



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



**JUNCTION OF MOOR LANE AND A1237,
YORK, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

by Mark Johnson

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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ABSTRACT

An excavation and watching brief was carried out in the area of new road-works at the Moor Lane, A1237 ring-road, York, by York Archaeological Trust in late May – early June 2007. This work did not reveal any archaeological remains of significance. The overwhelming majority of features proved to be land-drains of post-medieval or modern origin. Three features that were not land drains consisted of a modern test-pit in Trench 5, a modern posthole in the watching brief area of the Moor Lane realignment and an ash rich feature in Trench 2. Only the last feature can be considered of any real interest, but even here, particularly in the absence of any finds or dating evidence, there is nothing that can confirm a date of any antiquity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between 29th May and 5th June 2007 York Archaeological Trust undertook archaeological excavations on the site of a new road-works scheme near the junction of Moor Lane and the A1237 ring road on the western side of York (NGR: SE 4563 4492), (Figure 1 Site location map). The recent archaeological works comprised the excavation of six trenches following on from an archaeological desk-based assessment, a geophysical survey and the monitoring of a series of geotechnical trial pits and boreholes (Figure 2, Trench location plan).

Two short periods of watching brief (15th-16th May, 4th-5th June) also formed part of these latest archaeological works. The excavation works were commissioned by Halcrow Plc and followed an archaeological programme of works devised by Halcrow and approved by the City of York Council. The archaeological works were monitored by John Oxley, Archaeologist of the City of York Council.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 EXCAVATION

The six trenches (numbered 1-6) measured between 38.5m and 51m long and between 2.1m and 2.25m wide. Four were located in a field known as High Moor Close on the eastern side of the present ring-road and two in a field (that prior to the construction of the ring-road also formed a part of High Moor Close) to the west. All trenches coincided with areas that will be disturbed during the road scheme. The trenches were stripped of overburden using a 360° mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless bucket and operating under archaeological supervision. This overburden consisted of the topsoil and a few centimetres

of soils at the topsoil/drift interface, it proving necessary to thinly skim the latter in order to obtain visual clarity. During, and immediately after the stripping process, the trenches were manually cleaned. Thereafter, any features were identified, manually planned, excavated, drawn and recorded. The location of the trenches was plotted with TST surveying equipment.

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF

The first part of the watching brief was comprised of observation during stripping of part of the line of a new road-way leading to the contractors compound (and subsequently set to become part of the re-aligned Moor Lane). Mechanical stripping in this area followed the same procedure as in the excavation of the trenches. Encountered features were sample excavated, planned in relation to road chainage points and sections drawn. These records, together with written descriptions, were entered into a watching brief notebook. The second part of the watching brief involved monitoring of parts of a soil strip on the eastern side of the ring-road in the area of the group of four excavated trenches. The contractors stripping procedure here involved using a bulldozer to push the soil into linear heaps, onto which a 360° mechanical excavator sat and loaded the soils onto dump trucks.

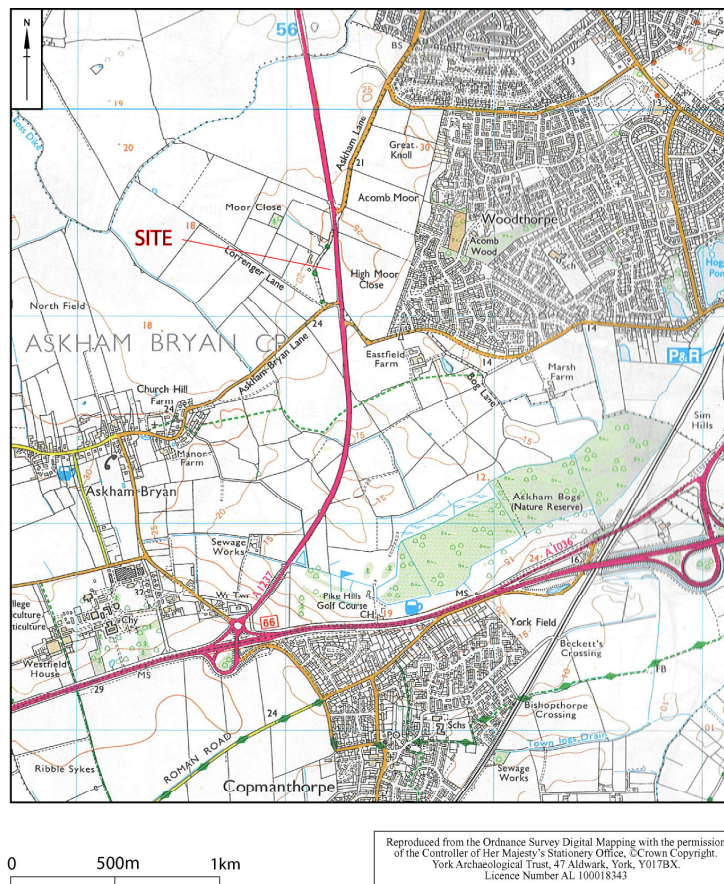


Figure 1 Site location map

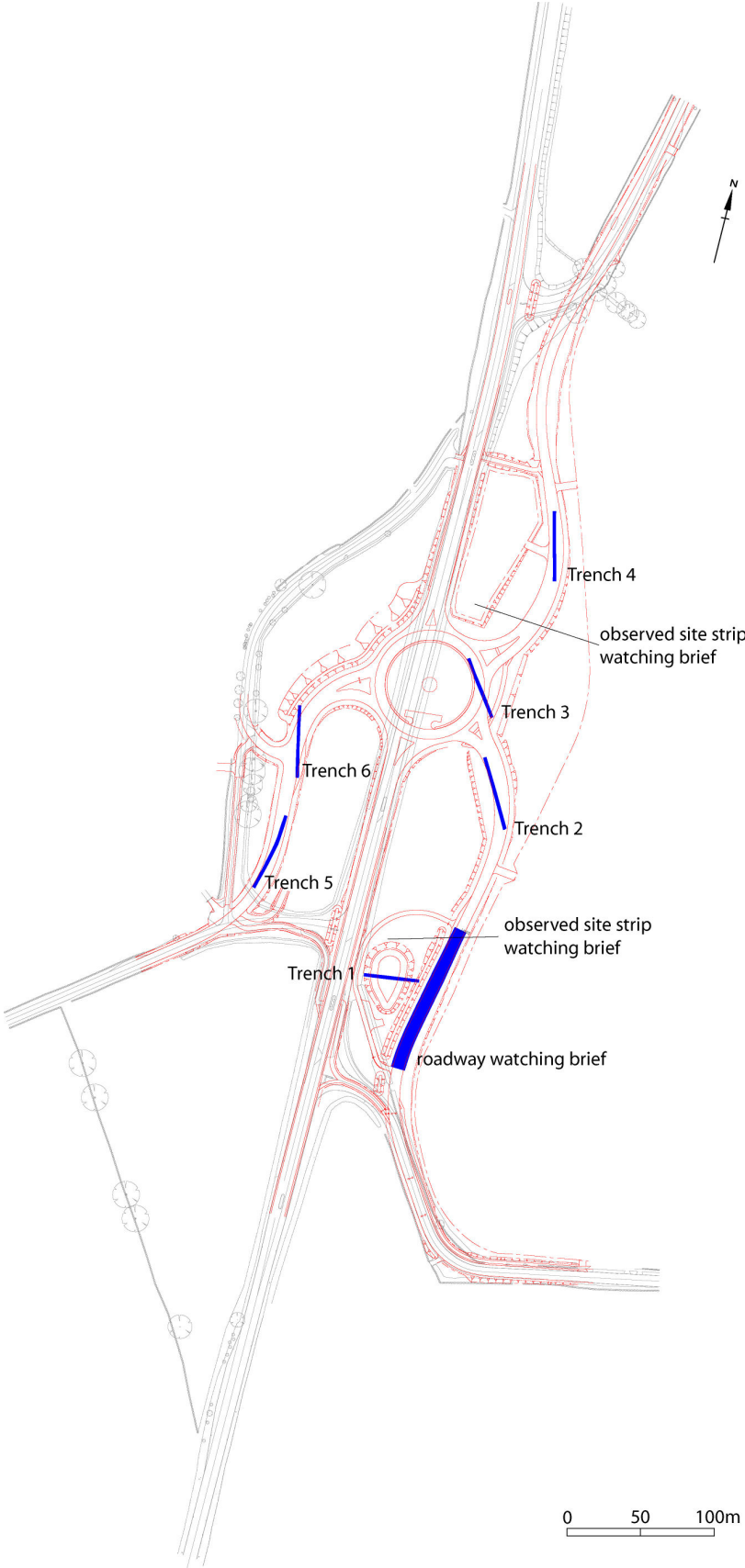


Figure 2 Trench location plan

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is located in arable fields immediately north of the junction of Moor Lane with the A1237 ring-road, just west of the suburban limits of the city. Four trenches were excavated on the eastern side of the ring-road and two west of the ring-road. The drift geology of the locality is of Warp and Lacustrine Clay with some sand and gravel. This lays above a solid geology of Bunter Sandstone (Geological Survey 1959). Excavation showed the topsoils in the area to be fairly thin, typically around 0.30m, with the basal part of this having an interface with the drift geology; no intact sub-soils being present. The highest point in the area lies a few metres south of Trench 4. From this point the land falls gently to the north, south, east and west. Heights around Trench 4 were in the region of 26.8m AOD, around Trench 1 fractionally over 23m AOD and around 24.5m AOD in the area of Trench 6.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The archaeological works forming the subject of this report followed on from a desk-based assessment, a geophysical survey and the monitoring of a series of archaeological test-pits and boreholes.

The desk-based assessment has indicated that the City of York Council Sites and Monuments Record does not include any known sites in the area of the new road-works (Halcrow 2006). However, a number of crop-mark sites are known from neighbouring fields. These comprise possible field boundaries and other features associated with human settlement and are likely to date to the prehistoric and Roman periods. No evidence was presented in the desk-based assessment that suggested the likelihood of remains of the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods being present in the area. It is believed that throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods the area has been laid to arable fields. The nearest focus of settlement in these later periods has been the village of Askam Bryan some 1km distant to the south-west.

The geophysical survey carried out at the site revealed a series of weak anomalies that, for the most part, could not readily be interpreted (GSB 2007). Certain of these anomalies seem likely to have represented field drains. A complex of such drains is apparent in aerial photographs of the site.

The monitoring of the geotechnical test pits and boreholes revealed no definitively archaeological features or finds (YAT 2007). Only natural drift deposits, top/plough soils together with a thin, somewhat mixed interface between these two being apparent.

5. RESULTS

5.1 TRENCH 1

Trench 1 was aligned approximately east – west, across the proposed position of a new pond, and represents the southern-most of the excavated trenches. Natural deposits, 1002, were revealed at the base of the trench at a depth generally around 0.25m BGL. Essentially a compact, yellowish orange silty clay, some slight variation was noted in this material. A single linear feature, 1004, cut into the natural deposits. This feature was aligned NW – SE, some 0.52m wide, 0.45m deep and displayed steep sides with a flattish base. The single fill of 1004, context 1003, was a firm, mid grey, slightly silty clay with some yellowish orange colour variation. No finds were recovered from this fill. It is probable that 1004 represents a form of primitive land drain in which trenches are dug and the stratigraphy effectively inverted i.e. turf and topsoil is placed at the bottom of the trench and any natural clays above this. This feature was sealed by the extant friable, mid greyish brown, clayey silt top/ploughsoil, 1001.



Plate 1 *Trench 1 overall shot looking W*



Plate 2 *Primitive land drain looking N*

5.2 TRENCH 2

Natural deposits were reached in Trench 2, 2002, at a depth of 0.20m-0.25m BGL. The majority of these deposits were comprised of firm, yellowish brown silty clays (some colour variation), with areas of increased stone and sand content. Two features were observed and excavated. The northerly of these was a linear cut aligned approximately E-W, cut 2006. This feature measured some 0.44m wide by around 0.90m deep and proved to have very steep sides and a flattish base. No finds material was recovered from the single compact, mid greyish brown, silty clay fill of this feature. In the southern part of the trench the NE end of a SW-NE aligned feature, 2004, was examined. With a width of around 0.91m and a depth of just 0.16m, 2004 was steep sided and had a flattish-slightly concave base. A fill of pale-mid grey, sandy clay containing large amounts of dark grey slightly fibrous decayed woody material, 2003, was present within this cut. It is possible that the pale grey colouration evident in this fill may have been derived from some ash like material. No finds or dating evidence was recovered from 2003. The function and origin of this feature are uncertain. It may be that 2004 forms the NE portion of a rectangular pit, or possibly even of a longer linear feature.



Plate 3 *Trench 2 land drain looking SE*



Plate 4 *Trench 2 shallow unidentified feature looking ESE*

5.3 TRENCH 3

Natural deposits, 3002, in Trench 3 were reached at a depth generally in the region of 0.25m BGL. Exhibiting some colour and textural variation, the bulk of 3002 was a compact, pale orangey brown silty clay though patches of sandier clay together with an area of gritty, sandy clay at the extreme NE end of the trench were noted. No archaeological features or finds were observed in this trench. The top/ploughsoil, 3001, was a uniform mid-dark greyish brown clayey silt.



Plate 5 *Trench 3 overall shot looking NW*

5.4 TRENCH 4

In this, the most northerly of the trenches, natural deposits were revealed at depths of between 0.25m-0.30m BGL. This material, 4002, consisted of firm, light yellowish brown (with some variation) slightly silty clays. A total of six linear features were seen to cut through the natural deposits. Four of these, contexts 4006, 4008, 4012, 4014 were modern land drains, typically between 0.28m-0.40m wide. The fills of these drains, 4005, 4007, 4011, 4013, contained large amounts of small rounded gravel together with re-deposited natural clays. Of the other two features in Trench 4, context 4004 was an E-W aligned cut towards the northern end of the trench. This feature had a width of 0.32m, a depth of 0.95m and displayed very steep sides with a slightly rounded base. The fill, 4003, was composed of a mix of re-deposited topsoil and natural clays. A piece of cinder and a sherd of 18th-19th century pottery indicate a post-medieval date for this feature which seems certain to have

served as a primitive form of land drain. The remaining feature, 4010, was also an E-W aligned linear cut. This feature, which had been partially truncated by one of the modern land drains, had a width of 0.26m, a depth of 0.50m and displayed near vertical sides with a flattish base. The fill of 4010, context 4011, was comprised of material that appeared to represent a mixture of re-deposited topsoil and natural. No finds were recovered from this feature which is though likely to have operated as a primitive land drain. The topsoil in Trench 4 was a dark greyish brown clayey silt.

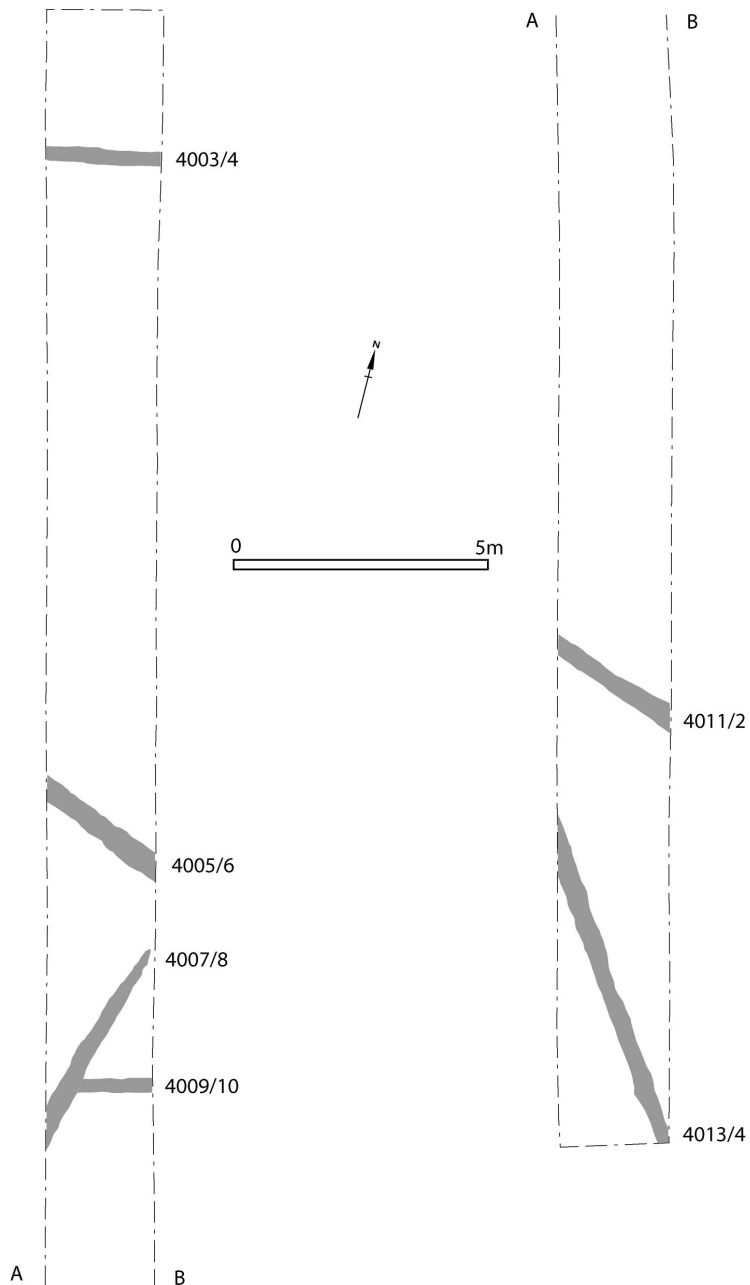


Figure 3 Trench 4 plan



Plate 6 *Trench 4 land drain looking E*

5.5 TRENCH 5

Natural drift was reached in Trench 5 at a depth typically around 0.25m-0.30m and again consisted of pale orangey brown, silty clays with some variation. Several features, all apparently of post-medieval - modern origin were revealed. At the southern end of the trench a NW – SE aligned linear cut 0.85m wide and backfilled entirely with clean gravel, 5003, represents a modern land drain. A further gravel filled land drain aligned approximately N-S and of somewhat smaller size, 5007, was evident at the northern end of the trench. Around 6m north of drain 5003 parts of a straight sided vertically edged cut, 5005, was examined. The fill of this feature, 5004, was a mixture of brown clay and greyish brown clayey silt which at a depth of some 0.35m produced pieces of only partially decayed grass and straw. Although seen to be sealed by topsoil of the latest ploughing event the origin of this feature seems certain to relate to Test-Pit 1 of the geotechnical investigation of early January 2007 (YAT 2007). In the central part of the trench a N-S aligned linear cut, 5008, was examined. Having a width of 0.25m, a depth in excess of 0.40m with near vertical edges, the fill of this feature, 5006, was composed of re-deposited natural and topsoil together with a number of small cobbles and pebbles. 5008 is likely to have originated as a primitive land drain. The only other features in the trench were a series of plough scars. These seem likely to be of modern origin, though a single sherd of later medieval pottery was recovered from one of these.

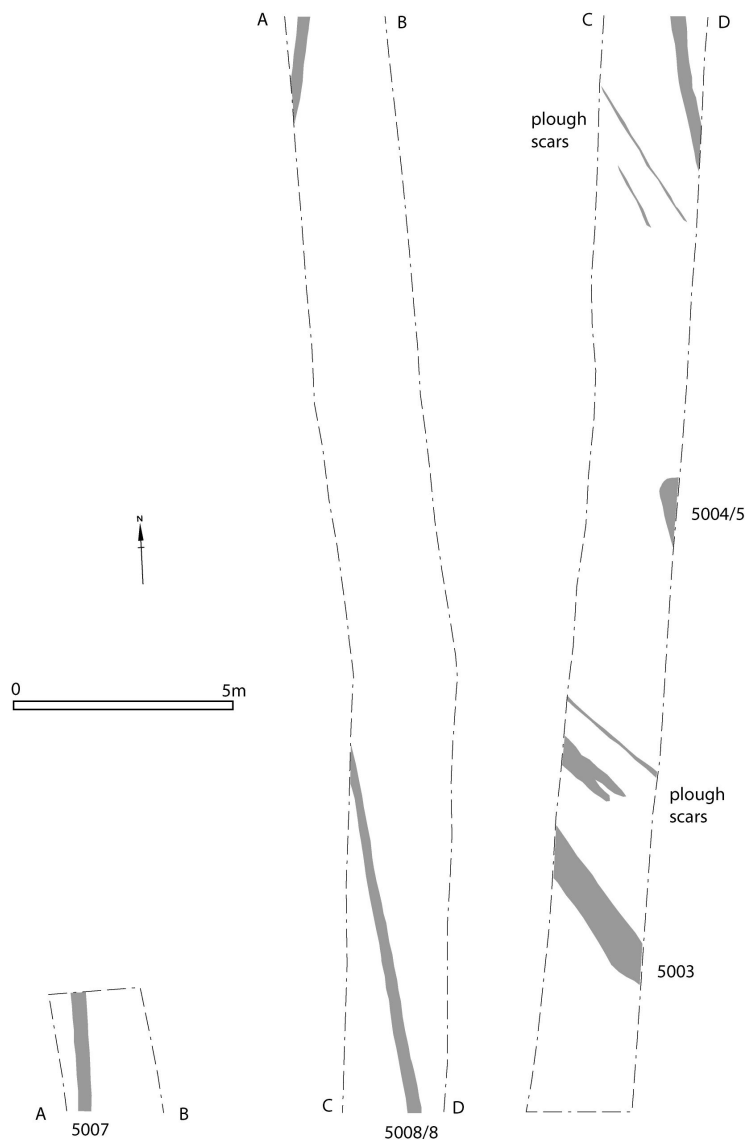


Figure 4 Trench 5 plan

5.6 TRENCH 6

Natural deposits were reached in Trench 6 at depths of around 0.30m BGL and were again seen to consist predominantly of firm, light orangish brown silty clays, 6002. Several features cut through the natural deposits. Two of these, 6004, 6006, were N-S aligned land drains of a width 0.30m-0.45m. Their fills, 6003, 6005 respectively, were mixtures of re-deposited natural clays, gravel and a small amount of topsoil. A number of linear stripes were apparent running across the trench. Two of these, 6007/6008, 6009/6010, were examined. These proved to be plough scars, quite probably of modern origin. The remaining features in trench 6 consisted of two small sub-oval depressions, 6012, 6014, up to 0.36m across and generally around 0.10m-0.15m deep. The fills were dark grey clayey silts, 6011, 6013, and

did not produce any finds. Given the proximity of these features to a number of plough scars it is entirely possible that they represent areas from which cobbles have been ripped from the ground by ploughing rather than, for example, postholes. The topsoil in trench 4, 6001, was a dark greyish brown, clayey silt.

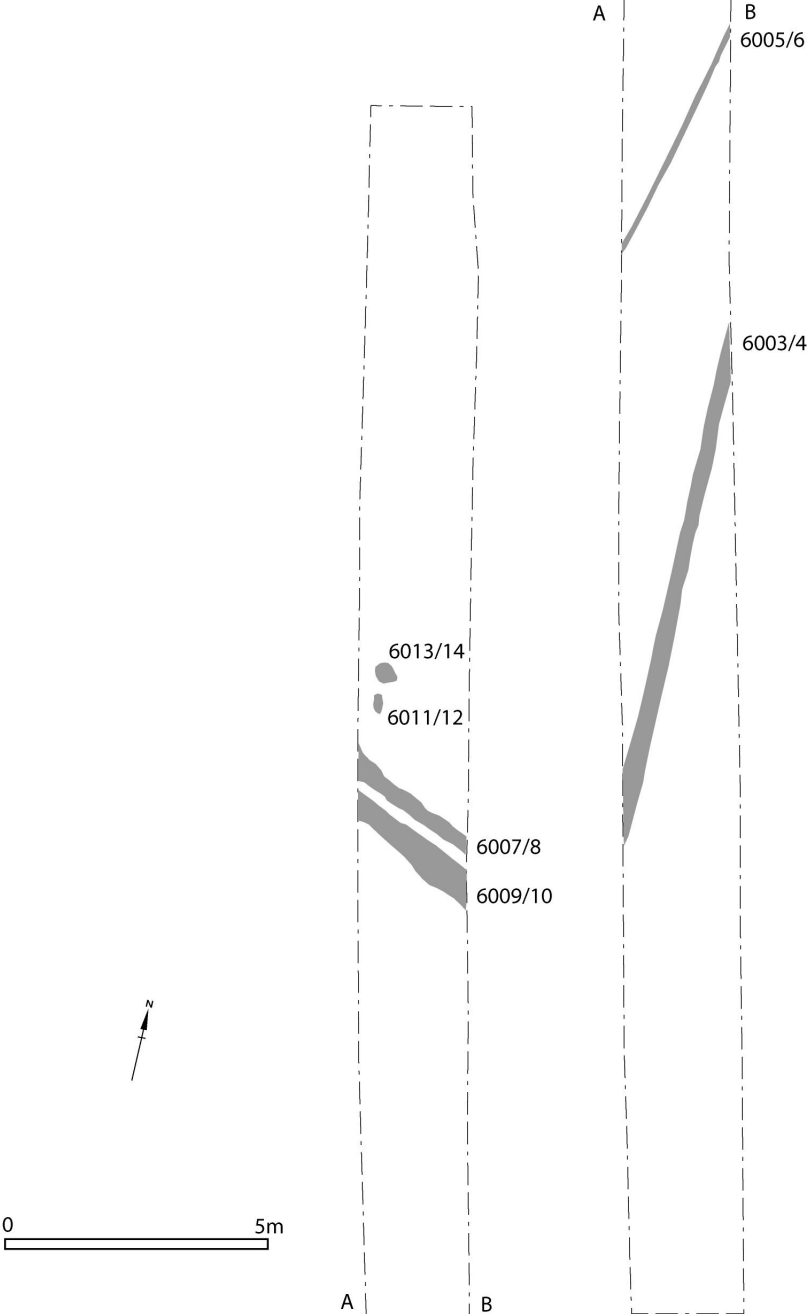


Figure 5 Trench 6 plan

5.7 WATCHING BRIEF

The first stage of the watching brief involved the stripping of all overburden, down to a horizon at which archaeological features were visible, over part of the realigned course of Moor Lane. This area measured approximately 102m by 9.5m wide. Eleven features were observed within this area, nearly all of which proved to be land-drains and their fills, contexts 103/104/105, 105/107/108, 109/110, 111/112, 113/114, 117/118, 119/120, 121/122, 123/124, 125/126. Measuring between 0.22m and 0.49m wide, all were linear in plan, followed a variety of alignments and were steep sided. Just over half of the drains featured gravel as their predominant fill whilst two contained plastic drainage pipes at their bases. Four of the features contained neither gravel or drainage pipes though their fills (mixtures of re-deposited clays and topsoils) suggests they may have been primitive land drains of a form in which drainage is aided by turf and topsoil at the bases of the trenches. The only other feature in this area of watching brief was a solitary sub-circular cut, 1016, measuring some 0.48m across, 0.30m deep and displaying steep sides and a flattish base. The fill, 1015, was of 19th century brick fragments within a sandy clay matrix. This feature may represent a modern posthole, the wider function of which is unknown.

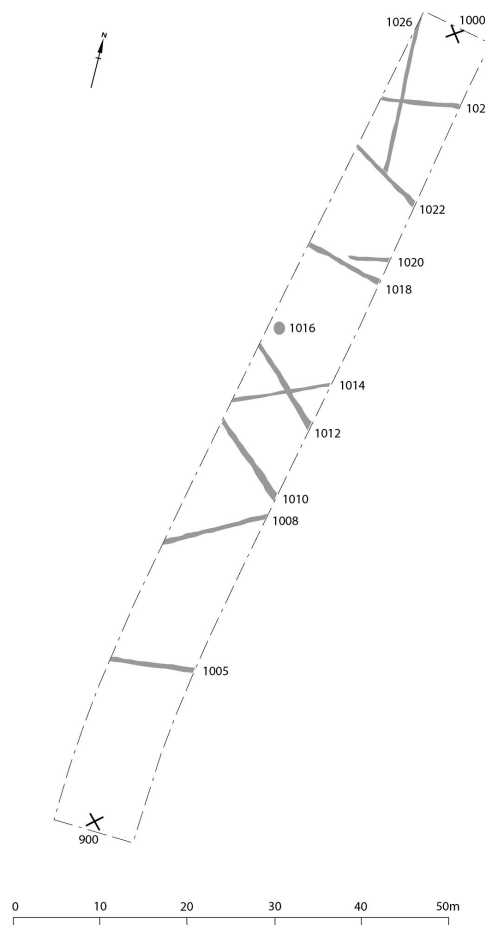


Figure 6 First stage watching brief plan



Plate 7 1stage watching brief, stripping, looking N



Plate 8 First stage watching brief, some of features revealed, looking W

The second stage of watching brief involved monitoring of the stripping of topsoil in the field to the eastern side of the ring-road, i.e. the area of Trenches 1-4 subsequent to their excavation. This proved to be archaeologically unproductive owing to the manner of stripping. The exercise was carried out by a bulldozer pushing topsoil into linear heaps, atop which sat a 360° excavator that loaded the topsoil into dumper trucks. By necessity the bulldozer was required to continually track back and forth across the area being stripped,

each time blading off more of the topsoil. This inevitably led to a patchy skin of compacted dirty track trample, this serving to obscure any archaeological features.



Plate 9 *Second stage watching brief, process, looking S*



Plate 10 *Second stage watching brief, results, looking S*

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The excavation did not produce archaeological remains of any great significance. The overwhelming majority of features proved to be land-drains, all seemingly of post-medieval or modern origin. The three features that were not land drains consisted of a modern test-pit in Trench 5, a modern posthole in the watching brief area of the Moor Lane realignment and an ash rich feature in Trench 2. Only the last feature can be considered of any real interest but even here, particularly in the absence of any finds or dating evidence, there is nothing that can confirm a date of any antiquity.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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