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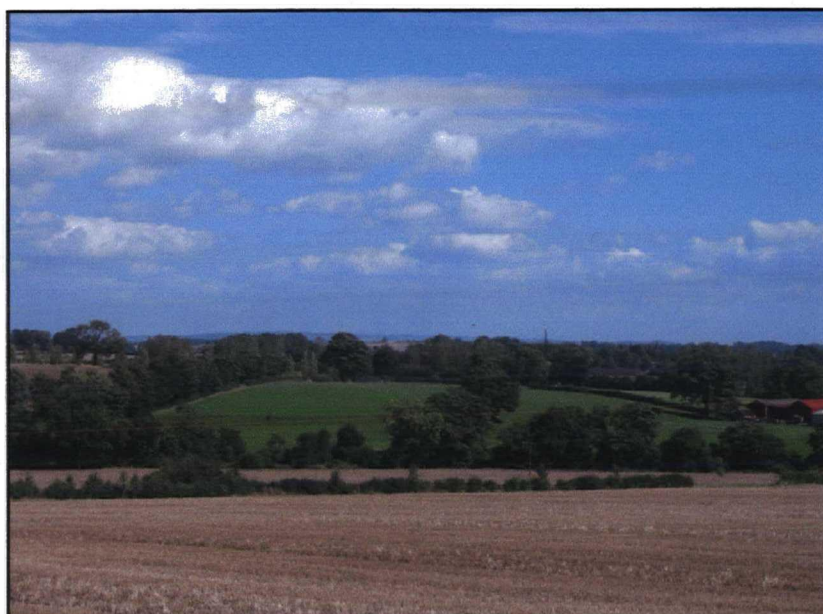
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REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
on the  
FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME  
RIPON  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

by Jason Smith

REPORT NUMBER 2004/64

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**FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME,  
RIPON,  
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

By

**Jason F Smith BSc PIFA**

*Front cover illustration:*

View looking east over Birkby Nab

©2004 .York Archaeological Trust, Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York YO1 7FG  
Tel: (01904) 663000 Fax: (01904) 663024 Email: enquiries@yorkarchaeology.co.uk  
Registered Charity No: 509060

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### List of Abbreviations

BGL	Below Ground Level
OD	Ordnance Datum (above sea level)

## **ABSTRACT**

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on August 24<sup>th</sup> – September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004 during the excavations for Phase 3 of a Ripon flood alleviation scheme sponsored by the Environment Agency at locations across the city of Ripon, and the neighbouring farm of Birkby Nab, North Yorkshire. The purpose of the watching brief was to record all excavations undertaken by the contractors, FUGRO Ltd. This was done because of the potential as outlined in the archaeological desk top study carried out by York Archaeological Trust in November 2002, for the survival of significant archaeological remains from the prehistoric to the post- medieval periods either as earthworks or buried below the modern ground surface. In the event the contractor's trial pits exposed sequences of predominantly modern levelling and/or garden deposits in Ripon, and primarily agricultural deposits around Birkby Nab, all overlying glacial river deposits.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

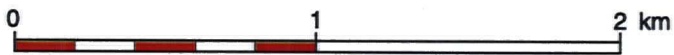
Between the 24<sup>th</sup> August and the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2004, York Archaeological Trust carried out a watching brief during the excavation of trial pits for Phase 3 of a flood alleviation scheme, at locations across the city of Ripon, and the neighbouring farm of Birkby Nab, North Yorkshire (Fig. 1). The trial pits were dug by FUGRO Ltd, subcontracted by the Halcrow Group Ltd which was in charge of the project, sponsored by the Environment Agency. Thirty-six pits were dug, twenty-three by mechanical means (eleven of these at Birkby Nab), the remaining thirteen dug by hand. Three further hand-dug pits were excavated by the drill crew prior to the boring of three rotary drill holes: RD301-302 and 308. The watching brief was undertaken because, as outlined in the archaeological desk top study carried out by York Archaeological Trust (Finlayson 2002), it was thought that there was significant potential for surviving archaeology in the areas affected by the flood alleviation scheme.

## **2. METHOD STATEMENT**

The 36 trial pits were dug primarily for engineering purposes to test the depth and quality of the natural boulder clay and assess its suitability for use in the flood defence dam. Twenty six of the trial pits were dug by a Volvo wheeled mechanical excavator, equipped with either a toothed bucket or a 2m ditching bucket, to an average size of 4m x 1m and depth of 4m. Factors such as service cuts and soil stability governed depths in some circumstances.

The other ten trial pits were dug by hand to an average size of 1m x 0.8 and depth of 1.2m. Rotary Drill holes 301-2 and 308 required hand-dug pits for access for the drill piece, these being dug to an average size of 0.3m x 0.3m and depth of 1.2m.

In addition to the trial pits, a river sieving exercise was undertaken under archaeological supervision over two days to collect any archaeological artefacts present in the river



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Fig. 1: Site Locations

Laver at Birkby Nab. Two posts were inserted at opposite sides of the river and a string was used to connect them. Parallel sweeps of the river were made at 1m intervals, where river depth and velocity would permit. At locations where there was sufficient alluvial material to sieve, samples were placed through a 10mm garden sieve. This was repeated over a 15m length of the river from the centre line of the dam to several metres down stream of it. In the event the pebbly nature of the river limited the amount of useful material that could be sieved. All finds were surface finds visible through the water.

### **3. LOCATION AND GEOLOGY**

The land in which the watching brief was undertaken ranges between the 50m and 60m contour lines each side of the Laver valley and is on the 40m contour on each side of the Ure valley. The solid geology underlying the area is an outcrop of Magnesian Limestone and Permian mudstone, which runs north-south between the Vale of York and the Pennines. East of the River Ure, the Magnesian Limestone is overlain by Keuper Sandstone (Geological Survey 1979), however this lies outside the area studied. Overlying the solid geology are non-uniform periglacial deposits of clay, sand and gravels, varying in both depth and composition. Along the river valleys there are also overlying alluvial deposits, again of varying extent and depth. Both sides of the Ure contain areas of gypsum, which occurs as both thin lenses and larger nodules, the latter being responsible for structural failure and road subsidence in the Ripon area.

The land around the farm of Birkby Nab exists as relatively flat river terraces on both sides of the river Laver, with the ground rising towards the south-west, in a series of gentle slopes beyond which is a series of rounded hillocks. The most prominent of these, Dick Hill, is situated c. 500m south of Birkby Nab, and provides uninterrupted views of the surrounding countryside for many kilometres. Beyond Dick Hill the ground tends to flatten out towards the south-west where there are several widely spaced troughs formed by relict stream beds or palaeochannels, which fall towards the Vale of York to the south-west.

### **4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

Since the desk top study (Finlayson 2002) provided a detailed background, only a summary is provided below.

#### **4.1 Prehistoric**

Although no prehistoric monuments or settlement sites have been identified to date within the area of study, small finds have been found. These include stone and bronze axes, hammers, a spearhead and a hoard of implements. An Iron Age sword was found in the river Laver near Clothholme Ford (SE28517205). These finds coupled with their proximity to known prehistoric settlements to the north, west and south of Ripon, indicate the possibility of a corridor of movement and settlement within the eastern part of the study area. There is significant potential for survival of archaeological remains on both the river terraces and on the plains where the river valleys roll out. At these locations the evidence of early settlement could be preserved.

#### **4.2 Roman to medieval (AD 71 – AD 1500)**

Roman artefacts have been recovered in the study area but there is no discernible evidence for settlement in the Roman period. The first definitive evidence for settlement at Ripon dates to the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century. Archaeological evidence of this date has been found and relates to the monastic site which is centred around the present Allhallowgate and Stonebridgegate junction on the eastern side of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Minster.

In 1316 Ripon was documented as a borough belonging to the Archbishop of York and in 1341 185 burgage plots were recorded. Excavated evidence demonstrates the survival of the remains of medieval settlement in a variety of locations in Ripon. Excavations on Low St Agnesgate and in the Deanery Gardens revealed significant evidence of occupation and activity in this part of Ripon dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. While the form of the early medieval monastic precinct and secular settlement are not yet fully understood, it is clear that in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the town underwent a period of expansion. There is evidence of ecclesiastical development from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Some time before the Conquest the monastery had become a Minster church with a college of canons and in the later 12<sup>th</sup> century the rebuilding of the Minster church had begun. The Minster today comprises fabric dating from between the early 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century. By 1320 Ripon may already have taken the form which was to survive until further expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (MacKay 1982, 73-80). The poll tax returns for 1379 divide Ripon into four wards, Market Stead, Skelgate, Stonebridge Gate and West Gate indicating the main areas in which the city had developed during the medieval period.

There is documentary, though scant archaeological evidence that in the Birkby Nab part of the watching brief area there are two deserted medieval settlements : Studley Parva adjacent to Birkby Nab and Clotherholme a village on the opposite, east side of the River Laver.

#### **4.3 Post-medieval to modern**

The pattern of settlement at Ripon did not substantially alter until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it began to expand. Many of the medieval buildings at its core were rebuilt a number of times often incorporating parts of the earlier buildings. Ripon developed the manufacturing trades of saddlemaking, spur making and lacemaking in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries although its economy remained dependant on agriculture and its allied trades.

With reference to the area of the watching brief, it may be noted that the mill race and the site of the mill on Skellgarths are features which continue into the post-medieval period. There were five mills sited around the Ripon area during this period exploiting both the natural power of the river and using it as a means of commercial transport. In 1776 an engine was installed at Bye Mill, Duck Hill Mill to pump water to stand pipes in the city. The mill race is shown clearly on Jeffrey's 1772 map running along the line of Skellgarths. A corn stream mill is shown on the 1856 Ordnance Survey map on Bondgate Green Lane. Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw mills were established close to the canal. Ripon Canal (NMR UI1340674) was completed c.1773 as a scheme to join the city to the Ure and improve the navigation of the river. The economic situation for freight on the canal altered after the opening of the Leeds and Thirsk Railway in 1848, which could bring

coal from the Durham coalfields cheaper and quicker than the canal could from south Yorkshire. The canal went into decline and by 1900 had become virtually obsolete. The railway was carried over the Ure by a viaduct and Ripon railway station was located immediately on the east bank of the river.



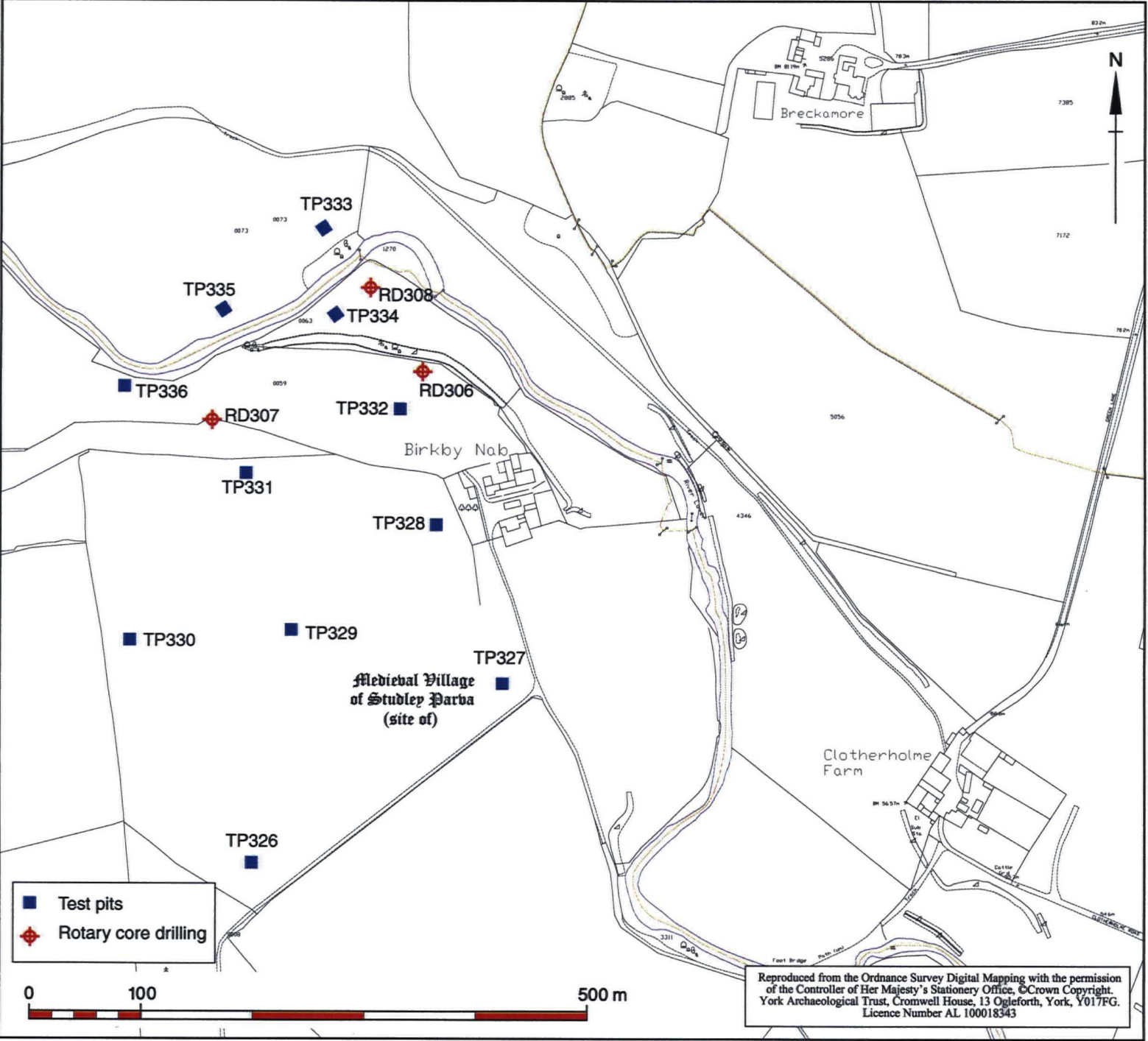


Fig. 2: Plan of trial pits at Birkby Nab

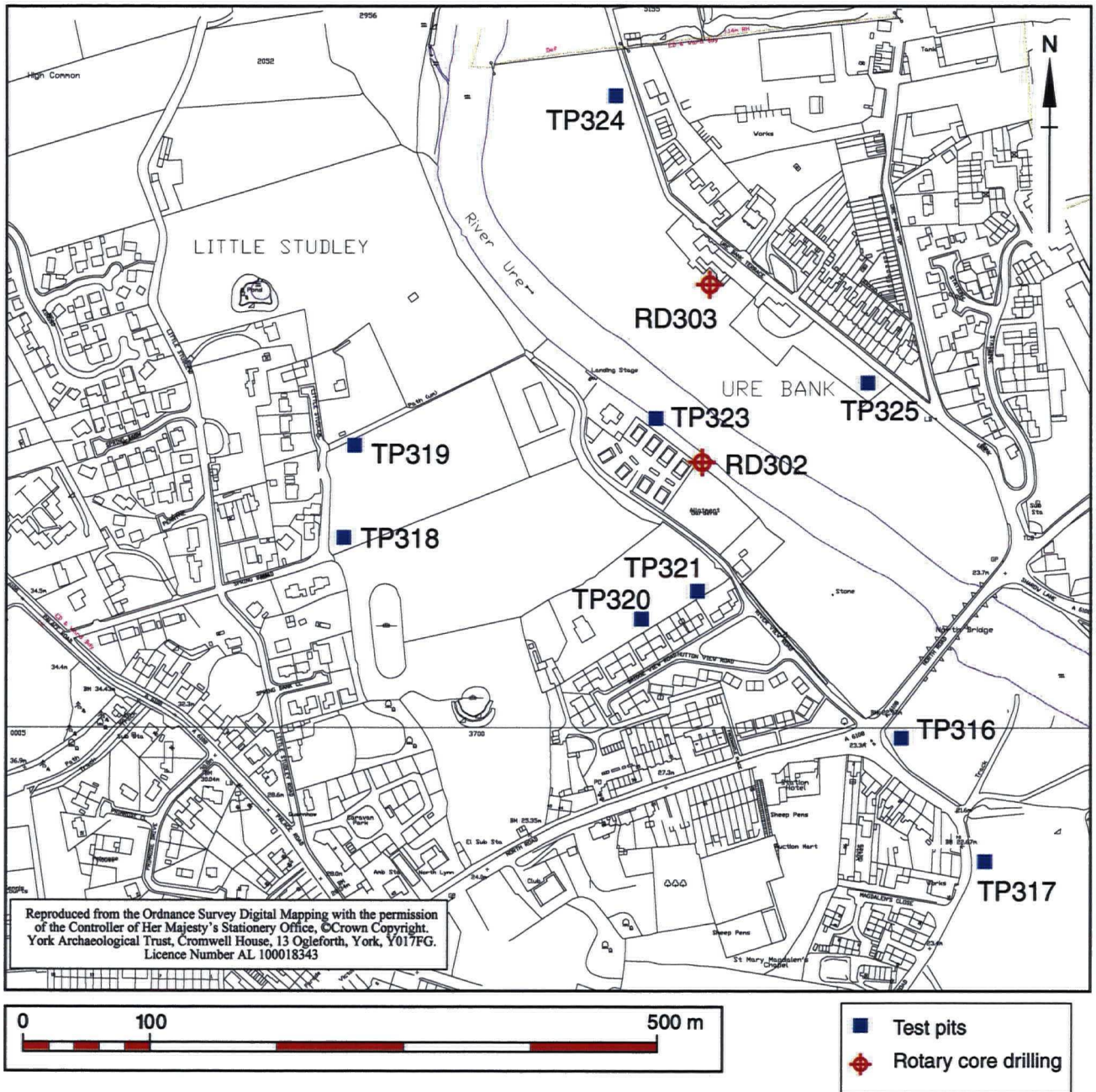


Fig. 3: Plan of trial pits at Ure Bank

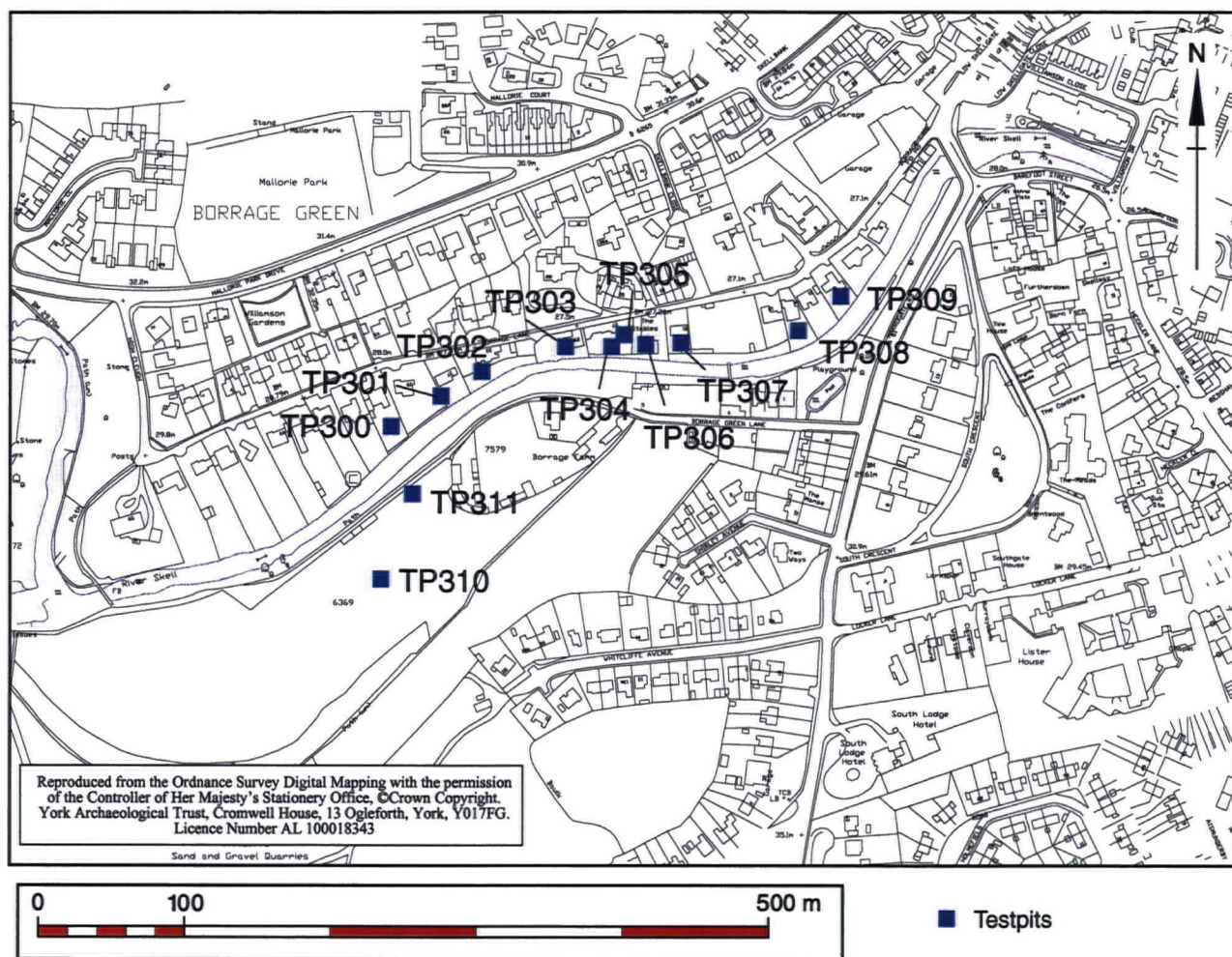


Fig. 4: Plan of trial pits at Borrage Lane

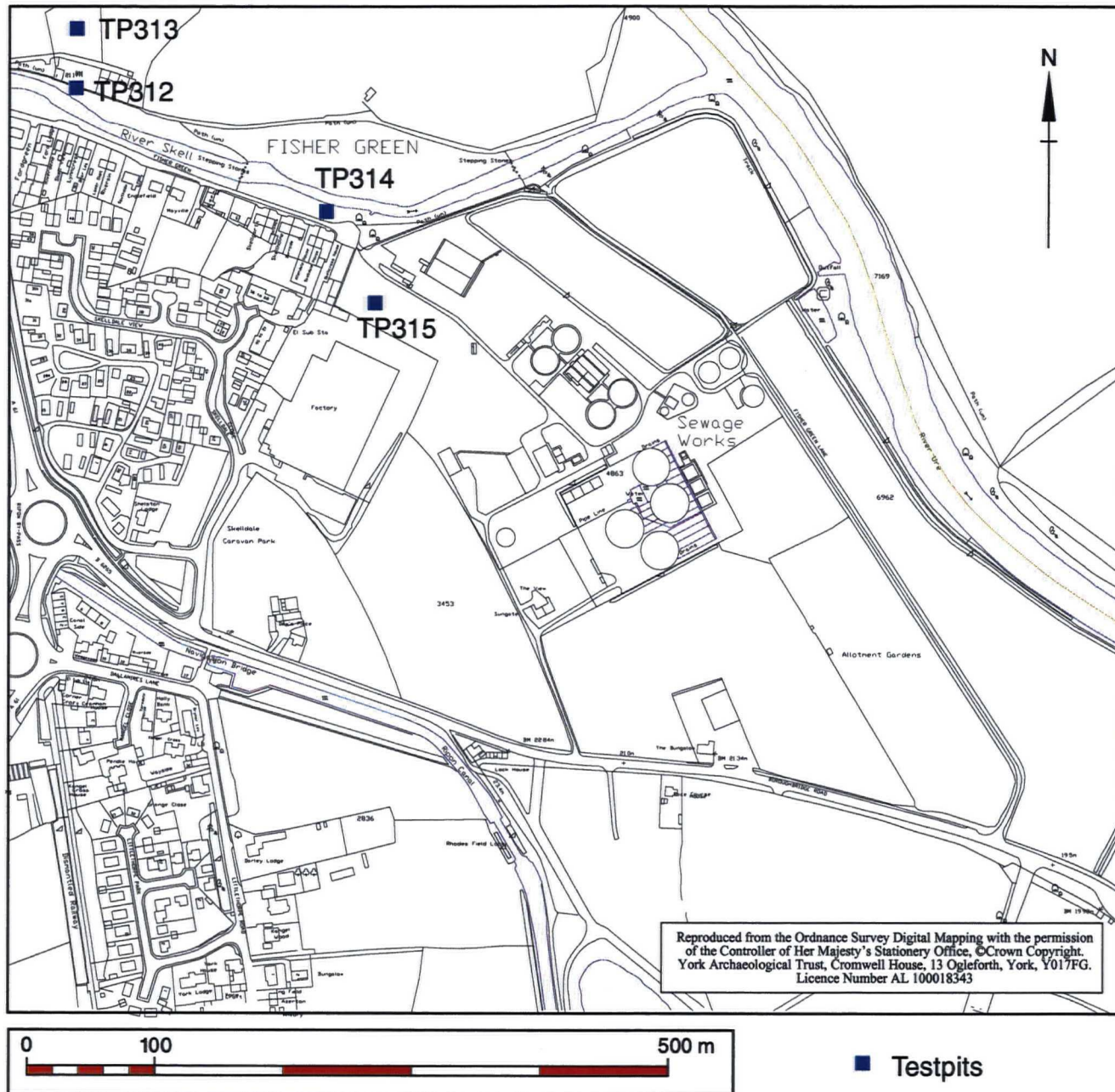


Fig. 5: Plan of trial pits at Fisher Green

## 5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

### 5.1 Trial Pit 300: Mechanical excavation, 39 Borrage Lane, Ripon. (excavated on 02/09/04)

A wheeled mechanical excavator dug a pit which ran north-south and measured 2.8m x 1m to a depth of 1.1m BGL. A deposit of loose mid-yellowish brown sandy gravels (3002) was exposed at 0.7m BGL and was a natural deposit. Above this was 3001, a loose mid-yellow gravelly sand which was sealed by a loose dark brown silty sand topsoil (3000) which was 0.35m thick. Topsoil 3000 contained one piece of modern pottery and one piece of a modern glass.

### 5.2 Trial Pit 301: Hand dug, 37 Borrage Lane, Ripon. (02/09/04)

The pit measured 0.9m x 0.86m and was hand excavated to a depth of 0.7m BGL against a north-east by south-west aligned limestone garden wall (3013). At the base of the pit was a deposit of loose yellowish-brown sandy gravel the top of which was at 0.45m BGL (3012). Above 3012 was both 3010 and 3011, the latter a concrete foundation of the wall (3013) encountered between 0.45m and 0.63m BGL, which extended 0.1m out of the section and cut into 3012. 3012 was sealed by loose dark brown silty sand topsoil 0.45m thick (3010).

### 5.3 Trial Pit 302: Hand dug, 33 Borrage Lane, Ripon. (01/09/04)

The pit measured 1m x 0.8m and was hand excavated to a depth of 1m BGL against a north-east by south-west-aligned limestone garden wall (3024). At the base of the pit was a compact yellowish-brown gravelly sand deposit that contained modern brick fragments, encountered at 0.8m BGL (3023). Above 3023 was a cobbled layer c. 0.4m in thickness (3022), which butts wall 3024. This deposit formed a cobbled surface, which was sealed by a lens of compact yellowish-brown, sandy gravels c. 0.1m in thickness (3021). 3022 was possibly part of an earlier flood defence structure for the north bank of the River Skell. Above 3021 was a soft dark brown sandy silt topsoil that was 0.29m thick (3020). 3020 contained cobbles, modern pottery, brick and tile fragments.

### 5.4 Trial Pit 303: Hand dug, 29 Borrage Lane, Ripon (06/09/04)

The pit measured 1m x 0.8m and was hand excavated to a depth of 0.8m BGL against an east-west aligned garden wall (3030). At the base of the pit was a cobbled layer encountered c. 0.8m BGL (3033). Above 3033 was a 0.5m deposit of loose yellowish-brown clayey sand (3032). 3032 appeared to be cut by 3030 but no relationship with 3033 could be seen. Above 3032 was soft dark greyish-brown sandy silt topsoil that was 0.3m thick and contained modern pottery, brick and tile fragments (3031).

### 5.5 Trial Pit 304: Hand dug, 27 Borrage Lane, Ripon (31/08/04)

The pit measured 1m x 0.8m and was hand excavated to a depth of 1m BGL against an east-west aligned limestone garden wall (3042). At the base of the pit was a cobbled layer encountered c. 0.95m BGL (3043). 3043 was sealed by a 0.65m deposit of loose yellowish-brown gravelly sand (3041). Above 3041 was soft dark greyish-brown silty sand topsoil that was 0.35m thick and contained modern pottery and brick fragments (3040).



*Plate 1: North facing shot of TP304*

**5.6 Trial Pit 305: Hand dug, 27 Borrage Lane, Ripon (31/08/04)**

The pit measured 1m x 0.45m and was hand excavated to a depth of 1.2m BGL against an east-west aligned limestone garden retaining wall (3053). At the base of the pit was a soft, dark yellowish-brown sandy silt that was encountered at 0.8m BGL and contained modern pottery and ceramic fragments (3052). 3052 was cut by brick wall (3054), which formed the foundation to wall 3053. 3052 was sealed by a 0.4m deposit of soft yellowish-brown sandy silt (3051) which contained cement and lime at the boundary with 3052, which corresponds with the connection of stone wall 3053 and brick foundation 3054 c. 0.8m BGL. Above 3051 was a loose, dark greyish-brown silty sand top soil that was 0.4m thick (3050).

**5.7 Trial Pit 306: Hand dug, The Stables, Borrage Lane, Ripon (03/09/04)**

The pit measured 1m x 0.8m and was hand excavated c. 2m from the River Skell to a depth of 1.1m BGL against a substantial east-west aligned limestone wall (3060). At the base of the pit was a deposit of compact, light greyish-brown gravelly sand, which was encountered at 0.9m BGL (3064). Above 3064 was both 3060 and a cobbled layer exposed at c. 0.7m BGL (3063). Both 3060 and 3063, which butts it, were possibly related to an earlier flood defence structure. Above 3063 was a 0.6m layer of loose mid reddish-brown sand, which extended down into the cobbled layer (3062). 3062 was sealed by a loose dark greyish-brown silty sand topsoil which was 0.3m thick and contained modern pottery, glass, brick and tile fragments (3061).

**5.8 Trial Pit 307: Hand dug, 21 Borrage Lane, Ripon (06/09/04)**

The pit measured 1m x 0.8m and was hand excavated to a depth of 1.2m BGL against a north-south aligned breezeblock property-dividing wall (3070). At the base of the pit was a deposit of compact, light greyish-brown sandy gravel that was encountered 1.05m BGL (3073). Above 3073 was a loose yellowish-brown gravelly sand deposit that was