], [3029], [3037], [3039], [3041], [3043] and [3045] respectively. Posthole [3047] and [3048] were very shallow and any fill was removed during cleaning leaving only slight depressions <40mm deep. The postholes ranged in shape from sub-circular to round, and in diameter from 0.10m to 0.30m ([3048] and [3040] respectively). The deepest was post hole [3038], at 0.38m in depth. Posthole [3040] had a stone postpad in the base. A single posthole [3065], filled by [3066], was situated to the south of ditch [3003].

Cut into the top of fill [3027] was a circular cut [3032], 1.25m diameter and 0.16m deep, containing a sub-circular single course of bricks [3031] (Plate 6) bedded on a layer of mortar [3061]. The cut was filled with mid reddish brown silty sand containing frequent mortar flecks and fragments, moderate charcoal flecks and occasional pebbles [3030].

A flagged surface [1008], encountered in Trench 1 during the evaluation, was exposed during the initial machine strip. Unfortunately, it was severely damaged when the 360° excavator became bogged down.

The medieval features were sealed by a site-wide mixed dump deposit [3009] to a depth of 0.85m. The deposit comprised dark brownish grey and dark yellowish brown sandy silt containing moderate mortar and coal flecks and fragments, occasional pebbles, CBM and sandstone fragments.

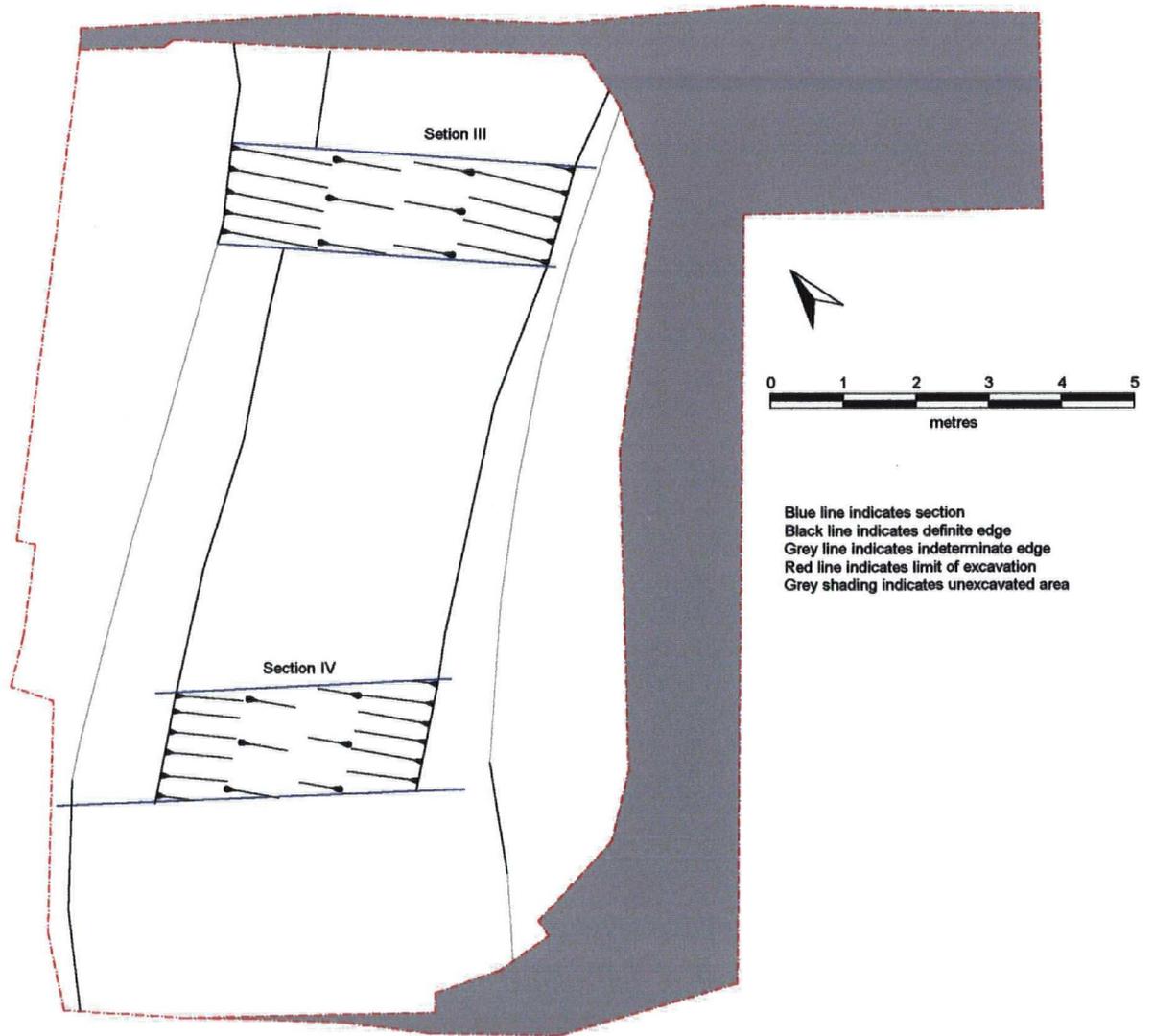


Figure 3. Plan of ditch [3003]. Scale 1:100

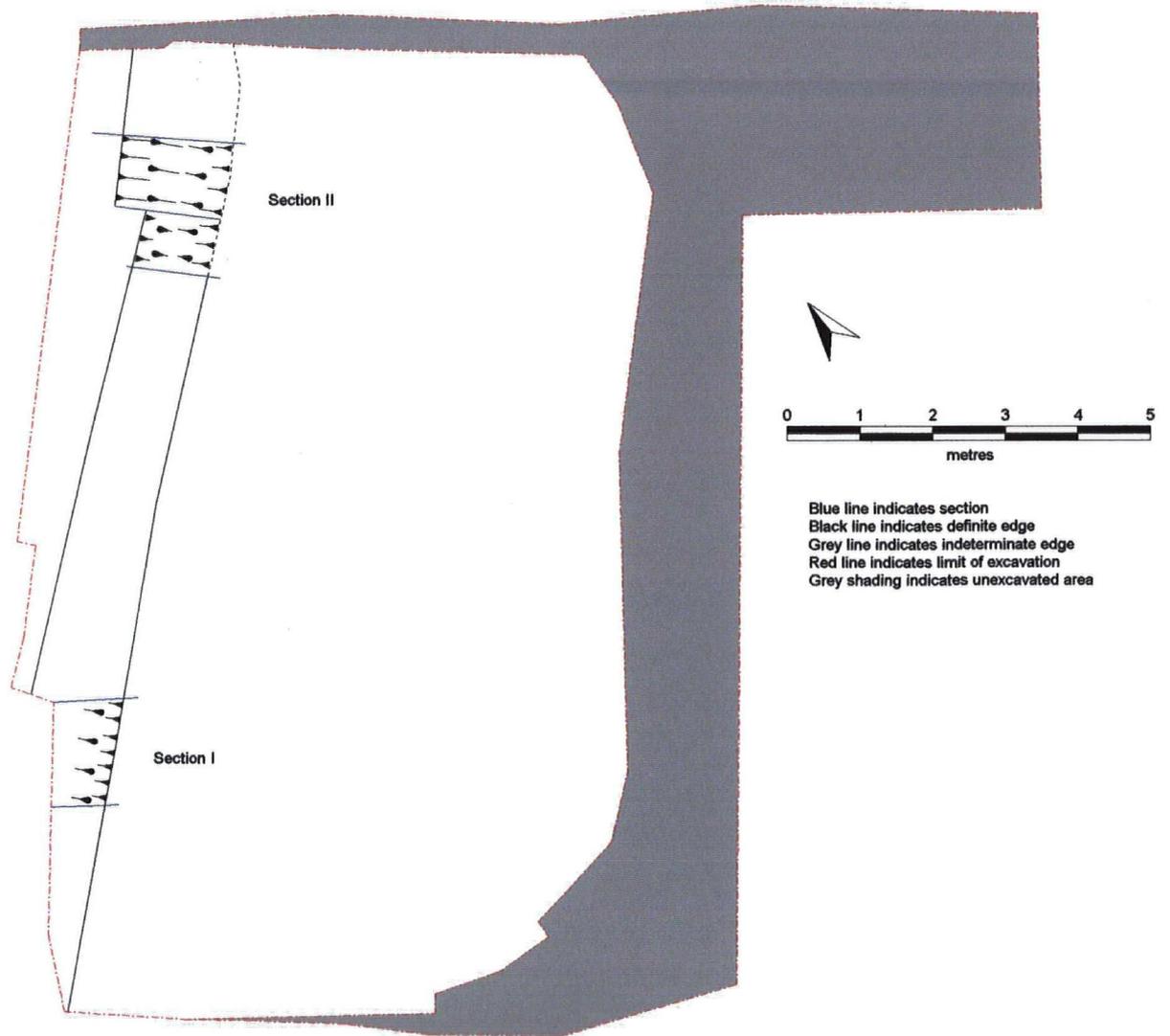


Figure 4. Plan of ditch [3021]. Scale 1:100.

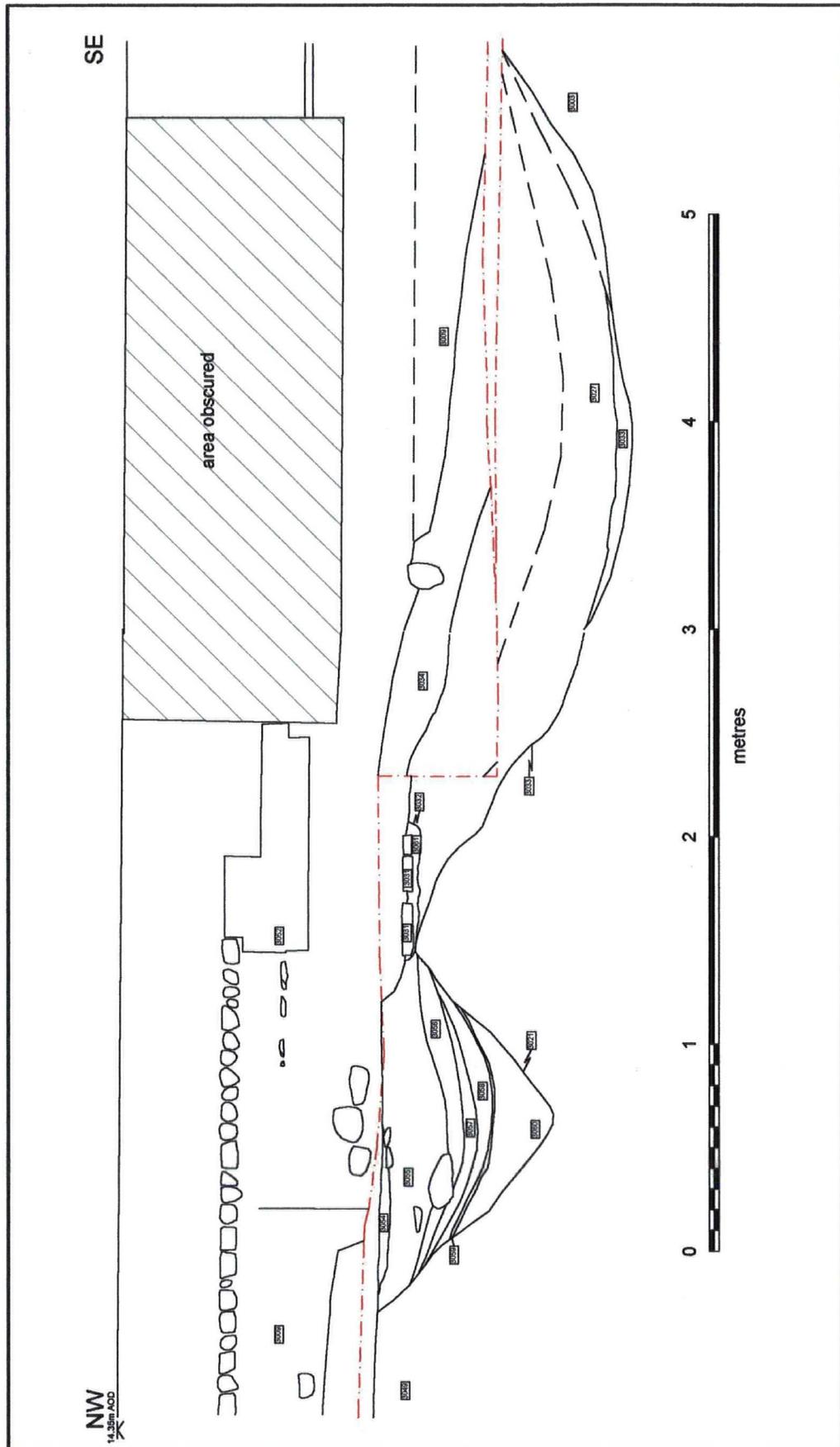


Figure 5. Section through ditches [3003] and [3021]. Scale 1:30.

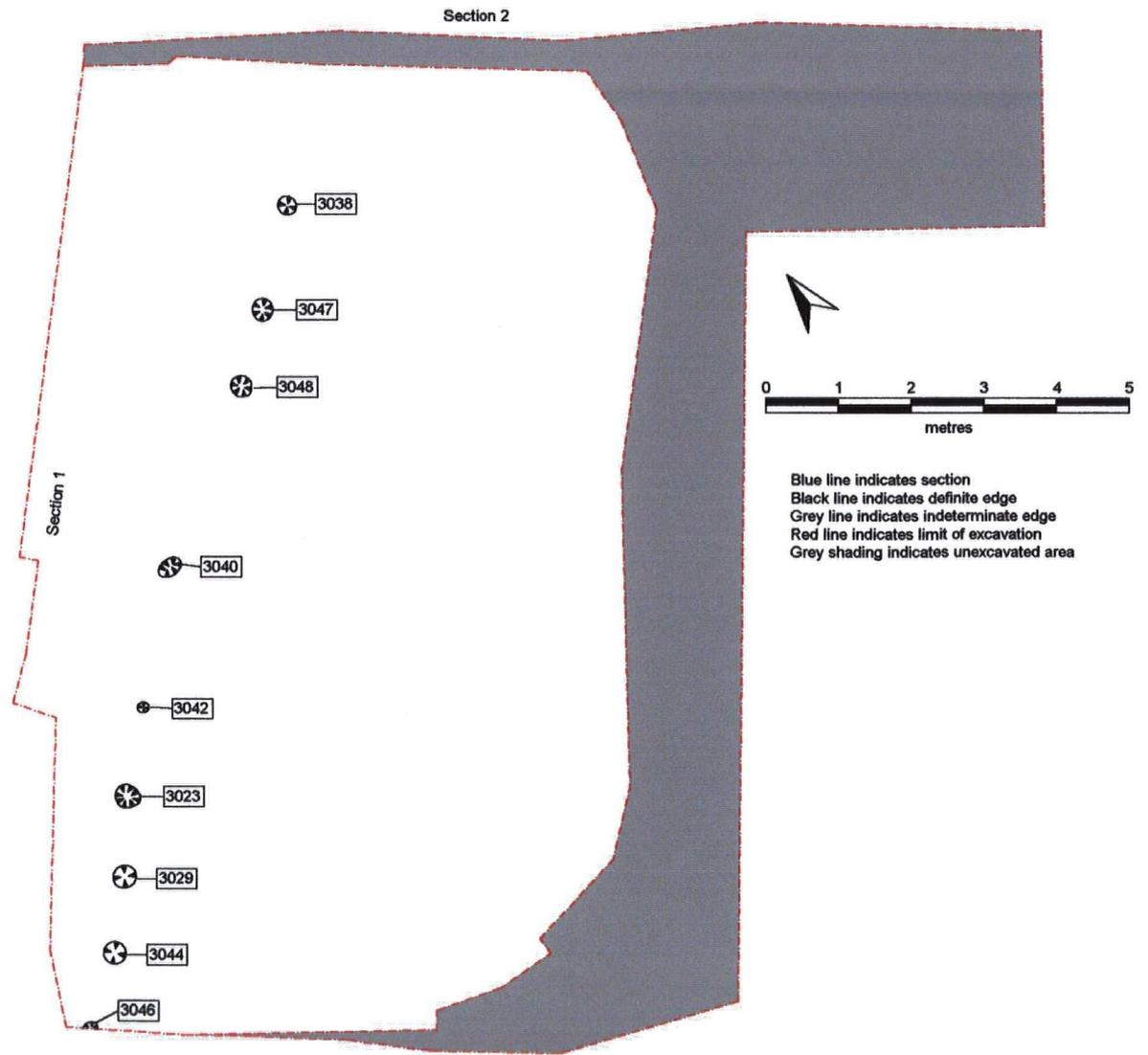


Figure 6. Post hole alignment. Scale 1:100.

5.3 *Post-Medieval*

A number of features dating from the post-medieval period to the modern period were cut into the dump deposit [3009].

Extending the full width of the site and towards the middle was a northwest – southeast aligned cut [3013], *c.*10.00m long, 1.19m wide and 0.46m deep, containing red sandstone rubble and occasional cobbles [3004] overlain by reddish brown silty sand containing frequent pebbles and occasional fragments of brownish yellow limestone [3014]. A layer of dark greyish brown sandy silt containing frequent gravel and occasional coal fragments sealed cut [3013].

Situated in the eastern corner of the site and thought to be associated with cut [3013] was a northeast - southwest aligned wall foundation, *c.*4.50m long, 0.47m wide and 0.66m deep, comprising regular-coursed, rough-faced red sandstone blocks bonded with mortar [3005] (Plate 7). The wall foundation filled construction cut [3006]. Abutting the wall foundation [3005] to the northeast was a square, brick drain/soakaway [3050], 0.55m long, 0.40m wide and 0.44m deep, contained within cut [3051]. The full extent of the feature was undetermined as it continued into the section.

Spanning the northern corner of the site was a brick wall foundation [3052], aligned approximately southeast – northwest, filling cut [3053]. A cobble surface [3062] was associated with the wall foundation. Situated *c.*8.00m to the southwest of wall foundation [3052] was a second brick wall foundation [3063], filling cut [3064], which lay along a parallel alignment. This foundation projected *c.*1.00m from the section before terminating. The stepped end of the wall suggested that it had been robbed out. The robber trench was not identified during machining.

Approximately 1.00m southwest of cut [3013], towards the centre of the site, was a rectangular pit [3001], 2.15m long, 0.70m wide and >0.33m deep, filled with brick, tile, mortar and red sandstone fragments and occasional cobbles [3000]. Towards the southwest end of the site and continuing into the section was a 'T'-shaped cut [3008], 2.70m long, 1.00 – 3.50m wide and 0.36m deep, filled with limestone and mortar fragments in light yellowish brown sandy silt containing flecks and small fragments of charcoal [3007]. The full depth of the cut is unknown due to truncation by a modern service trench and a lack of positive identification during machining. A posthole [3018], filled with [3019], was cut into backfill [3007]. Two sherds of pottery were recovered from fill [3019].

Situated *c.*0.30m to the south of cut [3008] was a rectangular, steep-sided pit [3025], 0.85m long, 0.30m wide and >0.30m deep containing ash and cinders [3024]. This feature was horizontally truncated during machining.

5.4 *Modern*

In the southern corner of the site was a drain, 5.40m long, 0.49m wide and 0.45m deep, constructed of brick and capped with limestone slabs [3011]. The drain was contained within cut [3012]. The site was sealed by a surface comprising York stone flags bedded on sand overlying a layer of concrete [3010].

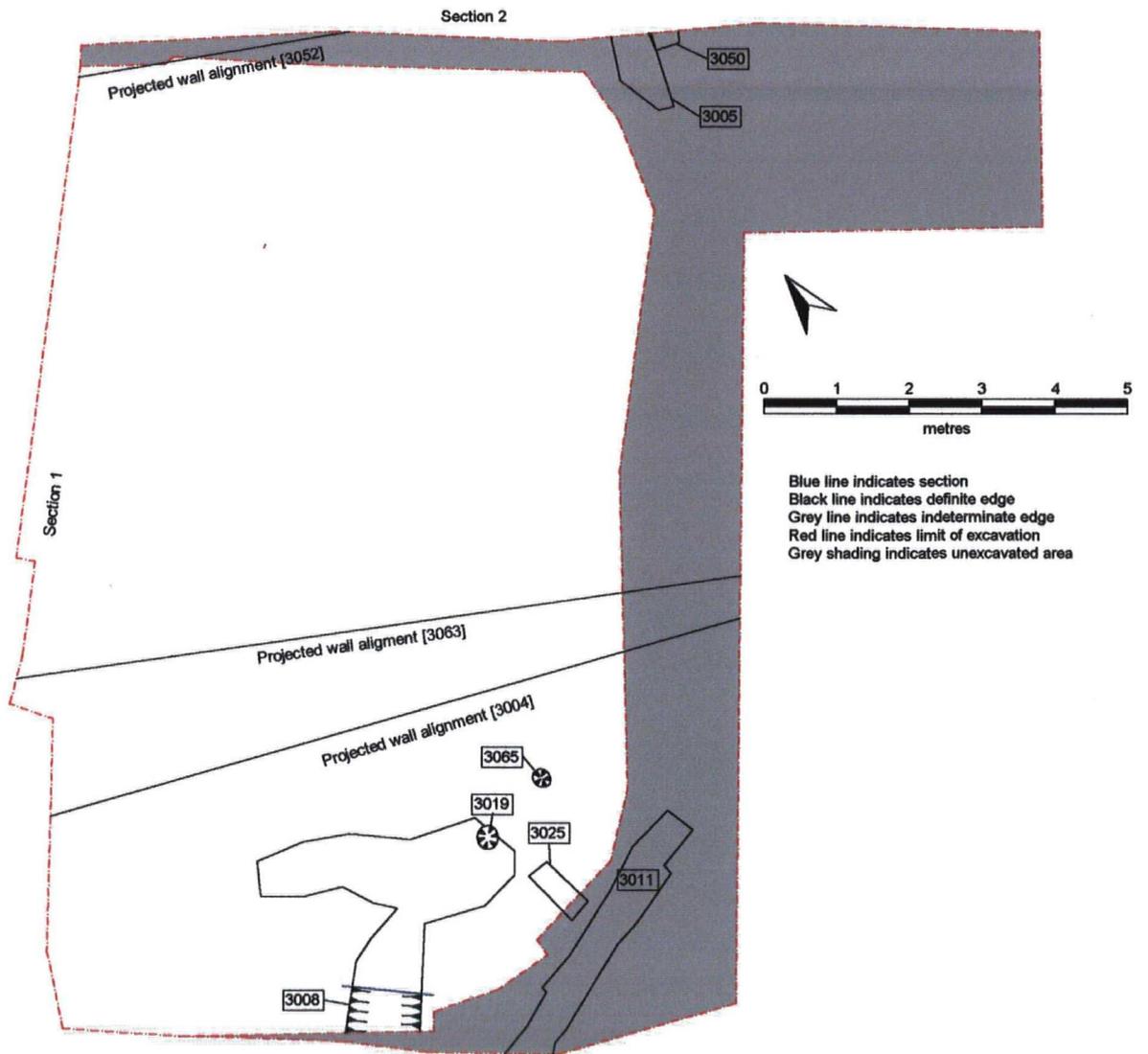


Figure 7. Undated / Post-medieval / modern features. Scale 1:100.

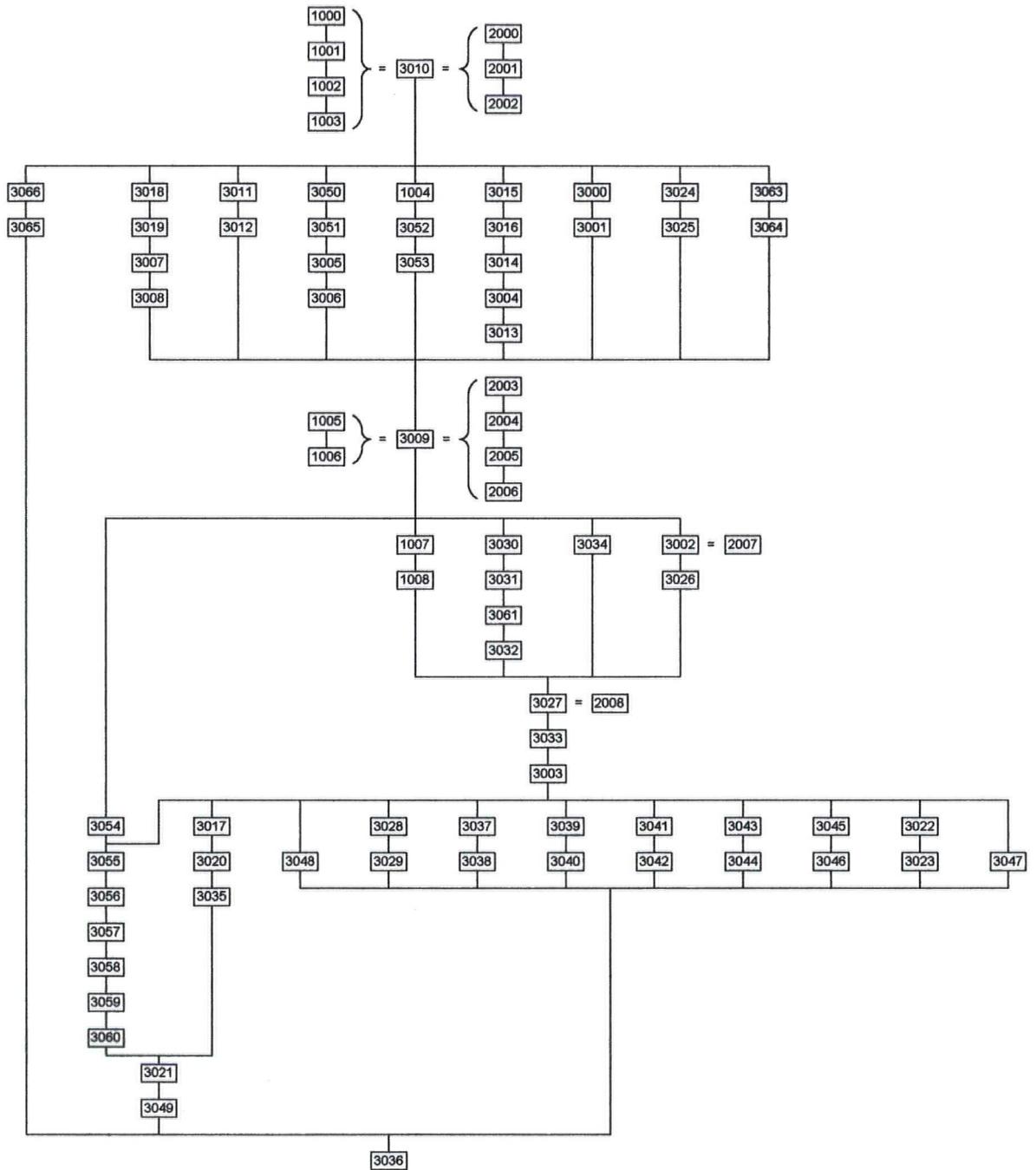


Figure 8. Matrix.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 *Medieval*

The depositional sequence within ditch [3021] differs slightly between the two sample sections. The ditch appears to have gradually silted up with material derived from the surrounding natural. Deposit [3020] contained late 11th – late 12th century pottery, a medieval arrowhead, charcoal, charred cereal grains and mammal and amphibian bones. This deposit is thought to represent very gradual silting up. The single sherd of 18th century ?drain that was included within the assemblage is thought to result from human error during the current excavation. Fills [3057] and [3058] are similar in composition to [3020] and may form part of the same deposit. Several sherds of mid 14th century pottery were recovered from fill [3017]. The depositional sequence represented in section II comprised a series of fills [3060] – [3054] which due to their character and composition are thought to consist of redeposited natural material. No finds were recovered from the fills in section II

Ditch [3021] was truncated to the southwest by a more substantial, slightly-curvilinear ditch [3003] which lay on a similar alignment. The primary fill [3033] comprised naturally deposited sands and gravels containing several CBM fragments and a small pottery assemblage. This was overlain by deposit [3027] which contained pottery, charcoal, a few charred cereal grains and mammal, amphibian and fish bones. A small quantity of iron smithing slag and two fragments of iron were also recovered. The deposit is thought to represent a period of gradual silting up during which time domestic refuse was dumped into it. Fills [3026] and [3002] appear to comprise redeposited natural material. The latter fill contained a small quantity of pottery, CBM fragments, a piece of iron smithing slag, part of an iron stake and an iron binding or reinforcement piece. Fill [3034] appears to have been dumped into the ditch. It contained a significant amount of burnt material comprising charcoal, coal and cinders along with charred cereal grains. The pottery assemblage from the fills of the ditch is dated to the mid 14th century

A line of postholes was situated between the ditches [3021] and [3003]. The postholes were cut into the natural [3036] and appeared to be sealed by ditch [3003]. This may be illusory and due to the fills being similar to ditch fill [3027] which physically sealed them. The postholes may have been cut through this fill [3027]. The postholes may represent a palisade and are possibly contemporary with ditch [3021] although there is no contextual evidence for this. A single posthole [3065] was situated to the south of ditch [3003].

Cut into fill [3027] was shallow, circular pit with a base comprising bricks dated to the 14th or 15th century [3031] founded on a bed of sand [3061]. It is possible that the bricks are reused and may originally have been used for bricknogging. That is, used as infilling between the members of a timber-framed building either as the original infill or as replacement of some other material (Brunskill 1997, 92). This feature is difficult to interpret, it may be a mortar-mixing 'hard-spot'. Frequent mortar flecks and fragments were evident within the fill [3030], although there was little mortar adhering to the upper side of the bricks. A similar feature,

dating to the medieval or late medieval period, was found in association with a quantity of mortar at Toft Green, York (Pearson 1999).

A flagged surface [1008] was situated, a short distance to the west of pit [3032] at a similar level. The surface was originally encountered during the archaeological evaluation and it was hoped that its full extent would be revealed. Unfortunately, it was severely damaged when the 360° excavator became bogged down and only a few flagstones remained *in situ*. In the evaluation trench (Trench 1) the flagged surface was sealed by a deposit containing late medieval pottery [1007]. During the excavation a single fragment from a brown-glazed tobacco pipe tip was recovered from this layer. Given that the deposit was severely disturbed during the machine strip, caution is advised if any significance is to be placed on the presence of this sherd within the finds assemblage for this deposit.

6.2 *Post medieval*

Deposit [3009] sealed the medieval features. During the evaluation, late 18th and 19th century pottery was recovered from contexts [1006] and [2004] respectively. The deposits were interpreted as dumps of domestic waste (Pearson 1998, 5, 6). These contexts formed part of the deposit numbered [3009] during the excavation. It is tempting to suggest that the possible mortar-mixing pit [3032] was in use during the construction of a street frontage and that deposit [3009] represents the subsequent steady accumulation of garden soil and domestic refuse.

A series of features were cut into deposit [3009]. Towards the middle of the site was a northeast – southwest aligned cut [3013] containing red sandstone rubble [3004]. This is tentatively interpreted as a robber trench. This feature is thought to be associated, on the basis of the fill material, with a northwest – southeast aligned red sandstone block wall [3005] situated in the eastern corner of the site. Adjacent to wall [3005] is a small, square brick feature [3050] which is possibly a soakaway or drain. To the southwest of, and adjacent to, the robber trench was square pit [3001] filled with brick and tile with fragments of bottle glass [3000]. This finds assemblage dates to the late 18th century. The pit is considered to be a soakaway. It is possible, although it must be stressed that there is no direct evidence, that these features comprise a stable block. Situated slightly to the northeast of the robber trench were the remains of a brick wall foundation [3063]. A second brick wall foundation [3052] lay along a parallel alignment *c.* 8.00m to the northeast. These foundations correspond to the long sides of a building to the rear of the Crown Inn on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1852. A cobbled surface [3062] was associated with wall foundation [3052].

The ‘T’-shaped cut [3008] located towards the southwest edge of the site is interpreted as a robbed-out foundation cut on the basis of its profile and shape in plan and the significant quantity of limestone and mortar fragments within the fill [3007]. The cut may outline part of the footprint of an outbuilding associated with the Crown Inn. A posthole [3019], the fill [3018] of which contained two sherds of medieval pottery, was cut into fill [3007].

The site comprised three distinct phases. The ditches and palisade may be associated with a reputed medieval manor house (Fiorato, *pers. comm.*). Remedial work in the 1970s uncovered

structural remains which have been interpreted as indicating the presence of an earlier phase of buildings on the site. Unfortunately, there are no outstanding record as to the precise nature of the evidence that was uncovered at that time. Following the silting up and disuse of the ditches, the area appears to have been left as open ground possibly forming the back gardens to a street frontage. The area may then form part of the property associated with the Crown Inn. It must be stressed that these hypotheses are formed solely upon the evidence provided by the excavation. The desktop assessment compiled by the York Archaeological Trust may be able to provide a chronological context into which this site may be placed.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Richard Stables for his indulgence and good humour during the course of the excavation and also for inviting a group of local school children to the site to experience their local history and view an archaeological excavation in progress. Thanks are also due to Gail Falkingham for sage advice during the early days of the excavation when the rain and mud had almost become too much to cope with.

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9.0 The Plates



Plate 1. Site conditions.



Plate 2. Site conditions.



Plate 3. Ditch [3021] top, ditch [3003] bottom.



Plate 4. Section II, ditch [3021].



Plate 5. Section IV, ditch [3003].



Plate 6. Brick base [3031] within pit [3032].



Plate 7. Wall [3005].