

6 STONEBRIDGEGATE
RIPON
NORTH YORKSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
APRIL 1992

INTRODUCTION:

During April 1992 a team of archaeologists were called in by Mr.C.Ekin, Building Services to monitor all ground disturbance associated with the demolition of a pre fabricated building and to excavate two 2 metre square trial holes in advance of the excavation of foundations for the proposed development.

The archaeologist worked to the approved scheme of works set down by Mr.K.J.Cale on 26th March 1992.

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REPORT

BACKGROUND STUDY:

INTRODUCTION - 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.

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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 Stonebridgetate and Allhallowgate as the centre of the town of Ripon; before the development of the Market Place area. Stonebridgetate, 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 Stonebridgetate 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 Stonebridgetate/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.

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PREVIOUS EXCAVATION WITHIN RIPON:

There have been a number of small scale excavations 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.

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. 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 on the site, also argues for a long history for the site.

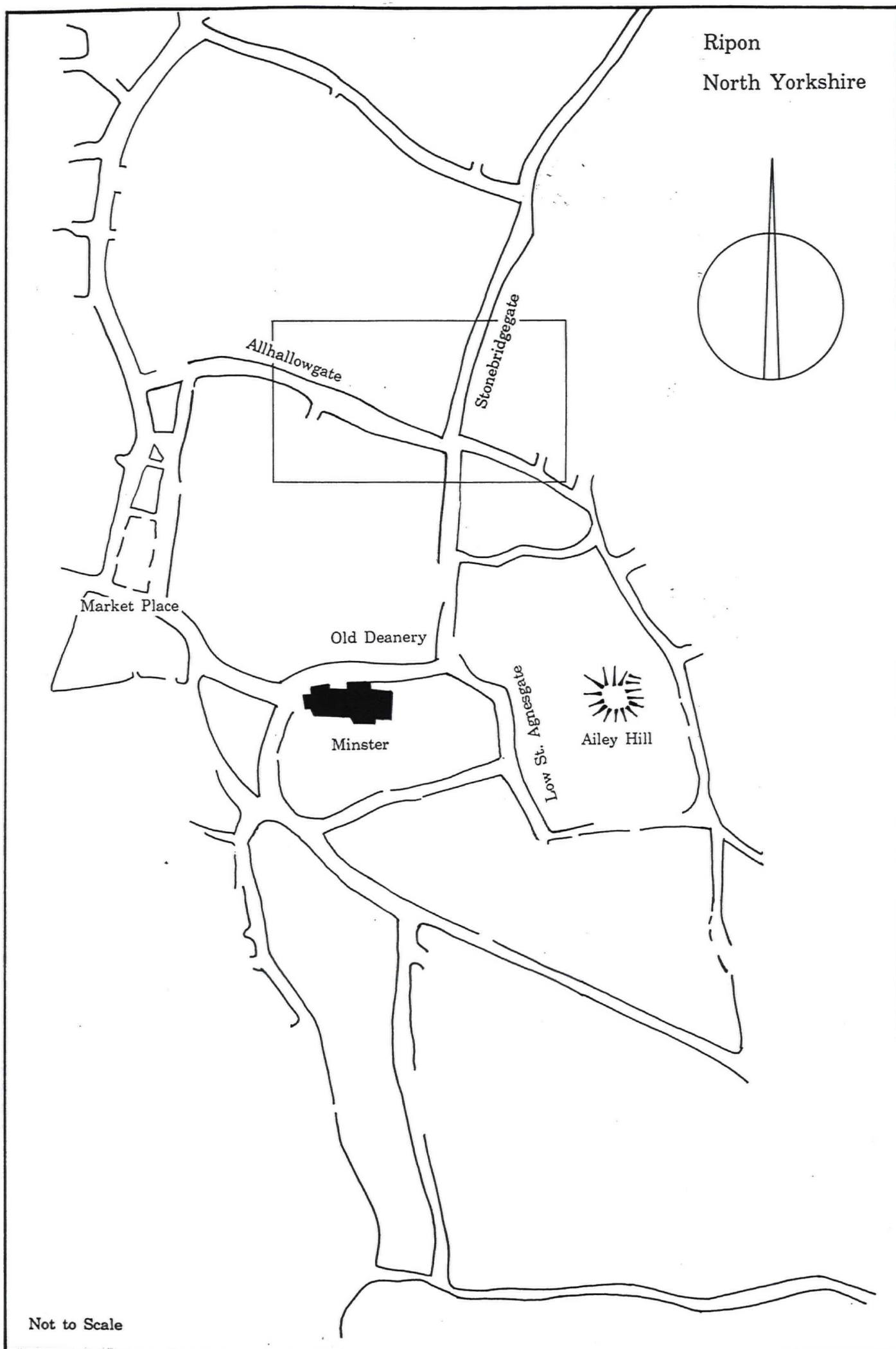
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6, STONEBRIDGEGATE

As discussed above, the area around the crossroads of Stonebridgetate and Allhallowgate may have been the pre-Conquest settlement area, and it is mentioned in the early medieval period as the centre of the town. The focus of the town moved westwards when the Market Place was developed in the 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 site was built up in the 18th Century and more recently it was occupied by terraced houses until the 1960's, when they were demolished and replaced with a prefabricated office building. Local tradition has it that there are considerable deposits of made up material on the site, these may well have buried archaeological deposits deeply.

Sketch location plan

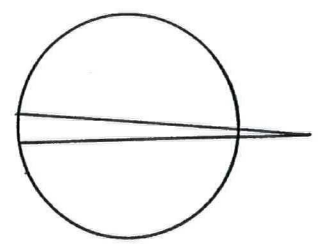


Site location plan

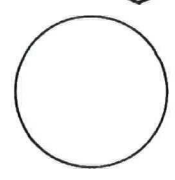
6 Stonebridgagate

Ripon

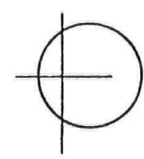
Church



Allhallowgate



gas works



site

Stonebridgagate

31600

71500

Lickley Street

Scale 1:1250