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ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

NEW SCHOOL, PRIEST LANE, RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL

WATCHING BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

Between July 2001 and March 2002 York Archaeological Trust maintained a periodic watching brief at Ripon New School, Priest Lane, Ripon, North Yorkshire. The works included the excavation of a series of drainage channels, the excavation of the foundation channels for the walls of the new school buildings, the excavation of an attenuation tank to the south of the new school, and landscaping works in the area of the school play ground. Following the levelling of the spoil heap a number of finds, including a possible Anglo-Saxon strap end, were discovered by local metal detectorists.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 4th July 2001 and 14th March 2002 York Archaeological Trust maintained a periodic watching brief at Ripon New School, Priest Lane, Ripon, North Yorkshire, (NGR: SE 3165 7121). The site (Figure 1) is bordered by Priest Lane to the east, Residence Lane to the north, Cathedral Close to the west and Ailcy Hill to the south, and covers an area of approximately 1900 square metres. The work was carried out on behalf of Accord Plc. as a planning condition imposed by Harrogate Borough Council prior to the development of the site as a new school. The watching brief was carried out to a specification provided by The Heritage Unit, North Yorkshire County Council. The watching brief followed on from a staged programme of works which had included a geophysical survey, an archaeological evaluation (Johnson 1998), the observation of a number of test pits excavated for engineering purposes (Johnson 2000), and extensive excavations (McComish 2001). These works (Figure 2) revealed a number of archaeological features and deposits dating from the 11th-14th and 17th –20th centuries. Most of the medieval features were field boundaries, with occasional rubbish pits, and build up deposits typical of open ground. No features of 15-16th century date were recovered implying that the area was open ground during this period. From the 17th century onwards the area seems to have been used for gravel extraction and for dumping. The only structures of this date were two brick walls of 17th and 18th century date, and a 19th century boundary ditch and wall. The results of the archaeological investigations together with details of the history of the site are given in McComish 2001.

2. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The New School site is located on an undulating field c.250m to the north-east of Ripon Cathedral. The natural topography of the site slopes downwards both from north to south and from east to west. At the eastern edge of the site there is a vertical drop of 1.50m to Priest Lane.

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. These are illustrated on Thomas Jefferys's plan of 1771 and Thomas Langdale's plan of Ripon (1818). The kames include Allhallows Hill, c.300m to the north-west of the site, and Ailcy Hill to the immediate south of the site. A third mound probably existed to the immediate north of the site at Scott's Monument Yard (Hall and Whyman 1996, 137), while the ridge around the northern and eastern edges of the site may mark the site of another glacially deposited feature.

It is known that gravel quarrying took place on all of the mounds listed above during the post-medieval period, greatly altering their appearance. It is unclear whether this quarrying also affected the topography of the New School site although some evidence for this was found in the evaluation trenches (Johnson 1998).

3. METHODOLOGY

The watching brief consisted of observing several elements of the construction of the new school (Figure 3). These were the excavation of a series of drainage channels across the site, a foundation trench for the walls of the new school buildings, an attenuation tank to the immediate south of the new school, and the landscaping of the playing field area. The latter was achieved by levelling the spoil heap which had resulted from both the earlier archaeological and contractor's excavations. All archaeological deposits were recorded in note books and appropriate photographic records were made. No finds were recovered during the watching brief but a number were located by local metal detectorists after the spoil heap had been levelled. The site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the project code 864, and Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM:10330.

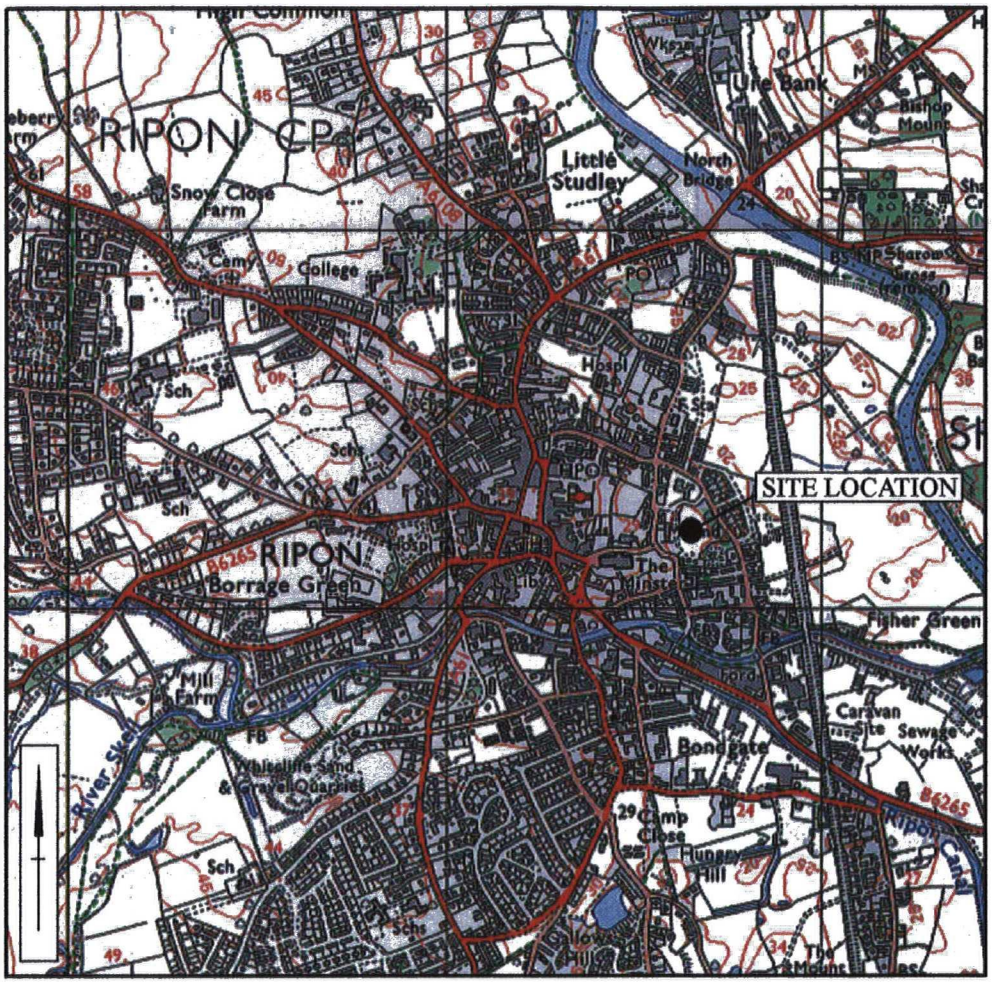

Figure 1 Site location plan

BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25000 MAP DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO17FG. LICENCE NUMBER AL100018343

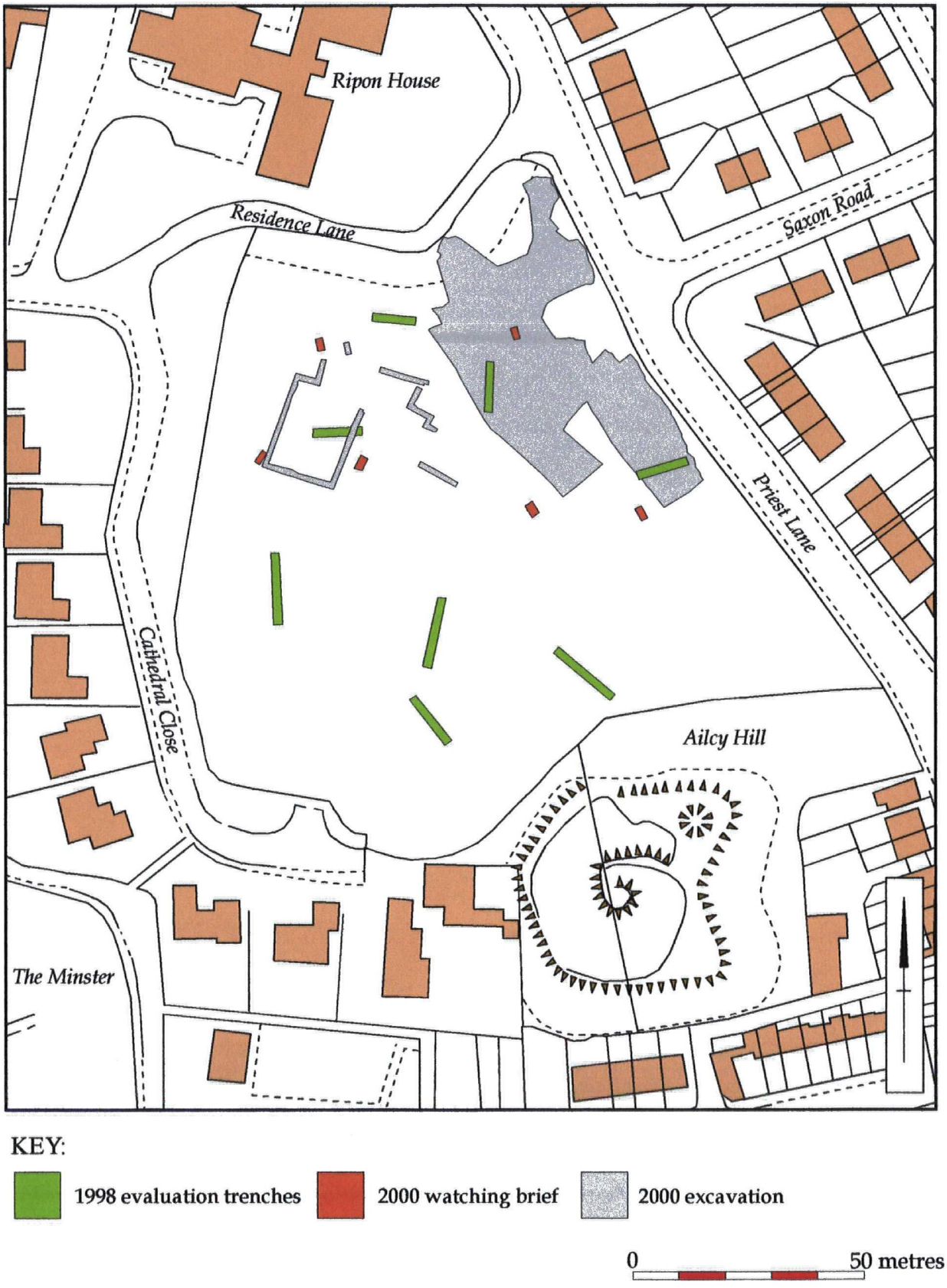

Figure 2 Previous archaeological works on site

KEY:-

Previous achaeologically excavated areas.

Main ground beam trenches

Manhole locations

Figure 3 Location of school foundation trenches in relation to earlier archaeological work

4. RESULTS

4.1 Excavation of drainage channels.

A number of drainage trenches were excavated across the site of the school (Figure 4). Those shown in dark blue caused no archaeological damage, as they were dug into a 0.50m thick deposit of rammed limestone hardcore, which had been deposited by the contractors to raise the ground level in the area. The drainage channels shown in dashed blue lines on Figure 4 were between 0.96m and 1.55m in depth and 0.40m wide, and cut directly into natural sands and gravels. No archaeological features were present. (Plates 1 and 2).

Plate 1 Excavation for manhole on drainage trench at north-east of site

Plate 2 Excavation of drainage trenches at north-east of site

4.2 Excavation of the foundation trenches for the school walls.

The foundation trenches shown in green on Figure 4 consisted of trenches up to 0.60m deep and 0.50m wide. These were, for the most part, cut into the same deposit of rammed limestone hardcore as the drains (Plates 3, 4, and 5). The limestone hardcore was 0.20m thick at the eastern side and 0.57m thick at the western side of the western wing of the new school. Beneath the rammed limestone was topsoil, which was in turn above mid brown clayey-silt with frequent gravel. This deposit was equivalent to contexts 2008, 2001, 2031 and 2050 from the earlier excavations on site (McComish 2001, 37) all of which were of modern date.

The trenches shown in pale blue on Figure 4 were between 0.45 and 0.60m in depth and 0.50m wide, and were cut into modern topsoil equating to contexts 1000, 2041 and 2042 from the earlier excavations (ibid. 10). The trenches shown in red on Figure 4 were between 0.45 and 0.60m in depth and 0.50m wide and were cut directly into natural sands and gravels which equated to context 1017 from the earlier excavations (ibid. 10).

None of these foundations either added to the archaeological information from the site, or caused any archaeological damage.

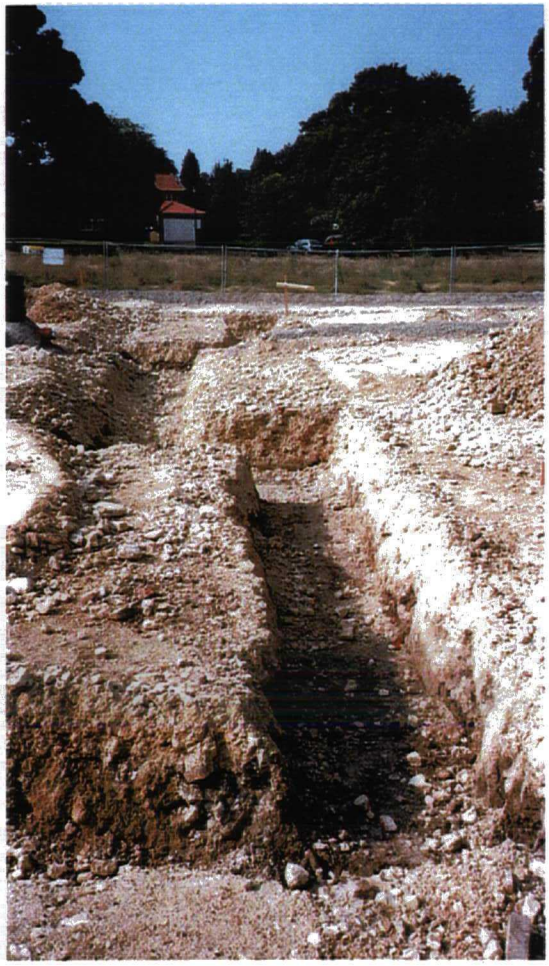

Plate 3 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school

Plate 4 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school

Plate 5 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school

Figure 4 Results of watching brief

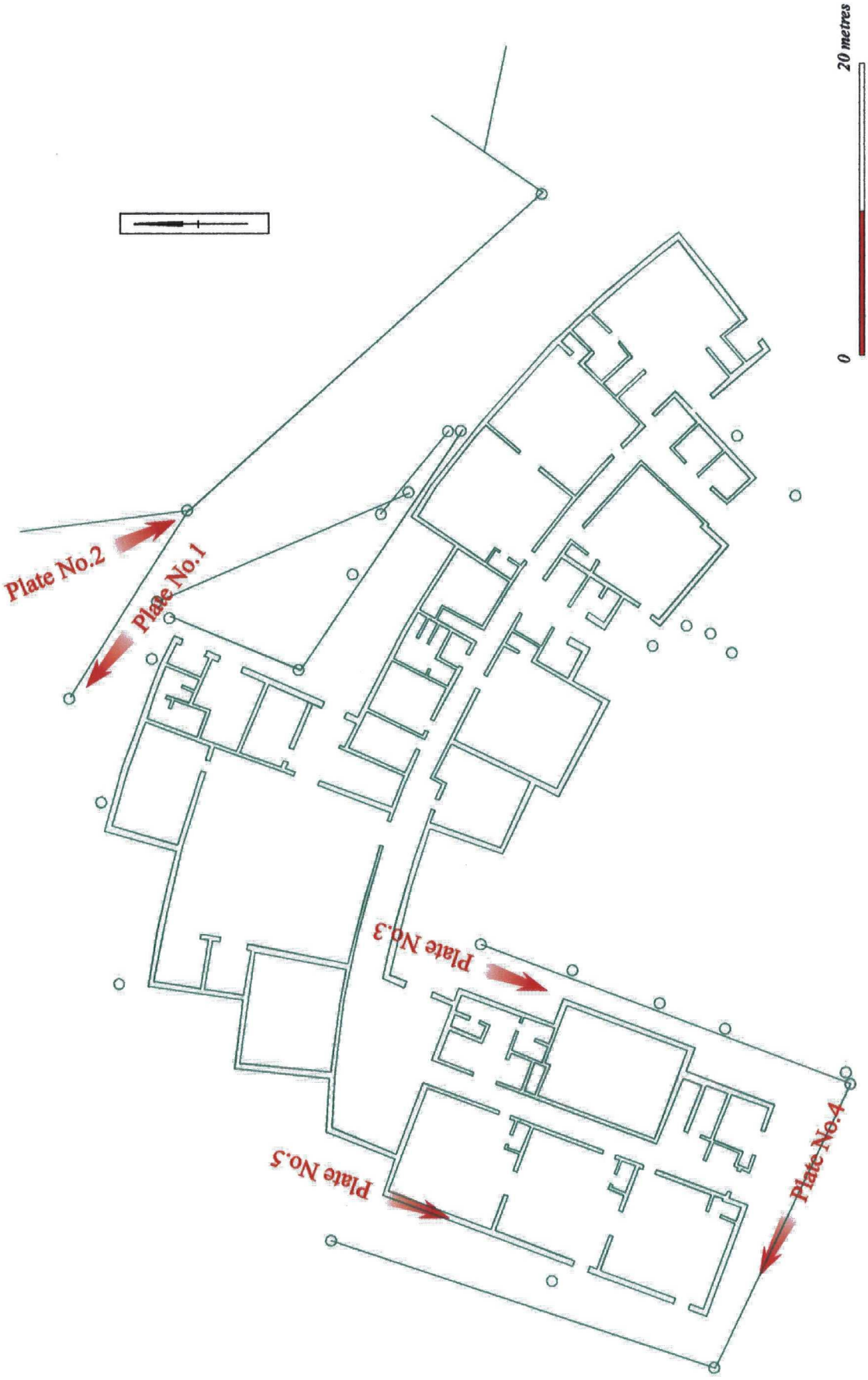

Figure 5 Location of photographic plates

4.3 Excavation of attenuation tank to immediate south of east wing of school.

The attenuation tank was 25 x 3m in size, and was 1.75m deep at the eastern end and 0.45m deep at the western end. As the trench was cut into a sloping surface the base of the trench was almost level. Although a number of features were observed no dating evidence was recovered, making interpretation difficult. The context numbers allocated began at 4000 to avoid re-using numbers already allocated in the earlier open area excavations. The results of the excavation of the attenuation tank are shown on Figure 6.

The earliest deposit was of gravel and cobbles in a matrix of pink clayey sand (context 4013); this was clearly natural boulder clay. Cut into the upper surface of the natural was a linear feature (context 4012) which was backfilled with mid brown sandy loam with frequent cobbles and pebbles (context 4011). This feature almost certainly relates to a 13th century field boundary ditch seen in the earlier open area excavations (McComish 2001, context 1023, p21 and Figure 5). To the immediate north of the 4012/4011 was a small circular pit roughly 1.00m in diameter (context 4010) which was backfilled with mid brown silty loam with frequent cobbles and pebbles (context 4009). It was impossible to say if the pit and ditch were related features. At the extreme northern end of the trench was a large depression (context 4008) which was backfilled with mid grey brown sandy clay with moderate animal bone fragments (context 4007). The depression may represent an attempt at terracing the hillside, or even gravel extraction. Sealing all the features described above was a deposit of mid grey brown to orange brown sandy loam with moderate to frequent pebbles (context 4006) which seems to represent a build up of field/agricultural deposits. This was truncated at the western end of the trench by a linear feature c 1.75m wide, which extended beneath the maximum depth of excavation (context 4005). The earliest fill within 4005 was dark brown sandy loam (context 4004) which was beneath orange sandy clay with frequent small to large pebbles and cobbles (context 4003). This was in turn below a deposit of mortar, bricks and cobbles (context 4002). Within 4002 was a lead pipe, but it was unclear if this was in situ or not. Context 4002 was beneath dark grey brow sandy loam (4001), which represented the uppermost fill of 4005. Clearly the presence of the lead pipe and brick rubble within the fills of 4005 indicates a modern date for the feature. Sealing the entire trench was topsoil and turf (context 4000) which equates to context 1000 from the open area excavations (McComish 2001 37 and Figure 5).

The medieval boundary ditches 1051/1021 and 1027/1054 which were identified in the earlier open area excavations (McComish 2001 Figure 5) were not observed within the attenuation tank trench. This implies that these ditches terminated to the immediate east of the open area excavations. The ditches may have had a butt end, as did most of the other boundary ditches seen in the earlier excavations (e.g. contexts 1045 and 1038 ibid.).

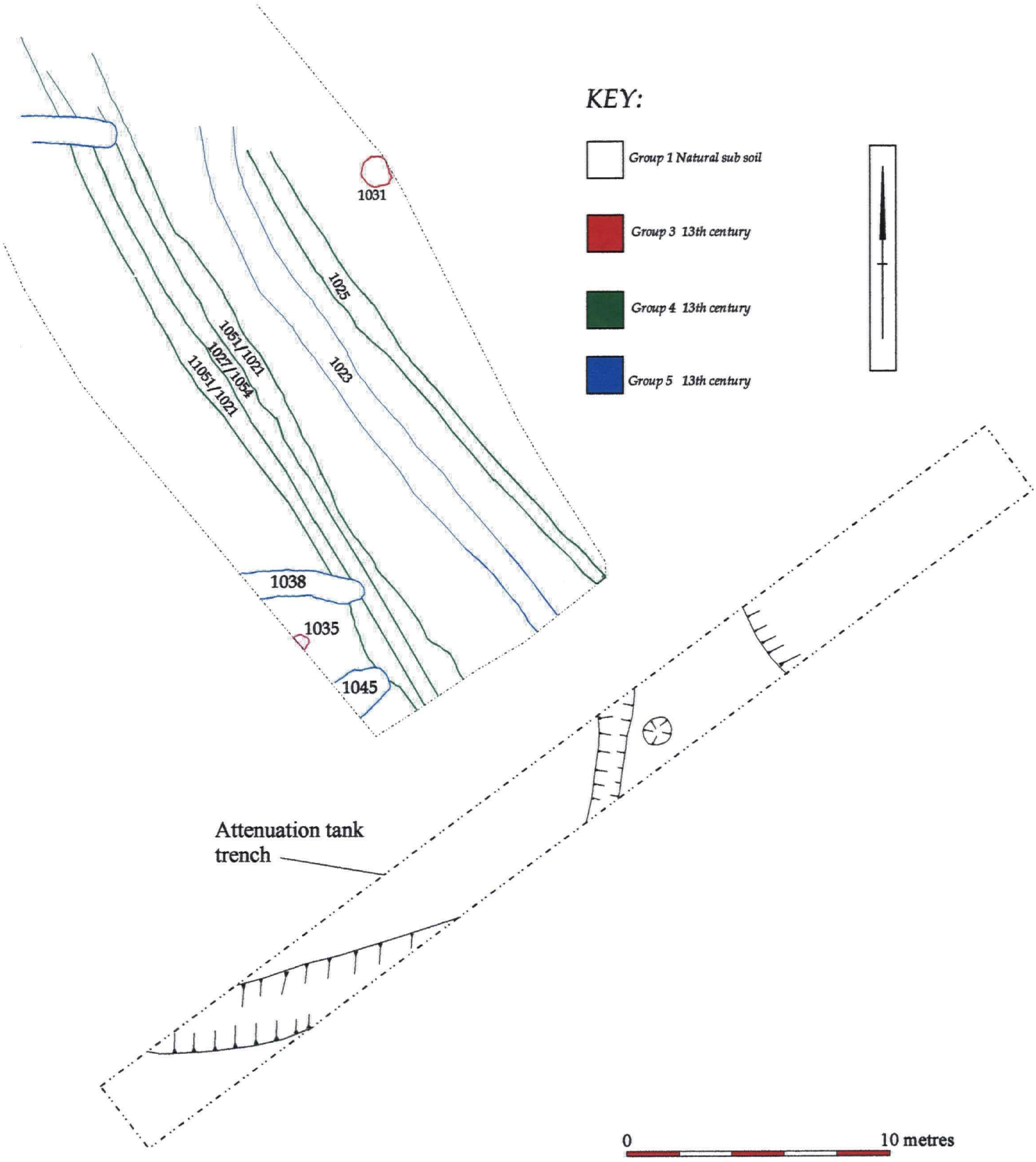

Figure 6 Results of excavation of attenuation tank

5. FINDS

A small collection of metal finds, mostly copper alloy and lead alloy, included a Middle Saxon strap-end fragment, lead alloy fishing net weights which may be Saxon or medieval and a mid-17th century French coin or token were brought in for identification following metal detecting of the spread spoil heap. The majority of the finds are, however, undatable and the functions of many uncertain.

1) Copper alloy strap-end fragment – animal head terminal and part of body of strap-end surviving, the rest broken off. The head has pronounced comma shaped ears, bulbous eyes and snout. Middle Saxon in date.
2) Copper alloy cockle shell shaped mount or other fitting. Date unknown
3) Copper alloy fitting with perforations through longitudinal and transverse axes and projections above – identification unknown, ??Roman
4) Copper alloy ?foot, small, with projection for attachment. Date unknown
5) Copper alloy rectangular decorative mount with one of two iron rivets surviving. Could be medieval or later
6) Lead shot of various sizes, mostly small.
7) Lead alloy fragments (2), both sub-discoidal, one centrally perforated
8) Lead alloy disc fragment, perhaps candle stick base?
9) Copper alloy rings (7) of various sizes, one with suspension loop, another with wire attachments. Two or three may possibly be buckle frames.
10) Lead alloy disc fragment, cf no.8?
11) Copper alloy ?badge, decorated. Modern?
12) Copper alloy coin or token, dated 1637 Louis XIII. Also decorative copper alloy button, date unknown.
13) Bone fragment with ?lead alloy fragment deliberately attached. Use unknown.
14) Lead alloy net weights (2), folded lead alloy sheet fragment, ?metalworking fragment, metal type uncertain. The net weights could be Saxon or medieval.
15) Copper alloy perforated strip. Also fragment of decorative perforated strip or mount, possibly medieval
16) Copper alloy buttons (5), and large dome headed stud of copper alloy
17) Lead alloy net weight, copper alloy button, copper alloy fragment
18) Large iron buckles (5), probably from horse harness
19) Copper alloy dome headed stud, and domed decorative ?mount, modern
20) Lead alloy folded lump
21) Copper alloy fitting, one end rounded, two perforations containing iron
22) Pottery fragment, green glazed, medieval

6. CONCLUSIONS

The excavations confirmed the pattern of land use seen on the earlier archaeological investigations on the site. In the case of the drainage channels only natural deposits were disturbed, while during the construction of the school foundations natural or topsoil were disturbed.

6.1 Naturally occurring deposits

The profile of the natural deposits on site is clearly reflected by the overall topography of the site. A naturally occurring ridge adjacent to Priest Lane and Residence Lane fell away sharply both to the south and west.

6.2 Roman (2nd -5th centuries), Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5th-11th centuries)

No archaeological features of these dates were observed but the possible Anglo-Saxon metalwork confirms activity of this date in the vicinity.

6.3 Medieval (11th-16th centuries) and Post-medieval (16th-18th centuries)

The only feature which seemed to be of this date was ditch 4012, as it equated with a 13th century ditch from the open area excavations. It is also possible that pit 4010 and cut 4008 were of medieval date, though they could both be post-medieval.

6.4 Modern (19th-20th centuries)

The modern deposits disturbed consisted of a linear cut 4005 backfilled with building rubble, and a number of build-up deposits including the present field topsoil and turf, which were particularly thick around the northern and eastern edges of the site. The presence of trees and bushes in these areas had undoubtedly encouraged the build-up of soils.

6.5 Archaeological Implications

All of the features located in the area disturbed during the construction of the new school had already been either fully excavated (in the case of pits and post-holes) or excavated sufficiently to recover dating evidence (in the case of the linear features). The watching brief did not yield any evidence that changed the overall picture of the site seen in the earlier excavations. There was no conclusive evidence for Anglo-Saxon monastic features, and during the medieval and post-medieval periods the site seems to have been largely open ground with occasional rubbish pits and boundary features.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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McComish, J. (2001) New School site, Priest Lane, Ripon, North Yorkshire, Report on an Archaeological Watching Excavation, *York Archaeological Trust, 2001 Field Report Number 9*

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8. PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The following catalogue is for all photographs taken during the watching brief which are stored at Y.A.T.

01.jpg Plate 2 Excavation of drainage trenches at north-east of site
02.jpg Plate 3 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school
03.jpg Plate 1 Excavation for manhole on drainage trench at north-east of site
04.jpg Plate 3 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school
05.jpg Plate 3 Excavation of foundations for western wing of school
06.jpg Laminated stones within natural
07.jpg General view across site facing west
08.jpg Section through deposits close to the proposed school gateway

2001:066.08 Excavation of the foundations of the north wing of the school
2001:066.09 Excavation of the sewers for the north wing of the school
2001:066.10 Excavation of the foundations of the north wing of the school
2001:066.11 Excavation of the foundations of the north wing of the school
2001:066.12 Excavation of the foundations of the north wing of the school

9. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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