

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

**THE MARKET PLACE,  
RIPON,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION**



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**THE MARKET PLACE,  
RIPON**

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**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION**

**CONTENTS**

- ABSTRACT**
1. INTRODUCTION
  2. METHODOLOGY
  3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY
  4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
  5. THE EXCAVATION
  6. CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIALS
  7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
  8. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS
  9. LIST OF SOURCES
  10. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**List of Illustrations**

- Figure 1 Site Location Plan  
Figure 2 Trench Location Plan  
Figure 3 Jeffrey's Map of Ripon, showing The Market Place, 1772  
Figure 4 Langdale's Map of Ripon, showing The Market Place, 1818  
Figure 5 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Ordnance Survey Map of Ripon, showing The Market Place, 1854  
Figure 6 Sections through Evaluation Trenches 1-4

**Photographs**

- Plate 1. Trench 1, Context 1005, cobble surface  
Plate 2. Trench 4, Context 4006, cobble surface  
Plate 3. Trench 1, South facing section  
Plate 4. Trench 2, North facing section  
Plate 5. Trench 3, Top of natural deposits

**ABSTRACT**

*In October 2000, York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological evaluation of the Market Place in Ripon. The evaluation comprised the excavation of four small trenches which identified medieval remains at 0.30m – 0.35m below ground surface in the northern part of the Market Place with a depth of between 0.30m – 0.40m. Although similar deposits were not encountered in the southern most trenches further investigation would be required to establish if there had been truncation of medieval deposits in the southern part of the area.*

*Medieval deposits appeared to be undisturbed and well preserved and included an undated cobble surface which may represent part of the medieval market place. Primary dumped material above it, dating to the period 1350-1450, included butchery waste and pottery which could indicate the dumping of waste from a kiln in the nearby locality, although a larger sample of material is required to address this question. Later deposits comprised remnants of post-medieval cobble surfaces, levelling, and modern redeposited natural used as make-up and levelling before the construction of the modern concrete Market Place.*

*The evaluation concluded that important medieval deposits could be destroyed as a result of the proposed scheme of works in the Market Place. The effects of the scheme should be mitigated where possible and appropriate archaeological recording should take place in advance of any further work.*



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Between October 27<sup>th</sup> and November 6<sup>th</sup> 2000, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation at Ripon Market Place, (NGR SE 3121 7127) (Figure 1). It was carried out to a specification provided by North Yorkshire Heritage Unit in advance of a proposed scheme of major refurbishment of Ripon Market Place by Mouchel, North Yorkshire on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council and Harrogate Borough Council. The proposed scheme comprised the resurfacing of the Market Place and surrounding carriageways and footpaths, new tree planting, lighting and signage and would entail excavations to a depth of 0.60m over the whole of the central area, with new tree pits around the perimeter at least 1.5m deep. A service trench would also cause disturbance to a depth of c.1.5m within the roadway alongside the Market Place.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by means of trial trenching to a maximum depth of 1.5m below ground surface, or to natural deposits, if higher. Trench 1 was located in the north western corner of the Market Place; Trench 2, in the central area, immediately to the north of the obelisk; Trench 3 in the south western area and Trench 4 to the north east (Figure 2). The aim of the evaluation was to establish the character, extent, depth and state of preservation of any surviving archaeological remains in order that appropriate design mitigation and/or further archaeological work could be agreed and that the potential damage to surviving archaeological remains could be mitigated as far as possible.

The archaeological records compiled and artefacts recovered during the evaluation are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM 10427.



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Figure 1, Site Location Plan



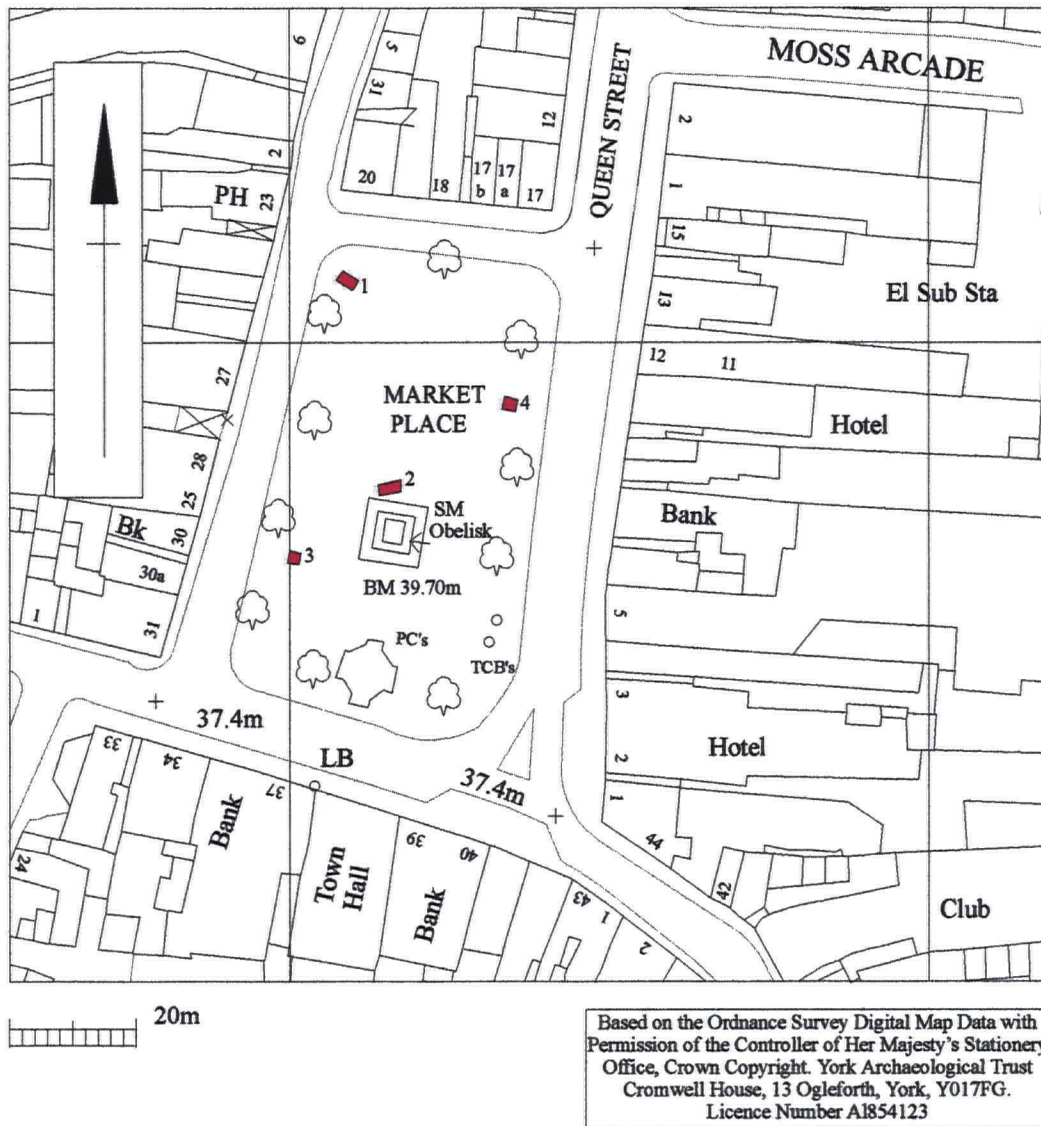


Figure 2, Location of Trenches

### **3. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

The Market Place, NGR SE 3121 7127 lies between Queen Street to the east and Fishergate to the west, within the heart of the historic town of Ripon. It is an open area, located on a plateau of high ground at c.39m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum), sloping gently down around the perimeter. It is currently used for car parking and is the site of a weekly market on Thursdays. There are trees of various sizes around the perimeter and their roots may have caused some disturbance to the below ground deposits. In the centre of the Market Place is an obelisk which was erected in 1702 to replace the market cross. The erection of this Grade I Listed structure and its restoration in 1781 may have resulted in some destruction of earlier deposits close to its plinth. It might also be expected that a complete truncation of archaeological deposits has occurred in the area of the below-ground public toilet block to the south of the Market Place which will be taken down and infilled as part of the refurbishment works.

The underlying solid geology of Ripon is an outcrop of Magnesian Limestone and Permian mudstone which extends in a north-south direction between the Pennines and the Vale of York (Ordnance Survey 1979). Overlying this solid geology are periglacial deposits of sand and gravels. Immediately adjacent to the Market Place at The Arcade (Finlayson 2000) these appeared as predominantly sand with bands of gravels and, closest to the street frontage, were encountered at c.39m AOD.

### **4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

While there is significant archaeological evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity in the vicinity of Ripon, to date, no such evidence from these periods has been discovered within the town, other than some sherds of residual Roman pottery from excavations in the Deanery Gardens in 1977-78. The earliest archaeological evidence for settlement at Ripon dates to the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century and relates to a monastic site. The first documentary evidence for this site dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century when Stephen of Ripon recorded the Life of Wilfrid in c. AD 709/10; it is also mentioned by Bede who wrote of the monastery in c. AD 730. These references record the foundation of a monastery by Eata, which post medieval tradition suggests was on land to the north of Residence Lane and its subsequent reallocation to Wilfrid, who built a church nearby where the Minster now stands (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140). After the Norman Conquest the



monastery became a part of the diocese of York and remained a significant ecclesiastical centre throughout the medieval period.

Little is known for certain of the form or layout of early medieval secular settlement in Ripon, but it is believed to have been centred around the Allhallowgate and Stonebridgegate junction on the eastern side of the Minster. The town is however thought to have undergone a period of expansion in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in 1194, Ripon is first referred to as a borough. The royal charters for a fair and market were granted in this period and Mackay has argued that these indicate flourishing secular activity and has suggested that a new market place was laid out in this period to the south-west of the old market at the end of Allhallowgate (Mackay 1982, 73). He argues that because Leland located the church of All Hallows "*about the north part of the old town*" and described the market place as being of a "*newer building*" that the market place and settlement around it may have been a development resulting from the expansion of the town in the 12<sup>th</sup> century which continued into the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century (Mackay 1982, 78). A deed dating to 1307 relating to the second burgage in Westgate is the earliest surviving documentary evidence of burgage plots around the Market Place (Mackay 1982, 79).

An assessment of excavations on Low St Agnesgate by P. Mayes in 1974 and in the Deanery Gardens by D. Greenhaugh in 1977-8 reveals significant evidence of settlement in this part of Ripon dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Whyman 1997, 121). Whyman's interpretation of the excavation evidence from these sites suggests that they hint at a major reorganization of settlement and street plan in the 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century and also imply modifications to the layout of ecclesiastical property holdings to the north of the Minster. A large ditch feature found to the east of St Agnesgate is suggested as a pre-13<sup>th</sup> century boundary to the ecclesiastical precinct, and the suggested date of buildings constructed over the ditch is given as the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century; "*Suggesting that the ecclesiastical precinct was reduced and encompassed within a new street layout in the later 12th or early 13th century, the frontages of which rapidly began to build up*" (Whyman 1997, 160). However the need for further excavation evidence to "*confirm, amplify or correct*" this interpretation is highlighted by Whyman (1997, 162).



The cartographic evidence for Ripon provides a good indication of the development of the form of the town in the post medieval period, and analysis of this may suggest that the location of the market place has not changed over time. The area called the old market place and the present market place together would form a larger rectangular market place, which has subsequently experienced infilling with small building plots on Old Market Place, Fishergate, Queen's Street and Finkle Street. These building plots form slightly higgledy piggledy arrangements, and none have long plots of land associated with the buildings. This type of development is common in other market towns where land in the market place was at a premium and building plots may have in part developed directly from market stall holdings.

To date, little archaeological work has been carried out in the centre of Ripon which can offer clear evidence of the early medieval layout of the secular settlement or its development during the medieval period. The documentary research and assessment of previous archaeological discoveries (Hall & Whyman 1996, Mackay 1982) indicate the potential importance of new archaeological information which could help address some of the unanswered questions regarding the development of the town. Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Ripon Market Place do give a positive indication of the potential for the survival of medieval remains in the area (Cale 1993, watching briefs at 4 Fishergate; Cale, 1996, an evaluation at The Fleece, St Marygate; Cale, 1998, watching brief for Northern Electric in the area from the top of North Street to the Old Market Place; Clarke, 1998, watching brief in the area of The Old Market Place and part of North Street). Most recently, work undertaken to the east of the Market Place at The Arcade by Archaeological Services WYAS, 1999 and York Archaeological Trust, 2000 has demonstrated the survival of a sequence of deposits indicating occupation of the area from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Together this evidence suggests that archaeological deposits in the area of the central Market Place area are potentially extremely important for understanding the character and development of the town during the early and later medieval periods.