



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



**YORK GAS WORKS,
HEWORTH GREEN, YORK**

WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

by I.D. Milsted

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CONTENTS

	Page
NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. METHODOLOGY	1
3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	2
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	2
5. RESULTS.....	5
6. DISCUSSION.....	8
7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	9
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	9
APPENDIX 1: FIGURES AND PLATES	11
APPENDIX 2: ARTEFACT REPORTS	17
APPENDIX 3: CONTEXT REGISTER.....	18
APPENDIX 4: ARCHIVE SUMMARY	18

Figures

1. Site location.....	11
2. Roman roads in area.....	11
3. Excavation locations	12

Plates

Cover: View of site

1. General view of Area S4	13
2. Natural exposed in deeper excavation	13
3. Agricultural soil 10006.....	14
4. Clay deposit 10009	14
5. General view of Area S1	15

6.	Contaminated blue soil 11003	15
7.	Construction cut for drain/tank 11006.....	16

Tables

1.	Pottery by Context.....	17
2.	CBM by Context.....	17
3.	Context register.....	18

Abbreviations

YAT	York Archaeological Trust
OAN	Oxford Archaeology North
AOD	Above Ordnance Datum
BGL	Below Ground Level

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

A watching brief during mitigation ground works at the site of the former York Gas Works identified natural geological deposits at around 1m below ground level, overlain by an agricultural soil of 18th – 19th century date. This had been disturbed by a clearance and extensive levelling, dumping and waste disposal activity associated with the 19th and 20th century developments of the Gasworks. The site was then extensively levelled and turfed in the later 20th century. No significant archaeological remains were found.

1. INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was maintained during ground remediation works between 23rd January and 20th March 2012 in an area of open ground in the north-west corner of the former York Gas Works, Heworth Green (Figure 1). The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the City Archaeologist, John Oxley. The remediation work was instigated by the landowner, National Grid Property Holdings, and conducted by WYG Environmental and VHE Construction.

2. METHODOLOGY

Two areas, S1 and S4, were reduced by 20 ton mechanical excavator to remove contaminated material associated with the former gas works at Heworth Green (Figure 3), NGR SE 6117 5254. Following archaeological evaluation by Oxford Archaeology North (OAN) in 2003 (see 4.6), these areas were subjected to different excavation methodologies. Area S4, in the northern part of the open ground, measured c.1540m² and was mechanically reduced without archaeological supervision to a depth of 0.5m BGL (Below Ground Level), removing turf, topsoil and a deposit of compacted brick rubble. Excavation then continued under archaeological supervision until the underlying contaminated material was removed, at an approximate depth of 0.70-0.80m BGL. Area S1 measured c.1985 m² and was mechanically reduced without archaeological supervision until the interface of the contaminated material and the underlying deposits was reached at approximately 0.70m BGL, at which point the area was archaeologically inspected. Both areas S4 and S1 were closely observed for archaeological deposits and features and recorded appropriately according to the specification. Context numbers were issued to each area, starting with 10000 in S4 and 11000 in S1. All records and artefacts are held with YAT under project number 5582 and museum accession code YORYM: 2012.1.

A considerable degree of contamination was present in the soils under observation, including benzene, acids and cyanide. Appropriate PPE in the form of protective suits, eye-wear and gloves was worn at all times, and appropriate decontamination procedures were observed. Artefacts were recovered from the surface of exposed deposits in accordance with the specification. These were handled using appropriate measures by YAT.

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is located c.800m north-east of the centre of York. The solid geology consists of sandstone of the Sherwood sandstone group, and the drift deposits are mainly Devensian glaciolacustrine clays and silts, with a pocket of wind-blown sand in the furthest north-east corner of the site (<http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer/>, viewed 27/01/2012). The area is generally level at c.12.5m AOD, and the specific area under investigation is a grassed triangle of land in the north-east corner of the main site measuring 1.03ha. This part is bounded by the A1036 Heworth Green to the north-west, by the defunct railway cutting of the former Foss Islands Railway, now a footpath, to the north-east, and by the rest of the gas works site to the south-west (Figure 2).

The OAN evaluation trenches dug in 2003 were clearly visible as turf-covered mounds which had experienced considerable vegetation growth, in marked contrast to the rest of the area. Area S1 was located in the southern corner of the grassed area, incorporating OAN trenches T7, T8 and T9. The north-west end of area S1 extended beyond the grassed area into the concrete-surfaced car park. Area S4 was located the centre-north part of the grassed area, and incorporated OAN trenches T4, T5 and T6.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 PREHISTORIC

Nothing of prehistoric date is known from the vicinity of the site, although it lies only 300m west of the modern course of the River Foss, and therefore may lie within an area exploited in the prehistoric period within the river valley. Such activity is likely to have been ephemeral, however, and easily masked or dispersed in later periods.

4.2 ROMAN

The general archaeology of Roman York is covered in great detail in a number of readily available sources. Of principal concern in the immediate vicinity of the site are two cemeteries and the possible alignment of a major road.

A road between Roman York (*Eboracum*) and Stamford Bridge was designated Road 3 by the Royal Commission in the 1960s and suggested to run along the line of Stockton Lane, joining with the putative line of Road 4, connecting *Eboracum* with Roman Malton (*Derwentio*) and then running along the line of what is now the A1036 Heworth Green, immediately north-west of the site (Figure 2). The basis for these alignments is minimal, however, relying on antiquarian analysis of late medieval road ways in agricultural land some 2.5kms east of the city, and on the alignment of Heworth Green with remains of a narrow road surface excavated in 1926 at Stockton Lane (RCHMY, 1962, 1-2), some 1.2km north-east of the gas works site. The Royal Commission did, however, acknowledge evidence that cast doubt on these alignments, and in the early 1970s, the York Excavation Group dug four trenches in the area of the Groves, c.300m north-west of the gas works site, and found sufficient evidence of road surfacing to suggest the alignment of Road 4 now generally accepted (Brinklow, 1986, 91). The road projected to run immediately adjacent to the gas works site is now usually marked as a 'possible alignment' and in the most recent publication as a 'conjectural road' (Ottaway, 2011, 160 and 192).

The presence of a road in the vicinity of the gas works site cannot be entirely discounted, however, thanks mainly to the presence of two Roman cemeteries. In 1878 a cremation cemetery was encountered during the excavation of the railway cutting that forms the north-eastern boundary of the gas works site (RCHMY1, 70), at a point immediately north of the A1036 Heworth Green, some 150 north of the current site. In 1926, a further cremation cemetery was encountered at the junction of Glen Road and Harcourt Street, 180m south-east of the gas works site. Both cemeteries were of early 2nd century date, in keeping with the pattern of burials of this period seen across the city, which typically although not strictly were positioned along the line of major roads (Ottaway, 2004, 121). The archaeological evaluation undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North in 2003 (see 4.6) found disturbed remains of possible Roman burials at the gas works site and these may relate to nearby funerary activity, although the degree of disturbance observed (Clark, 2003, 19) suggests significant disturbance and possible re-deposition of Roman funerary material by later activity.

4.3 ANGLIAN AND ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN

The gas works site lies in what would have been the agricultural hinterland of the Anglian and Viking settlements. A cremation cemetery of Anglian date was encountered during the railway works referred to above, some 360m north of the gas works site, but excavations in the 1960s suggested that the limits of the cemetery had been defined and that it bore no relation to the nearby earlier Roman burials (Tweddle, 1999, 170).

4.4 MEDIEVAL

The Heworth area would have continued to have been agricultural land throughout the medieval period. The leper hospital of St Loy's is recorded in the area of Monk Bridge, 250m west of the gas works site, associated with the excavated remains of a large 12th century boundary ditch (Dean, 2008, 103).

4.5 POST-MEDIEVAL

The area of the current site remained open ground whilst the area around became progressively built over during the 19th century. The Foss Islands Railway was cut through in 1879, forming the current site north-east boundary (Tillot, pp.472-481. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36382>). The current site became part of the York United Gas Company's works after the 1880s, adding to an operation that had been active on the west bank of the Foss from 1824 (Tillot, pp.460-472. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=36381>). The extant gasholder is visible on the 1962 OS map along with structures to the south now demolished; the site was latterly converted from gas production to storage. The grassed area north of this gasholder appears to have been open land throughout the industrial use of the whole site, and not immediately used by the gas works as the north-western area is shown in OS maps from 1900 as containing allotments connected to Heworth Green by small paths. By the 1962 OS map the allotments have gone and the area has reverted to open ground; it is likely that the gardens and paths were removed in the 1930s when parts of the complex to the south were constructed (Clark, 2003, 9), and the grassed area used as a coal-yard (Ibid, 20).

4.6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

The evaluation of 2003 identified possible Roman and medieval features which informed the methodology of the current project (Clark, 2003, 12-18; figure 3).

Across S4, natural deposits in the form of an orange clay were identified c.1m BGL in the west (T6), c.1.15m BGL in the centre (T5) and c.0.89m BGL in the east (T2 just beyond the limit of S4). To the south and east, this deposit was overlain by clean brown clayey silts and grey sandy silts.

Cut into natural in T2 were two ephemeral linear features containing some late 1st - early 2nd century pottery and a later posthole; these features were interpreted as 'pertain[ing] to a human burial' on the basis of the pottery type and some burnt animal bone (Clark, 2003, 19). Some potential post-depositional disturbance was noted.

Medieval activity was identified in T3, to the north of S4, and in T6. Three small ditches or gullies were interpreted as possible field boundaries, although no dating evidence was recovered from their backfills (Clark, 2003, 20).

These features were sealed by a deposit of black silty-clay across the whole area, interpreted as a post-medieval plough-soil and heavily contaminated by the later industrial activity in the area (Clark, 2003, 20). This was in turn sealed beneath a layer of brick rubble and then the topsoil and turf of the current grassed area surface.

The layer of brick rubble and modern topsoil had a combined maximum depth of 0.65m; the underlying contaminated plough soil was up to 0.25m thick but varied across the site (Clark, 2003, 14-15). The resulting methodology took account of this variability and stipulated that the uppermost 0.50m could be removed without archaeological supervision, and that the remaining deposits had to be removed under archaeological supervision until the project objective of removing the contaminated material had been achieved.

In area S1, the evaluation trenches identified modern deposits to at least 1.9m BGL (Clark, 2003, 16) and subsequently the methodology for this area stipulated that all contaminated material could be removed to the interface with natural without archaeological supervision, and that the area would be inspected by the archaeologist after this had taken place.

5. RESULTS

5.1 AREA S4

Area S4 (Figure 3, Plates 1-4) was cleared in three main sections, during which heavy rain and then snow reduced the opportunity to view successive areas together before the exposed surfaces became weathered, potentially reducing the likelihood of identifying site-wide features. Further small extensions to the north-east were later excavated under archaeological observation following further soil tests. In general, the excavation did not go deeper than approximately 0.70-0.80m BGL, which was the point at which a dark grey-black silty clay identified across the site and containing ash, coal, clinker and modern material gave way to underlying deposits. In many areas, these underlying deposits contained relatively modern material and were considered to represent levelling and dumping of rubbish (see below). Consequently, the opportunities to view natural strata and any potential Roman or medieval features cut into it were very limited.

5.1.1 SEQUENCE

The earliest deposit identified in area S4 was an orange sandy clay, context 10010, which was interpreted as natural. This was only seen in the eastern part of S4 at a depth of between 0.80m – 1m BGL, where the backfills of the OAN evaluation trenches 4 and 5 were completely dug out, and in a few small areas where deeper ‘hotspots’ of contaminated material were removed (Plate 2). In general, the excavation did not reach this depth across the whole area, and so observation of natural was limited.

Overlying natural clay in the eastern part of S4 was a layer of pale orange-brown slightly silty clay, context 10006, that was up to 0.35m thick and again observed mainly in the more deeply excavated areas (Plate 3). Although this deposit appeared to derive partially from natural material, it produced residual medieval roof tile and abraded sherds of 18th century pottery, suggesting that 10006 was an agricultural soil that was in use until the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, and was truncated by later levelling. 10006 was partially exposed in plan at approximately 0.70m BGL across the eastern part of S4 but was considerably mixed with the overlying deposits at the interface between the two.

The next deposits, 10003, 10004 and 10005 were a mixed series of dark grey silt, mid brown silty sand and mid grey sand. The earliest of these, 10005, contained a fragment of 18th bottle glass (Appendix 2). These deposits were up to 0.20m thick and were present mainly in the eastern half of S4. In places they were difficult to distinguish from the overlying deposit, context 10002. This was a 0.25m thick dark grey-black silty clay, which was observed across the whole of S4 at around 0.50m BGL. 10002 was contaminated with a significant amount of ash that was the subject of the contractors’ mitigation exercise, and produced C19th and C20th pottery along with residual medieval brick and tile, probably disturbed from the lower agricultural soil 10006 during clearance. The removal of 10002 exposed the interface between it and the underlying levelling deposits, which themselves were mixed with the underlying soil 10006, at around 0.70m across S4. In some areas, particularly the central part of S4, this produced linear trends that on inspection transpired to be the truncated tip-lines of the underlying levelling material rather than distinct cut features.

The probable truncation of the post-medieval agricultural soil 10006 is thought to have taken place during a 19th century clearance of the site prior to levelling with refuse, including deposits 10003-10005, and then the deposition of 10002.

Cut into 10002 across the whole site were probable refuse pits, including 10008, which was 0.70m wide and contained 10007, a gritty, ashy silty sand with frequent brick fragments and pottery of 19th century date. This pit was typical of numerous other spreads and pockets of

similar material seen across S4, which were interpreted as evidence for periodic refuse disposal in what had become effectively waste-ground by the early-mid C20th. In some areas, specific refuse disposal was indentified, including a modern deposit of batteries that was removed as a contaminated hazard. In the SE corner of S4, a 1m wide strip of clay, context 10009, was observed (Plate 4). This was aligned east-west, was cut into the levelling material below 10002 and may represent the remains of a footpath associated with the last surviving allotments in the NE corner. This was severely truncated, however, and was clearly of relatively modern origin.

Sealing 10002 and the refuse pits cut into it was 10001, a 0.30m thick layer of crushed brick rubble, which lay beneath 10000, a 0.20m thick topsoil with turf that represents the current site surface.

5.2 AREA S1

Contaminated deposits in area S1 were removed prior to archaeological observation, in accordance with the specification (Plates 5-7). In general, this entailed excavation to a depth of between 0.70m – 0.80m BGL, save in the south-eastern part, where a considerably greater quantity of contaminated material was observed. Here, deposits up to 1.4m deep were removed, and subsequent testing necessitated the extension of S1 to the north-east in an area measuring c.18m x 17m (Figure 3).

5.2.1 SEQUENCE

The earliest observed deposit in area S1 was 11005, an orange sandy slay interpreted as probably natural in origin. This was observed at around 0.70-0.80m BGL, save in the south-east part where it was seen at around 1.4m BGL. This level probably reflects a later truncation of the natural strata, which sloped markedly downwards, but all the overlying deposits were clearly 19th century or later in date.

Overlying 11005 across much of area S1 was 11004, a very mixed deposit of grey and grey-brown sandy silts up to 0.30m thick. No artefacts were recovered from this deposit, but given the sequence previously observed in this area (see 4.6) it seems likely that this relates to the 19th century levelling deposits observed in area S4. In the south-east corner, 11004 was overlain by a 0.40m thick deposit of blue-grey sandy silt, 11003, and a further deposit of brown silty sand up to 0.20m thick, 11008 (Plate 6). The blue colour derives from contaminated material associated with town-gas production (Rebecca Pool, pers. comm.) and as such relates to the mid-late 19th century expansion of the Heworth gasworks. These deposits were observed in section and not inspected in detail as they are toxic, and lay within

the range of contaminated deposits that were removed without close archaeological supervision in accordance with the specification.

Overlying these deposits, and covering the entire area of S1, was 11002, a 0.10-0.20m thick layer of charcoal and ash-rich dark grey sandy silt. This deposit represented the main contaminant to be removed by the contractor, and was considerably mixed with the underlying deposits in the interface as observed in area S4. Cut into this deposit, and therefore of 20th century date, was a very large concrete-lined drain or tank, 11006. This measured approximately 25m x 10m wide and was oriented NNW-SSE along the boundary of the grassed area and the car-park to the west of it. This feature was at least 3m deep, and when excavated was full of water and too deep to enter and record in detail (Plate 7). The base, when briefly exposed, was clearly cut deeply into the underlying natural deposits and no features were observed in the section of its construction cut, 11007.

Sealing this structure, and covering the entire area, was 11001, a layer of crushed brick rubble up to 0.65m thick that was also observed in area S4. Two large sherds of mid-19th century stoneware were recovered from this deposit, demonstrating the disturbed nature of the area as the rubble was clearly of 20th century date. 11001 was deeper to the south-east, reflecting the greater depth of modern material in that area, and was sealed beneath the topsoil and turf, 11000, as seen in area S4.

6. DISCUSSION

The ground works observed in this watching brief did not find any Roman or medieval features similar to those identified during the evaluation trenches of 2003, but in deposits 10002 and 11002 did encounter a deposit that can be correlated with the contaminated 'dark silty clay' identified during the earlier investigation. This deposit, interpreted as a possible post-medieval ploughsoil by OAN, can with the considerable benefit of a much larger exposed area be re-interpreted as a levelling deposit of waste material, mixed with earlier dumps of rubbish and disturbed soil, dating from the mid-late 19th century. This deposit, and similarly contaminated underlying levelling material, was the target of the mitigation works described above, and overlay the heavily truncated remnant of a post-medieval agricultural soil, 10006, that was difficult to distinguish from the underlying orange-clay natural. Deposit 10006 was observed at around 0.80m BGL, at the very limit of the excavation across the majority of the area, and so therefore any earlier features cut into the true natural, similar to those identified in OAN trench 2 would, if present, still lie below the unexcavated deposits

that were exposed following the removal of the contaminated material at around 0.70-0.80m BGL.

Agricultural activity, represented by 10006, survived in the form of allotments into the 20th century beyond the excavated area to the north-west, and a possible path, 10009, may be associated with them, but this is not certain. It is just as likely that the clayey material observed in S4 was a further levelling deposit associated with 19th century industrial activity.

The waste levelling, 10002/11002, and later refuse pits represent the use of the site as open ground and possibly as a coal yard as the gasworks expanded its operations into the 20th century. The highly contaminated blue-coloured silts in S1 derive from town gas production and reflect this phase of the site's use. It seems likely, following the cessation of gas-production and conversion to gas storage in the mid 20th century, that the large tank or drain in S1 was inserted as part of the infrastructural redevelopment, and that the area was then levelled and raised with brick rubble to seal contaminated material prior to being grassed over.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Illustrations	I.D. Milsted
Editor	M.R. Stockwell

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APPENDIX 1: FIGURES AND PLATES

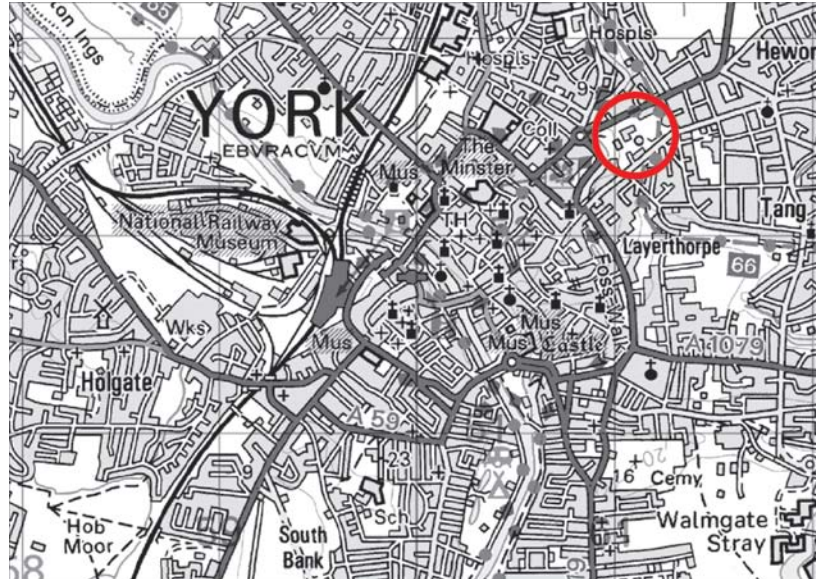


Figure 1 Site location in red circle

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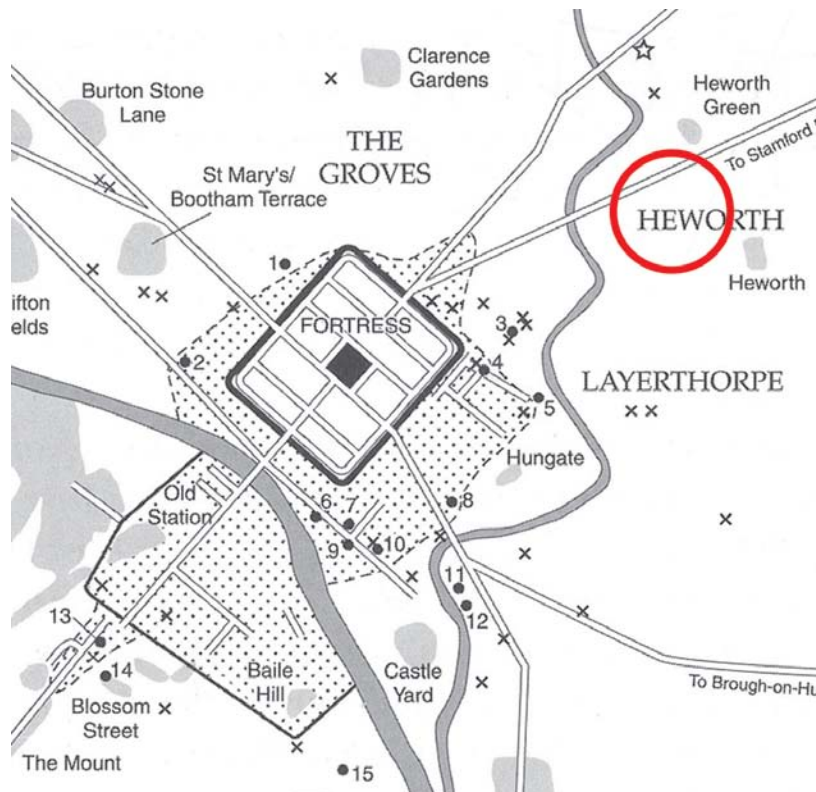


Figure 2 Roman roads with site in red circle (Ottaway, 2004, 12)

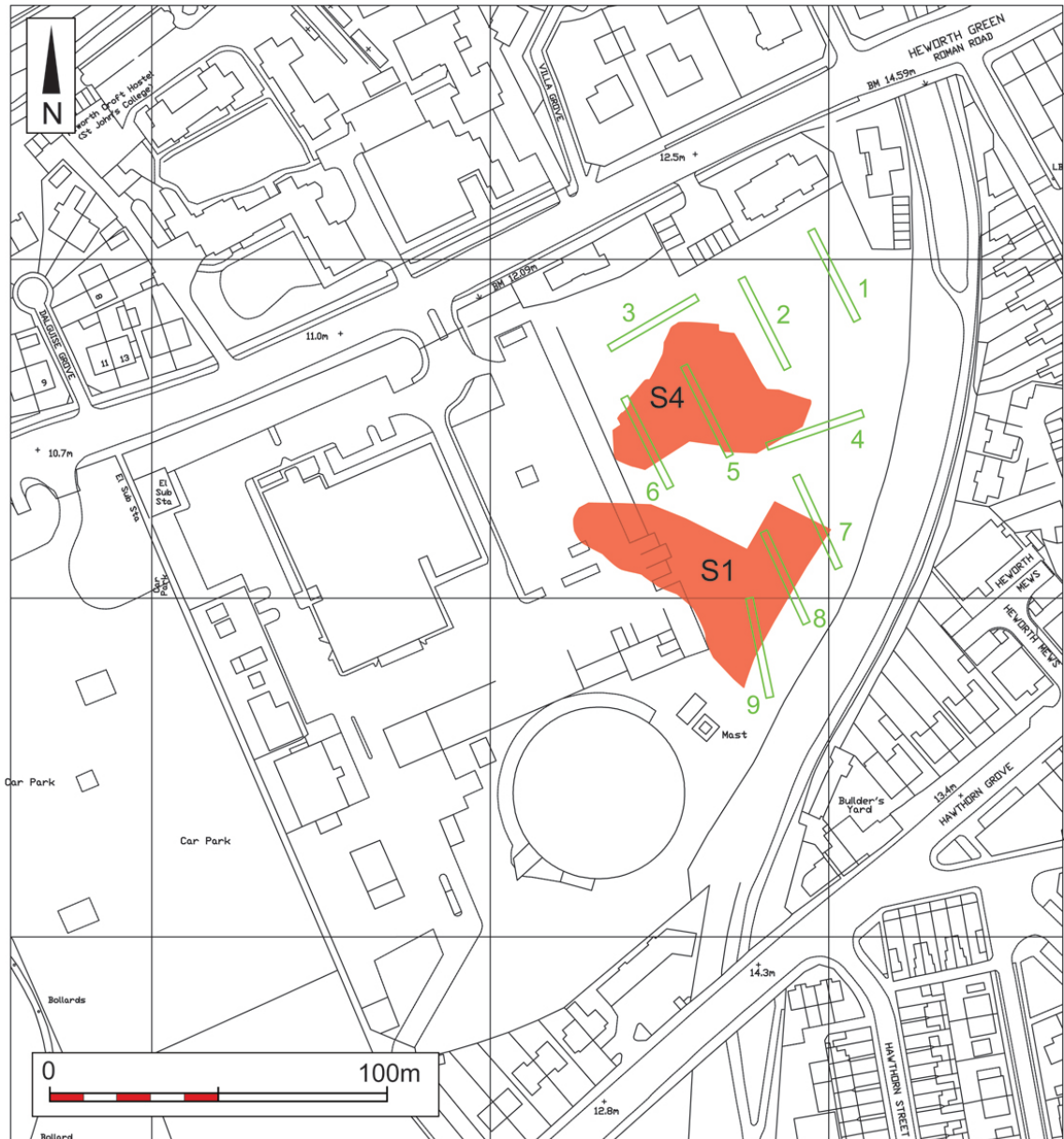


Figure 3 2012 excavation areas (red) with 2003 evaluation trenches (green)

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Plate 1 General view of Area S4, looking south-east



Plate 2 Eastern side of S4, showing Natural 10010 after hotspot removal



Plate 3 Agricultural soil 10006 in section overlying Natural 10010, looking east



Plate 4 Clay deposit 10009 looking east in eastern side of S4



Plate 5 General view of Area S1, looking north



Plate 6 Blue soil 11003 at base of south-west facing section in southern part of S1



Plate 7 Excavated construction cut 11007 for tank 11006, looking south

APPENDIX 2: FINDS REPORTS

POTTERY: A.J. MAINMAN

A small assemblage of pottery (8 sherds) was recovered comprising glazed and unglazed earthenwares, one possibly of industrial function. Most are likely to be 19th or early 20th century in date, with the exception of some abraded possibly earlier sherds in context 1006. These are likely to be of no assistance in interpreting the site and are recommended for discard.

Context	Find	Quantity	Dating	Details
10002	BF2	5	19th century / 20th century	1 black glazed earthenware open form 1 unglazed shallow bowl form, possibly industrial in purpose 1 base fragment, unglazed earthenware 1 transfer-printed ware plate rim 1 ceramic screw top LUCAS ENGLAND 1 transfer-printed ware plate rim
10006	BF3	2	18th century?	1 handle of late possibly German stoneware vessel – ?17th or 18th century 1 fine oxidised earthenwares with internal amber glaze - abraded - ? 18th century
10007	BF4	1	19th century	1 base of white glazed earthenware bowl
11001	BF9	2	19 th century	1 base of Bristol glaze English stoneware, mid 19 th century 1 fragment of Bristol glaze English stoneware, mid 19 th century

Table 1 Pottery by context

CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL: J. MCCOMISH

A total of 765g of Ceramic Building Material (CBM) was examined from the site. The CBM was recorded following standard YAT procedures.

There were four fragments of plain tile, one of peg tile and one of ridge tile all of which are of 13-16th century date. There was also one fragment of brick of 14-16th century date. All the material was typical for York in terms of dimensions and fabrics.

The main interest of the material is in providing dating evidence for the various contexts on site. The quantity of material recovered is too small to be able to say anything meaningful in terms of distribution patterns for CBM within York. No further work on the CBM is recommended.

Context	Date	Forms
10002	14-16th	Plain, Mbrick?
10006	13-16th	Plain, Peg, Ridge

Table 2 CBM by context

GLASS: K. WESTON

A single fragment of glass was recovered from the site, from context 10005. The fragment was part of a free-blown wine bottle base of 19th century date, being no later than c.1820. No further work is recommended.

APPENDIX 3: CONTEXT REGISTER

Context	Description
10000	Turf and topsoil
10001	Brick rubble levelling
10002	Contaminated ashy levelling
10003	Dark grey silty levelling
10004	Brown silty sand levelling
10005	Mid grey sand levelling
10006	Agricultural soil
10007	Refuse pit backfill
10008	Refuse pit cut
10009	?Footpath make-up/ clay levelling
10010	Natural
11000	Turf and topsoil
11001	Brick rubble levelling
11002	Contaminated ashy levelling
11003	Blue gasworks waste dump
11004	Dark grey levelling
11005	Natural
11006	?Drain/Tank lining
11007	Construction cut for ?Drain/Tank
11008	Mixed levelling/capping above 11003

Table 3 Context register

APPENDIX 4: ARCHIVE SUMMARY

The archive consists of 292 digital photographs, 1 plan on drawing film, a paper version of the matrix and the context register, and 5 pages of measured sketches and notes in a notebook. All archive materials are held by YAT under project number 5582 and museum accession code YORYM: 2012.1.