

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**PAVEMENT REPAIRS,
ST MARYGATE,
RIPON
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2001 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 30**

**PAVEMENT WORKS AT ST MARYGATE,
RIPON, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

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ABSTRACT

In May 2001, York Archaeological Trust was called to carry out an archaeological watching brief on pavement replacement works at St. Marygate, Ripon, subsequent to the discovery of large quantities of apparently disarticulated human bone. The archaeological monitoring, which was carried out in three areas, determined that the cemetery to which these remains originally belonged extended for a distance of approximately 15m-20m along the course of the footpath. It appears very likely that the human remains were interred within a cemetery associated with a small two celled church excavated in 1955 immediately west of the watching brief area. A further part of this cemetery was excavated on the east side of St. Marygate in 1974. Some of the human bone was seen to extend under the adjacent Abbot Huby's Wall believed to have been built around 1505. Parts of the foundations of this same wall were also recorded.

The skeletal material represented the remains of at least eleven individuals of varied age and sex. A number of fragments of decorated bone comb and case were also found and may date the bodies to the 9th – 11th centuries.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 2nd, 3rd and 8th May 2001 York Archaeological Trust maintained an archaeological watching brief during a programme of pavement replacement works by the local authority Highways Department at St. Marygate, Ripon, North Yorkshire (NGR: SE 3155 7120), (Figure 1, Site location map, Figure 2, Works location plan).

The pavement works had been in progress for some days without any archaeological monitoring when the workers encountered human remains within a 9.3m long section of pavement area that had been excavated to a depth of around 0.30m below ground level (BGL). This area was subsequently designated Area 1. The Police and North Yorkshire County Council Heritage Unit were duly informed. The North Yorkshire County Archaeologist, Mr Neil Campling made an inspection of the site, called a temporary halt to further below ground works, obtained a Home Office Burial Licence and requested York Archaeological Trust to maintain a watching brief. When a Trust member of staff arrived at the site the County Archaeologist had arranged for the spoil that had already been removed from Area 1 to be examined for further bone by the pavement workers and had himself started to clean up the base of the same area. An agreement was then reached between the County Archaeologist and a representative of the Highways Department that any further ground reduction during the pavement works would be restricted to a depth of 0.13m below the top of the pavement kerb. From this point onwards the work was monitored and archaeologically recorded by York Archaeological Trust.

A drift geology of periglacial sands and gravels overlies a solid geology of magnesian limestone and Permian mudstones (Geological Survey 1979). All works were carried out on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council Highways Department to a verbal specification agreed between the County Archaeologist, the Highways Department and York Archaeological Trust.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

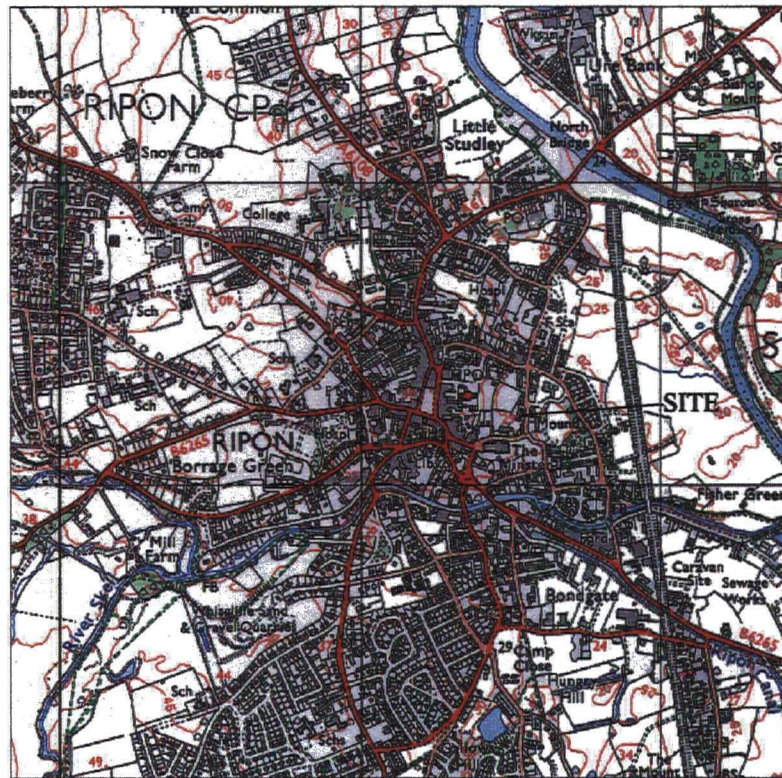
The relative paucity of Roman material recovered from the market town to date suggests that the establishment of monastic institutions in the 7th century is likely to herald the beginning of nucleated, continuous settlement in Ripon. The development of ecclesiastical institutions in the town is recorded in a wide range of documentary sources. Facets of these are to some degree also attested archaeologically and in a range of standing structures.

Four excavations have taken place close to the area of the pavement replacement works (Figure 2). One of these took place adjacent to Areas 1, 2 and 3 immediately west of Abbot Huby's Wall in 1955. Another was carried out on the eastern side of St Marygate opposite Areas 1 and 2 in 1974. The third excavation took place in the north-eastern part of the Deanery Gardens, to the west of Abbot Huby's Wall, in 1977, whilst the fourth was located in Low St. Agnesgate in 1974. An observation has also been recorded underneath the road of St. Marygate. The former two of these works are cited in Hall and Whyman (1996), the latter two in Whyman (1997).

The 1955 work took place in an area where a medieval dependent church, the Ladykirk, is believed to have been sited. Here, a simple, east - west aligned two-celled church of nave and chancel, that may originally have sat atop a low gravel hill, was revealed. A number of east - west aligned inhumations were associated with this structure. On the basis of grave alignment the excavator defined two phases of burial. Four burials of the later phase contained complete or fragmentary combs that have been dated to the later 9th to early 11th centuries. The second excavation, on the opposite side of St Marygate in 1974, revealed eight intact or partially intact east - west aligned burials. Unfortunately, no datable material associated with these inhumations was recovered. Given the proximity of this second site to the earlier Ladykirk excavations it is reasonable to suggest that the burials uncovered in 1974 are likely to form a part of that cemetery associated with the small church. Evidence in support of this assertion comes from the previous observation of skeletons underneath the roadway of St. Marygate, (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140).

The excavations in the Deanery Gardens revealed deposits and features dating primarily to the 11th-13th centuries and later (Whyman 1997, 121). The bulk of these were seen to relate to settlement type activity though three burials were uncovered and may form outliers to the Ladykirk cemetery. Settlement structures, of the 13th- 14th centuries, were also encountered in the Low St. Agnesgate excavations, these being built over a large pre 13th century ditch that may have formed a boundary to the ecclesiastical precinct (Whyman 1977, 156). It has been suggested that the evidence from the Deanery Gardens and Low St. Agnesgate excavations hints at a major reorganization of settlement and street plan within the town in the 12th or early 13th centuries. It has also been suggested that the road of St. Marygate may have been laid out at this time (Whyman 1997, 160), (Hall and Whyman 1996, 140).

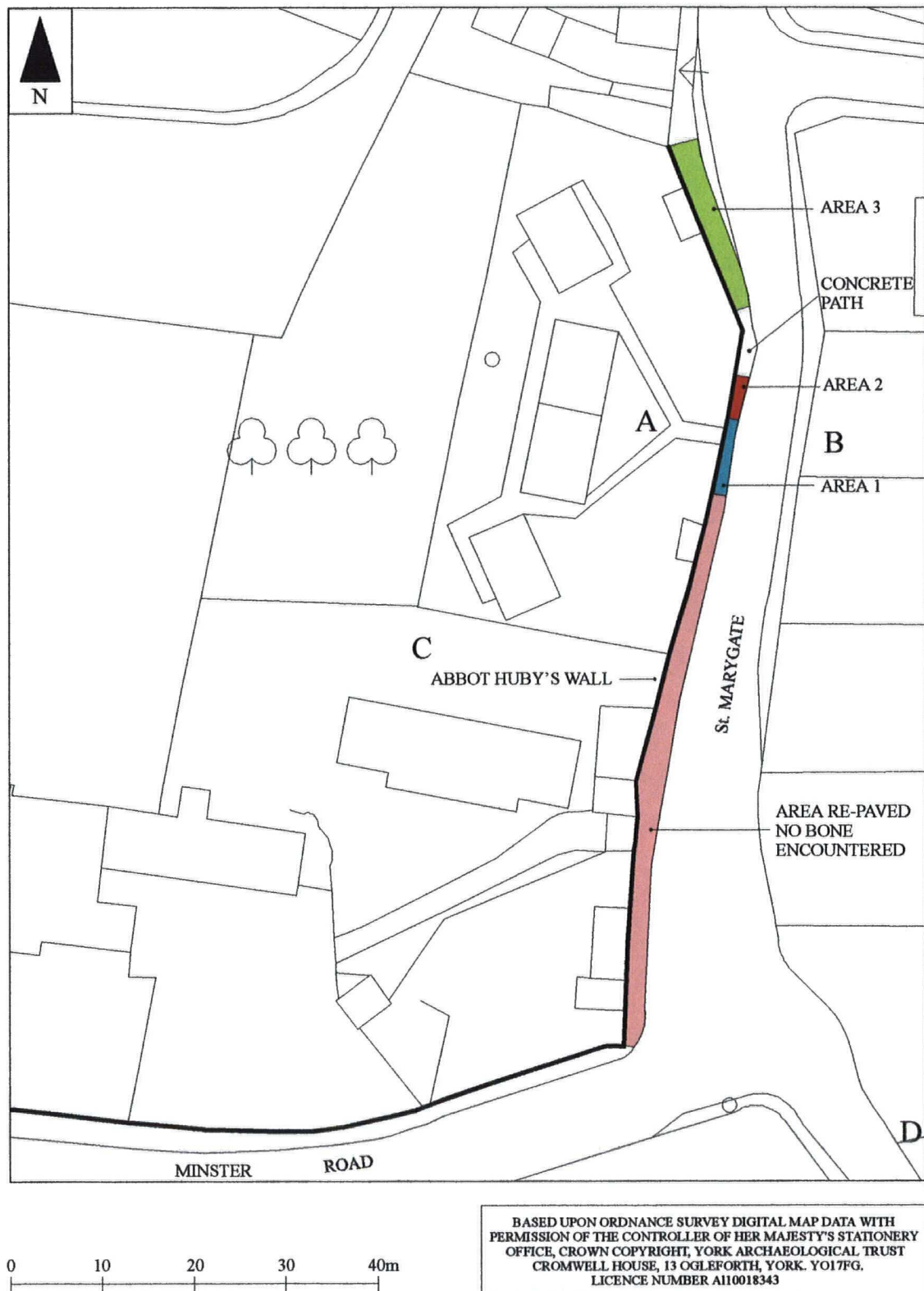
Abbot Huby's Wall, which is believed to have been built in the early years of the 16th century, bounds the pavement on the western side. This wall forms part of a Scheduled Ancient Monument, number NY1282.



Scale 1:25 000

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Figure 1, Site location map



A = Ladykirk excavation, 1955 B = excavation, 1974 C = Deanery Gardens, 1977 D = Low St Agnesgate, 1974

Figure 2, Works location plan (also showing locations of earlier excavations)

3. METHODOLOGY

The principal aims of the watching brief were to establish the extent of human burials within the area of the pavement works, to determine the degree of disturbance - both ancient and modern to these, and if possible, to provide dating evidence for the interments. Secondary to this, the opportunity was also to be taken to establish the presence or absence of any other archaeological remains within the area of the works and to determine, where feasible, the date, extent, character and quality of any such deposits that may be found. This secondary element included the recording of below ground walling/foundations of the adjacent Abbot Huby's Wall.

Archaeologically, the works were divided into three areas, Area 1, Area 2, and Area 3; these are shown on Figure 2. The first of these embraced that area in which human remains were first recognized prior to the arrival of an archaeologist. Areas 2 and 3 were worked under full archaeological supervision. It will be noted that a small area of continuous concrete slab paving some 7.50m long is present between Areas 2 and 3. Owing to its good state of condition, this part of the pavement was not replaced but left intact. Prior to the arrival of an archaeologist at the site Area 1 had already been reduced by mechanical and manual means. Areas 2 and 3 were stripped of their paving slabs by a mini excavator and were thereafter reduced to a level of 0.13m below kerb level manually under archaeological supervision. The bases of Areas 2 and 3 were then cleaned by an archaeologist, planned, levelled and recorded. Plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20, context descriptions and notes were made on pro-forma record sheets. A series of colour print photographs were taken of the site and of works in progress. The lower courses of Abbot Huby's Wall were drawn in elevation in Areas 1 and 2, and recorded photographically in Area 3.

All finds and site records are presently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Harrogate Museum accession code HARGM: 10673

4. RESULTS

The results of the watching brief are discussed area by area these elements being drawn together in a wider discussion within Section 5, Conclusions.

4.1 Area 1 (Figure 3)

Area 1 forms that stretch of the pavement works in which human remains were first observed by the Highways workers. No remains were observed by the workers during re-paving in the area extending south of Area 1 to the junction with Minster Road. As has been stated in sections 1 and 3 above, Area 1 had been reduced to a depth generally around 0.30m BGL by the time of arrival of the County Archaeologist. This reduction had been achieved by the use of a mini-excavator operating in conjunction with manual shovelling. The spoil removed from this area was subsequently sifted for bone, which was retained as context 1000. Conversation with the Highways workers suggests that this bone was not articulated prior to its removal but rather "jumbled" and fragmentary. The material from which the bone was recovered was essentially a mid reddish brown, friable, silty sand though this was contaminated by modern pavement bedding materials which had been lifted at the same time. A number of interesting items were recovered from this deposit during sifting. These included five fragments of a bone or antler comb case (s.f.s 5-9), a fragment of a composite bone or antler comb (s.f. 10) and a decorated tubular object - possibly a knife handle (s.f. 11). An Anglo-Scandinavian date is suggested for

these objects (see Assessment of Small Finds). A single iron nail together with small quantities of 19th century pot, clay pipe and flecks of coal were also noted within this material.

The arbitrary level at which ground reduction had ceased was cleaned. Because of the trampled nature of this basal area, context 1001, material recovered from this cleaning spit, cannot be considered as being better stratified than that of 1000. Finds from this context consisted of two iron nails (s.f. 2) one of which had traces of plating, and a wire wound headed pin. This latter object is most likely to be of 15th-16th century date but could be as early as the 13th century. Cleaning spit 1001 revealed a horizon apparently clear of modern disturbance that was assigned the context number 1002. Material at this level was a fairly uniform mid reddish brown, friable, slightly silty sand, approximately 30% of the material consisting of small rounded pebbles. Complete and fragmentary human bones were present within 1002, all of which appeared to be disarticulated and often pitched at steep angles within the deposit - a situation that is unlikely to occur when those remains are articulated. It is clear that 1002 represents a burial soil. Given the apparent absence of modern materials it is likely that this horizon was free of recent disturbance; as such the disarticulated and pitched bone must be accounted for by other means. Such means may have been the successive digging of graves, each new cut increasing the "churned" nature of the bone. Against this, it must be pointed out that no grave cuts were visible cutting through 1002 despite thorough cleaning. Whilst this absence may simply relate to the similarity of grave backfill to surrounding soils (it is not uncommon for the first indication of a grave to be defined by skeletal material!), it cannot be completely ruled out that disturbance, of the upper part at least, of the cemetery has occurred at some point in the past.

A single possibly articulated burial, context 1007, was noted towards the northern end of Area 1 and this curiously in a section rather than the trench base. The skeletal remains consisted of a vertebra, pieces of rib bone inclined horizontally to either side of this and what may have been parts of radius and ulna immediately to the north; no arm bones were visible to the south of the ribs. This arrangement of bone, whilst hinting at articulation, was seen only in section and cannot be considered proof absolute of an intact burial. What is indisputable however, is the fact that these bones, together with others nearby, were overlain by the foundations of Abbot Huby's Wall. These bones, at least, clearly pre-date the earliest years of the 16th century.

Within Area 1, the bulk of the foundations of Abbot Huby's Wall, context 1005, extended below the basal limits of the excavated area. That the foundations were fully visible only in the northern 2.5m of the area (where 1007 was observed) is accounted for by their reduced depth rather than the slight deepening of the trench at this point. In the southern 3.5m of Area 1 the foundations consisted of crudely squared blocks of sandstone, up to 0.30m in size, interspersed with much lesser quantities of large cobbles and limestone blocks, all of which were bonded with a creamy coloured lime mortar. This southern part of the foundations projected out from the main face of the walling above by an average of some 0.10m. Extending for a distance of around 4.0m northwards of the northern limits of the projecting parts of 1005, the foundations were noted as being of a different character. Here, the foundations were almost exclusively of mortar bonded cobbles of a size 0.06m-0.029m. Furthermore, this material was flush in line with the dressed stonework of the walling above. The most northerly parts of 1005 were different again. Here a single course of small roughly hewn sandstone blocks, mortared together with the occasional cobble, and only 0.20m deep, formed the full depth of foundation material. It will be noted that it was under this northern part of the foundations that possible in-situ human remains, together with other disarticulated fragments, were recorded. No foundation cut was visible for the wall at any place in Area 1.

There were only three modern intrusions within Area 1. The first of these was a concrete slab threshold, context 1008, inserted into the base of what is probably an original gateway through Abbot Huby's Wall. This had been set on a bed of modern concrete immediately above the foundations at this point. The second intrusion was an east - west aligned narrow cut, context 1004, that contained a water pipe. This was backfilled with a gravel rich, mid reddish brown, silty sand, context 1003, in which pockets and lenses of darker silt were also present. It is probable that both of these modern features relate to the post World War II houses for retired clergy that occupy the ground west of Abbot Huby's Wall. The third intrusion was represented by the pavement kerbstones and their haunching of concrete, context 1009.

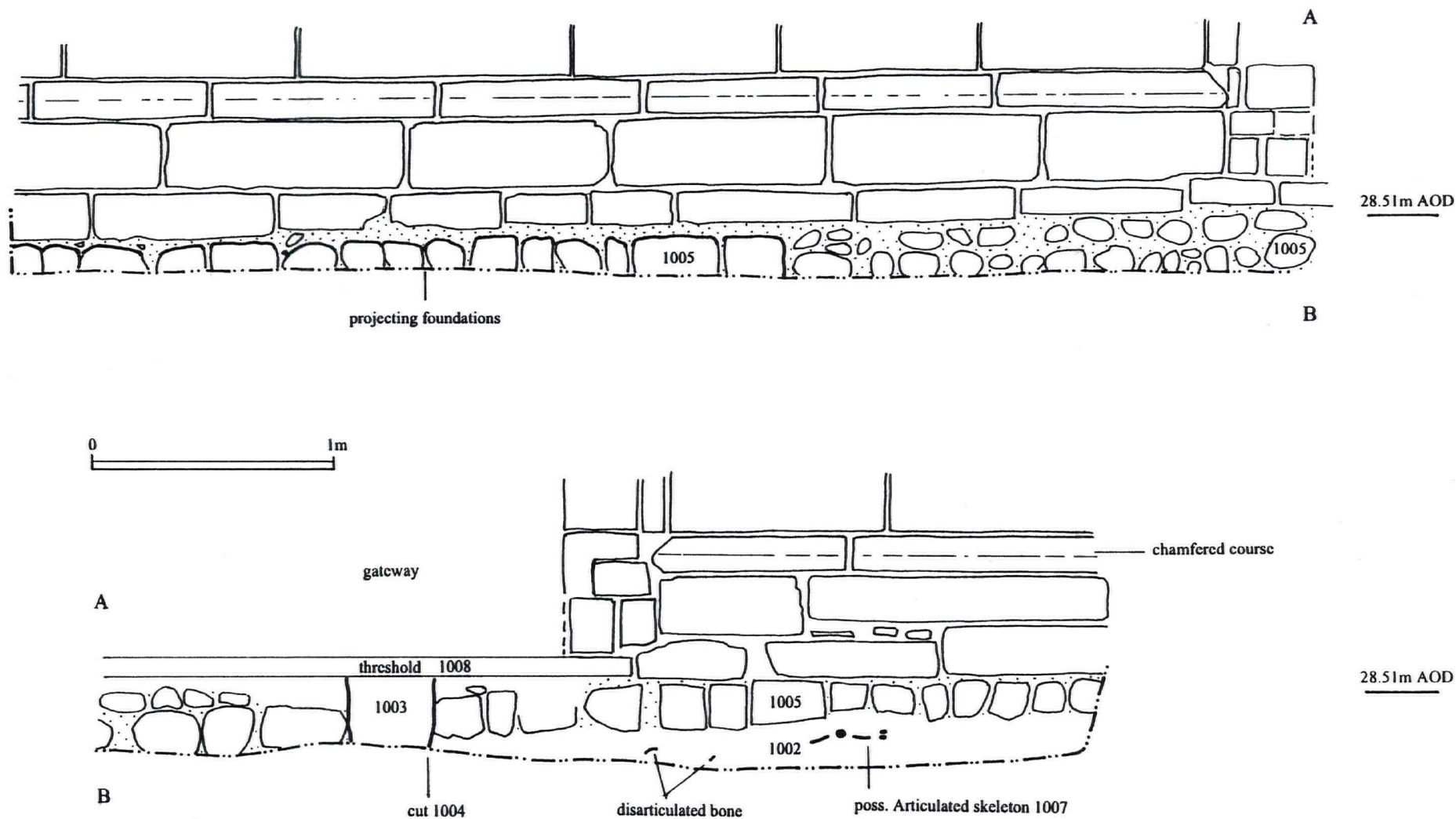


Figure 3, East facing elevation of foundations and lower courses of Abbot Huby's Wall, Area 1

4.2 Area 2 (Figure 4)

The entirety of the ground reduction works was archaeologically observed in Area 2. Formation level here was to the reduced depth of 0.13m below the top of the road/pavement kerb. The existing flagstones were lifted by mini-excavator whilst the underlying pavement makeup, context 2001, was removed by shovel and trowel. This makeup consisted principally of mixed reddish brown silty sands and gravel together with lenses of darker silt. Several sherds of 19th century or later blue and white transfer ware pottery together with clear bottle glass were observed (not retained) within this deposit. A small assemblage of human bones was also recovered from 2001. Perhaps the most interesting item recovered from 2001 was a broad, flat object with a possible tang. This find may be a knife. The removal of 2001 to the required formation level exposed a number of deposits.

The earliest of the deposits encountered, and visible only in the central and eastern parts of Area 2 was context 2004, a mid reddish brown, friable, slightly silty sand that, where visible, appeared to be free of modern contamination. Quantities of disarticulated human bone and bone fragments were apparent within this deposit. As was the case with 1002 in Area 1, this material is perhaps best interpreted as a "dug over" burial soil, though again, no grave cuts could be determined cutting 2004.

Context 2004 was sealed by a somewhat mixed deposit, context 2003. This context was composed of three intermixed components. The first of these was a material seemingly identical to 2004, the second a number of patches and lenses of mid greyish brown sandy silt and the third a series of lumps, flecks and small lenses of creamy coloured lime mortar. A number of small fragments, up to 0.02m in size, of pale greyish cream coloured limestone occurred throughout 2003. The presence of lime mortar and absence of modern materials within this thin layer point towards an origin in antiquity. It is very tentatively suggested that 2003 may have originated as working debris associated with the construction of Abbot Huby's Wall, certainly this would explain the presence of both the lime mortar and the limestone chips. Counter to this, it must be noted that 2003 occurs some 0.10m-0.15m below the lowest dressed stone courses of the wall.

Only the upper parts of the foundations, context 2005, for Abbot Huby's Wall were exposed in Area 2. What little that was seen was almost ubiquitously of cobbles bonded with lime mortar, the occasional crudely dressed block of sandstone also being present. No wall construction cut was visible.

Modern intrusion in Area 2 was limited to the kerbstones and its haunching of concrete, context 2006.

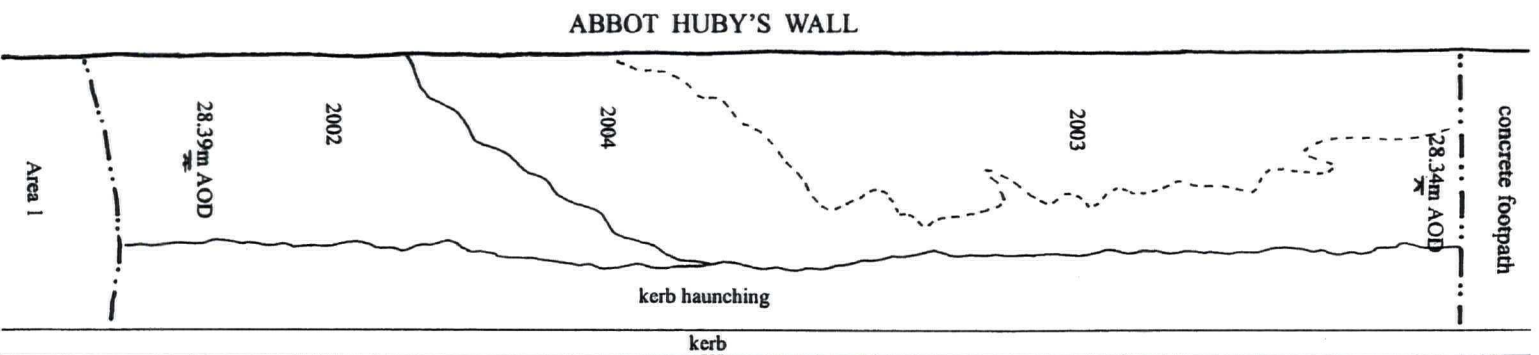


Figure 4, Plan of Area 2

4.3 Area 3

All of the ground reduction works in Area 3 were again archaeologically observed down to a level of 0.13m below kerb level. The existing concrete paving flags were removed by mini-excavator exposing the bedding make-up deposits, context 3001, below. These deposits were removed by trowel and shovel in combination with the mini-excavator. Context 3001 was essentially a pale pinkish red sand containing large amounts of pebbles and a lesser quantity of cobbles. A dark, friable, silty sand formed approximately 10% of the deposit. Several fragments of 20th century glass, one or two fragments of modern brick and a number of small lumps of solidified tar were also present within 3001. No bone, either human or animal, was observed within this deposit, which can be interpreted as bedding material for the paving slabs. Such was the depth of this deposit that at the required formation level the bulk of the base of Area 3 was still covered by 3001.

Only a single deposit was apparent below 3001, context 3002. This was a light orange - pale pinkish red coarse sand that contained substantial quantities of pebbles and small cobbles. This context contained no finds, including bone, and appeared exceedingly clean. It is likely that 3002 represents undisturbed "natural" drift.

The only ancient feature cutting through 3002 was the predominantly cobble foundation for Abbot Huby's Wall, context 3003, the uppermost 0.10m of which were visible after ground reduction. The northern 2/3rds of 3003 were seen to project beyond the main line of the wall by 0.04m-0.08m.

Modern intrusion in Area 3 consisted solely of modern kerbing and a telegraph pole, contexts 3004 and 3005 respectively.

5. FINDS ASSESSMENT

Eleven objects were viewed for assessment. The metalwork had been X-rayed.

5.1 Iron

The iron finds comprised three nails, one in sf4, c.1000 and two in sf2, c.1001, one of which had traces of plating. Sf3, c.2001 appeared to be a broad flat object, possibly tanged like a knife; more accurate identification may be possible after some conservation investigation. Currently, none of these finds is datable.

5.2 Copper alloy

Sf1, c.1001 is a wire wound headed pin – this is most likely to be 15th – 16th century in date, but could be as early as 13th century.