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SDC 97

WATCHING BRIEF AND EXCAVATIONS

IN

FINKLE STREET AND MICKLEGATE,

SELBY,

NORTH YORKSHIRE

FOR

SELBY DISTRICT COUNCIL

VOLUME 1

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1. SITE AND SETTING

The town of Selby is located 13 miles south of York and 30 miles west of Hull, in the centre of Selby District, North Yorkshire, on the River Ouse (Plan 1). The District of which Selby is the capital is largely rural, with coal mining between York and Selby bringing some recent prosperity. Historically it was situated in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but transferred to North Yorkshire with local government reorganisation in 1974.

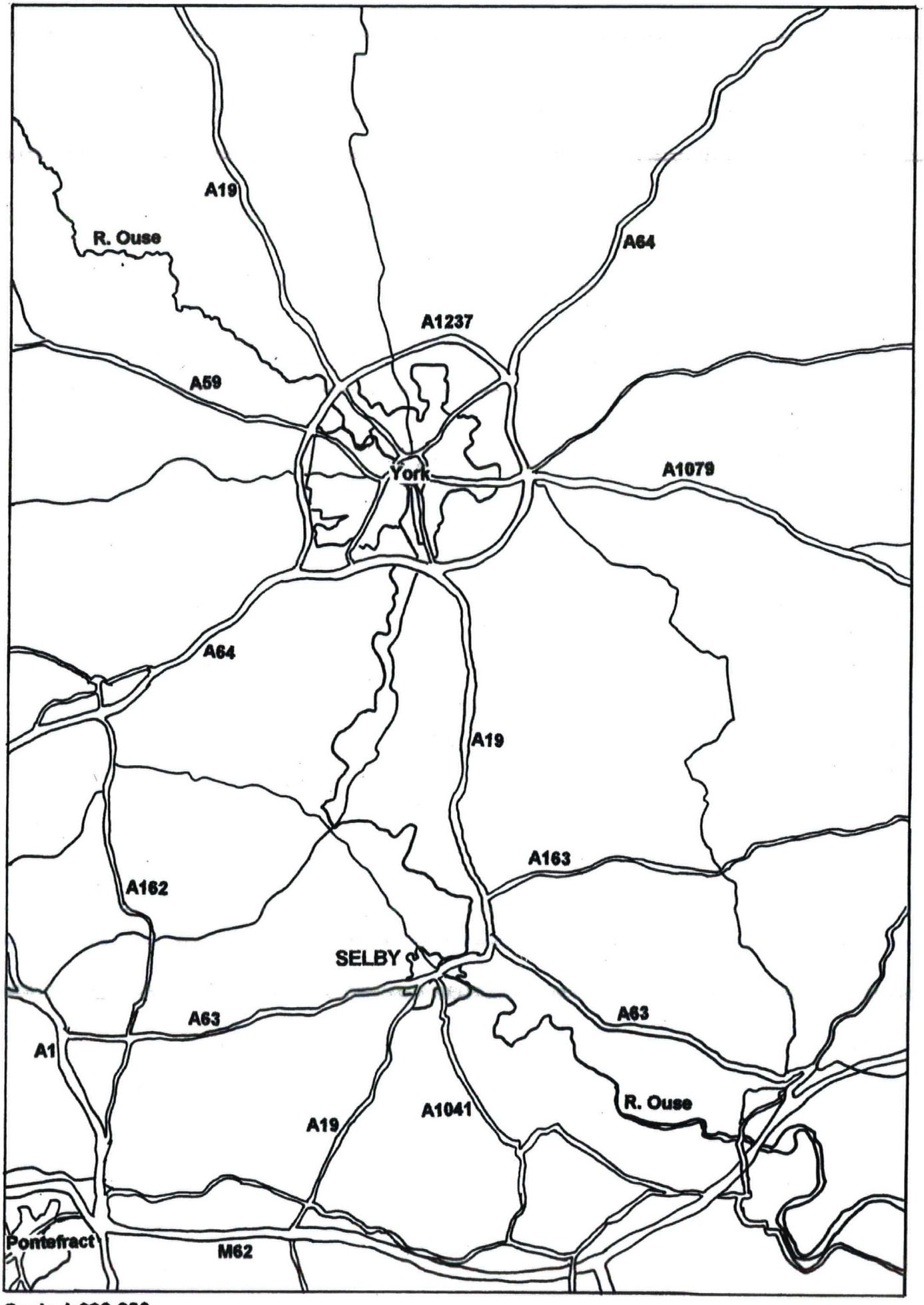
The surface geology of Selby is dominated by sands and gravels with some clay, largely of riverine or periglacial origin. The area of Micklegate and Finkle Street is low-lying and rises very gradually from north-east to south-west away from the river, from 6.1m. OD at the north-east end of Micklegate to 6.7m OD at the south-west end of Finkle Street (OD spot heights). The town generally rises slightly to the site of the Abbey Church, but is everywhere low-lying (below 7m. OD) and has been subject to periodic flooding throughout its history. Notable floods are documented in 1794, 1866, 1947 and 2000, as well as earlier ones in 1315, 1550, 1564, 1614, 1625, 1715 and 1763 (Radley & Simms 1970, pp.8-9). The evidence of the archaeological work described in this report indicates that there were almost certainly a number of flooding episodes at Selby other than those listed here, particularly in the 14th and 15th centuries. The eighteenth century seems to have been a particularly severe one for flooding, and may have been a factor in the impetus to build a bridge at Selby. The Ouse is tidal up to Selby, and Selby Dam, a tributary now much straightened and canalised, was used as an anchorage point in the medieval period. Selby Dam runs into the Ouse to the north of Micklegate.

The areas involved in the excavations of 1997 consisted of the market area of Micklegate and an adjoining street, Finkle Street (Plan 2). Micklegate is a large, roughly rectangular open area aligned south-west to north-east, narrowing to the south-west. It is used as a car park except on Mondays when the street market is held there. Finkle Street joins Micklegate from the south west. The River Ouse runs approximately north-west to south-east to the north-east of Micklegate, separated from it by warehouses and wharves. The Abbey Church, formerly the church of a Benedictine Monastery, lies to the south, and the main routes through the town now bypass Micklegate.

The built landscape of Micklegate and Finkle Street is a mix of late twentieth century development and mainly nineteenth century buildings, with some eighteenth century or earlier. Nineteenth century frontages may mask earlier buildings, and Finkle Street contains a higher proportion of pre-nineteenth century buildings than Micklegate. Much of the south-east side of Micklegate has been redeveloped in the twentieth century, leaving only the Griffin public house (Victorian frontage) in the southern corner and a small row of probably nineteenth century shops to the west of Wren Lane. On the north-west side of Micklegate is a mixture of modern and earlier.

The north-eastern end of Micklegate is open to Millgate and Water Lane, but beyond these is a group of buildings some of which are medieval. The Abbots Staithe is a substantial, finely built, magnesium limestone warehouse facing the north-eastern end of Micklegate and backing on to an area of wharves, warehouses and industrial development alongside the River Ouse. It dates to the later medieval period and its name derives from what was presumably an adjacent staith or jetty from which ships would unload their goods into the warehouse. Its present location, at least 40 metres from the river edge, indicates that the river has been encroached upon and canalised since the late medieval period.

PLAN 1 SELBY LOCATION PLAN



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2. HISTORY

2.1 Pre-medieval settlement

The conventional history of Selby begins with the foundation of the Benedictine monastery in 1069. However, evidence has recently become known of earlier settlement. Traces of Roman occupation have been found near Selby Dam (Gez Moody, pers. comm.) and in the Church Hill area (Antoni, 1998), mainly nearer to the river than the existing centre of the town and possibly centred around the slightly higher ground of Church Hill.

The place name itself indicates a settlement earlier than the Norman, as it combines the Old English *sel* – willow – (or less probably, dwelling) with the Scandinavian suffix *by* – farmstead (Smith, 1961). The discovery of fourteen wooden coffins on Church Hill in 1857 (Morrell 1867) also suggests pre-Norman settlement, as the style of burial is considered to be Anglo-Saxon. No trace of these coffins survives. An early eleventh century survey of the estates of the archbishop of York mentions '*uper* Seleby' (Dobson 1993). This was the area to the north of the present town, while lower Selby was attached to the king's estate at Snaith.

The most likely area for the pre-Norman (Anglo-Scandinavian) settlement has generally been assumed to be around Church Hill (Morrell 1867, Tyler 1976). The coffins were from this area, and the first, wooden church is supposed to have been here also, close to the river. It is possible that, if there was an existing, pre-Norman settlement, its centre was a little upstream, by the banks of Selby Dam. The earlier course of Selby Dam is not known with any precision, but a small settlement by its banks could be postulated, presumably dependent on fishing and farming.

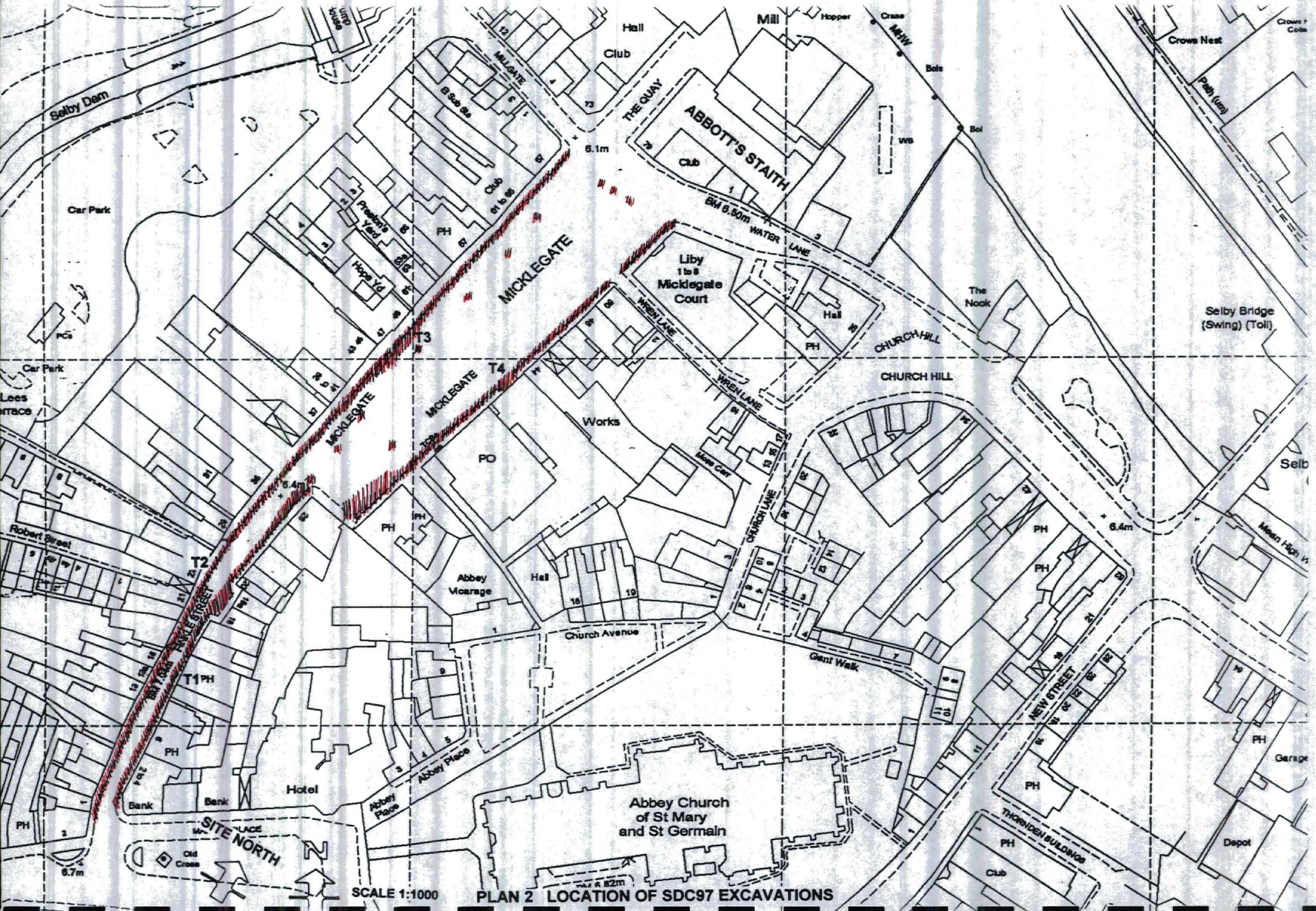
2.2 Medieval period

The town was dominated by the Abbey throughout the medieval period, when many of the townsfolk were tenants of the Abbey, and the town's administration was under the control of the church. The Abbey stimulated the growth of the town, and the market, trade and ship-building activities of the town flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and beyond. The woollen industry was also an important factor in the town's prosperity. In 1379 a Poll Tax (Farrer & Clay, 1914-1955) shows Selby to be the sixth largest town in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but by the end of the fifteenth century towns such as Bradford and Halifax had taken over as the principal centres of woollen cloth production. The dissolution of the monastery in 1539 resulted in the development of numerous small industries as the monastic monopoly was removed, and the town also continued to function as a market and trading centre.

The name of Micklegate was first recorded in 1297 and may have been the first market area in the town. Until the late eighteenth century, traffic from the west approached the river crossing either along Bondgate/Millgate or from Finkle Street through Micklegate. The ferry, which predated the toll bridge (built in 1791-2), operated a little upstream of the bridge (Tyler 1976, Plan 3), not far from Micklegate. Micklegate and Finkle Street were therefore at the heart of the medieval town, and the Market Place was a slightly later development more closely associated with the commercial activities of the Abbey. Equally important was proximity to the river Ouse, where much trade was carried out and boat-building was an important activity throughout the medieval period. Selby was used as an entrepot where goods brought in to the country by ship were transferred into smaller vessels for onward passage, and vice versa (Dobson, 1993).

2.3 Post-medieval period

After a period of change and development at the end of the medieval period, there seems to have been a period of stagnation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the end of the eighteenth century, major changes were made in the street pattern around the south of the Abbey church which had become the parish church of the town. The construction of The Crescent, which was cut through an area formerly occupied by monastic buildings, and the

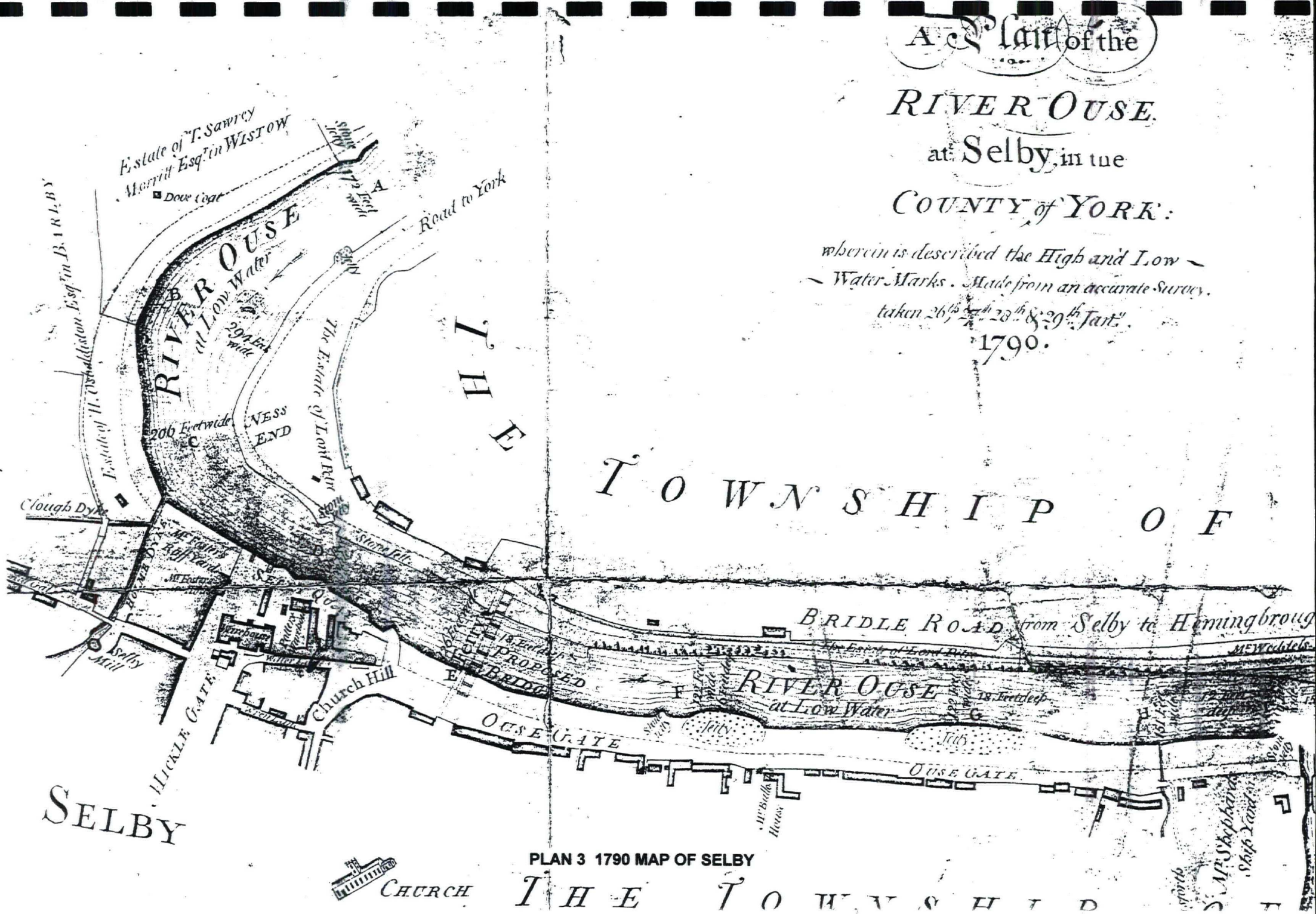


PLAN 2 LOCATION OF SDC97 EXCAVATIONS

construction of the bridge over the River Ouse, had a strong effect upon Micklegate and Finkle Street. The main traffic through the town northwards no longer passed through these streets to the ferry crossing, but was directed past the end of Finkle Street into Market Place, along The Crescent and New Street directly to the new bridge. This must have affected the shops lining Finkle Street and Micklegate, but the weekly market continued to be held in Micklegate as well as the Market Place before the Abbey Church.

The nineteenth century saw a decline in the fortunes of Selby as a port, as a new canal bypassed the town and the new port of Goole took over much of the previous river trade. There was also a major cholera outbreak in 1848-49, and the coming of the railway in 1834 did not halt the general decline in the prosperity and population of the town.

There is cartographic evidence (Plan 3) that the north-eastern end of Micklegate was occupied by buildings in the late eighteenth century, which have disappeared by 1808. A map of 1847 (Plan 4) shows, on the south-eastern side of Micklegate, enclosed areas corresponding to property frontages. These may have been gardens or more probably sales or display areas in front of shops, but are not evident on other maps.



PLAN 3 1790 MAP OF SELBY


Oil Manufactory
Selby Dam
Saw Pit
Timber Yard
Abbey or Thorp's Abbots Staith
Crane
Sen. Cock
Site of the Old Church Yard
Site of the Old Parish Church
Church Lane
Brunswick Row
New Street
Brewery
St. Mary and St. German's Church
(Perpetual Curacy)
Formerly the Church of the Benedictine Abbey of St. German. Founded in the Year 1069.
Chancel
North Transept
The Nave
Tower
Chapel
Porch
Font
PLAN 4 1847 MAP OF SELBY

3. PROGRAMME OF WORK

In early 1997, Selby District Council began a programme of improvements in Finkle Street and Micklegate in Selby town centre. The roads and pavements were completely resurfaced, new gullies inserted and eleven trees planted in Micklegate. Previous work in 1996 for Yorkshire Water had shown that both streets and particularly Micklegate had high potential for the survival of archaeological remains including environmental evidence of very good quality (Clarke 1996). The opportunity was therefore taken to conduct an archaeological watching brief during the resurfacing and gully work, and to excavate the tree pits by hand archaeologically (Photo 1).

The results of these excavations and the accompanying watching brief are presented here. Both the watching brief and excavation were limited in scope and constrained by time, and the archaeology revealed was complex. No large areas were available to be opened up and subjected to full archaeological examination, and as a result only small 'snapshots' of the accumulated deposits were possible. Further difficulties were presented by the complexity of the deposits. Much of these had been subject to re-working and mixing over time (due in large part to the very wet and intermittently flooded ground), with resultant problems of residuality and the difficulty of precise dating.

The evidence from the watching brief portion of the work is necessarily less precise than that from the excavations, but it nevertheless provides valuable information from areas otherwise unexplored. Much of the material was recovered from spoil brought up by machine, and access to the deeper machine trenches was very limited. This obviously resulted in further mixing of deposits and imprecise dating. As was to be expected, some of the most interesting material was unearthed by machine in a watching brief trench in the south-west corner of Micklegate.

The methodology for determining the phase structure of the deposits was largely intuitive. For the watching brief element (T1-T5), a division into medieval, post-medieval and modern is all that has been attempted, as it was not possible to determine fine stratigraphy. For the tree pit trenches (TP1-TP11), a combination of factors has been taken into account. Where undisturbed natural was reached, the first phase has been defined as the earliest visible human intervention. Where clear structural elements were visible, these have been used to define a phase, but this was possible only occasionally. Otherwise, dating evidence from both pottery and leatherwork has sometimes produced clear divisions between one context and another, and the presence or absence of other inclusions such as wood (either as stakes and beams or as small fragments within the soil), tile, or brick has also contributed to the process. An alteration between thick deposits built up over a considerable time, and very thin layers can indicate a significant change in depositional regime and thus help to define a phase. In the absence of other defining features, a change in soil type, from organic silt to sand or clay (or vice versa), has generally been used as a criterion.

The results of the Finkle Street watching brief are described first, then those of the watching brief around Micklegate, and finally the excavations of the tree pits. Site north throughout the report points up Micklegate directly towards the River Ouse, a direction that is actually north-east.

PLAN 5 FINKLE STREET – T1 AND T2

SCALE 1:500

4. FINKLE STREET WATCHING BRIEF
(Plan 5)

4.1 The surface of the footpath along both sides of Finkle Street was removed to a depth of between 300mm and 450mm. The kerbs were also removed, creating a trench approximately 500mm deep. All the existing surface water runoff gullies were replaced, which involved the cutting of trenches between 1m and 1.65m deep at intervals along both sides of the road. There were seven of these, of which three produced evidence of medieval occupation. The width of the trench varied according to the position of the existing and the new kerb lines, but was between .7m and nearly 4 metres. The trench on the eastern side was designated T1 and that on the west T2 (Plate 1).

Phases were hard to define as modern disturbance from the existing gullies and from other services was widespread, but organic deposits with good preservation of organic material were present not only in the gullies but in some of the shallower excavated areas. Some of these also produced medieval material.

Plate 1 – Finkle Street from north after refurbishment

4.2 MEDIEVAL

Apart from one disturbed context extending along much of T2, containing 15th to early 16th century pottery (Appendix 4) and medieval leather shoe fragments (Appendix 3), all the medieval material was recovered from the northern end of Finkle Street. In the machine cut trench T1 on the eastern side of the street were several features showing at the base of the trench, at a depth of between 400 and 500mm below the surface. The precise nature of these was not established as they were not excavated in full, but two appeared to be large postholes or small pits cut into disturbed soils, and another could have been the top of a larger spread of material. All contained dark brown or black organic sandy silts, and pottery dated from the 14th to the 15th or 16th centuries. Fragments of leather, animal bone and wood were also present, indicating a high level of organic preservation.

There were also several other features, both cut features and spreads, containing similar soils but without dateable evidence recovered. It would seem likely that they too date to the late medieval period or earlier, as they were at similar levels. Undoubtedly more dating evidence could have been obtained if full excavation had been possible.

Contexts 3052 and 3088 in T2 contained medieval material, but were identified as the fill of a water main trench running the length of the street. The original cut of the trench had clearly disturbed earlier layers and brought material close to the surface from lower down. This clearly implies that more widespread medieval deposits exist in Finkle Street than were identified in this watching brief.

This conclusion is borne out by the evidence from the gullies. While four of the cuts for these revealed no dateable material earlier than the 18th century, three produced abundant medieval finds. Gullies J/K (adjacent to each other in T1, Plan 5) were in new positions, so not subject to the same disturbance as the gullies further down the street. They contained a cobbled surface at approx. 5.79m OD, set into pale grey sand. Above and around the cobbles was a 250mm layer of black organic silt containing bone, wood, tile and several leather fragments. One of these was identifiable as a piece of a medieval turnshoe (a diagnostic construction method dating to before the 16th century – Appendix 3), suggesting that the cobbled surface itself was of medieval date.

Sealed below the pale grey sand in Gully J was a further layer of black organic silt at a height of approx. 5.09m OD. It was not excavated as it lay at the base of the required depth, but it contained animal bone and is assumed to have been medieval.

A little further up T1 a machine cut was made to locate a 19th century sewer pipe known to run along Finkle Street. This was located at a depth of 1.65m. below the surface in a vertically cut trench filled with mixed and disturbed soils. To the west of the sewer trench a layer of black organic silty loam emerged approximately half way down, extending to the base of the trench. It contained some cobbles as well as bone, wood and pottery dating to the 14th – 15th centuries.

Gully M was machine cut into the road alongside the sewer trench cut. The organic silt layer continued beneath a thick layer of most-medieval deposits, and extended from approx. 5.18m to 5.61m OD. Cobbles, bone, wood and pottery were frequent, as were fragments of leather. The leather was concentrated in 3 places within 100mm of the base, fairly close to each other (no more than 500mm apart), and consisted of various waste and scrap fragments and numerous parts of shoes. The shoes included ankle boots and shoes of turnshoe construction, one of which was dateable to the early/mid 14th century (Appendix 3). This accords very well with the pottery dates of 14th to 15th century. One of the concentrations was centred on a vertical stump of wood around 100mm. in diameter, which may be significant (see description of T5 in section 5.3.1).

A soil sample taken here produced wood, bracken and straw fragments, as well as large numbers of cornfield weeds (Appendix 1, context 3046). It has been interpreted as most likely to represent cornfield waste probably being used as bedding together with the bracken. It is not clear what part the leather plays in this, though it seems likely that the whole layer is a dump of material that had been used elsewhere, possibly to build up and provide a firmer footing on muddy ground.

In T2 another new gully, Q, was machine cut alongside an old gully. A layer of black, organic, stony silty loam was encountered between 5.85m and 5.65m OD, containing wood, animal bone, tile, pottery and leather. The pottery dated to between the 14th and the 16th centuries, and the leather consisted of waste and scraps together with parts of shoes of medieval construction. Beneath this layer was a layer of fine pale grey silty sand, similar to that in Gully K/J, which in turn sealed another organic layer.

The material from this lower layer included animal bone, metalwork, pottery from the 14th to 15th centuries and leather including shoe parts of late 14th to early 15th century date. A soil sample (Appendix 1, context 3106) showed a composted structure containing abundant seeds and some cereal straw. The plants represented included wet-ground and fen-type conditions, and there was no food debris. As with the sample from Gully M, it is most likely that the deposit was bedding material with a dung component. If it were the same as the lower organic material in Gully J, it would indicate a widespread layer.

The only other contexts with dateable medieval material were those associated with the fills of later service trenches, where soils had been disturbed to a greater depth and then replaced. There were however some deposits in two of the other gullies, H and N, that were similar to the medieval contexts elsewhere, and may have been further evidence of medieval occupation. It seems certain that medieval deposits were present along the length of Finkle Street, though in some areas, particularly the southern end of the street, they were too deeply buried to have been identified by the limited excavation undertaken.

4.2.1 Interpretation

The overall picture is of deposits of organic material, probably representing animal bedding in part but also containing other evidence of human activity, in a rather damp and muddy

environment. The presence of a layer of fine silty sand between organic layers may indicate a flooding episode. It may be that ground levels in the medieval period were lower at the southern end of Finkle Street than the northern, or conversely that there has been a greater build-up of material since the medieval period, since medieval deposits at the southern end of the street only occur where modern disturbance has brought them nearer to the surface. This would seem to be in accordance with findings from excavations in Selby in 1996. Soil samples from both Micklegate and Market Place found that Market Place, despite being further away from the River Ouse, was a wetter environment than Micklegate. It may therefore be the case that the southern end of Finkle Street, near to Market Place, was lower and more waterlogged than the northern end near Micklegate.

4.3 POST-MEDIEVAL (16th-18th C)

There was intermittent evidence of post-medieval activity in Finkle Street. Clearly there was a build-up of material after the medieval period, but occupation debris and therefore dateable material was scarce. 17th and 18th century pottery was present in a widespread layer of stony loam on the western side of Finkle Street that extended from 150 to 750mm below the surface, and again in Gully N half way along the street. Post medieval pottery was also present in a very mixed deposit 400 to 950mm below the surface in the machine cut to identify the sewer trench. Fragments of tile were fairly frequent, as were brick fragments and animal bone. Other layers that sealed medieval deposits were presumably post-medieval, and were predominantly stony loamy sands with some clays. They may represent deliberate attempts to build up the ground levels, in order to mitigate the effects of flooding or merely to cover earlier material and provide a better footing for traffic.

4.4 MODERN

Modern disturbances were widespread. Most consisted of services, from the main 19th century sewer trench and other water services to electric, gas and telecommunication trenches. The trenches cut by Yorkshire Water to renew services and mains supplies in 1996 were identified (Clarke 1996). Outside the Blackamoor public house (6-8 Finkle Street) was an area of brick rubble and mortar, in places a solid line approximately 1.75m out from the present building line. It appeared too modern to represent an earlier building line, and may be an earlier kerb or possibly a porch protruding from the pub. Earlier kerb lines were also identified outside 20-22 Finkle Street and 26-28 Finkle Street. Modern deposits also included the original gully pots that were replaced, dating probably to the 1850's when the main sewer was put in. These were constructed of bricks forming a cylinder, packed around with pink very sticky clay as a sealant, with ceramic drains running from them to the main sewer, generally to a depth of 750mm below the surface.

The former kerbs were granite stones set in concrete, and the pavements were mainly tarmac laid onto mixed sands and sandy loam. At the southern end of Finkle Street on the east side there were paving slabs set onto sand over coarse concrete.

5. MICKLEGATE WATCHING BRIEF
(Plan 6)

5.1 A similar operation to that in Finkle Street took place around Micklegate, involving the replacement of kerbs and gullies on the western, eastern and southern sides of the market area (Plate 3). In addition, an area in the south-eastern corner was reduced in level overall, and several smaller trenches were cut across parts of Micklegate. As with Finkle Street, the cuts for the gullies revealed the most substantial evidence of medieval occupation, but the shallower trenches also contained disturbed deposits containing medieval material. Work on the western side of Micklegate is considered separately from that on the eastern and southern side.

Plate 2 - T3 from north

5.2 Micklegate West Side – T3

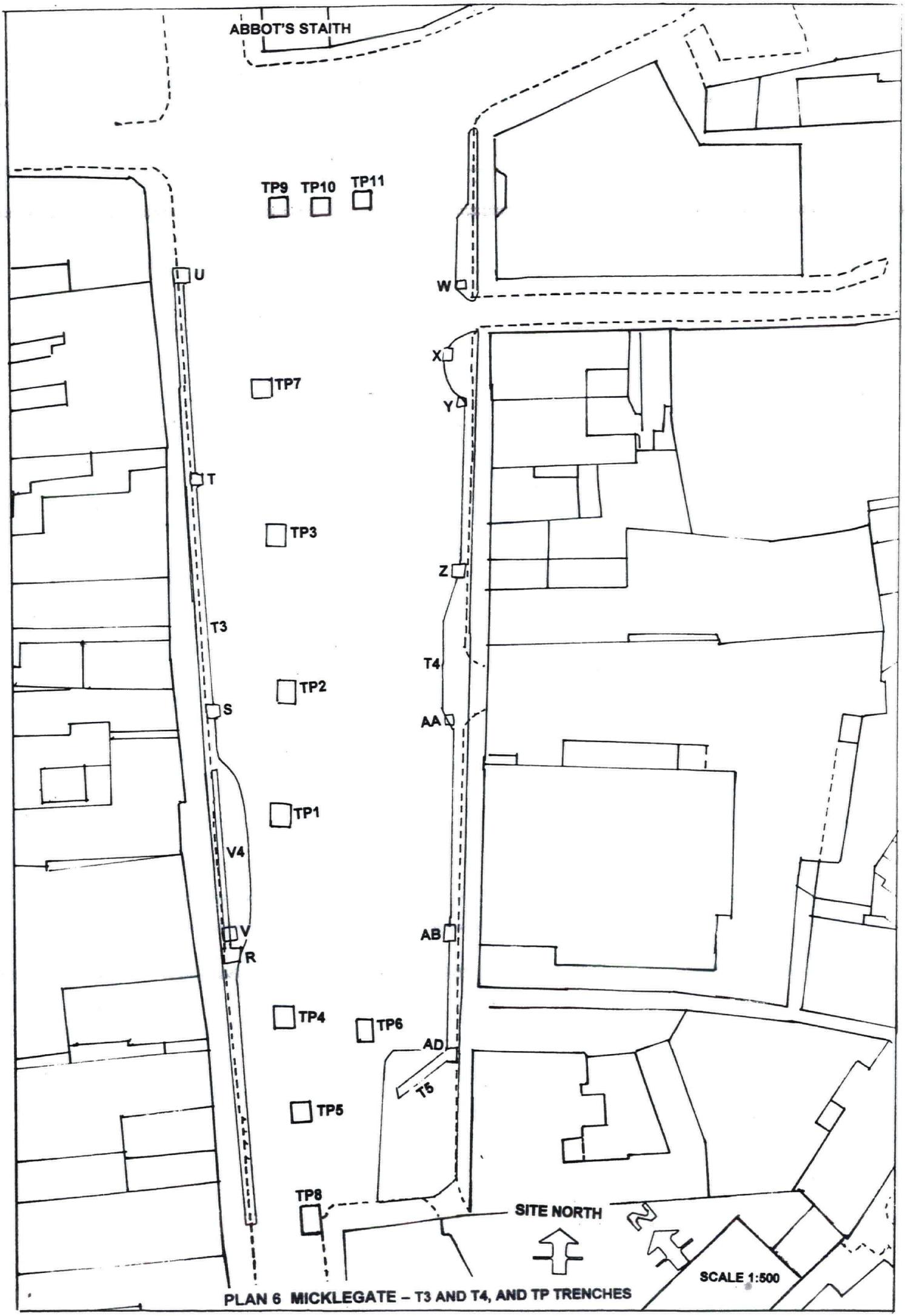
5.2.1 MEDIEVAL

The earliest medieval pottery was found in the trench outside 43-45 Micklegate, at V3. This was part of an additional trench cut along the edge of the pavement to trace the route of a drain and to join it to a new gully between gullies R (Photo 2) and S. V3 was cut out into the road adjacent to Gully R, and from 350mm below the surface a variegated black and brown organic silt extended to the base of the trench at 1m. This contained pottery dating from the 12th to the 14th centuries.

Elsewhere in the trench as it extended northwards, the same soil produced pottery from the 13th to the 17th centuries, and concentrations of leather pieces. These included waste scraps and shoe parts, predominantly 17th century but with at least one medieval type. Several timber stakes or posts were revealed near the southern end of the trench. Bone, shell, nuts and slag were also present throughout. A soil sample (Appendix 1, context 3224) produced large quantities of a tile or brick material, and bracken mixed with a little wood, charcoal, coal and straw. There was some evidence of burning, and a single fig seed.

Plate 3 –T3, Gully S, NW facing section

At Gully S (Plate 3, Photo 3) outside 51 Micklegate an organic stony silty loam, between 5.71m to 4.86m OD, contained 13th to 15th century pottery, coal, slag, an iron stud, wood, bone and leather shoe material of medieval type. This deep deposit overlay hard grey silty clay, which was probably the natural subsoil. Pottery of similar date was found between gullies S and T in the shallower trench on the pavement edge, and this may have been from the top levels of the same layer as that in Gully S.



PLAN 6 MICKLEGATE – T3 AND T4, AND TP TRENCHES

The excavation for Gully T contained a thick layer of black and brown organic loamy silt extending from approximately 5.39m to 4.89m OD, where it overlay a similar grey silty clay to that at the base of Gully S. The organic silt contained animal bone, wood, charcoal, leather and 13th to 17th century pottery, and there was also a large horizontal wooden beam within it. No cut was identified for this, but observation was extremely limited by the size and depth of the trench. The soil sample (Appendix 1, context 3238) contained mainly straw with some arable weeds and bracken, and rye straw was identified.

There was no dateable evidence in Gully U, but a number of well preserved vertical wooden posts and other timbers were embedded into the hard grey silt at the base of the trench, possibly part of a fence.

Generally in the trench T3, a widespread layer of mixed sands, gravel and loam immediately beneath the pavement contained occasional tile and fragments of leather, some of which was identifiable as medieval. It is probable that this layer represents a mix of modern and earlier disturbed deposits resulting from various alterations and interventions in the pavement.

5.2.2 Interpretation

The thick organic silt deposits resting on the natural subsoil represent the earliest surviving evidence of activity in this area. The evidence from the machine cut trenches was unclear in terms of stratigraphy and close dating, but it was apparent that there was considerable activity in the medieval period, possibly including some structures.

Soil samples showed highly organic deposits, mainly bedding type material as in Finkle Street, but with some evidence of food remains including rye straw and fig. Leather working and possibly iron smithing were also carried out in the vicinity.

The overall impression gained from this material is of very mixed deposits, with medieval and 17th century material mixed together, possibly indicating secondary deposition or re-working of the soils. This may have been the result of a clearance of accumulated debris from the market area, which was partly burnt and then dumped. It is also possible however that the circumstances of recovery of the material masked any stratigraphy that may have been present. It will be seen from the excavation of the tree pits that there was frequently little visible differentiation between deposits of different dates that accumulated gradually and were subject to in situ mixing.

5.2.3 POST MEDIEVAL AND MODERN

It proved difficult to distinguish medieval from post-medieval deposits in T3. 16th and 17th century pottery was present in a number of contexts, but these mostly also contained earlier materials. The trench at V1 – 4 produced a wide variety of pottery from the 12th to the 17th century, and in V4 as it stretched northwards was an area of cobbles crossing the trench in a line, associated with 16th century pottery. Gully T also produced pottery dating from the 13th to the 17th century in an organic silt that also contained a concentration of leather of various different types. The deposit was .5m thick, extending to the natural clay at 4.89m OD, and had clearly

Plate 4 – JCB removing tarmac in Micklegate to reveal brick paving

built up over a considerable length of time.

Little from the 18th century or later was recovered. The edge of a layer of red bricks that extended across the whole of Micklegate (Plate 4) was revealed in T3, and this was in place by the late 19th century. Once this solid surface was in Plate 3 –T3, Gully S, NW facing section place there was little further accumulation of deposits, and the modern tarmac lay directly above it. Various modern interventions for providing services from water to telecommunications crossed the trench at intervals, and also ran along it for periods.

5.2.4 Interpretation

It would seem that from the medieval period up to the 17th century there was a relatively uninterrupted accumulation of occupation debris, represented by black and brown organic loamy silts. These contained not only pottery and animal bone but also wood, shell, nuts, leather, slag and coal, preserved in anaerobic conditions.

The absence of later finds suggests that from the 18th century the ground was cleared and further deposits not allowed to accumulate, or perhaps that the laying of the brick surface in the 19th century was accompanied by a clearance of the later material.

5.3 Micklegate East Side – T4 and T5
(Plan 6)

5.3.1 MEDIEVAL

The earliest deposits revealed in the machine trench on the east side of Micklegate appear to have been in the deep cut for Gully AA, about half way down the street at the northern end of the Post Office. Here, at a depth of 1.05 to 1.25m. below the surface, dark brown organic silt lay directly on the natural pale grey clay. There was some mixing of the layers above, due to the machine digging of the trench, but this silt contained 12th to 14th century pottery, animal bone, wood fragments, shell, a knife blade (Appendix 7) and leather shoe parts of medieval construction along with waste pieces. The layers above, which were visually similar, also contained quantities of leather, including an ankle boot of late 14th century style (Appendix 3), and pottery ranging from the 12th to the 16th century. There was also 12th century pottery in a deep machine trench at XY, just south of Wren Lane. This thick layer contained leather, bone, wood, slag and 12th to 15th century pottery and extended at least as far as the required depth for the base of the trench at approximately 5.08m OD. The full deposit was not excavated.

Layers containing pottery of 14th to 15th century date were present in most of the gully excavations. Gully Y, just south of Wren Lane, contained a layer similar to the one mentioned above, with pottery of 14th-15th century date. Gully Z contained 15th – 16th century pottery and leather fragments in a compacted organic silt at similar depths (approximately 5.25m to 5.45m OD). The very mixed deposits in Gully AA have been mentioned, and also included an iron knife blade. Gully AB, at the southern end of the Post Office, also contained an organic silt layer, and this contained 14th - 15th century pottery, as well as a fragment of modern bottle glass.

Gully AD, outside the Griffin public house, provided the most prolific deposits, along with a trench, T5, connecting the new gully to a main drain. The deep cut for the gully itself, extending to approximately 4.68m OD, contained a thick layer of black organic silt, which produced mainly late medieval pottery, as well as slag and large amounts of leather. The leather included shoe parts of medieval (turnshoe) construction, several of which are dated to the late 14th or early 15th century. It seems likely that, as elsewhere in Micklegate, this layer was accumulated over a considerable period of time, as some of the pottery was possibly as early as 13th century and some possibly as late as 17th century. In the conditions of machine trenching, material from visually similar layers was inevitably somewhat mixed. A soil sample from this deposit was

composed almost entirely of wood fragments, with very few seeds (Appendix 1, context 3326) but a good collection of insect remains (Appendix 2, context 3326). These were largely associated with damp muddy conditions and with accumulations of dung, probably indicating an origin in stable manure.

The trench T5, running west from Gully AD, revealed a more complex stratigraphy. The maximum depth of the trench was 1m., and nowhere did it reach natural. The lowest layers, of grey and black silt with a high percentage of wood fragments and with stones in places, contained pottery of 14th to 15th century date, and a further layer, of almost pure straw manure, had pottery of a similar date and medieval shoe leather. These layers were cut by a shallow pit containing brown silt with a high percentage of small slivers of wood and straw and extending for c. 1 metre along the trench.

Overlying this and extending over most of the length of the trench was a layer of smelly wet black organic silt containing tile, animal bone, leather offcuts and a concentration of cobbles above the woody deposit below. The leather included a piece cut from a turnshoe (medieval) sole, so the layer can be dated to the medieval period. It was cut near the eastern end by a pit consisting almost entirely of leather scraps and pieces, which also contained pottery of 15th to 16th century date. This shallow pit or dump, 2.3 metres long, held a large quantity of leather clearly associated with leather working, and also animal bone and some slag of a type generated by smithing (Appendix 6). At its eastern end was a large post sunk into the ground to a depth of 1m below the surface, which appeared to mark the edge of the leather deposit (cf. Gully M in T1 mentioned in section 4.2). This may have been part of a structure.

The ground surface was lowered by approximately 450mm throughout the area of T5, from the south-east corner of Micklegate to the northern end of the Griffin public house. Towards the south-east corner was an area of loamy sand containing 14th to 15th century pottery and medieval leather shoes. The layer appeared to be mixed and probably contaminated with later material such as brick. A little further to the west, near the end of T5, a deeper trench was machine cut to a depth of 580mm. The lower parts of this also contained 14th to 15th century pottery together with medieval leather and animal bone.

5.3.2 Interpretation

The earliest deposits on the east side of Micklegate were 12th century in date. At Gully AA the organic silt containing pottery of this date lay directly on the natural sub-soil, and so was here at least the earliest surviving occupation of the area. The majority of the medieval material was 14th to 15th century, and this was associated in several places with evidence of industrial activity such as leather working and smithing. There was less evidence of wooden structures than on the western side of Micklegate, though some of the deposits were very woody. A soil sample from Gully AD showed few seeds but those present were mainly from arable weeds and ruderals. The insect remains suggested a damp muddy area, possibly stable manure.

The impression gained from the results suggests some early medieval activity, with an intensification of usage of the area in the 14th and 15th centuries. The area seems to have been open, with leather working, smithing and open stabling of animals.

As on the west side of Micklegate there was a considerable build-up of material from the medieval period, and a certain amount of mixing of deposits. As discussed in section 3, this is from a combination of recovery techniques and in-situ reworking of deposits.

5.3.3 POST-MEDIEVAL

As on the western side of Micklegate, there was no clear division between the late medieval deposits and the post-medieval in T4. 15th to 17th century pottery was recovered from Gully W in a layer of compacted sandy silt with wood and cobbles lying directly on the natural at 90 cm

below the surface. Above this was a further layer containing 16th and 17th century pottery alongside animal bone, leather, an iron nail and brick fragments. Elsewhere in T4, 16th and 17th century pottery was widespread, mainly in disturbed brown stony sandy loams with frequent brick fragments. A piece of cordage was recovered in a 16th to 17th century layer that extended along much of T4. This was analysed and proved to be of hemp, which was the standard material for post-medieval cordage (Appendix 10).

In T5, the late medieval deposits described above were overlain by a modern layer of mixed soils containing brick fragments to a depth of c.75 cm.

The layer of brick paving encountered in T3 extended throughout T4 and T5 and effectively sealed the layers below as well as inhibiting the further build up of material. It was covered by tarmac and breached by numerous modern service trenches including water pipes, gas pipes, electricity cables and telecommunication cables. The pavement areas were partly flagged and partly tarmac, in both cases overlying modern sandy loams.

5.3.4 Interpretation

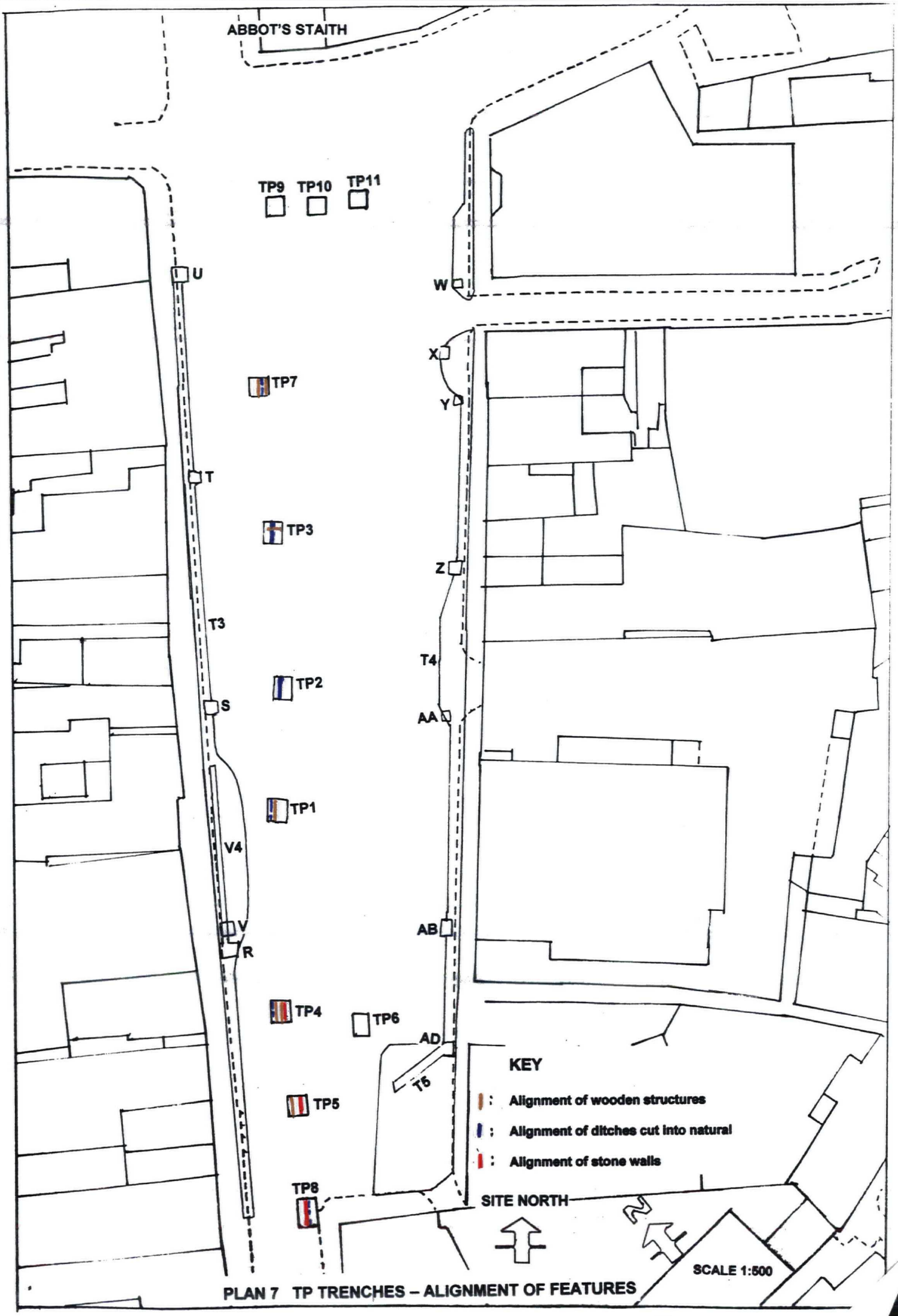
It would seem that from the medieval period up to the 17th century there was a relatively uninterrupted accumulation of occupation debris, represented by black and brown organic loamy silts. These contained not only pottery and animal bone but also wood, shell, nuts, leather, slag and coal, preserved in anaerobic conditions. The concentration of leather working evidence in T5 spans the late medieval and early post-medieval periods, indicating a continuity of land-use in this area.

The absence of later finds suggests that from the 18th century the ground was cleared and further deposits not allowed to accumulate, or perhaps that the laying of the brick surface in the 19th century was accompanied by a clearance of the later material.

6. EXCAVATION OF THE TREE PITS

6.1 A total of eleven tree pits were excavated (Plan 6). They extended along the western side of Micklegate and along the northern end, with one centrally placed towards the southern end. Each tree pit (designated TP1 – TP11) was approximately 2 metres square and up to 2 metres deep, although a few exceeded these dimensions. The top surface of all the tree pits, including the tarmac road surface and the brick below, was removed by machine under archaeological supervision. Depending on the nature of the soils revealed below, the machine continued to excavate or archaeological hand excavation proceeded. One tree pit, TP10, was entirely machine excavated, and the majority of TP11 was also machine excavated, with shoring inserted as it was dug.

The pits are numbered in the order in which they were excavated, but are described in spatial order. Thus the descriptions start from the north-east, across the northern end of Micklegate, down the western side, ending with the single central pit.



PLAN 7 TP TRENCHES – ALIGNMENT OF FEATURES

6.2 TP11

6.2.1 Excavation method

TP11 was machine excavated to a depth of 1.2m below the surface. The conditions were extremely wet, and shoring was introduced as the trench was dug. The layers above this were modern tarmac, brick and brick rubble, or barren sands and silts with patches of natural clay. Below this were occupation levels extending for a further 300mm or so, which were archaeologically excavated. Because of continuing wet conditions, this was completed under a tarpaulin, and the unstable nature of the ground above (part of the section behind the shoring collapsed as the trench was nearing completion) meant that a full section could not be drawn. The dimensions of TP11 were approximately 1.78m by 1.75m at its base, though the surface measurements were larger.

6.2.2 First Phase

The natural pinkish-grey clay that emerged at approximately 4.65m OD had stake holes cut into it, some with the wooden stakes surviving (Plate 5). These had been driven in from above. The surface of the clay was otherwise smooth and sloped down slightly to the south. Over most of the trench the clay was covered with a very thin layer of brown silt, no more than 5mm, containing some tile fragments, bone and slag. Above this was a layer of hard, variable coloured sand, and it was into this surface that the stakes had been driven. There was no discernible pattern to the stakes, which may have held up small flimsy or ephemeral structures. The sand was intermittently covered by a thin skim of hard white mortary sand.

Plate 5 – TP11 base with stakeholes and slot 3669, from SE

6.2.3 Second Phase

Towards the south-west quadrant of the trench this sand became very hard and compacted and was burnt red and black in a roughly bowl-shaped area approximately 800mm in diameter. The clay beneath this was somewhat disturbed, with several pieces of tile and wood impressed into it. On the outer eastern edge of this area was a deposit of silty clay, the surface of which sloped down into the bowl of burnt sand. To the north of the burnt sand was a very thin layer of black organic silt containing slag that sealed the variegated sand in a crescent around the burnt area. The whole area was covered in turn by a thin 50mm layer of pale pinkish brown silty clay that had embedded into it numerous pieces of tile. The tile fragments were set almost vertically into the soil, sloping steeply down to the south and concentrated on the northern side of the feature where the clay was topped with a crescent of pale brown compacted sand.

To the north-east corner of the trench there was a small concentration of animal bone, a scrap of leather, tile and 14th to 15th century pottery contained in a patch of hard reddened sand within the variegated sand covering the rest of the trench.

6.2.4 Third Phase

Above the white sand was a layer of compacted mid grey to black organic silt covering most of the trench. This contained some wood and much cinder, together with animal bone, nails, slag and pottery of 14th-15th century date. The slag included smithing slag, which is generated by the smithing process (Appendix 6). An analysis of the soil revealed a group of invertebrates generally associated with the interior of a building (Appendix 2, context 3657). The layer was at a height of approximately 4.7m to 4.8m OD.

It was at this level that a deep slot was cut into the organic silt and through the underlying layers into the natural to a depth of approximately 4.4m OD (Plate 5). It lay on the eastern side of the trench, running north-south, and had a narrow v-shaped profile. The upper layers were filled with mixed hard pale grey to brown clay and brown gritty silt (context 3657). It contained large quantities of slag as well as an iron timber nail, wood and bone. There was also a small amount of pottery, which appeared to date from the 12th century. This date is unlikely as a primary context, as the slot cuts through a 14th-15th century layer, but may represent a secondary deposit of material used to fill the feature at a later date. The slag included hearth bottom, smithing slag, and hammerscale, all diagnostic of smithing debris, and indicating the proximity of a smithy or smithies (Appendix 6). The bottom 150mm of the slot was filled with a mix of hard lumpy grey brown clay and woody brown silt with no artefactual material.

Plate 6 – TP11, shallow pit 3662 from south

Also cut into the surface of the organic silt on the northern edge of the trench was a shallow pit packed with angular stones and brick fragments in a soft friable peaty dark brown silt (context 3662, Plate 6)). The pit also contained bone, an iron spring arm from a padlock (Appendix 7) and pottery in the 15th-16th century range, and extended through the silt into the sands below and into the natural clay.

6.2.5 Later Phases

Above the organic silt and the features cut into it was a partial layer of silty brown clay over the southern third of the trench, above which were successive layers of silty sands and clays. These filled the trench up to approximately 5.58m OD. A layer of brick rubble covered the trench at that level, topped with more clayey sand beneath the ubiquitous brick paving layer.

6.2.6 Interpretation

The earliest phases of activity in this trench seem to have been associated with industrial activity, probably interrupted by episodes of flooding. The natural clay was overlaid by occupation debris represented by a layer of brown silt, over which sand was laid, possibly by a flood. The stakes and burnt area towards the south of the trench represent further occupation, and the presence of slag and tile indicates the proximity of industrial activity, possibly taking place within the area of the trench.

Above a thin layer of white mortary sand was another occupation layer of compacted organic silt, and the presence of 'house fauna' taxa indicates that at this time the trench may have been within a structure. The associated pottery was late medieval, and despite the evidence of earlier

pottery in the slot 3659 cut into this layer, this seems the most likely period for this occupation. There is evidence elsewhere in Micklegate (especially in T5) for an increase in activity in this period, particularly of industrial processes taking place. The deep slot was filled with clay and silt mixed with large quantities of slag, again indicating industrial activity in the form of smithing. Shallow rectangular troughs are often associated with metalworking, and may have been used in annealing (Schofield & Vince 1994). The 12th century pottery in the fill of this slot may represent a redeposition of material from elsewhere, perhaps to fill in the feature when it was no longer in use.

Later layers of silty sands and clays may represent further flooding, or deliberate infill of the area. It is significant that the medieval building of the Abbots Staith is at a similar level to the present ground surface of Micklegate. Since occupation surfaces extend to over a metre below this level, it is clear that the Abbots Staith building must have stood on a spur or bank of high ground adjacent to the river, behind which the ground fell considerably and fairly swiftly. Occupation here must have been subject to frequent and probably sometimes catastrophic flooding.

6.3 TP10

6.3.1 Excavation method

TP 10 was excavated entirely by machine. The conditions were extremely wet and the unstable nature of the ground made it unsafe to enter the trench (Plate 7, Photo 4). A section was drawn by taking measurements from the ground surface and by observation (Plan 8). The dimensions of the trench were approximately 2.2m square at the surface, and 1.7cm deep.

6.3.2 First Phase

At the very base of the machine excavation, at a height of approximately 4.42m OD, some timbers were revealed by the machine. Two vertical and one horizontal beam appeared to be set into the grey-brown silty clay that lay above and around them, in the south-west corner of the trench. The timber was left in situ as it was below the level required for the tree pit.

Plate 7 – TP10, south facing section

6.3.3 Second Phase

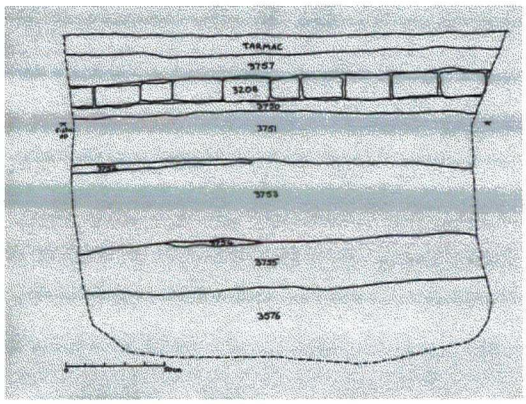
Above a thick band of clay was a layer of brick and tile rubble, which was covered in places by a thin layer of cinders and coal fragments. This was sealed by another thick layer of brown and grey silty sand. To the east side of the trench there was a 40mm layer of white lime mortar covering the sand, and above this over the whole trench was yet another thick layer of silty sand. A 60mm layer of brick rubble lay between this sand and the brick paving that covered the whole trench.

6.3.4 Third Phase

The brick paving was not immediately beneath the tarmac in this trench. A further layer of brick and stone rubble overlay the brick paving beneath the tarmac surface.

6.3.5 Interpretation

The earliest phase identified in TP10 was the timber at the base of the trench. No dating evidence was obtained for this, and it only showed in one corner of the trench. The only statement that can be made with certainty is that the timbers predate the layers above. However, they appeared to be different from medieval wood observed elsewhere in Micklegate, and may therefore have been post-medieval.



Plan 8 – TP10, south facing section

The clay layer appeared to be redeposited natural, possibly accumulated in a flood episode or through deliberate infilling. The brick and tile rubble above, topped with coal and cinder, can be

interpreted as the base of a cellar, subsequently filled in with sand. The white lime mortar layer above may be part of a floor surface. There are known to have been buildings on this part of Micklegate in the 18th century (Plan 3), though these must have disappeared by the time the 1808 enclosure map was made, as there is no sign of a building then nor in subsequent maps throughout the 19th century (Plan 4). More sand above the floor surface again could be either flood deposit or deliberate infill.

The layer of brick and stone rubble above the brick paving is unusual as over most of Micklegate the tarmac lay directly above the paving. It would seem to indicate that the ground, when brick paved, was lower here, and the surface was raised when the area was tarmaced.