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ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
SERVICES  
WYAS

**Land Adjoining 92/94 Main Road  
Drax  
near Selby**

*Archaeological Evaluation*

*Report No 728*

*July 1999*

C L I E N T

**Mr J Wetherell**

# Land adjoining 92/94 Main Road,

## Drax

### North Yorkshire

#### *Archaeological Evaluation*

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##### Summary

*An archaeological evaluation by trial trenching was carried out on land with the historic core of Drax. Four trial trenches were excavated across the site. Two contained only either natural deposits or features/deposits associated with a recently demolished dwelling. A third contained the foundation trench of a probable 19th century building. A ditch containing a small assemblage of late medieval pottery was identified in the last trench together with probable 19th century rubbish pits. It is thought that the ditch may have been a medieval burgage plot division.*

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Archaeological Services WYAS

14 St Johns North Wakefield WF1 3QA

## **1 Introduction**

- 1 1 Archaeological Services (WYAS) was commissioned by Mr J Wetherell to undertake an archaeological evaluation on land adjoining demolished properties at 92/94 Main Road Drax (see Fig 1) This evaluation took the form of archaeological trial trenching which followed on from an earlier desk based assessment of the surrounding area (Keith 1999)
- 1 2 Outline planning permission is being sought for a residential development on the site which lies within the historic core of Drax and as such in an area of potential archaeological significance For this reason the archaeologist for the Heritage Unit of the North Yorkshire County Council Ms Gail Falkingham prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation For Archaeological Evaluation (see Appendix 1)
- 1 3 The fieldwork was carried out between the 15th and 18th of June 1999

## **2 Archaeological Background**

- 2 1 The village of Drax was already in existence at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 but documentary evidence suggests that the village started to develop as a settlement during the 12th century after the church and castle were established
- 2 2 A century later there seems to have been a deliberate attempt to establish an urban centre in Drax with the foundation of a borough However the success of this was shortlived possibly due to the establishment of a town nearby at Airmyn and a period of contraction followed
- 2 3 Little is known of the layout and extent of the early settlement although it is considered probable that the current road layout is based on the medieval routeways with properties on the frontage of Main Road with ancillary buildings and activities to the rear
- 2 4 More specifically all the available map evidence which dates to the 1774 enclosure plan indicates that the southern and eastern parts of the proposal area have been open land from this time onward whilst a dwelling has been present in the location of the recently demolished properties since the middle of the 19th century There is therefore the potential for the survival of evidence of earlier occupation on the site

## **3 Aims, Objectives and Methodology**

- 3 1 As the site was unsuitable for evaluation by geophysical methods (it was extremely overgrown with several piles of rubbish the remains of several bonfires and a derelict shed) the initial phase of the archaeological fieldwork comprised trial trenching the main aims of which were to determine the nature depth extent and state of preservation of any archaeological deposits on the site

- 3 2 To achieve these objectives it was recommended by the North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Unit that a total area of 100m<sup>2</sup> be excavated (see Appendix 1) and a trenching plan was proposed and approved that reflected this
- 3 3 The desk based assessment did not highlighted any specific archaeological activity within the application area although it was noted that the alignment of the roads was unlikely to have changed much since the medieval period. It was therefore assumed that if the medieval settlement extended as far west as the current site any burgage plots would probably be aligned at right angles to the frontage along Main Road. For this reason all the proposed trenches were aligned from south west to north east so that they would intersect with any ditched divisions at right angles over as wide a front as possible whilst at the same time covering as many parts of the site as possible within the constraints of total area for investigation
- 3 4 The four proposed trenches were all moved slightly from the proposed positions in order to avoid some of the most dense areas of vegetation and trees
- 3 5 All trenches were opened up using a JCB excavator using a smooth bladed ditching bucket down to the top of the first archaeological deposits or the natural. All features were then excavated by hand
- 3 6 A Geotronics 600 series Geodimeter total station theodolite was used to survey in the position of the trenches which were tied in to fixed points on houses along the north side of Main Road (see Fig 2). Local grid coordinates are given for these points. A temporary bench mark was established and the height determined from the bench mark on the corner of the church

## **4 Results**

### **4 1 Trench 1 (Fig 4)**

- 4 1 1 This trench measured 15m by 2m and was the most easterly of the four trenches. The topsoil was of a very dark brown humic composition between 0.2m and 0.25m in depth. Below this was a much lighter sandier subsoil which became increasingly lighter and sandier finally merging into a bright orange sand natural at about 0.4m below present ground level. It was impossible to discern a specific level at which the subsoil became natural. The water table was reached at about 3.9m O.D.
- 4 1 2 Approximately 7.5m from the eastern end of the trench a linear feature about 1.6m wide in plan was identified crossing the trench on a north-north west to south-south-east alignment
- 4 1 3 A 1m wide slot adjacent to the southern baulk edge was excavated by hand through this feature F105. The section and post excavation plan are shown on Figure 4. The cut for the ditch is vertical on the eastern edge to

a flat bottom with a stepped appearance on the western edge initially it is vertical but it flattens out so that in section the ditch is nearly 2m wide and 0.65m deep. The base of the ditch on the western side is extremely irregular. When the fill from the northern half of the ditch segment was excavated a more regular U shaped profile with a very steep western edge and a more curving eastern edge was seen in section. The fill of the ditch 106 comprised a dark grey/brown well compacted silt which contained twenty two sherds of pottery which have been dated between the 12th and 15th centuries (see Appendix V)

4.1.4 The ditch was cut on the western side by a pit F109 which was not noted in plan during machining. The fill 110 comprised a dark brown fine soil which contained two sherds of modern pot.

4.1.5 Approximately 2.5m north west of the ditch three discreet sub circular features were also seen in plan. The largest of them (about 1.2m in circumference) F100 continued under the northern baulk edge. A much smaller feature was immediately adjacent on the eastern edge with the third feature 0.4m to the east.

4.1.6 All three were half sectioned and it was established that F103 was a later feature than F100. However only modern pottery and other domestic rubbish was recovered from any of these features which are thought to be rubbish pits of late 19th or early 20th century date.

## **4.2 Trench 2**

4.2.1 This trench measured 15m by 2m. It was primarily positioned to establish whether there was evidence of earlier occupation beneath the demolished remains of the dwelling at 92/94 Main Road.

4.2.2 From the western end of the trench beneath the house for about 4m east a dark brown sandy silt was observed directly beneath the foundations. The water table was again reached approximately 1m below current ground level at this end of the trench.

4.2.3 The deposits along the whole length of this trench were severely disturbed due to the house and adjacent track at the western end and by sewer pipes and manhole, a land drain and electricity cable at the eastern end of the trench. No archaeological deposits were seen and the orange/brown sandy natural was identified in the western end of the trench at 0.5m below current ground level.

## **4.3 Trench 3**

4.3.1 This trench was positioned to evaluate the deposits at the southern end of the site and measured 10m by 2m.

4.3.2 Beneath the topsoil (0.15m deep) was a dark brown sandy silt deposit, up to 0.5m deep. This deposit model remained the same along the whole length of the trench. No inclusions or organic material were noted in this deposit which was thought to be natural possibly built up through the periodic inundation of this lower lying part of the site. At 0.65m below

current ground level the predominantly orange sand was encountered and the water table reached

#### **4 4 Trench 4**

4 4 1 The topsoil/subsoil model in this trench which measured 10m by 2m was the same as that encountered in Trench 1 0 2m of dark humic topsoil above about 0 5m of dark brown sandy soil that gradually merged into the orange sandy natural at 0 65m below current ground level

4 4 2 At the south east corner of the trench an L shaped feature could be seen cutting the natural (see Fig 3) A section was excavated against the eastern baulk edge Much modern pottery as well as glass brick and other rubble material was removed from this cut F113, which was not bottomed as the water table was reached It was assumed that this was a foundation trench for an unrecorded outbuilding associated with the demolished cottages

### **5 Conclusions**

5 1 Although only one archaeological feature (F105 - Trench 1) has been identified the pottery found in the fill indicates that the ditch was in use during the later medieval period possibly as burgage plot division As no other such ditches were identified further west the excavated feature may locate the western extent of the settlement in the later medieval period

5 2 The absence of any other evidence for occupation on the site until the late 19th century supports the conclusions reached in the desk based assessment namely that Drax underwent a period of contraction at the end of the medieval period following the establishment of a town at Airmyn

### ***Bibliography***

Keith K (1999) *Land adjoining 92/94 Main Road Drax near Selby Archaeological Desk based Assessment* (WYAS R721)

### ***Acknowledgements***

Project Management A Webb BA

Fieldwork A Webb, M Whittingham BSc MA

Report A Webb

Illustrations Andy Swann MAAIS M Whittingham

## ***Figures***

- Figure 1 Site Location
- Figure 2 Trench location plan
- Figure 3 Detailed trench plan
- Figure 4 Post excavation plan and sections (Trench 1)

## ***Appendices***

- Appendix I Written Scheme of Investigation For Archaeological Evaluation
- Appendix II Primary Archive Inventory
- Appendix III Context Summary
- Appendix IV Inventory of Finds
- Appendix V Pottery Report

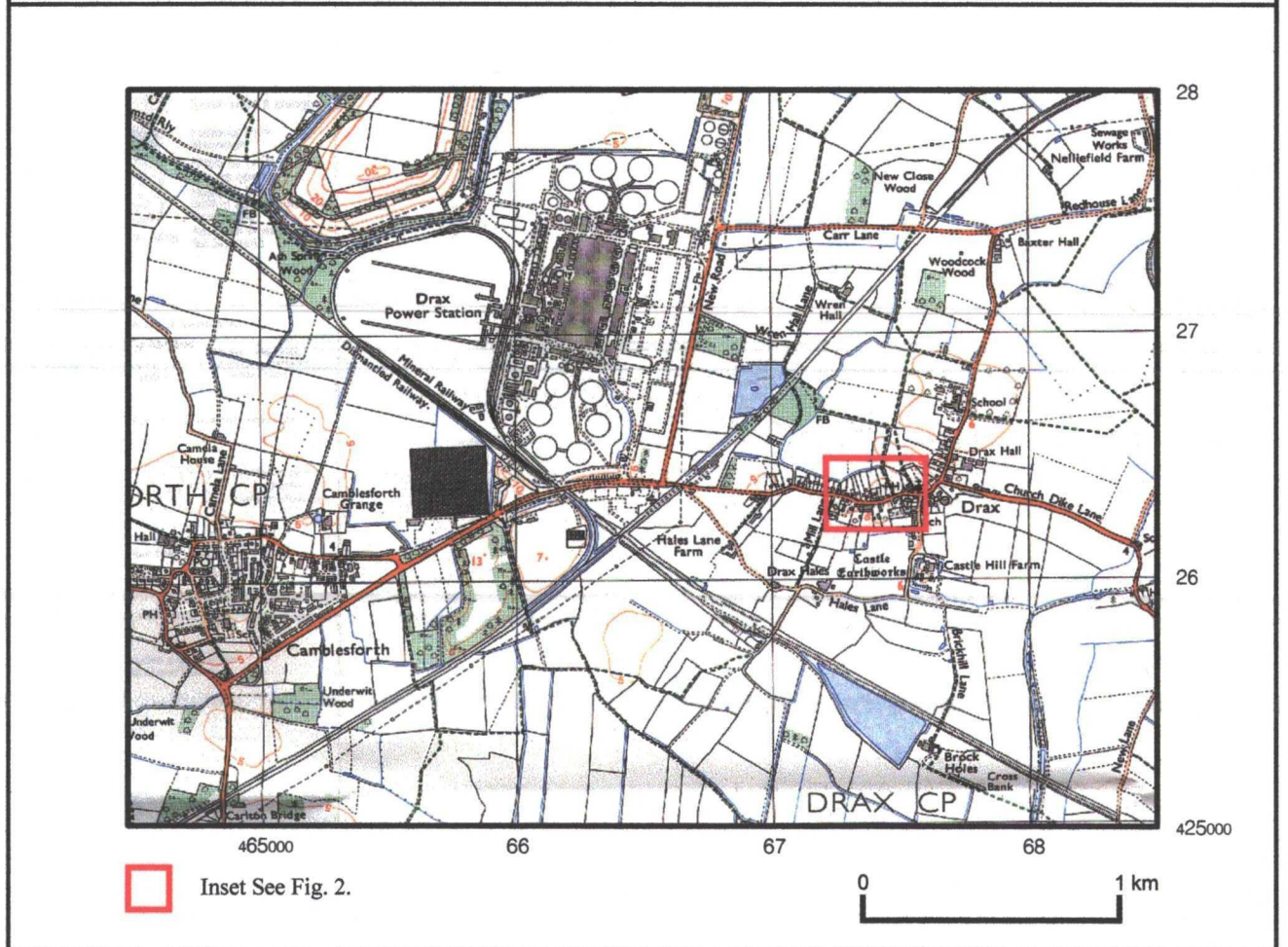
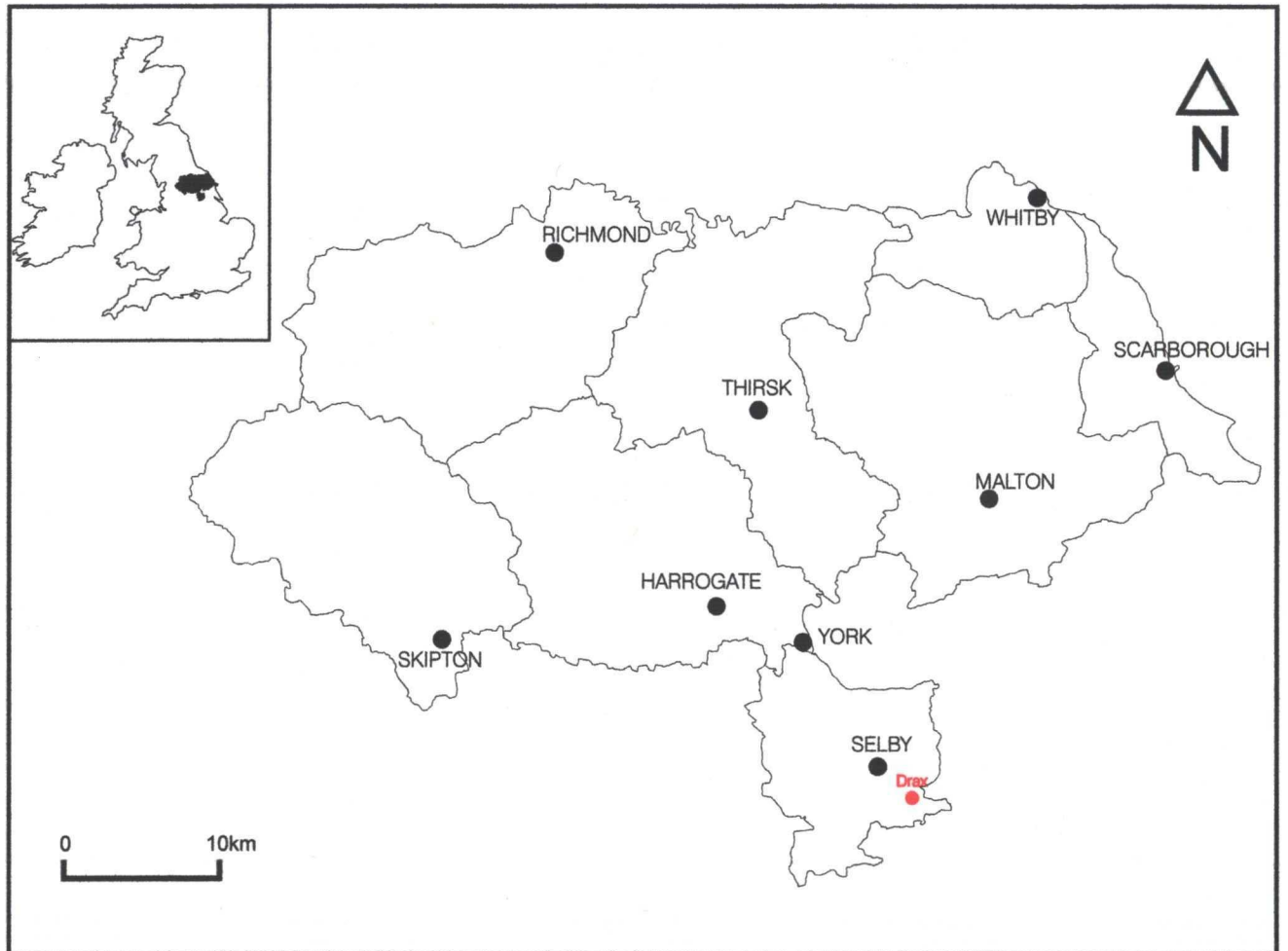


Fig. 1. Site Location



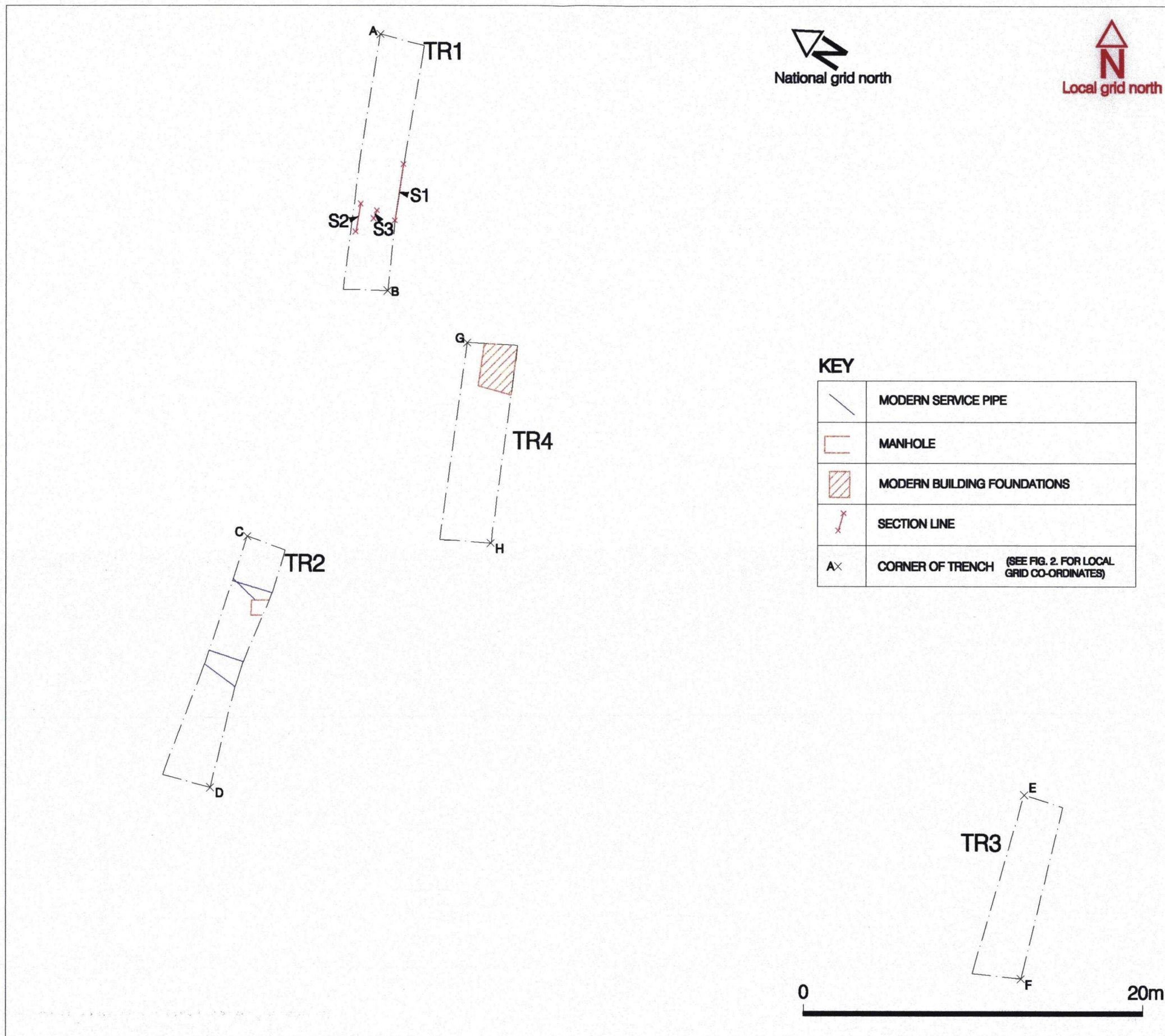
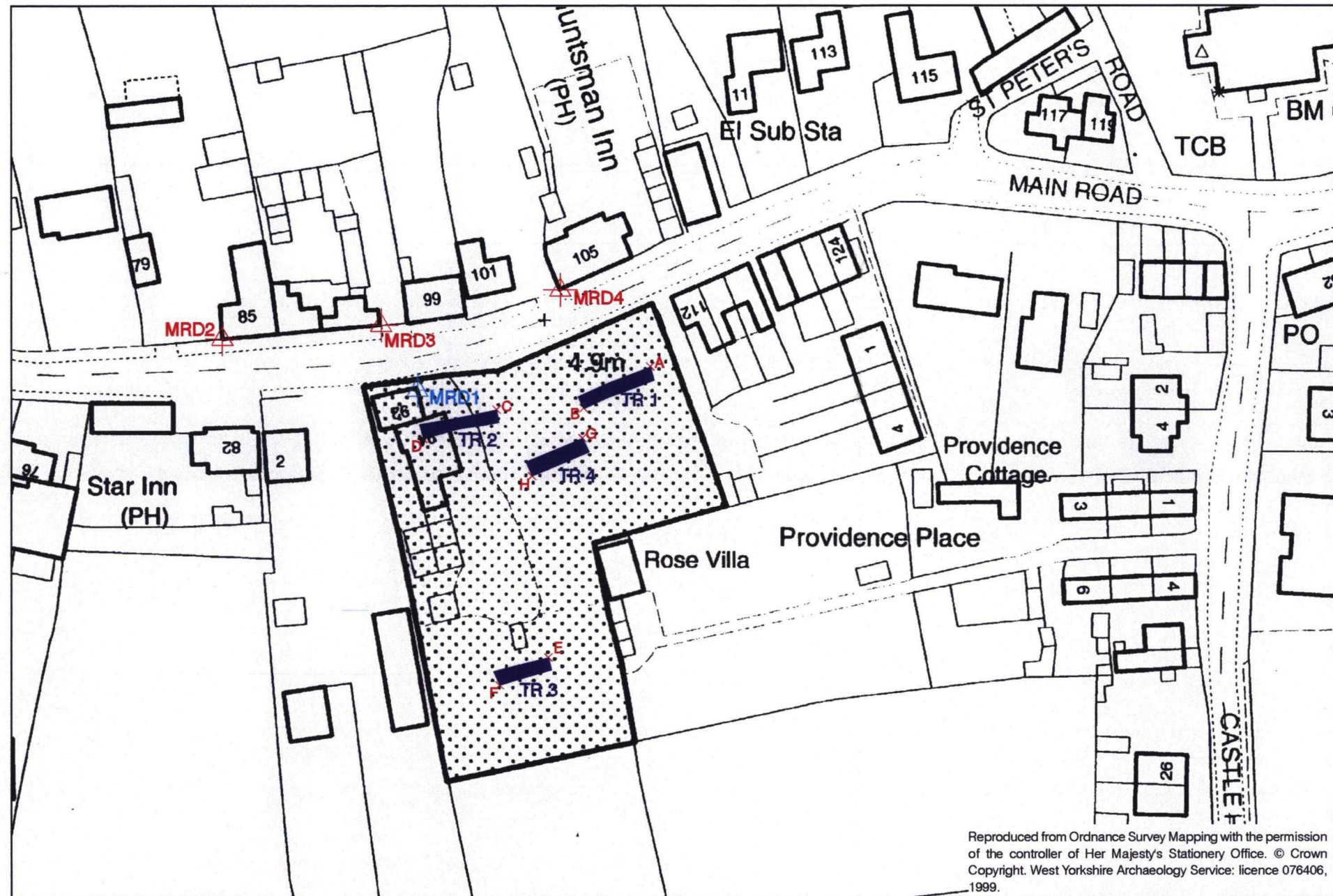


Fig. 3. Detailed trench plan (1:250)

Local grid north



KEY

	PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AREA
	TRENCH
	REFERENCE POINT
	TEMPORARY MARKER POINT (TBM)
	CORNER OF TRENCH

Local grid co-ordinates

- MRD1: 1000.00E 2000.000N
- MRD2: 972.78E 1972.75N
- MRD3: 985.79E 2000.40N
- MRD4: 997.27E 2033.20N
- A: 1018.64E 2040.73N
- B: 1019.09E 2025.58N
- C: 1010.81E 2011.09N
- D: 1008.64E 1996.28N
- E: 1056.68E 1995.87N
- F: 1056.48E 1985.03N
- G: 1023.76E 2022.52N
- H: 1025.15E 2010.70N

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0 40m

Fig. 2. Trench location plan (1:1000)