

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**MINSTER ROAD,
RIPON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2002 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 38**

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MINSTER ROAD, RIPON

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological watching brief at Minster Road, Ripon revealed a stone lined coffin and burial, and modern road surfaces. The burial is thought to have been early medieval in date.

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 22nd August 2002 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) carried out a watching brief at Minster Road, Ripon (NGR SE 3144 7113) (Figure 1). The work was undertaken for North Yorkshire County Council Highways and Transportation Department and took place during the excavation of test-pits to establish the causes of subsidence of the recently laid block paving.

2. METHODOLOGY

The trenches were excavated under archaeological supervision using a Volvo mini mechanical excavator with a toothed bucket. The deposits revealed in section were cleaned, photographed, sketched, measured and recorded. Recording followed procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust *Context Recording Manual* (1996).

Site records are currently stored with YAT awaiting a Harrogate Museum accession code.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

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 (Geological Survey 1979). Overlying this solid geology is a series of glacially deposited sands and gravels, which formed a number of mounds and ridges (kames) in the area.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

While there is significant archaeological evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity in the vicinity of Ripon, to date, no archaeological evidence from these periods has been discovered within the city except for some sherds of residual Roman pottery from excavations in the Deanery Gardens and some unstratified Roman coins which may be later importations (McComish, 2000).

The earliest archaeological and documentary evidence for settlement at Ripon dates to the mid 7th century monastic site. The documentary evidence for the monastery comes from Stephen of Ripon's *'Life of Wilfrid'* written c.AD 709/10, and from Bede's *'History of the English Church and People'* written c.AD 730. This evidence records that King Alhfrith of Deira donated land to Abbot Eata of Melrose in the 7th century, and that the monastery was subsequently reallocated to Wilfrid following the adoption of Roman rites (McComish 2000). Local tradition places Eata's

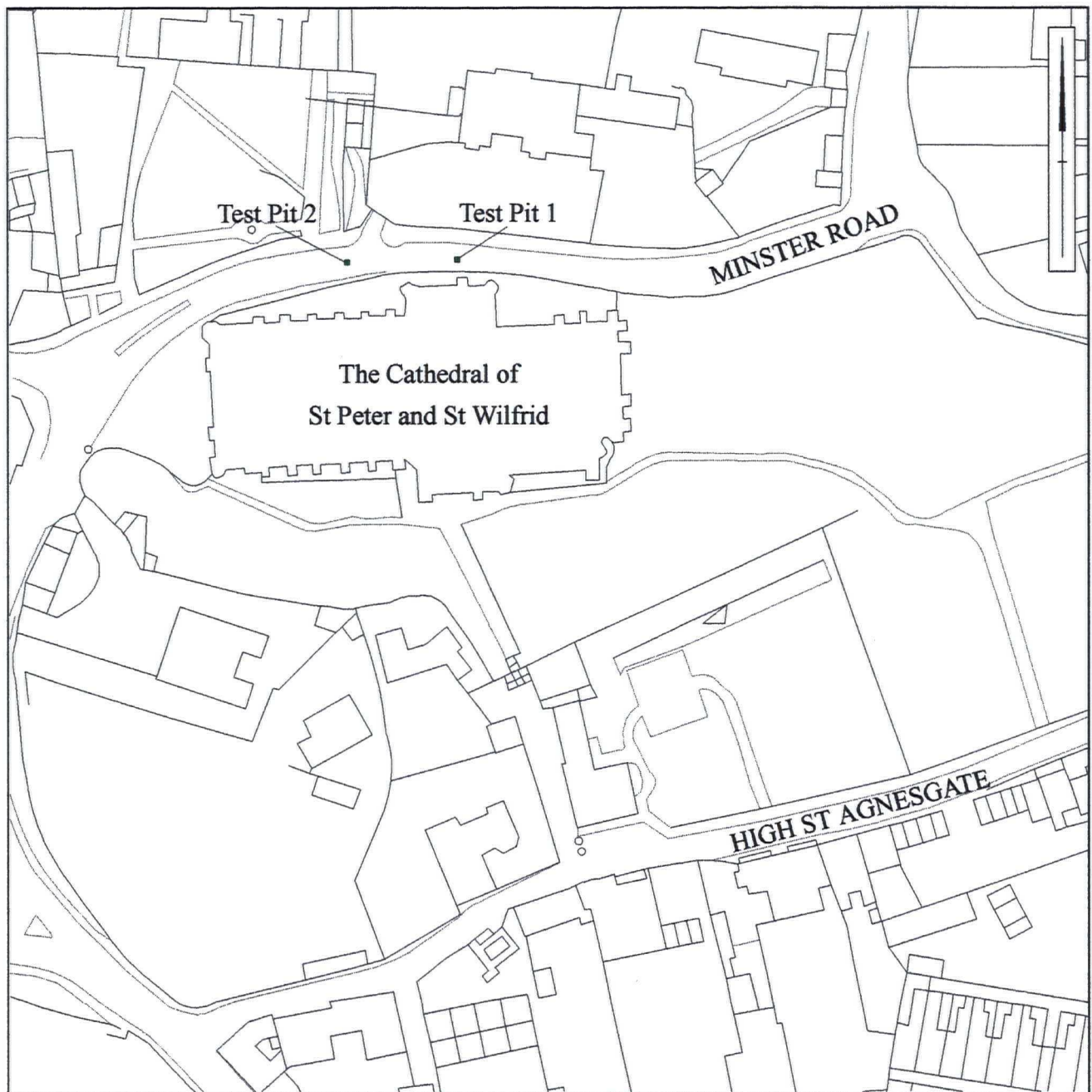


Figure 1 Location of Trial Pits

0 50 metres

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monastery at Scots Monument Yard, immediately to the north of the New School site (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140), while Wilfrid's church (of which the crypt survives), was on the site of the present Minster. Some time before the Conquest the monastery had become a minster church with a college of canons (McComish 2000).

An archaeological watching brief carried out by YAT in 1999 during the construction of a new footpath and the relocating of an existing kerb to the north of Ripon Cathedral revealed a number of burials believed to be of medieval date close to the north transept door. Several phases of burial were identified. Of particular interest was a cist burial which had been truncated by the construction of a brick tomb in the 19th century (Antoni 1999).

Abbot Hubby's Wall which is believed to have been built in the early years of the 16th century, bounds the pavement on the northern side (Johnson 1999). This wall forms part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, number NY1282.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Test-pit 1

The test-pit was located close to the North Transept, in Minster Road (Figure 2) and measured 1.12m long and 0.82m wide. It was excavated to a total depth of 0.55m below the present ground surface.

The earliest deposit was mid orange brown silty sand (1007) located at the base of the test-pit on its north side at only 0.40m below the present ground level. It contained occasional small fragments and flecks of charcoal, mortar, limestone and pink and red sand, and is interpreted as a burial soil. A large crudely fashioned block of limestone (1009) measuring 0.36m long by 0.20m wide by over 0.08m thick was located within the test-pit. This was probably situated on the southern side and formed part of the lining of a grave cut which was not visible. Within the cist style burial (a grave lined with boulders or roughly cut blocks of stone) the articulated lower arm (Ulna and Radius) of an individual was located. A pelvis or shoulder blade was also observed in section, perhaps from a second individual burial that may have truncated the cist burial (0.45m below the present ground surface). It was impossible, from the visible human bone, to estimate the sex or age of the individual(s?). From the evidence from the watching brief in 1999 adjacent to the North Transept, it is believed that these cist type burials are of early medieval date.

To the south of the burial a layer of dark grey brown silty sand was observed (1010) from 0.36m below the present ground surface. This may represent the top of the intact burial soil horizon in the area.

Layers of compact gravel (1006 and 1004) and cobbles (1005) which represented former road surfaces for Minster Road, were located at 0.33m, 0.24m and 0.17m respectively below the present ground surface.

Modern tarmac (1003), sand cement mortar (1002), block paving (1001) and a tarmac patch (1000) represent the modern surface, its bedding and a temporary subsidence repair. These deposits were 0.17m thick.

5.2 Test-pit 2

The test-pit was situated to the west of test-pit 1 (Figure 2) and measured 1.20m long and 0.80m wide. It was excavated to a total depth of 0.50m below the present ground surface.

Burials or burial soils were not encountered within this trench, as work stopped when a cobbled road surface (2006) was located 0.42m below the present ground surface. This appeared to have been bedded in yellowish orange sand. A build-up of mid brown silty sand (2005), which was up to 0.10m thick, lay on top of the cobbled surface, on the eastern side of the trench. This was sealed by a layer of compacted gravel and pebbles in a yellow brown sand (2004), which was located at 0.16m below the present ground surface, and may have formed the bedding for a modern road surface. A thin skim of tarmac (2003), a sand and cement bedding (2002), block paving (2001) and a tarmac repair (2000) sealed the top of the test-pit and raised the ground surface to its present level.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The test-pits have shown that significant archaeological deposits, in the form of human burials, exist beneath Minster Road. These may occur from as little as 0.36m below the present ground surface (the top of graveyard soil), although the top of the burial located within test-pit 1 was situated at 0.45m. The finding of a second cist burial to the north of the church, adds significantly to the earlier findings in 1999. It is advisable therefore that any relaying of the surface of Minster Road should keep within a 0.30m (300mm) limit, as otherwise significant quantities of human remains may be uncovered.

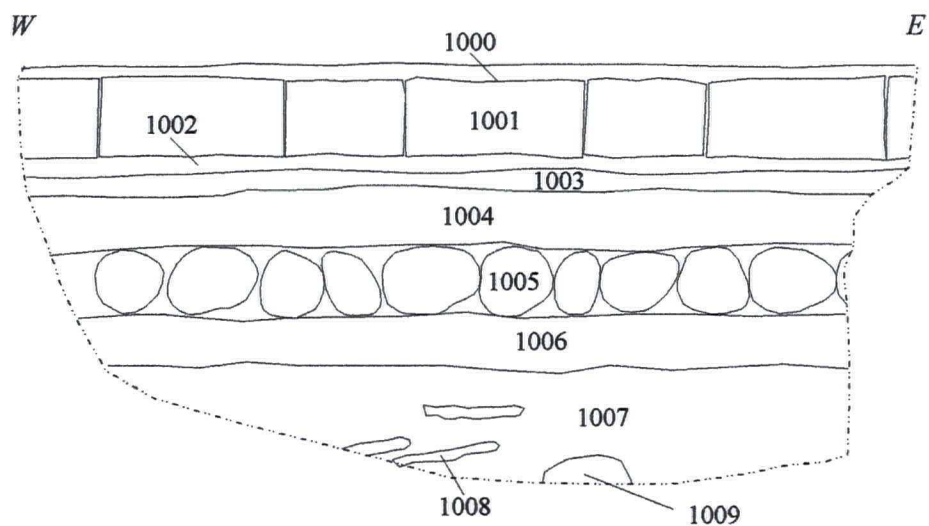


Figure 2 Test pit 1 South facing section

0 0.5 metre

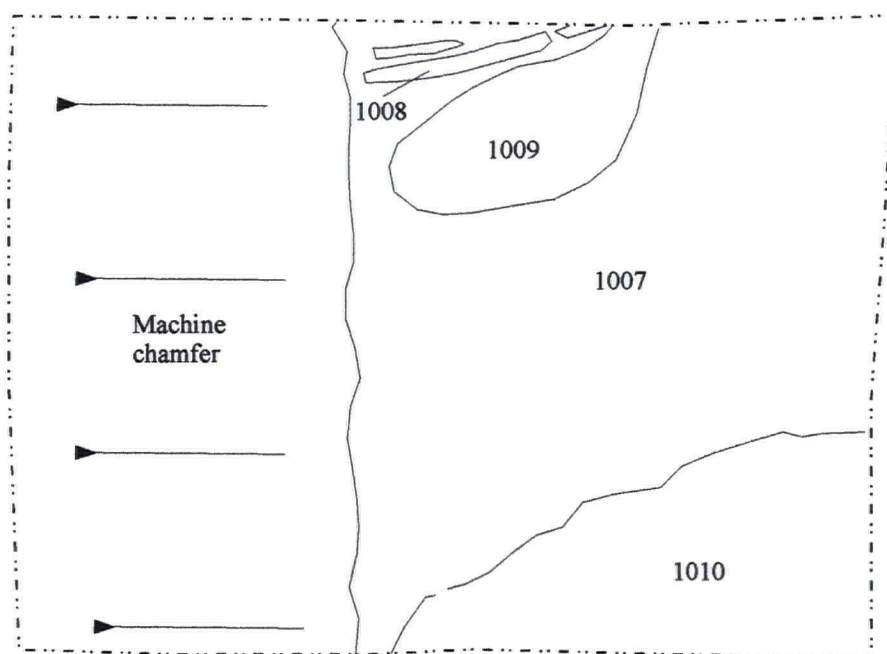


Figure 3 Test pit 1 plan

0 0.5 metre

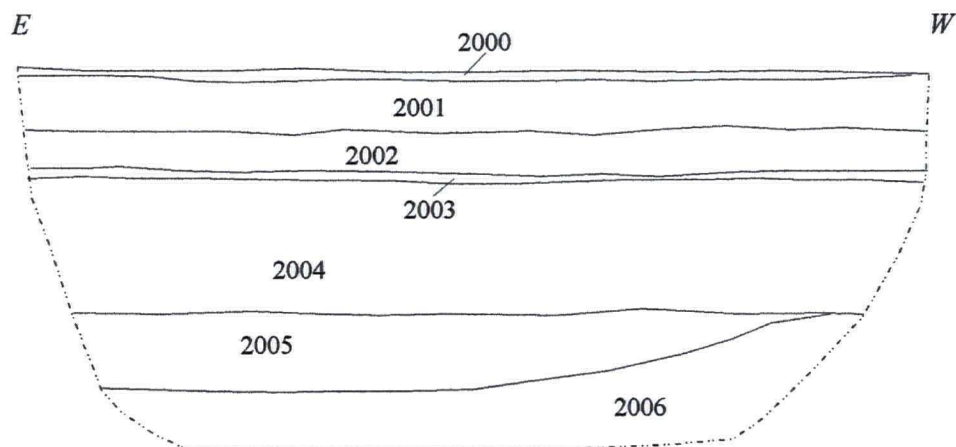


Figure 4 Test pit 2 North facing section

0 0.5 metre

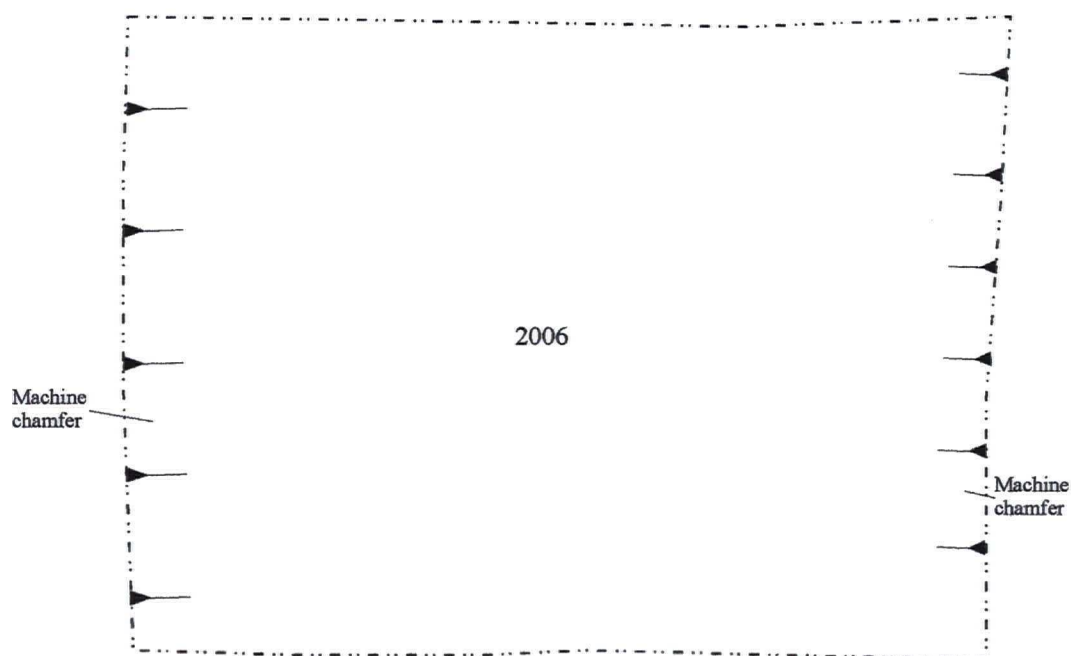


Figure 5 Test pit 2 plan

0 0.5 metre

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8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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