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**RIPON CATHEDRAL
PRIMARY SCHOOL,
LOW ST AGNESGATE,
RIPON
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
DESK-TOP STUDY**



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ABSTRACT

In September 2001, York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological desk-top study of the site of Ripon Cathedral Primary School, Low St Agnesgate in Ripon. The study examined the Sites and Monuments Records of North Yorkshire County Council, cartographic evidence from the 18th to the 20th century, published, and unpublished reports.

The study identified that the site of the Cathedral School, lying close to the ecclesiastical precinct and immediately to the east of the Cathedral, is an early 19th century school building which has subsequently been modified in the 20th century. Below ground, important archaeological deposits relating both to an early medieval cemetery and more generally to the layout and occupation of early medieval and medieval Ripon have been located nearby. While it has been identified that truncation of below ground deposits could have occurred on the site due to sand and gravel extraction of the nearby mound of Ailcy Hill it is thought more likely that archaeological deposits survive close to the modern ground surface. There is also a possibility that individual early medieval or medieval burials could be located here.

1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2001, York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological desk-top study of Ripon Cathedral Primary School, Low St Agnesgate in Ripon (NGR SE 3163 7107) (Figure 1). The study was carried out under instructions from Mr. Paul Elgar, Dacre, Son & Hartley on behalf of the Diocese of Ripon & Leeds to assess the likely impact of proposed development on any archaeological deposits that may be present at the site. The proposed development was understood to involve the retention of all buildings dating prior to 1900 with possible further development of the north and western part of the site. The historical and archaeological background to the area was studied via a variety of media.

2. METHODOLOGY

The media consulted in the study consisted 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century), published and unpublished archaeological reports and works of historical and archaeological synthesis.

Research notes are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under their accession code YORAT:2001.4.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Ripon is sited on an escarpment with Ripon Cathedral standing on a spur of this ridge. The site of proposed development is located c.130m to the east of the Cathedral where the natural topography of the ground falls steeply away from the spur and has levelled out at a height of c.23.30m AOD.

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). The drift geology of the area is glacial boulder clay and a series of glacially deposited sands and gravels which formed a number of mounds and ridges. Some of these are illustrated on Thomas Jeffery's plan of 1772 and Thomas Langdale's plan of 1818. One of these mounds, Ailcy Hill, lies immediately to the north-east of the site and rises c.11m above the surrounding ground surface. It is known that gravel quarrying took place during the post-medieval period and that it is therefore unlikely that the existing profile of Ailcy Hill is a true reflection of its original form (Hall and Whyman 1996, 65). However, the mound may not have extended into the area of the proposed development site. Evidence to support this assertion was found during the excavation of evaluation trenches towards the southern part of the site of the New School, Priest Lane, adjacent to Ailcy Hill. Here, quarrying took the form of individual quarry pits (Johnson 1998, 31). Overall the results of the investigation of this site suggest that while there may have been some churning of deposits and the re-deposition of natural, particularly in the northern part of the site, there was no evidence of wholesale truncation. There may have been some levelling associated with the construction of the houses in Cathedral Close in the later part of the 20th century. It is thus suggested that the natural topography of the area slopes down towards the south, levelling off and sloping gradually across the area of proposed development, indicating that there is unlikely to be severe truncation of deposits within the area of proposed development.

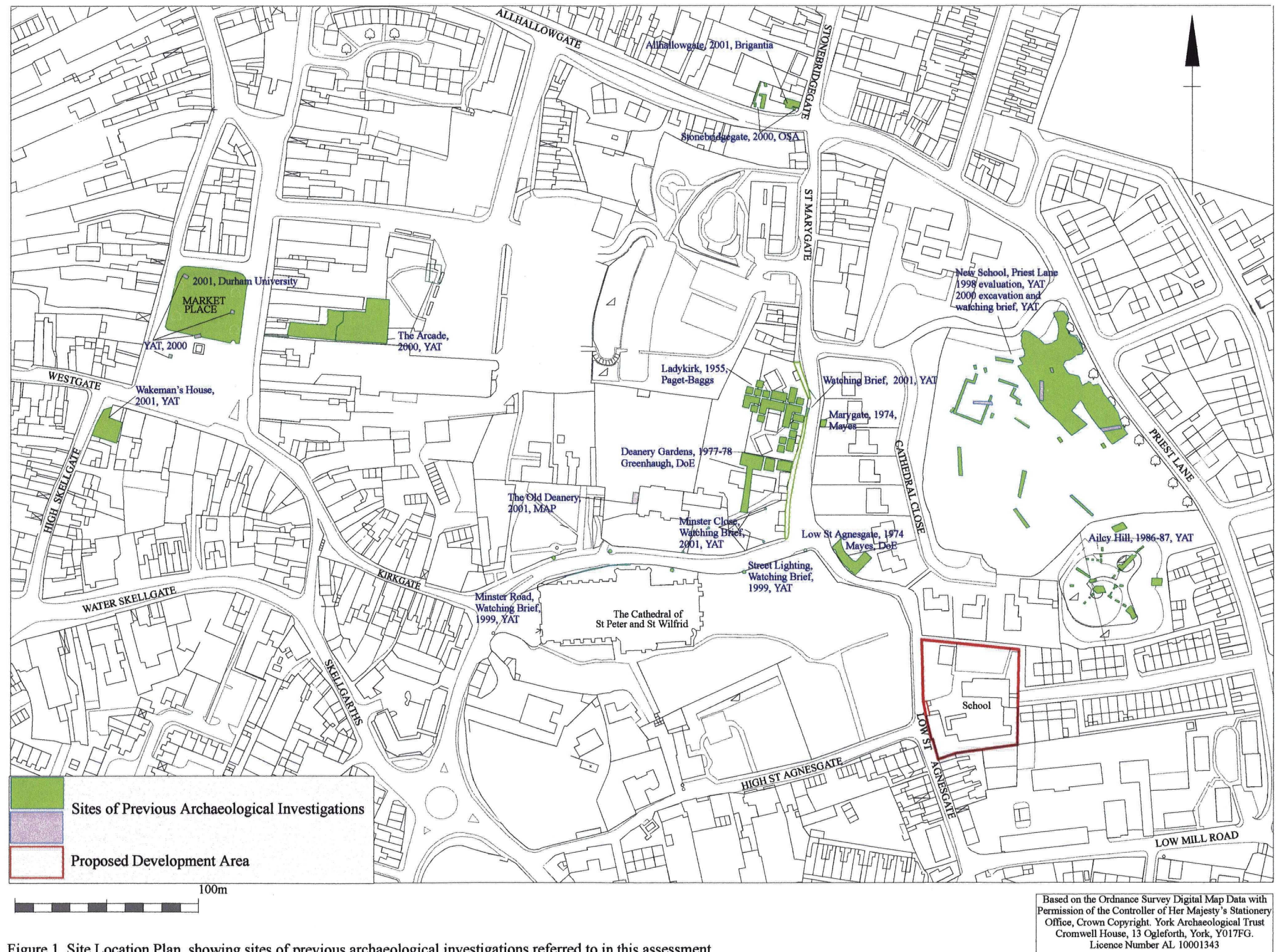


Figure 1, Site Location Plan, showing sites of previous archaeological investigations referred to in this assessment

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site lies close to the boundary of the ecclesiastical precinct of the Cathedral of St Peter and St Wilfrid but outside the area defined as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (number NY1282). 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. More recently, work in this area has included three watching briefs. In 1999 YAT monitored work in Minster Road, in 2001 they monitored work in Minster Close and to pavement repairs in St Marygate. Prior to proposed development of The Old Deanery, which lies to the north east of the development site, a desk top assessment was made, followed by an evaluation and very recently, further excavation was carried out. The first two stages of work have been reported on (Finlayson 2000c and MAP 2001). The excavation report is awaited but some early indication of the preliminary findings were provided verbally by the Heritage Unit of North Yorkshire. The excavations in Low St Agnesgate in 1974 directed by P. Mayes lie close to and north west of the proposed development site and those at Ailcy Hill in 1975-6, and the adjacent site of the New School, Priest Lane in 1998, 2000 and 2001 by York Archaeological Trust lie immediately to the north east of it. Reference is also made to other investigations distanced slightly further from the development site. There investigations are, in 2000 at 4 Stonebridgegate by On Site Archaeology, at The Market Place, The Arcade and to the rear of Wakeman's House by York Archaeological Trust and in 2001 at 47 Allhallowgate by Brigantia Archaeological Practice and The Market Place by the University of Durham.

Findings from these archaeological investigations and an examination of the documentary and cartographic evidence for the site is discussed below period by period.

4.1 Prehistoric period (to 1st century AD)

There is significant evidence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of Ripon but no finds from this period have been recovered within the town.

4.2 Roman period (1st to 5th centuries AD)

While there is significant archaeological evidence of Roman activity in the vicinity of Ripon, to date, no archaeological evidence from this period has been discovered in excavations within the city apart from some sherds of residual Roman pottery from excavations during 1977-78 in the

Deanery Gardens (Whyman 1997, 129) a residual Roman coin of the house of Constantine I (AD 330-47) recovered from excavations to the rear of Wakeman's House (Finlayson 2001, 21) and a small quantity of residual brick and a part of a hypocaust flue tile from the site of the New School, Priest Lane (McComish 2001, 46). While these finds could indicate, as yet, undiscovered Roman activity in Ripon they may be later importations.

4.3 Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th-11th centuries)

The first documentary evidence of the Anglo-Saxon monastic site dates from the 8th century when Stephen of Ripon recorded the Life of Wilfrid c.AD 709/10 and Bede also wrote of the monastery c.AD 730. This evidence records the foundation of a monastery by Eata and its reallocation to Wilfrid. Although there is no evidence of its layout, or an accurate location for the site, post-medieval tradition suggests that Eata's monastery lay on land to the north of Residence Lane (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140). The site of Wilfrid's church is that of the present Minster. After the Norman Conquest, the minster church became a part of the diocese of York and remained a significant ecclesiastical centre throughout the medieval period.

The earliest archaeological evidence for settlement at Ripon dates to the 7th century and relates to the monastic site. Some of the archaeological evidence which has been recovered lies within c.140m of the development site and includes that from an excavation in 1955 by A. Paget-Baggs in the grounds of the former Deanery Garden Hotel. This work 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. This excavation revealed eight burials aligned east-west but unfortunately no datable material was recovered. However, given their proximity to the Ladykirk excavations, it is reasonable to suggest that they are likely to form part of that cemetery associated with the small church. Evidence to support this assertion comes from the previous observation of skeletons under the roadway of St Marygate (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140). Further evidence of the likely continuation of this cemetery was found when pavement repairs in Marygate to a depth of 0.30m below ground disturbed the remains of eleven individuals. When the soil was later sifted fragments of a bone comb case, a composite bone comb and a knife handle of 9th-early 11th

century date were recovered and may date the bodies. When the area was cleaned and observed archaeologically a single possibly articulated burial was seen in section and this was seen to lie below the foundations of Abbott Huby's Wall which dates from the early 16th century. While evidence of burials was not observed in areas exposed to the north and to the south of the concentration of remains (Johnson 2001b, 7, 33) the furthest extents of this cemetery have not yet been established.

Individual burials have also been found within the curtilage of The Old Deanery and in what is now Mason's Yard. These included burials found in the course of work carried out to install bay windows on the south face of The Old Deanery in 1859. No date was attributed to these but Ryder suggests that they may have related to part of a medieval cemetery (Ryder 1990, 6). Recent evaluation work at the Old Deanery uncovered two inhumations. Both were oriented east to west and continued under the west wall of the Old Deanery. The graves predate the construction of the Old Deanery in the early 17th century and the excavators have tentatively dated them as medieval on the basis of two residual sherds of medieval pottery found in the fill of a pit which cut through one of the graves (MAP 2001, 3, 9). However, since the recent excavation at the same site has revealed six more closely spaced burials which included those of children (G. Falkingham *pers comm.*) a cemetery has clearly been encountered here with, hopefully, evidence to allow it to be more closely dated.

In 1977 an area in St Marygate immediately to the east of the Old Deanery 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 a gold cloisonné roundel known as the "Ripon Jewel" dating from the 7th century was recovered from here. An early medieval secular settlement in Ripon is likely to have pre-dated the important ecclesiastical centre, and its presence was demonstrated by York Archaeological Trust's 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. This was replaced by an all male cemetery, interpreted as a monastic burial site of 9th century date. Some of the rubbish pits and post holes excavated at the site of the New School, Priest Lane may have been dated to the pre-Conquest period (McComish 2001, 46). Recent excavations elsewhere in Ripon imply the presence of 11th century occupation in the area close to the Market Place (Finlayson 2000b and 2001).

The precise pre-conquest boundaries of ecclesiastic and secular settlement and their development are not known with certainty but the findings from excavations, together with antiquarian observations and an examination of the cartographic and topographical evidence have allowed it to be suggested that 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). Similarly, the form and layout of early medieval secular settlement in Ripon is not known, but it is believed to have centered around the Allhallowgate and Stonebridgagate junction on the eastern side of the Minster. Settlement of this date has been speculated to have extended to the *"area between the Cathedral and the River Skell ... and St Agnesgate may have been the ancient route between the river Ure and the Skell"* (Younge 1995, 9). The form or layout of early medieval Ripon is not known with certainty and while the proposed development site lies to the south of previously recovered archaeological evidence of either ecclesiastic or secular activity of this date, evidence has not been encountered which allows the southern boundary to be defined. Thus settlement of this period may have extended southwards towards the River Skell including the area which covers the site.

4.3 Medieval period (11th-16th centuries)

There is clear evidence of ecclesiastical development in Ripon 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.

Recent excavation evidence demonstrates the survival of the remains of medieval settlement close to the site. The majority of the features excavated in the main excavation area on the site of the New School, Priest Lane were medieval in date and consisted of a number of property boundaries, build ups of horticultural soil and rubbish pits. The overall pattern of land use on this site appears to have been of open ground up to the 13th century when the area was divided into smaller plots or fields (McComish 2001, 46). 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 more significant evidence of occupation and activity in this part of Ripon dating from the 11th century onwards (Whyman 1997, 121). In the Deanery Gardens, two timber built structures were found. The easternmost was represented by a wall slot and an internal cobbled surface. It was thought to be probably two storied, or at least to have had a loft space, and could

be characterised as a stable block with a likely 13th century date (*ibid.* 153). A smaller building to the east was also recorded, and although there was less evidence on which to permit interpretation, construction techniques and ceramic dating evidence indicate it could have dated to the 12th century (*ibid.*). Documentary evidence from 1228 of a court case between the Ripon Chapter and the Archbishop of York makes it clear that the land in this area formed the core of the ecclesiastical holdings in Ripon and it seems probable that the structures recorded in the Deanery Gardens represent outbuildings within a precinct owned or controlled by either Ripon Chapter or the Archbishopric. These buildings, the use of which can be dated to the 12th/13th century, appear to lie across Marygate, suggesting that this street was established some time after this date (*ibid.* 156).

A substantial ditch which ran parallel to Low St Agnesgate was recorded by the excavations in 1974. The ditch was subsequently deliberately infilled and a building constructed across it. The building was later demolished and its footings were found to have been sealed by a cobbled yard which incorporated a stone-lined drain. This sequence ran from the 11th to the 15th century but the surviving site archive did not allow artefact assemblages to be linked with specific recorded strata (*ibid.*). Whyman's interpretation of the excavation evidence from the sites at Low St Agnesgate and The Deanery Gardens is to suggest that the ditch may have formed the boundary of the pre 13th century ecclesiastical precinct and that the construction of a building was likely to have been contemporary with the establishment of a thoroughfare along the line of St Marygate and Low St Agnesgate. He suggests that evidence hints at a major reorganization of settlement and street plan in the 12th or early 13th century and also implies modifications to the layout of ecclesiastical property holdings to the north of the Minster. A stratified sequence of medieval features over the greater part of the excavated area with the date range late 11th to the late 13th or 14th century was uncovered immediately beneath a modern garage construction at 4 Stonebridgegate. The excavators here postulate that the site was levelled during the late 12th or 13th century fitting the pattern of development proposed by Whyman in 1997 (OSA, 2000, 21-22). Excavations at The Arcade revealed a number of structural features and rubbish pits typical of burgage plots and dating from the 12th- 14th century (Finlayson 2000b, 50). Further evidence of medieval occupation has been demonstrated by excavations to the rear of Wakeman's House where the sequence of stratified deposits dated from the 11th/12th – 15th century (Finlayson 2001, 28). Recent investigations within the Market Place have uncovered a cobble surface, structural features and layers of accumulation above the surface dating to the medieval period (Finlayson

2000c, 18). These strata were confirmed and more extensively examined by later large scale excavation of the area when additionally a north south aligned boundary ditch which predated the medieval cobbled surface was found along the eastern side of the present Market Place. This ditch was then subsequently replaced by a smaller gully (Carne 2001, 1).

It should also be noted that negative archaeological evidence was recovered from an observation carried out nearby where a maximum depth of c.0.3m below ground was reached. In the course of a watching brief which monitored tree planting in Minster Close recently only one deposit was observed which was likely to have represented *in situ* archaeological deposits. This was possibly a demolition or dump layer within hole 2, closest to Marygate (Johnson, 2001a, 2, 5).

4.4 Post-medieval period (16th-19th centuries)

Jefferey's map of Ripon (1772) shows the area to the north of the site of proposed development to be open ground divided into fields and this land use is confirmed by excavation evidence from the site of the New School, Priest Lane. However, some evidence of structures dating to the 17th and 18th century was also uncovered here (McComish 2001, 47).

In the post-medieval period Ailcy Hill, a peri-glacial deposit of sands and gravels, which is shown on Jefferey's map of Ripon (1772) as a large conical mound "*Hillshaw*" and as "*Elleshaw*" on Langdale's map (1818) is thought to have been the site of gravel digging. Langdale's map may underestimate the extent of quarrying since this did not cease until 1826 (Hall and Whyman 1996, 66, 117). While the mound of Ailcy Hill may well have been substantially reduced by quarrying the adjacent area, the site of the New School, Priest Lane has shown evidence of small, individual quarry pits, (McComish 2001, 47 and Johnson 1998, 2) rather than wholesale removal of deposits. The survival of deposits on the site of the New School, Priest Lane can be taken as an indication that the ground level on the proposed development site may not have been greatly altered. This assessment is supported by cartographic evidence from the later 18th century which shows the whole of the east side of St Agnesgate to be built up, including the site of the current school. Jefferey's map (1772) may be schematic rather than an accurate representation of buildings but nevertheless at a time when Ailcy Hill was being quarried the area to the west of it was already built on. Humphrey's map of 1800 also shows buildings along the east side of Low St Agnesgate, but none are identified as a school. Langdale's Plan of Ripon and Bondgate, (1818), shows buildings on the east side of Low

St Agnesgate, and marks the National School at the site of proposed development. Apart from these buildings and a range at right angles to them along Low Mill Road this plan shows an area of open ground stretching from Residence Lane in the north to the River Skell in the south. Similarly the Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1856 shows a building within the development site marked as National School. The 1909 25" to the mile scale OS map shows the main body of the school buildings as they are today, with a centrally placed main school building, a small additional building to the south and a range of buildings along the southern edge of the site. In the course of the 20th century these buildings have been augmented by additional brick structures and temporary buildings.

In initial documentary searches the exact date for the construction of the school was not discovered but visual inspection of the buildings and the cartographic evidence suggests that they are of early 19th century date. The buildings are not listed.

5. WALK-OVER SURVEY

The site is approximately level, but sloping very slightly down towards the south. To the north it is bounded by a footpath and modern brick wall and to the west, south and east by relatively modern mortared stone walls. The surface of the site is the playground of the school yard and it is currently occupied by a series of 19th and 20th century brick buildings together with some temporary classrooms. A survey and assessment of the standing buildings is not part of this study.