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**SKELLGARTHS,
RIPON,
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION**



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**SKELLGARTHS,
RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

In March 2001, York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological evaluation of land off Skellgarths in Ripon. The evaluation comprised the excavation of three trenches which identified a well preserved undisturbed sequence of medieval remains at 1.30m below ground surface from the area close to the Skellgarths street frontage. Undated alluvial deposits c. 2m below ground surface from the central trench are interpreted as an early course of the River Skell. Heavily truncated medieval deposits were recorded c. 0.60m below ground surface at the rear of the site. Investigation suggested that medieval deposits which related to the river course, the establishment of a mill race and associated water courses, the subsequent infilling of these features, land reclamation and subsequent use and activity are likely to be preserved in the half of the site closest to Skellgarths. Organic preservation within this sequence of deposits was very good allowing high quality biological data and organic artefacts to have remained well preserved.

Later deposits comprised post-medieval levelling and horticultural activity as well as structural remains of boundary walls, one of which may have acted as a retaining wall. 19th-20th century dumping and large pits were found to have truncated earlier deposits to the rear of the site. The pits had been filled with industrial waste, including quantities of casting sand, discarded by a brass foundry operating in the vicinity at the turn of the century and quantities of butchery waste derived from a pie factory associated with a butchers shop close by.

The evaluation determined that important medieval deposits could be destroyed as the result of development but that it should be possible to design appropriate foundations to minimise that destruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

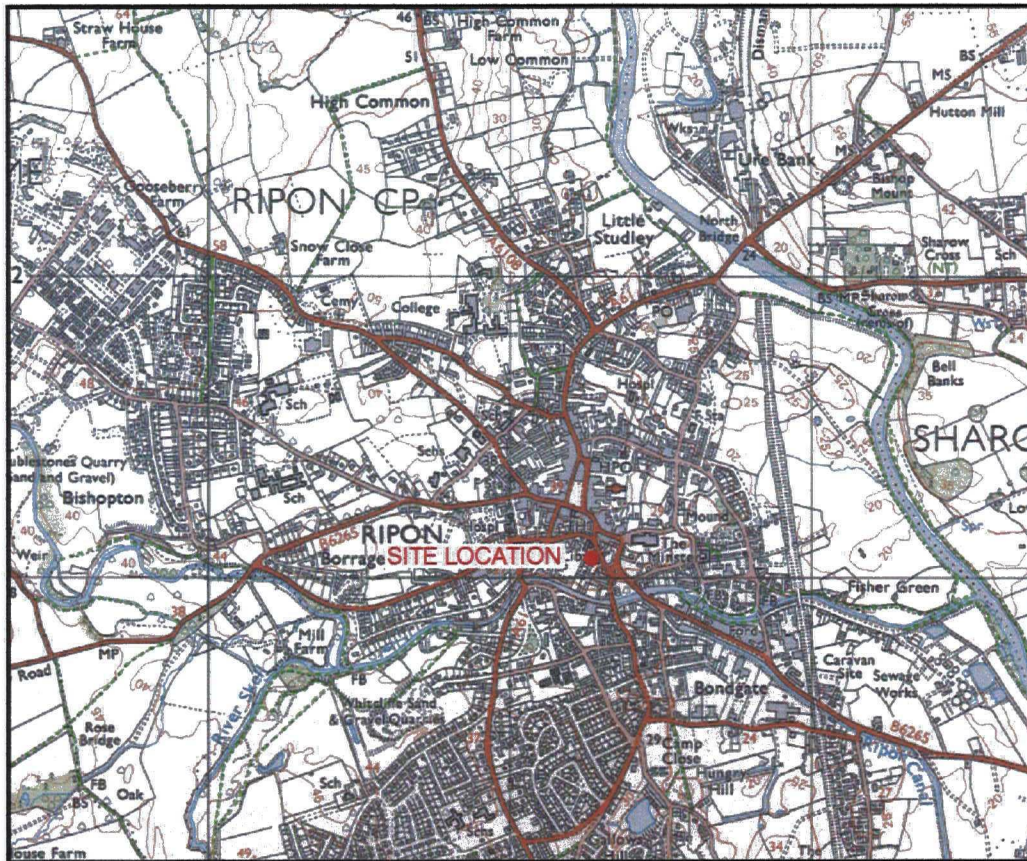
Between 7 - 20th March 2001, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation of a plot of land on Skellgarths, Ripon (NGR SE 3130 7110) (Figure 1). It was carried out to a specification developed by York Archaeological Trust and augmented by North Yorkshire Heritage Unit in advance of a proposed development scheme for the construction of houses on the street front and at the rear by Sanctuary Housing Association. A reinforced slab or piling may be the foundation options for the construction. At the time of writing a raft foundation was the preferred foundation solution. At the time of the evaluation, the type of foundations for the proposed buildings had not been chosen so the proposed depth of destruction was not known. Architects drawings showed that the slope on the site would largely be levelled out and thus the construction depths from the top of the present ground surface at the rear of the site would be deeper than those at the street frontage.

2. METHODOLOGY

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken by means of trial trenching with the intention of recording the complete archaeological sequence in each trench. Trench 1 was located towards the rear of the site; Trench 2, in the central area; Trench 3, in the L shaped area close to the street frontage with Skellgarths (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 10426.



Scale 1:25 000

BASED UPON THE 1985 ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25 000 SCALE MAP WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK, YO17FG. LICENCE NUMBER AL 100018343.

Figure 1, Site Location Plan

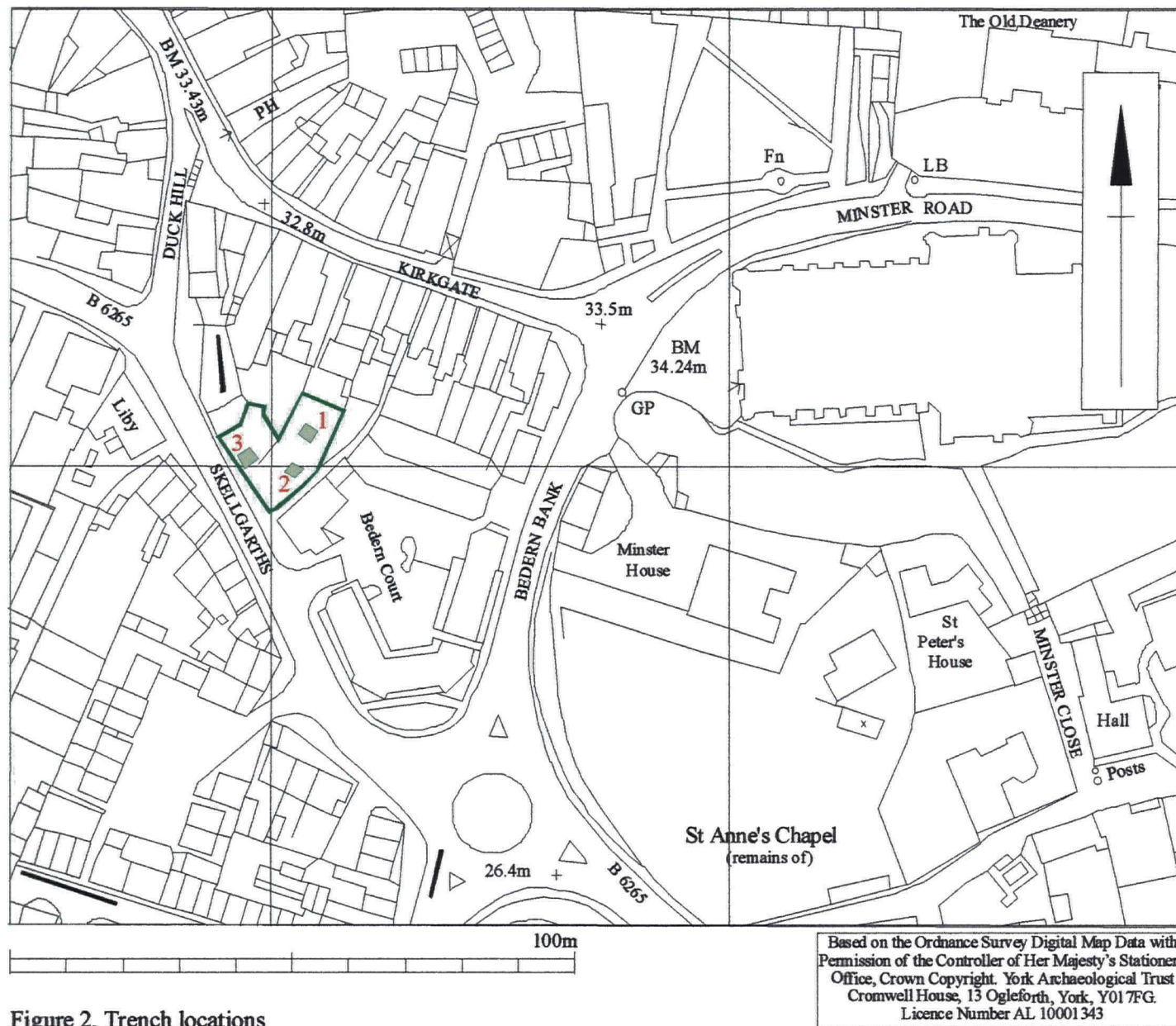


Figure 2, Trench locations

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Ripon is sited on an escarpment with the Minster standing on a spur of this ridge. The development site falls within the southern area of the town where the land falls steeply away from this ridge towards the River Skell, which meanders eastwards to its confluence with the River Ure c.1.25km to the east. The site on Skellgarths forms an L shaped plot which is currently vacant. The northern and south eastern boundaries are formed by a stone and brick wall which acts as a retaining wall, supporting terraced ground some 4-5m above Skellgarths, on which properties at 10-11 Kirkgate are built. A footpath from Skellgarths to Kirkgate lies adjacent to the south eastern boundary of the property. Within the development site itself the land slopes gently down from north to south with a slightly steeper slope immediately adjacent to Skellgarths. The surface of the site was mounded with relatively recent accumulations of debris, including substantial quantities of demolition material from the site to the rear of the plot, in Kirkgate. There are several well established trees located around the margins of the site which is, in parts, also overgrown with vegetation. The tree root systems may have caused some disturbance to the below ground deposits.

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 are periglacial deposits of sand and gravels. A recent ground investigation carried out by Norwest Holst Soil Engineering Ltd. (2000) recorded "*made ground*" extending to 3.3m below the existing ground level and underlying this a layer of sand and gravel was found above sandy gravelly clay, both representing glacial deposits. The recent desk top survey of evidence relating to this site demonstrated that previous excavation results from the adjacent site at Bedern Bank suggest that these boreholes may not record the full extent of the variation in the natural topography of the site (Finlayson, 2000).

Ripon is situated on the River Skell c.1.25km west of the confluence with the River Ure but the modern course of the Skell does not represent its changing, meandering historical course. The archaeological excavations at Bedern Bank in 1985 (CEU) located an upper and lower terrace to a meander with braiding of the Skell which, in the medieval period, flowed to the north of its present course. The Bedern Bank excavations were located on a modern ground surface which sloped down to the south from c.32.80m AOD to 26.8m AOD. In the northern excavated area (which is described as behind No.3 Bedern Bank) naturally deposited sand silt gravel and pebbles were located directly below the make up layers of the modern car park. This area was located on the upper terrace of the River Skell. The terrace sloped southwards to c.29m AOD and Perring interprets the excavation results to suggest that the original ground surface here had been cut away. Within the central part of the site, naturally deposited sandy clay was found at c.25.85m AOD. Within a distance of 13m to the south west this material was seen to slope down irregularly, and in places was stepped, to a depth of c.24.90m AOD. Beyond this point various waterlain silts and gravels were noted at and below 24.30m. The lower terrace was occupied by part of a braided meander of the River Skell, which was observed as a shallow water course, c.4m wide and c.0.50m deep in which the flow would have been towards the south east. Deposits on the banks of this water course indicated that it was prone to flooding and perhaps to slightly shifting water channels. The approximate locations of the excavated trenches have been established, but their precise location and the alignment of the terraces and the water course cannot at present be mapped with accuracy without significant further work on the Bedern Bank archive. The textual description in the archive report has been used to attempt to position the

water course, and unless it was particularly meandering in its course it almost certainly will also run across the area of the proposed Skellgarths development (Figure 9).

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to the evaluation an archaeological desk top study was commissioned. This study included an assessment of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) of North Yorkshire County Council, (records cards and maps), cartographic data (1733 to late 20th century), published and unpublished archaeological reports and works of historical and archaeological synthesis which related to this site (Finlayson 2000). The information in this section based on that report.

The site lies within Ripon Conservation Area, immediately to the west of what is likely to be the boundary of the ecclesiastical precinct of Cathedral of St Peter and St Wilfrid. It is defined as an area of archaeological interest on the NYCC local plan, 1991. No archaeological investigations have taken place within the boundaries of the development site but there have been a number of excavations within the area of the ecclesiastical precinct the findings of which have been published by Hall and Whyman, 1996 and Whyman, 1997. Most significantly, in relation to the development site was an excavation immediately adjacent, carried out in 1985 at Bedern Bank by D. Perring for the Central Excavation Unit. The findings of this investigation have not been published but a statement of the character of the archaeology of the site is amongst the reports in the NYCC SMR and the archive of the site has also been consulted. Findings from these archaeological investigations and an examination of the documentary and cartographic evidence for the site are discussed below.

While there is significant archaeological evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity in the vicinity of Ripon, to date, little 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 and more recently a Roman coin residual to a 11th/12th century context from the excavations to the rear of Wakeman House (Finlayson 2001). The earliest archaeological evidence for settlement at Ripon dates to the mid 7th century and relates to a monastic site. The first documentary evidence for this site dates from the 8th 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). Archaeological evidence which has been recovered from within this area includes that from an excavation in 1955 by A. Paget-Baggs in the grounds of the former Deanery Garden Hotel. This uncovered the foundations of a two cell church and associated cemetery believed to be the Ladykirk noted by the 16th century antiquarian John Leland. The findings of the 1955 excavation suggest that there was a church and cemetery on the site by the early 11th century, and that both may have been present from the 8th century onwards (Hall and Whyman 1996, 130). What are likely to have been further remains of this cemetery were recorded on the other side of Marygate by P. Mayes in 1974. In 1977 the area immediately to the south of Paget-Baggs site was excavated by D. Greenhaugh. A few contexts in the north-west corner of the site were identified as possibly pre-Conquest in origin and the "Ripon Jewel" dating from the 7th century was recovered here. While the position of the pre-Conquest ecclesiastical boundary are not known with any certainty, the findings from these excavations, together with antiquarian observations and an examination of the cartographic and topographical evidence have allowed the area enclosed by Allhallowgate to the north and Marygate to east,

encompassing the Minster, is at the core of Wilfrid's monastery (Hall and Whyman 1996, 136-44).

An undated skeleton was found at Bedern Bank and this may relate to the Minster graveyard (Hall and Whyman 1996, 141) but is unlikely to be an indication that burials might be found on the Skellgarths development site.

An early medieval secular settlement in Ripon is likely to have pre-dated the important ecclesiastical centre, and its presence was demonstrated by excavations at Ailcy Hill in 1986-87 (Hall and Whyman 1996) which show that a non-monastic cemetery on the site dated from the 6th -7th century. However, nothing is known for certain of the form or layout of early medieval secular settlement Ripon although remains from this period may well survive in the area of the development site as it lies close to the ecclesiastical precinct. After the Norman Conquest the monastery became a part of the diocese of York and remained a significant ecclesiastical centre throughout the medieval period.

While the form of the early medieval monastic precinct and secular settlement are not yet fully understood, there is clear evidence of ecclesiastical development from the later 12th century onwards and the town may also have undergone a period of expansion at this time. Some time before the Conquest the monastery became a Minster church with a college of canons and in the later 12th century the rebuilding of the Minster church was begun. Bedern Bank is thought to have been the site of the Vicars' houses (or Bedern) (Ryder 1990). An assessment of excavations on Low St Agnesgate by P. Mayes in 1974 and in the Deanery Gardens by D. Greenhaugh in 1977-8 revealed significant evidence of settlement in this part of Ripon dating from the 11th 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 12th or early 13th 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-13th century boundary to the ecclesiastical precinct, and the suggested date of buildings constructed over the ditch is given as the 13th/14th 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). The coincidence of the earliest surviving documentation from the later 12th and the 13th centuries and the reorganization of the town is noted (Whyman 1997, 162). However the need for further excavation evidence to "*confirm, amplify or correct*" this interpretation is also highlighted by Whyman (1997, 162). At the end of the 12th century, in 1194, Ripon is first referred to as a borough and Mackay argues that the royal charters for a fair and market are granted in this period indicating flourishing secular activity (Mackay 1982, 73). Recent excavations to the rear of properties to the east of the Market Place indicate intensive domestic occupation of the area from the 12th/13th century onwards but there is also some indication of earlier features on the site dating from the 11th century. A large ditch, possibly dating from the 12th century, was found to closely follow early cartographic representations of the rear boundary of burgage plots fronting the Market Place (Finlayson, 2000). Excavations to the rear of the Wakeman's House, to the south side of the market place also demonstrated domestic occupation from the 12th century onwards, with some features possibly dating from the 11th century (Finlayson, 2001).

Excavations at Bedern Bank in 1985, adjacent to the development site, indicated that this area of Ripon was also occupied in the medieval period. They show that "*in the early medieval period the Bedern Bank site was mainly occupied by a broad meander of the River Skell. Evidence was*

found to show that in the late 12th or early 13th century the river banks had been revetted by timber stakes and a terrace wall had been built. Two stone lined hearths were found set in an open area between the bank and the wall. On the upper terrace 3-4m above the stream and opposite the western front of the Minster no occupation levels survived. During the 13th century water was drained from the lower terrace, probably by the construction of a mill stream which in the post-medieval period ran alongside Skellgarths. Reclamation dumps extending across the stream beds were rich in well preserved organic materials (including several shoes and a wooden bowl) and had been deposited in order to raise the ground level so that the area could be used as a garden or orchard. By the end of the 15th century the site had been divided into a number of separate properties with houses built against Bedern Bank and tan yards against the mill stream. The tanning industry was represented by liming pits, waste horn cores and clay floored buildings with stone footings, the earliest of which may have dated from the 14th century” (Perring, 1985).

Post-medieval maps show a mill race, which draws its water from the River Laver, running along Water Skellgarth and Skellgarths before joining the main course of the River Skell near Bondgate Green Bridge. Mackay locates the Archbishop’s Mill adjacent to the mill race on Skellgarths. The mill is referred to in Domesday Book as standing on the archbishop’s demesne, and is recorded as the Archbishop’s Mill called Bymylne in 1228 (Fowler 1881, 60). There is an 18th century reference to a watermill at the bottom of Duck Hill called Byemill (Mackay 1982, 77). In 1893 part of Bye Mill - Duck Hill, was sold due to road widening and the remainder became a house in 1988 (Taylor 1998, 15). There is a documentary reference to Skellgarths being called “Walkmill Bank” in the 1340’s (Fowler 1881, 140-143) which indicates that the mill here may have been a fulling mill.

The natural water course located by the excavation at Bedern Bank (1985) may have been used as a source of water power before its course was more formally manipulated into the mill race as documentary evidence suggests that a mill may have existed here from at least the 11th century. Recently part of the construction of the mill race was observed in the gardens to the rear of St Agnes Lodge (Younge, *pers.comm.*) and its line can be followed from 18th century maps. The 1744 Enclosure Map for Ripon shows that the course of the River Skell has been manipulated to form a mill race at Bondgate Green. Jefferey’s map of Ripon, 1772 shows the course of the mill race with the bridges which cross it most clearly and a path runs along the line of Skellgarths. This map also marks a mill at the bottom of Duck Hill, on Skellgarths, and there appears to have been a mill on this site from the 11th century. This mill seems to lie outside the development site, but it is possible that earlier structures could encroach upon it.

Cartographic evidence provides an indication of the development of the site from the 18th century onwards. The mill race and the site of the mill on Skellgarths are features which continue into the post-medieval period (see above). In 1776 an engine was installed at Bye Mill, Duck Hill Mill to pump water to stand pipes in the town. (This “water works” is wrongly identified on Jeffrey’s map as at Union Mill) (Taylor 1998, 15). The mill race is shown clearly on Jeffrey’s 1772 map and Langdale’s 1818 map running along the line of Skellgarths.

“Skell-Garths” appears as a street name on T. Gent’s 1733 map of Ripon. Jeffrey’s map, 1772 shows the whole of the Skellgarths street frontage to have been built up, but this may be a stylised representation. The 1800 enclosure map of Ripon shows a narrow pathway leading from Kirkgate to Skellgarths and this has continued in use to the present day. On this map one building is shown on the Skellgarths street frontage within the development site and the land

lying to the rear of the Kirkgate plots is shown as built up with ranges of buildings extending back from the main properties. However, Langdale's map of 1818 shows the area which is now Bedern Court to have been built up but the development area appears as open space. In the second half of the 19th century the area was clearly more heavily built up. The 1854 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows the whole of the Skellgarths frontage with buildings. The building footprints shown on the 1929 Ordnance Survey map appear to remain constant until these buildings were demolished (presumably) in the 1980's and there is some evidence of demolished buildings on site in the form of old walls.

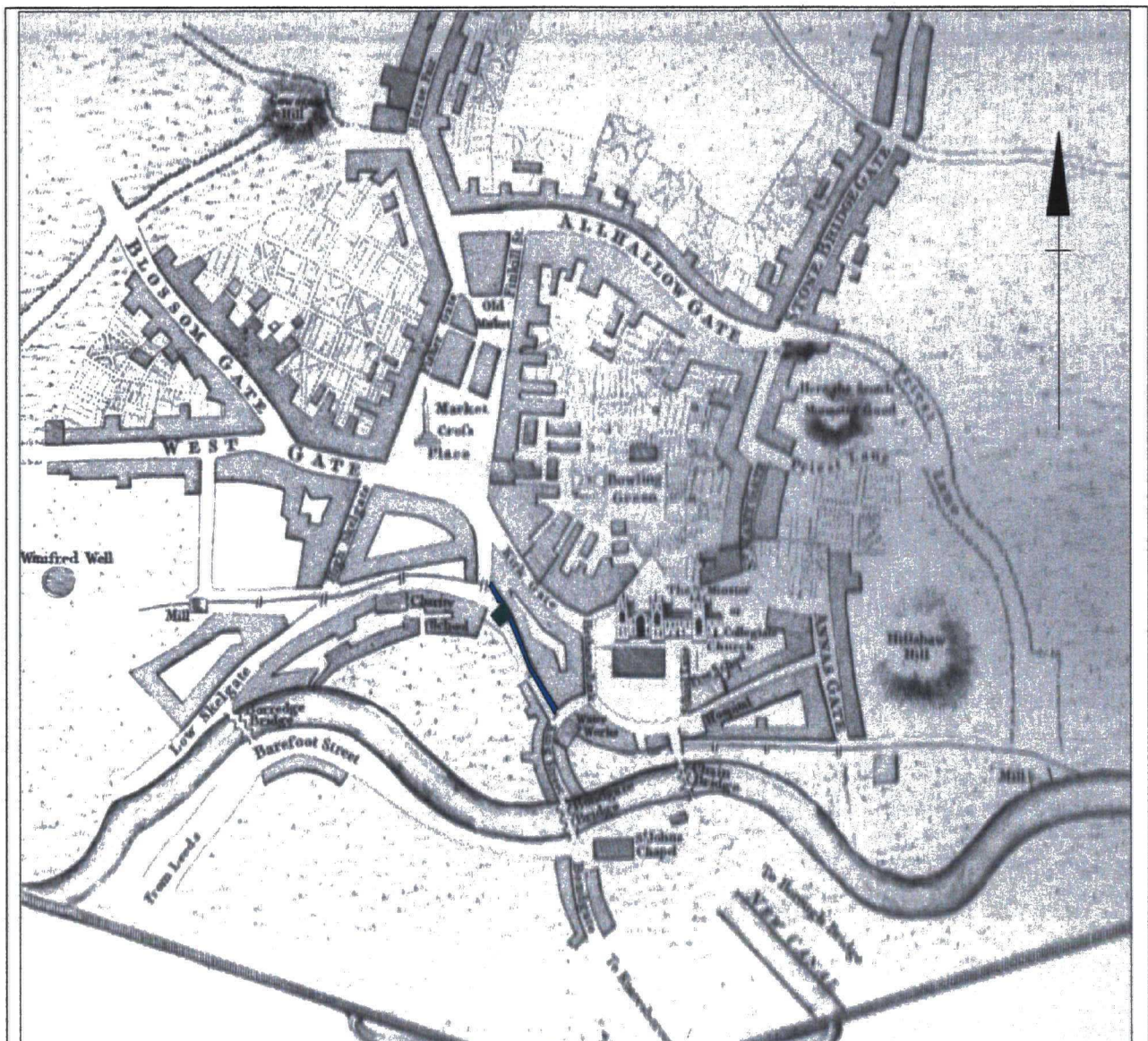


Figure 3, Jeffereys Map of Ripon, 1772, with the millrace and mill at Skellgarths emphasised

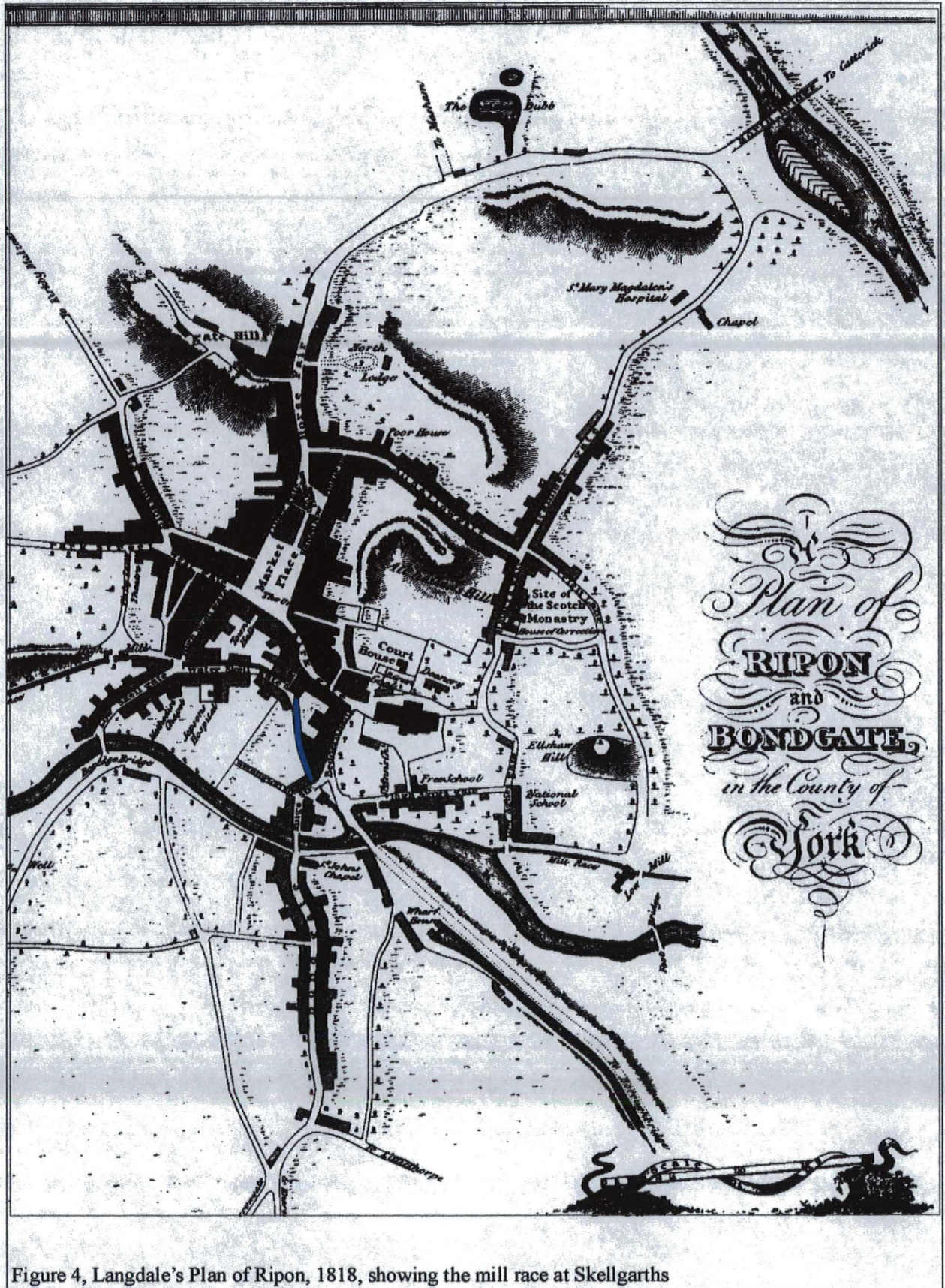


Figure 4, Langdale's Plan of Ripon, 1818, showing the mill race at Skellgarths

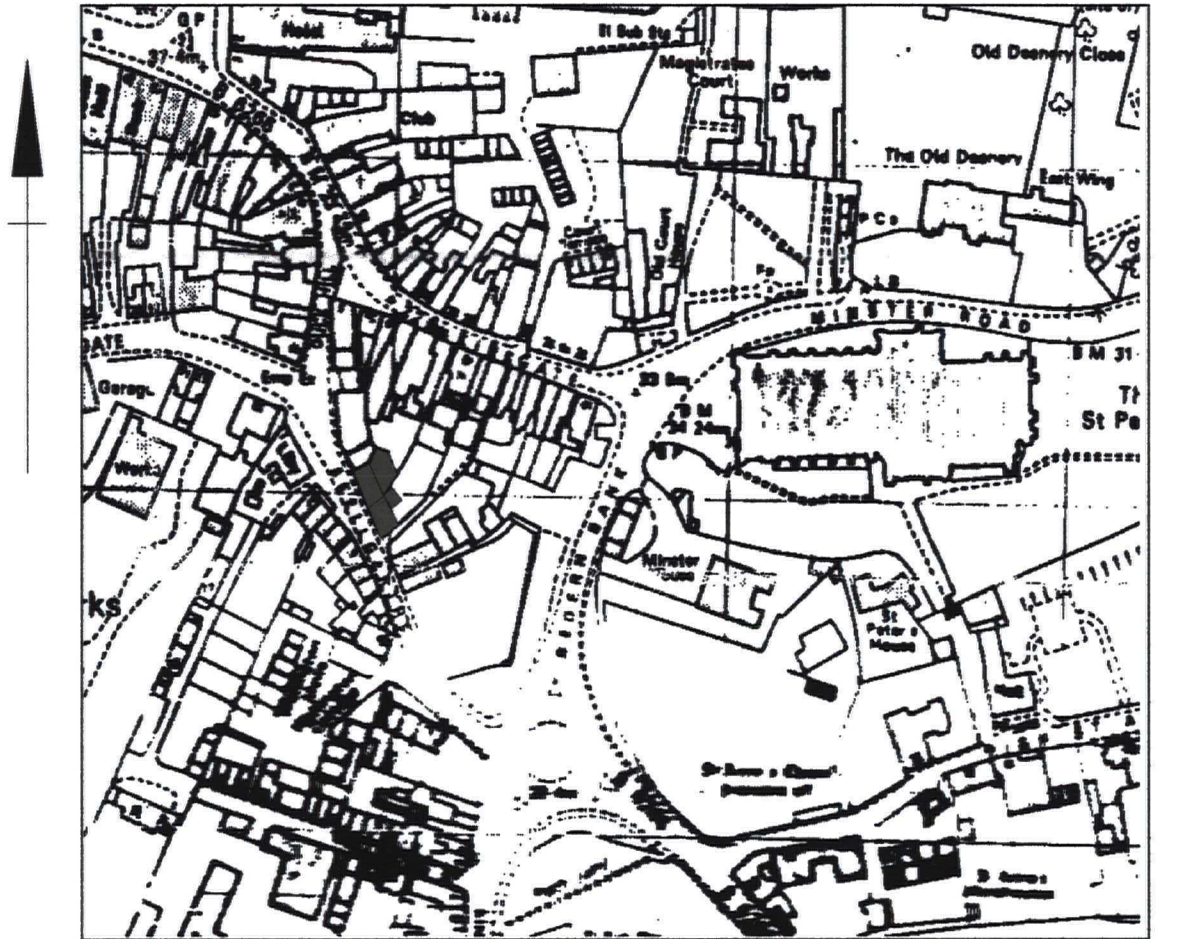
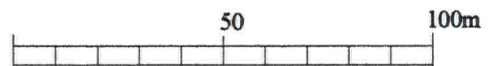
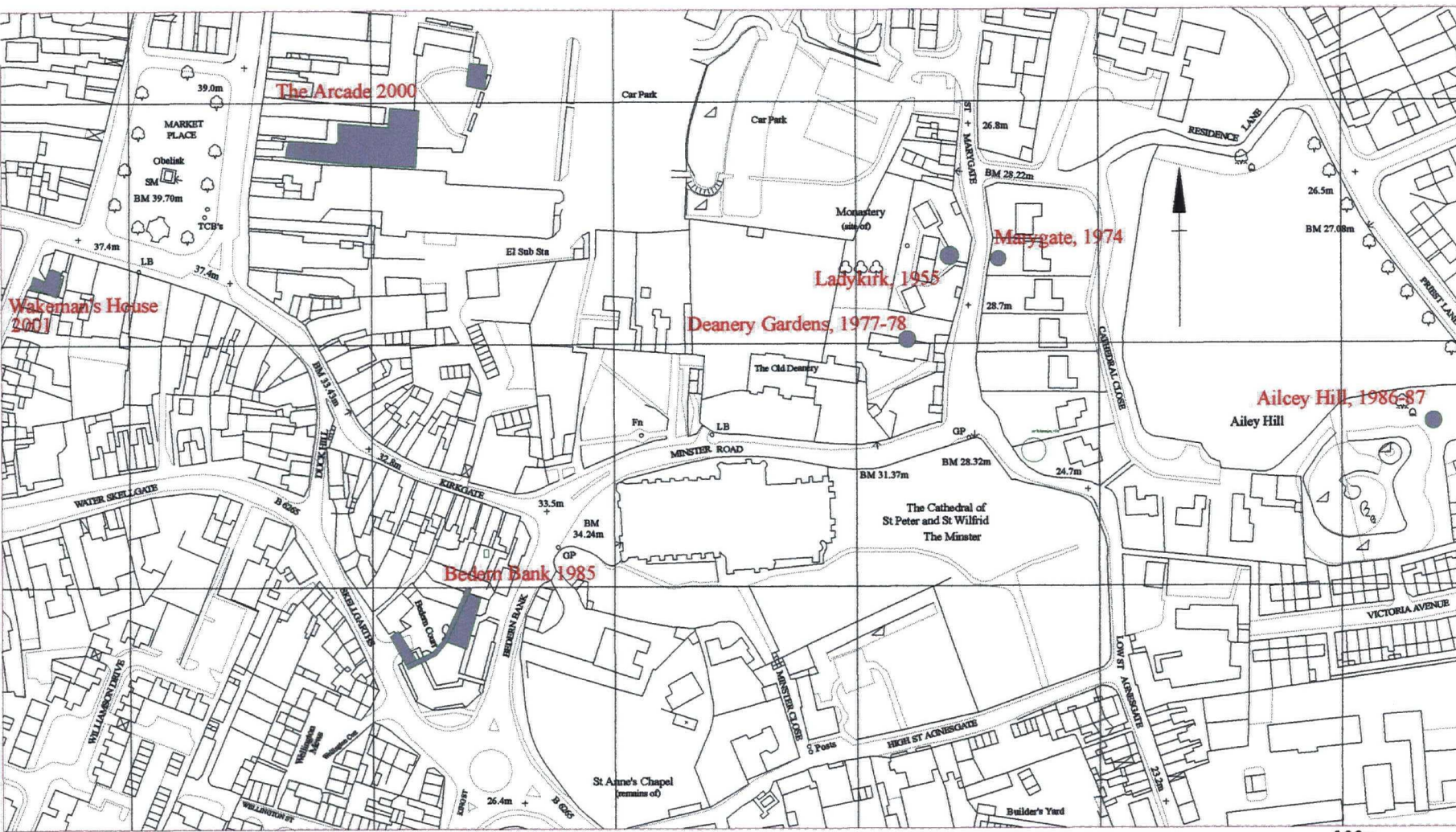


Figure 5, Buildings on the site, 1983





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Figure 6, Previous Archaeological Interventions mentioned in text

5. THE EXCAVATION

Modern deposits were removed in all three trenches by machine using a toothless bucket under constant archaeological supervision. All archaeological deposits were carefully excavated by hand and were recorded at a scale of 1:20 using a single context planning system and following the procedures in the York Archaeological Trust Context Recording Manual (1996). All significant archaeological features, deposits and structures were recorded in section at a scale of 1:10, and were photographed using colour print film; where appropriate soil sampling was implemented to recover environmental evidence.

The levels in this report were calculated from the bench mark on the wall of the Old Deanery which has the value 31.37m AOD.

The excavated contexts with their descriptions are listed in appendix 1; their stratigraphic order is shown on the matrices (Figure 7). The contexts are discussed below trench by trench in groupings which have been made on the basis of their close stratigraphic relationships and the similarities in character and the processes of their deposition and phased into periods on the basis of initial dating of the pottery assemblage. The stratigraphy is then discussed period by period.

5.1 TRENCH 1 (Figures 7 and 8)

Naturally deposited sand with pebble banding and occasional fragments of gypsum (1013) was encountered c.0.95m below the ground surface and sloped down towards the south from c.27.83m to 26.95m AOD. This material had been cut by a later pit (1002) allowing a section through it to be observed. While environmental contamination by roots, worms and a small mammal's burrow was observed the material was clearly seen to be naturally deposited glacial sands and gravel.

In Trench 1 the earliest archaeological deposits had been substantially truncated by a pit cut (1002). However, in the areas which remained, there was c.0.10m depth of a build-up, or dump of natural sub-soil, comprising a pebbly silty sand (1010), immediately above the natural sub-soil. This deposit followed the natural slope down towards the south and was encountered at its highest point c.0.60m below the ground surface. Below it, a very small area of an earlier clay silt deposit (1011) was observed in the south-west corner of the trench. This was seen in too small an area to reach a conclusion as to whether it was the back-fill of a pit or yet another dump following the ground slope from north to south. Poorly preserved charred grains of wheat and oats were identified by biological analysis in context 1010. It appears that these deposits were the only material surviving in this area of the site from the medieval period and pottery recovered from them dated from the 12th/13th century.

Stratigraphically above 1010 was a thicker dump deposit, a loose mixed sand (1006) with inclusions of quantities of mortar and limestone including one very large limestone block which indicated that it may have derived from building demolition. 1006 included fragments of 14th century pottery and it is possible that it was an *in situ* medieval deposit but the loose character of the material suggested that it had been reworked later during levelling or landscaping of parts of the site, in which case the pottery may be residual.