

Excavations at The Ridings, Northampton Now Yates' Wine Lodge

by

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SUMMARY

During November and December 1999, AOC Archaeology Group excavated an area within the footprint of the new Yates Wine Lodge. The primary objective of the work was to locate the medieval Gobion Manor, and to determine whether there was any pre-conquest settlement. In addition, a stone building encountered in an earlier excavation (1981-2) was to be re-assessed.

The earliest evidence of activity on the site was a large 12th century quarry, 2m deep, which occupied up to 25% of the site area. A large stone foundation was constructed in the quarry during the mid 13th century. This represented the first phase of a north-south boundary which continued in use until the town fire of 1675, and was probably a boundary of the Gobion Manor estate. To the west of the boundary were the remains of properties dating to the 13th century fronting onto Fish Street.

The road now known as 'The Ridings' appears to have originated as an access route to Gobion Manor, founded in the 12th century. A stone-floored house revealed during the 1981-2 excavations is now thought to be one built across the thoroughfare which was demolished by the council in 1622. The name 'The Ridings' dates from the 18th century, when the land was occupied by a town farm superseding the Gobion Manor Farm. In the 19th century, a row of terraced, gable-ended houses were erected facing onto The Ridings. These were demolished during the 20th century, and a basement of significant depth was constructed at the south of the site.

INTRODUCTION

During November and December 1999, AOC Archaeology Group carried out the excavation of

a site fronting The Ridings, Northampton. The site was to be developed by Yates Group PLC for the construction of a new wine lodge. The site is located in central Northampton, covering an area of 25m x 32m (NGR SP 7571 6058) (Fig 1). An application for planning consent was submitted to Northampton Borough Council, which agreed to the development, subject to the implementation of a programme of archaeological works. The need for an evaluation was deemed unnecessary as previous excavations by Northampton Development Corporation's Archaeological Unit in 1981-2 (Williams & Farwell 1984) had identified archaeological features. This excavated area had been backfilled with a high quantity of asbestos and was hazardous to re-excavate.

The following report presents the findings as a continuous narrative incorporating information from several specialist reports. For further information and specialist appendices please refer to the archive report. The full archive is to be deposited with the Northampton Borough Museum. The site code is YWL 99.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest written reference to Northampton dates from AD 914. The archaeological evidence indicates occupation of the area in the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods yet no settlements of any significance appear to have existed at Northampton before the time of the Danish conquest. During the Viking occupation (AD 877-912) Northampton was a centre for military and administrative organisation. In the Norman period Northampton became a town of national importance due to its strategic geographical location in the middle of the kingdom. It is at this time that the town expanded and developed to the north of the Saxon settlement, *Hamtum*, which centred on St Peter's Church.

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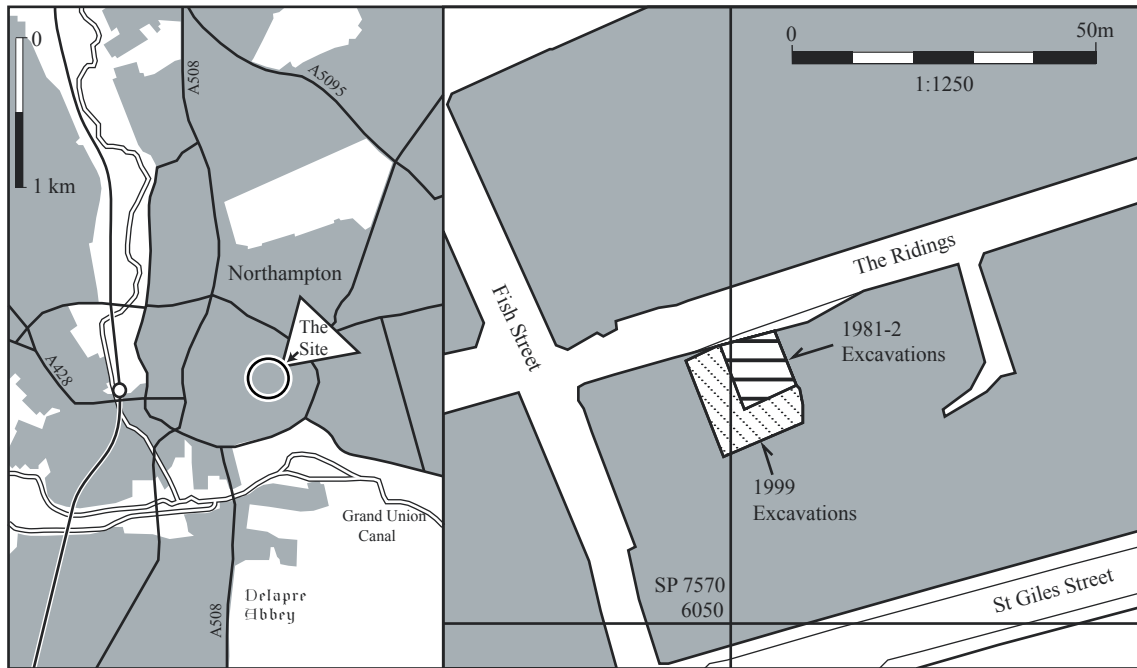


Fig 1 Location Map

The site lies within the medieval walled town, in the parish of St Giles, to the north of the main medieval east-west road; St Giles Street. It is thought this area, in the east of the town, was within the land holding of Gobion Manor. The Gobion family were persons of note and respectability in the area during the 12th and 13th centuries. The first recorded family member was Hugh Gobion, who was sheriff of Northamptonshire between 1161 and 1164. His property stayed in the family until 1300, coinciding with a decline in the fortunes of Northampton (Serjeantson 1911). By 1558, the Harrison family owned the property. It was sold to the mayor and corporation of Northampton in 1622, finally burning down in 1675 (ibid). A map of Northampton by Speed (1610) shows the location of the site (Fig 2).

The street to the west of the site, Fish Street, was established at least by 1369, when it was known as Gobion's Lane, and was occupied by buildings including the town gaol. Leases of gardens on the east side of Fish street survive from 1740, which indicate that the properties had plots up to 40 ft long.

It may be that the limit of the Manor's estate was the same boundary defined by these plots.

It is thought 'The Riding' was the town farm which succeeded Gobion's Manor Farm after 1744. In 1847 and 1868 the land was sold in a piecemeal fashion and this led to the construction of tenements along the previously undeveloped 'The Ridings'.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

TOPOGRAPHY

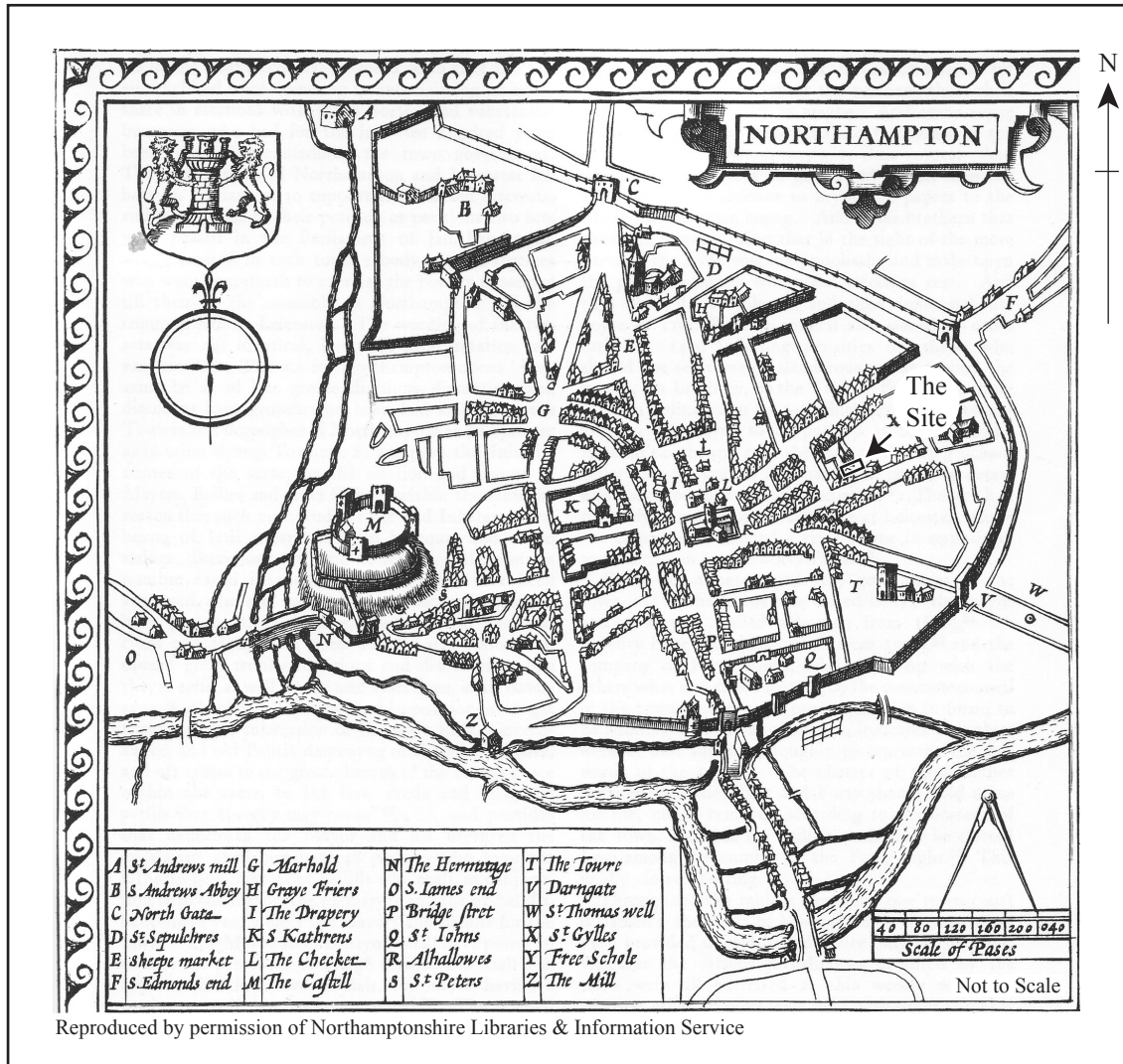
Undisturbed natural deposits of clay with ironstone were recorded at around 76.40m OD, giving a generally level horizon, barring deeper cut features.

SAXON

PHASE 1

The earliest remains were represented by a number of sherds of Saxo-Norman pottery within later deposits. This suggests that the area was peripheral to Saxon *Hamtun*. There was a single sherd of type 1 St. Neots ware, (AD 850-1100), 8 small sherds of type 2 St. Neots ware (AD 1000-1200) and 2 sherds of Stamford ware (AD 850-1200)

EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIDINGS, NORTHAMPTON, NOW YATES' WINE LODGE



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Fig 2 Speed's map of Northampton in 1610

MEDIEVAL

PHASE 2: 12TH CENTURY

The earliest feature on site was a 2m deep quarry [1169], occupying the southern portion of the site. Such quarrying seems to be characteristic of early medieval activity in Northampton, with quarries recorded at Derngate and near St Giles to the west. It seems likely that the quarry recorded at The Ridings is part of the same programme of works to retrieve ironstone for construction of the town walls or buildings. Although only a single sherd of 12th century shelly coarseware was collected from the lowest fill in the quarry, the lack of any later material

gives a high probability of this date. The fills were typified by lenses of dark brown silty sand and layers of small stone.

PHASE 3: 13TH CENTURY EXPANSION (FIGS 3-5)

During the early 13th century, the quarry was filled by household dumps, generally greyish brown sandy silt, and lenses of ironstone. The backfill of the quarry included 13th century pottery in the lower deposits, and 12th century material in the upper layers. This includes Shelly and Sandy Coarsewares, Lyveden/Stanton 'A' and 'B' wares, Brill/Boarstall ware and Developed Stamford Ware. The pottery sequence suggests secondary deposition, possibly the result of layers of made ground being cleared to

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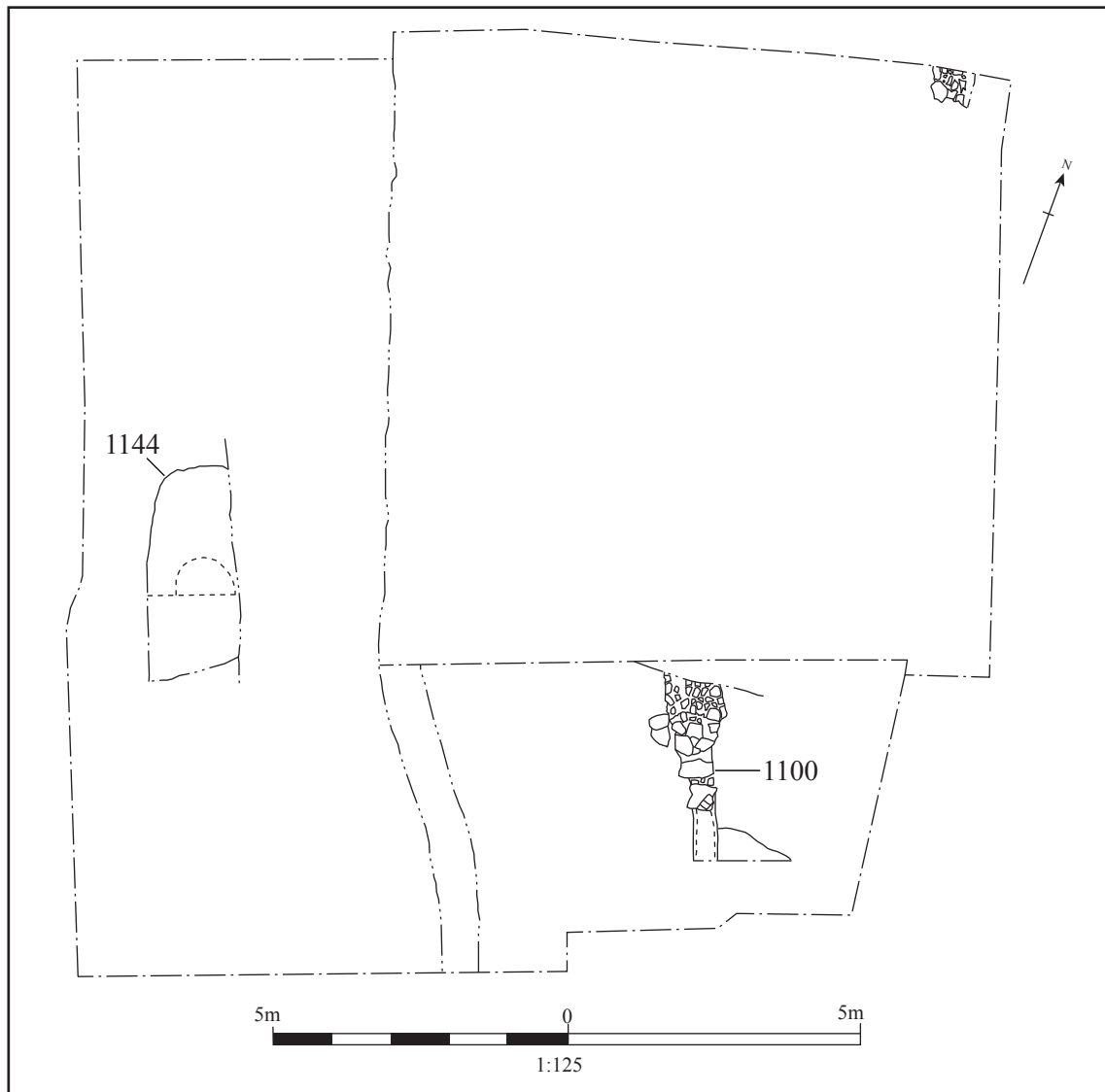


Fig 3 Early Phase 3

fill the quarry, a potential hazard within the town. The fills also illustrated the diet of the period: cattle, pig, sheep and fowl were consumed, as were wheat, peas and beans. One find of note was a spindle whorl with incised decorative circles (Fig 10). The reason for the infilling may be partly due to the establishment of the estate of Sir Hugh Gobion, who owned Gobion Manor from 1230 until 1275, and therefore would have required level ground for what was a working estate. Also, tenement construction along St. Giles Street and Fish Street (formerly Gobion's Lane) may have required the quarry to be filled.

An ironstone wall [1100] 0.65m wide and standing 0.48m tall with a large quantity of tile among its demolition material was founded within the backfilled quarry and ran north-south, parallel to Fish Street, and is a candidate for a western boundary of Gobion Manor Estate, defining also the eastern boundary of Fish Street properties (Fig 3). To the west of the boundary was a cess pit [1144] which is likely to have served a property on Fish Street. The lowest fills of the pit were 'cessy', but the upper layers indicate rapid infilling, due to the deposition of large blocks of masonry.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIDINGS, NORTHAMPTON, NOW YATES' WINE LODGE

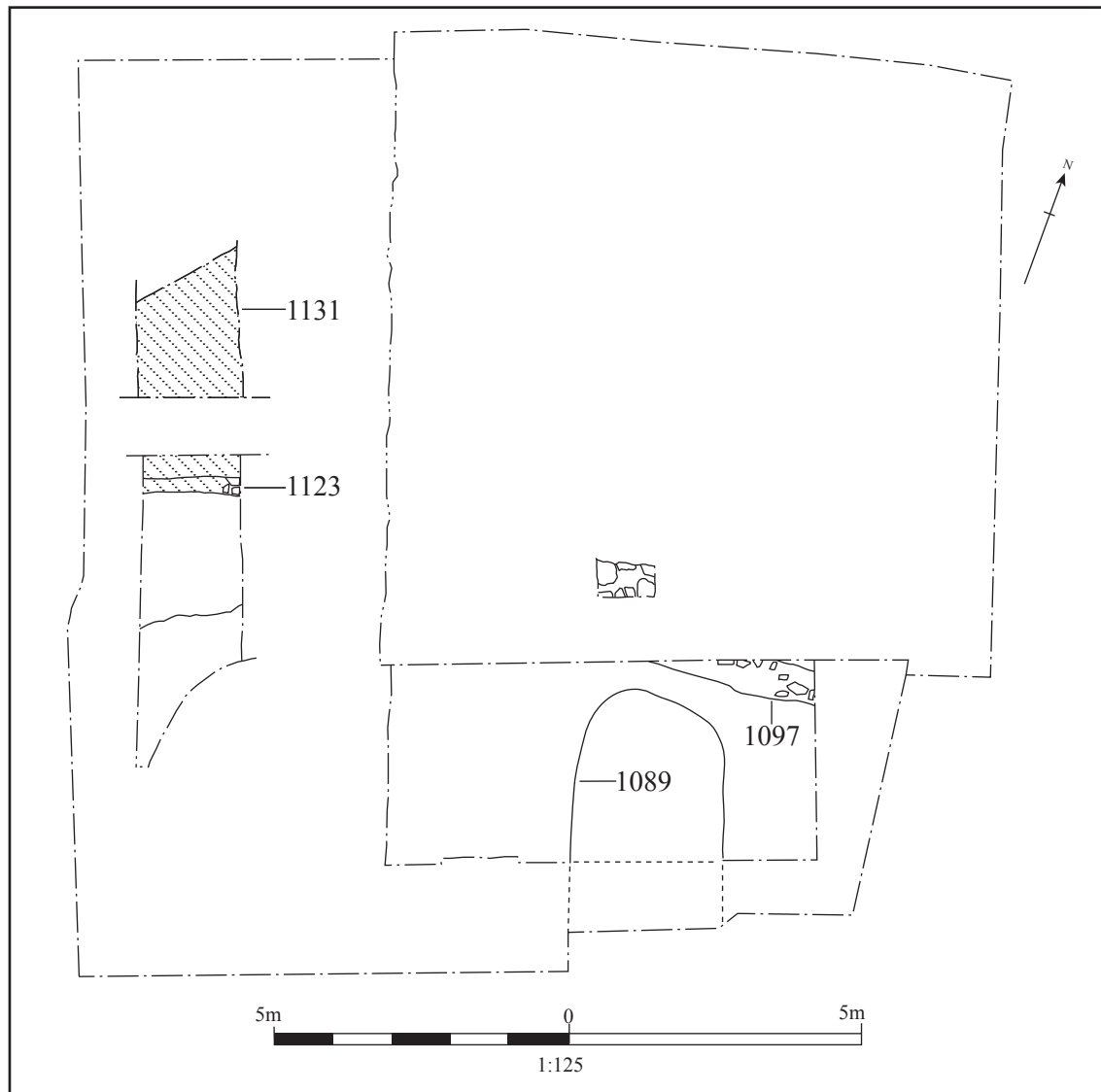


Fig 4 Late Phase 3

The boundary wall did not survive for long, the finds suggesting less than 50 years, and was replaced by a boundary ditch [1089] by the end of the century (Figs 4 and 5). A building was then established over the filled pit. Only the sub floor [1131] and three blocks of masonry [1123] survived (Fig 4).

A length of wall foundation 1.60m long [1097] was identified cutting the filled quarry, at 90° to the demolished wall. This may be the remains of an outbuilding of Gobion Manor. Any internal surface associated with this structure would have lain to the north and east of it, in the area 'machined to lower level' in the

1981-2 excavations (Fig 4). Much of the roof tile collected from the excavations of this phase had a green glaze, other roof tiles were limestone; suggesting the varied form of the roofscape of Northampton.

PHASE 4: DECLINE, LATE 13TH -14TH CENTURY

The estates of the Gobion family were divided in 1300. This coincided with a decline in the fortunes of Northampton, a decline that continued until the 17th century, when the town defences were in ruin, and housing plots in the city were granted

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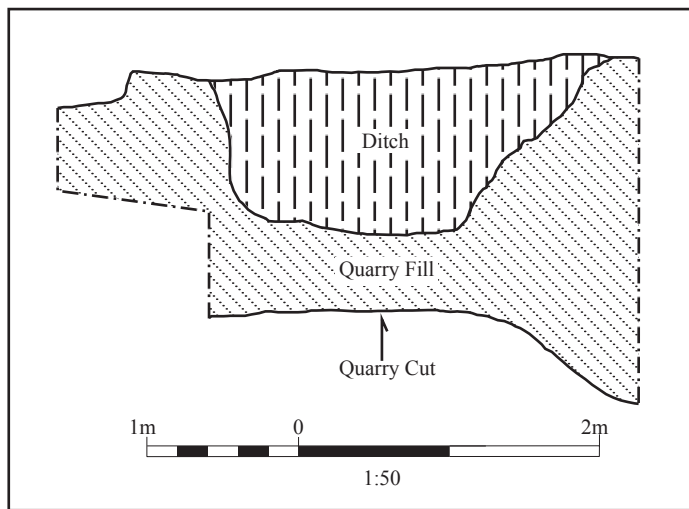


Fig 5 North-facing section through Quarry and Boundary Ditch

to those with the wherewithal to rebuild. The ditch interpreted as limiting the Gobion estate became filled with domestic waste and a layer of firm brown clayey sand, suggesting it was no longer a respected boundary, but an area for refuse (Fig 5). A sherd of Rouen ware was recovered from the fill (Fig 8 Tr5). Rouen ware has been noted at previous excavations in the town, such as those at St Peter's Street (McCarthy 1979, 165), but generally finds of this ware are rare in Northampton. Its presence demonstrates the importance of the town during the 13th century, in that there were trade routes which extended all the way to London or the east or south coast ports, the points of entry for such pottery. The domestic waste from the years of decline includes a higher quantity of cattle bone than the previous phase, indicating a less varied diet. By the end of the 14th century, the town was in recession, a downturn caused by high taxation and the effect of the Black Death (Serjeantson 1911). There are no features on site after this period until the early 16th century. Were 14th century features present, it is expected that Pottersbury ware would have been present.

POST-MEDIEVAL

PHASE 5: 1500-1550

The 13th century building associated with the Fish Street properties was burnt down, the fire causing discolouration of the building materials *in situ*. This seems to have occurred in the early 16th century, probably during a known fire of 1516 (Williams 1979, 6). To the south of the site, a dark brown silty deposit containing 15th century pottery and high quantities of charcoal (1048) was dumped into the top of the quarry. The nature of this deposit suggests this represents post-fire clearance. The pottery group contains a significant proportion of Midland Purple ware, which had largely ceased production by 1600. Furthermore, red earthenwares, which are virtually ubiquitous in deposits of the mid-16th century or later, were absent. Instead, the utilitarian vessels which were usually made in redware fabrics, such as pancheons, are Brill/ Boarstall type, which were first made in the

14th century, and carried on in production until the 16th century, dominated the assemblage (Mellor 1994).

PHASE 6: 1550-1625 (FIG 6)

A ditch [1086] 3m wide and 0.8m deep was established running north-south and terminated 3m from the street front. This was 5m west of the earlier boundary, and its terminus indicates passage was possible along what is now The Ridings. This ditch seems to have gradually filled, through erosion of the sides and silting, the lower fill being silty with a high proportion of stone fragments. For the first time, pieces of clay tobacco pipe were found within this deposit, confirming its post-1600 date.

In the north-east of the site a large foundation [A74] of ironstone and limestone blocks enclosed an area of pitched limestone slabs. This structure was quite substantial and is most likely part of the house of Harrison of Stowe recorded as blocking a lane into Gobion's Farm in 1585 (Cox, 1898). To the south of the area, a stone drain (1054) was considered likely to be contemporary with this property. The house was demolished, and scattered across the site following its purchase by the Town Council in 1622 (*ibid*).

PHASE 7: AD 1625-1675

To the east of the ditch, layers of local stone and silt were dumped, raising the land surface by 0.20m, dating evidence assumed from the stratigraphy. This did not occur west of the ditch, indicating that this was a respected boundary. The ditch gradually silted up while open, but was still functioning.

Records state that Gobion Manor and much of the medieval town was completely destroyed by the town fire in 1675, during which the whole homestead, including barns, cowsheds, and other associated buildings were destroyed. This fire was identified within the depositional sequence in only two instances. One deposit recorded at the top of the ditch to the west of the site (1086) was a regular layer of brittle dark brown clayey silt contained 80% charcoal pieces (1082). In the north-eastern part of site, a scatter of charcoal was found at the base of a layer of

EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIDINGS, NORTHAMPTON, NOW YATES' WINE LODGE

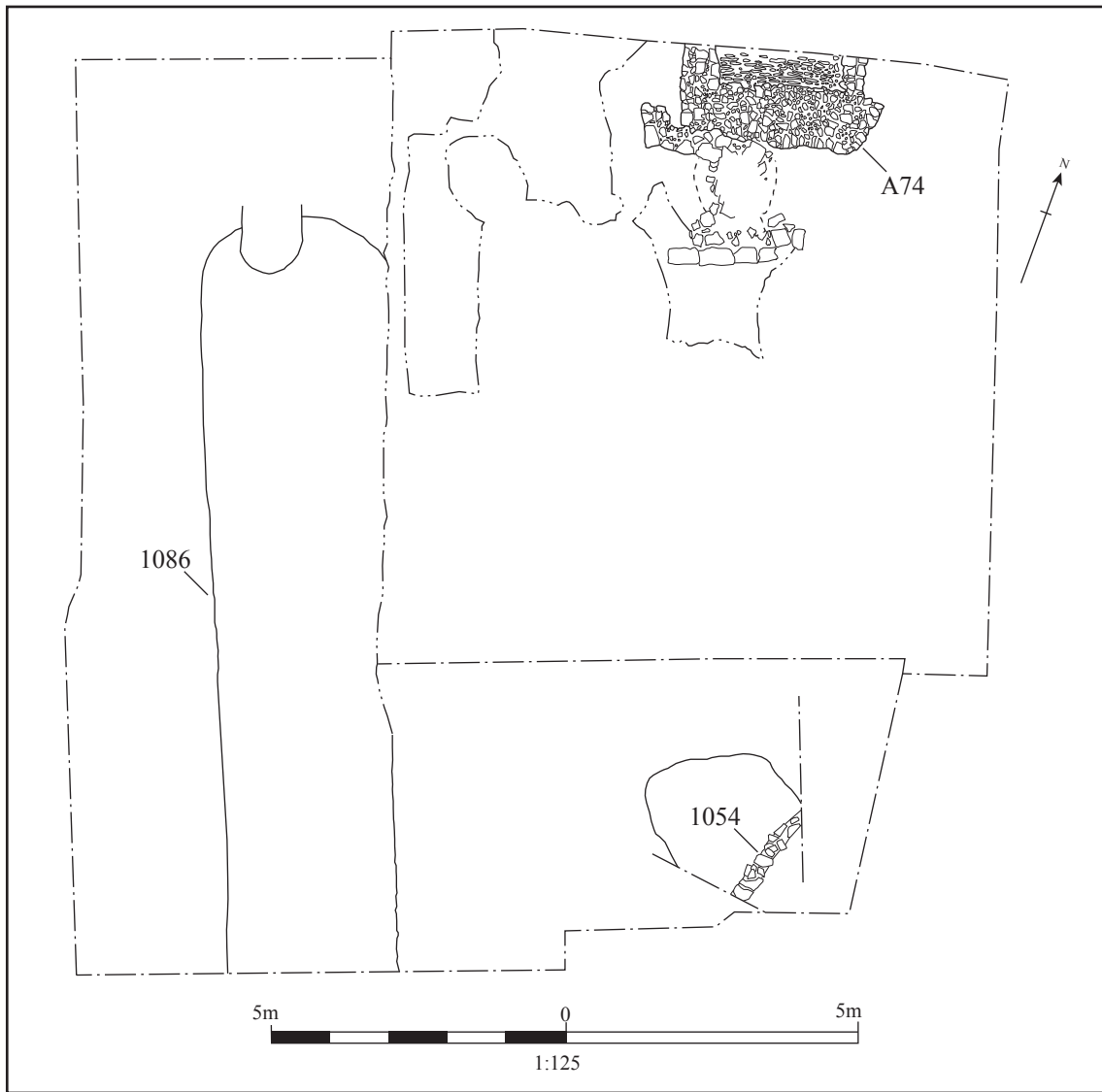


Fig 6 Phase 6

loam (A56), representing post-fire clearance and dated by the finds assemblage.

PHASE 8: AD 1675-1725

The fragmentary nature of the destruction horizon relating to the Northampton fire seems to be entirely due to later disturbance. To the south of the site a thick layer of charcoal-rich humic silt was recorded (1048). The quantity of charcoal was very high here, but did not actually form a solid horizon, indicating some reworking of the deposit. The finds included a green-glazed sherd of Siegburg stoneware (Fig Tr3), signifying European

trade. Small quantities of such material are known from eastern England and Scotland (Gaimster 1997, 60), and were exported to Britain from the 'Low Countries', with King's Lynn or Norwich being the most likely port of entry. The main dating evidence is Staffordshire Manganese wares. Barker (1999) has stated that the majority of the excavated production waste in Staffordshire appears to date to the period 1700-1720. This would therefore suggest that this area of The Ridings may have been derelict for at least two decades after the Great Fire. Further evidence of this comes from a lease dated 6th April 1685, that states that the area of Gobion Manor was still derelict at that time (Williams & Farwell 1984).

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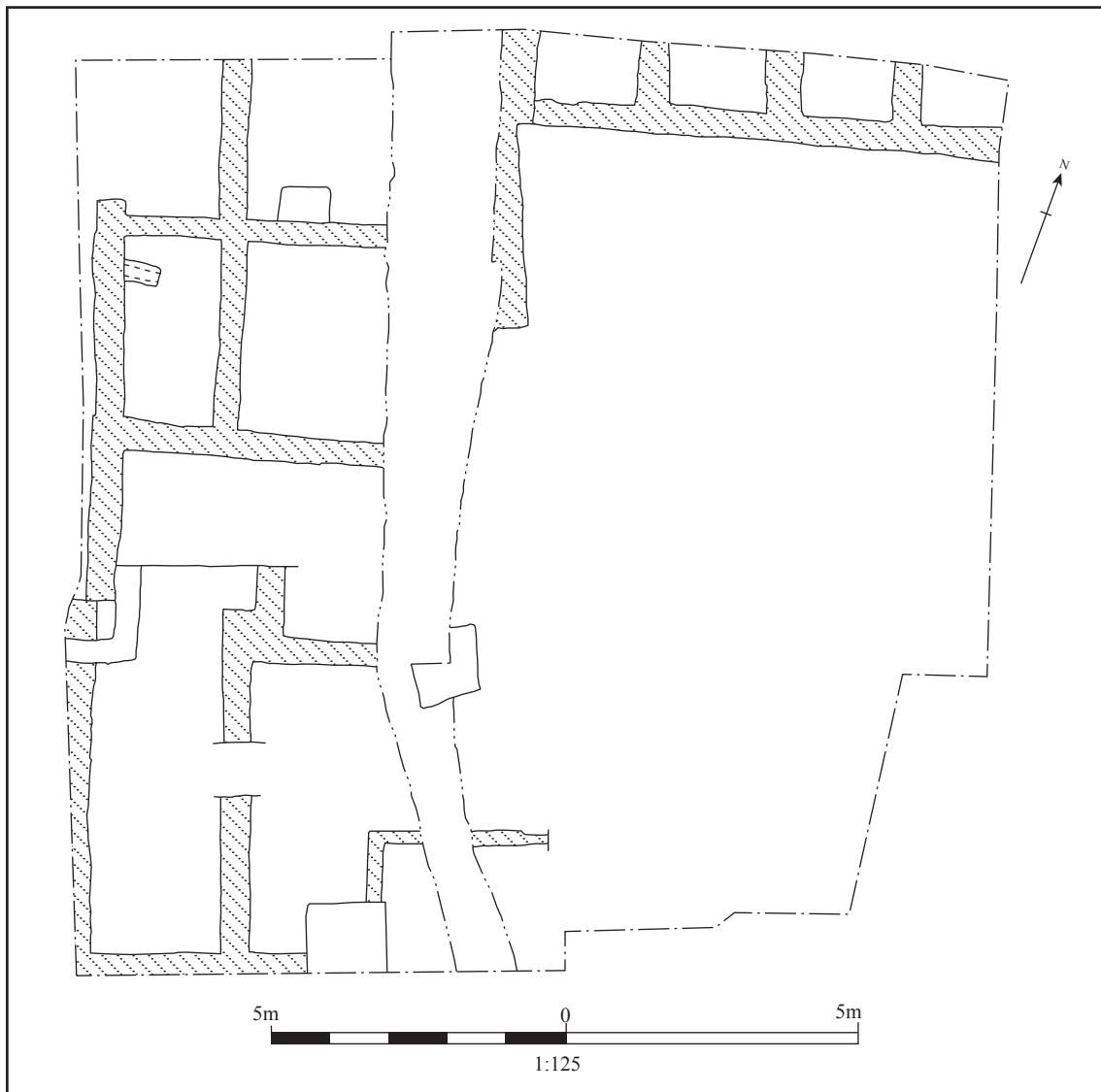


Fig 7 Phase 11: 19th-20th century

PHASE 9: AD 1725-1810

This phase features a robbing episode into the wall of the burnt-down building of the thirteenth century and further layers of made ground were deposited across the site. The area first became known as The Ridings during this period, and was used as a town farm. Five marked clay tobacco pipe bowls made by local pipe maker, Robert Roberts, c.1780-1818, were recovered from one of the layers of made ground.

PHASE 10: EARLY 19TH CENTURY

Possible floor deposits and a robber trench were recorded to the

centre of the site in the 1981-2 excavations, and a stone drain [1083] may be associated with this structure. The animal bone collected from this phase had relatively high proportions of horse and dog, compared with earlier phases. This may be indicative of the land being used as a town farm.

PHASE 11: 19TH-20TH CENTURY (FIG 7)

This late phase of development on site is characterised by the erection of a row of buildings fronting onto The Riding, behind which were two associated wells and a stone-lined pit. The excavations undertaken in 1981-82 identified partially surviving

EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIDINGS, NORTHAMPTON, NOW YATES' WINE LODGE

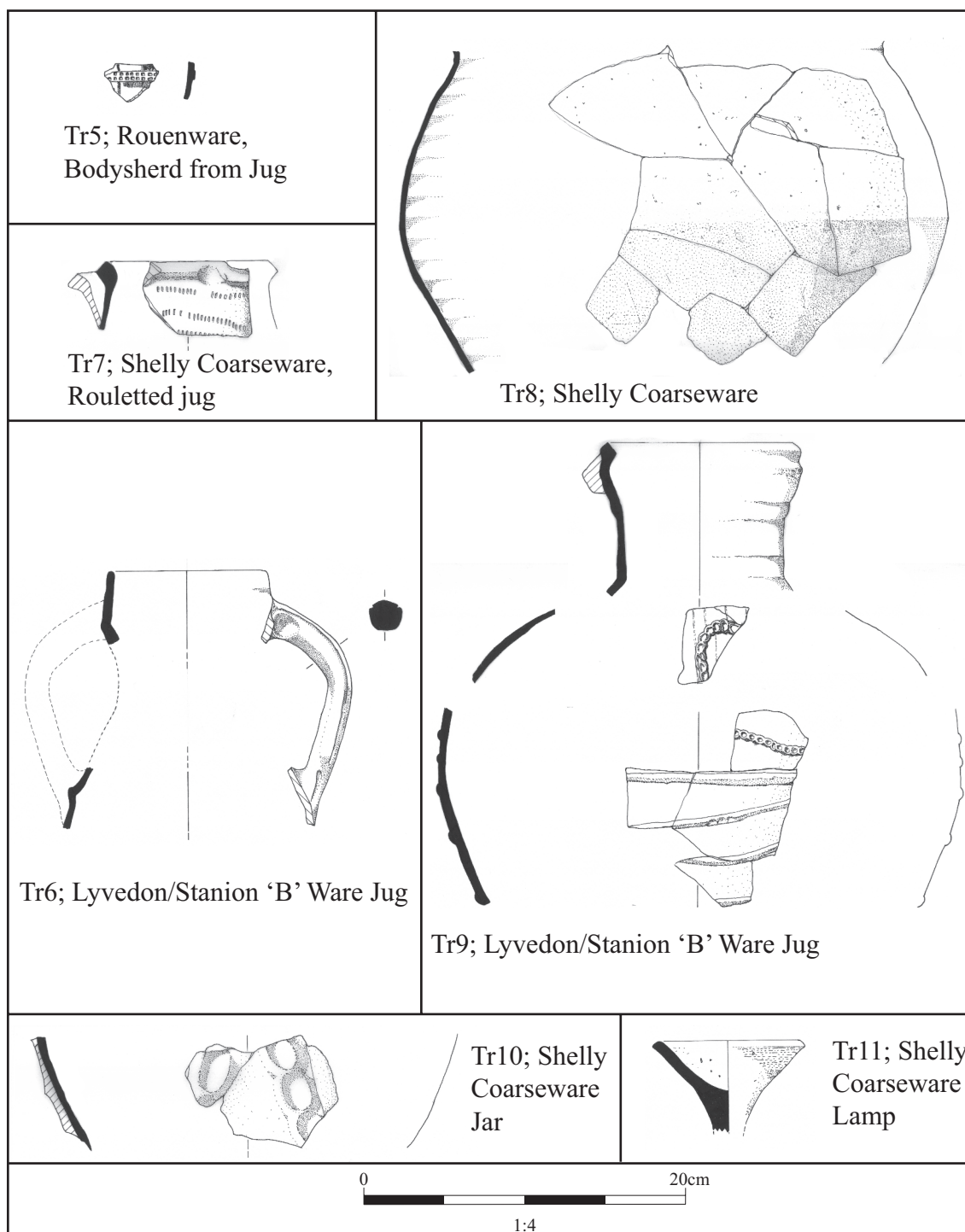


Fig 8 Medieval pottery

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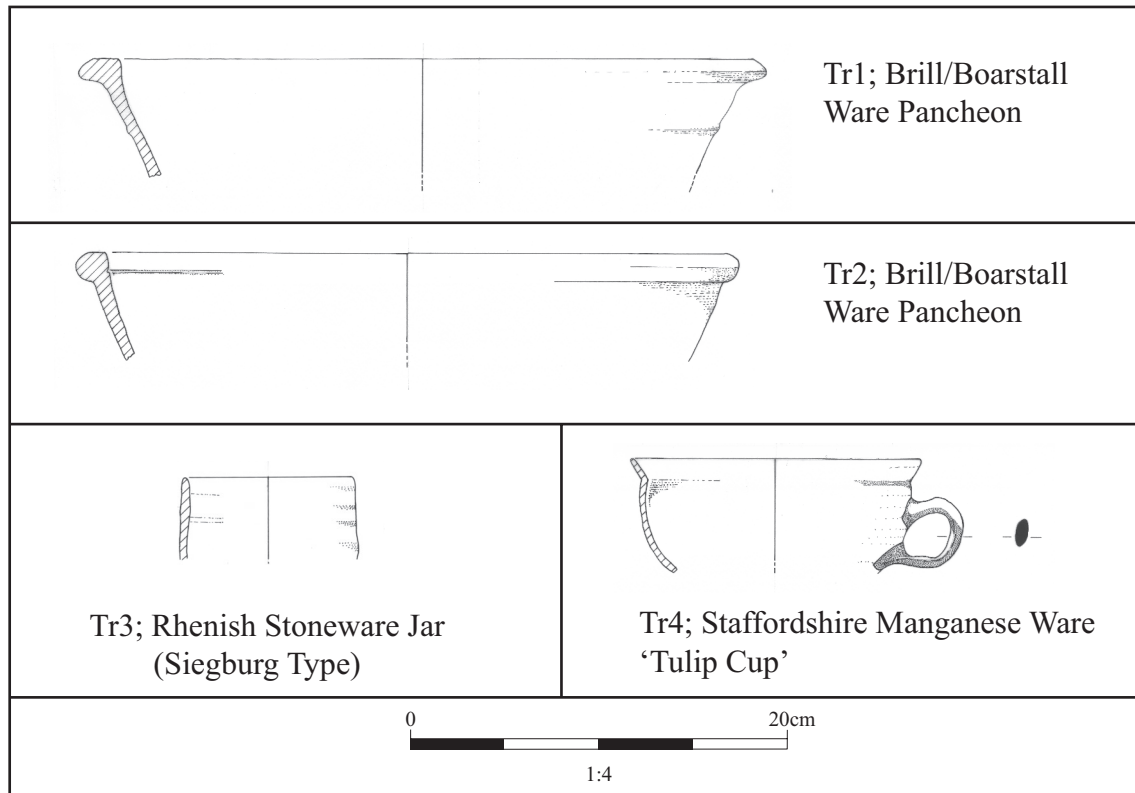


Fig 9 Post-Medieval pottery

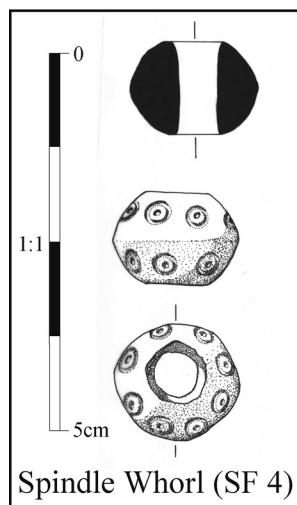


Fig 10 Stone spindle whorl

foundations. In the recent works, deep foundations were identified approximately 17 metres south of The Riding, beyond where basements had been constructed.

CONCLUSIONS

MEDIEVAL LAND USE

Quarrying seems to be characteristic of early medieval activity in Northampton, with quarries recorded at Derngate and near St Giles to the west. It seems likely that the quarry recorded at The Ridings is part of the same programme of works to retrieve ironstone for construction of the town walls or buildings. Once used, the quarry was rapidly filled with domestic waste from the town; the nearest source would be the yards of tenements on Fish Street and St Giles Street.

MEDIEVAL DIET

Diet in the 13th century was indicated by examinat-

EXCAVATIONS AT THE RIDINGS, NORTHAMPTON, NOW YATES' WINE LODGE

ion of the animal bones and botanical evidence present in the soil samples. A number of species were identified; horse, cow, pig, sheep/goat, dog and cat. Bird remains were also found; most appear to be domestic fowl although goose was also identified. Dog and cat bones amongst the assemblage could have derived from either working animals or scavengers.

The environmental samples showed that Emmer was the main wheat in the diet. Variation was available in the form of Spelt and bread wheat. Pulses were another addition to the diet, in the form of peas and beans. Rye and/ or oats may also have been eaten.

LOCATION OF GOBION MANOR

The physical evidence from the site has shed little evidence regarding the probable location of Gobion Manor. There is a lack of high status building material, and although materials from said manor may have been taken for re-use, it seems likely that there would have been significant spreads of demolition material were the Manor in close proximity to the site. Also, notably, there are not concentrated dumps of household waste apart from within the backfilled quarry: the household waste in these layers could feasibly be general waste from the town during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Documentary research by Dr TC Welsh (1997) has shown that there is some confusion regarding the exact location of the Manor and its estate, but he has concluded that the estate was bound to the north by Abington Street, and the manor itself fronted onto Abington Lane. The site was accessed from the west by a cartway leading from Dithers Lane (Dychurch Lane) into a yard that appears to have evolved into the Ridings, which led to estate buildings. The excavations that are the subject of this report offer several pieces of information that support Dr Welsh's research. The succession of north-south boundaries to the west of the site indicates a rear limit to the Fish Street properties and also potentially marks the western extent of the Gobion estate.

The documentary evidence notes that following the 1675 town fire, the town leased the manor house site on condition of building a substantial house fronting Abington Street. This suggests that demolishing the Manor had left a gap in the street frontage. The lack of any medieval house foundation within the excavation proves that Gobion Manor was not on this site, unless it was comprehensively removed.

The building with the pitched stone floor revealed

in the 1981 excavations was post-medieval in date. Dr Welsh's (2000) interpretation of the documentary and cartographic sources offers a scenario which gives a precise date for the erection and removal of this building. Records from 1586 (Cox 1898, 157) report that "Mr Thomas Haryson of Stowe hathe encroached upon a Layne lyinge nere Saynte Gyles Churche". This encroachment would account for the large building shown on Speed's Map of 1610. It seems to have been removed by 1622 when the Corporation acquired the ground. Certainly, there was no evidence that it was destroyed by fire, as would have been expected had it been standing by 1675.

TOWN FIRE, 1675

Evidence for the town fire of 1675 was fragmentary and was identified *in situ* by only one feature, being a brittle crust of charcoal in the upper fill of a boundary ditch. This seemed to have been burnt *in situ*, and resembled a burnt layer of turf. The lack of further direct burning was accounted for by horizontal truncation across the whole site, and reworking of deposits to the south and east of site. After this, the site became open ground until the erection of houses fronting onto the Ridings in the 19th century.

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