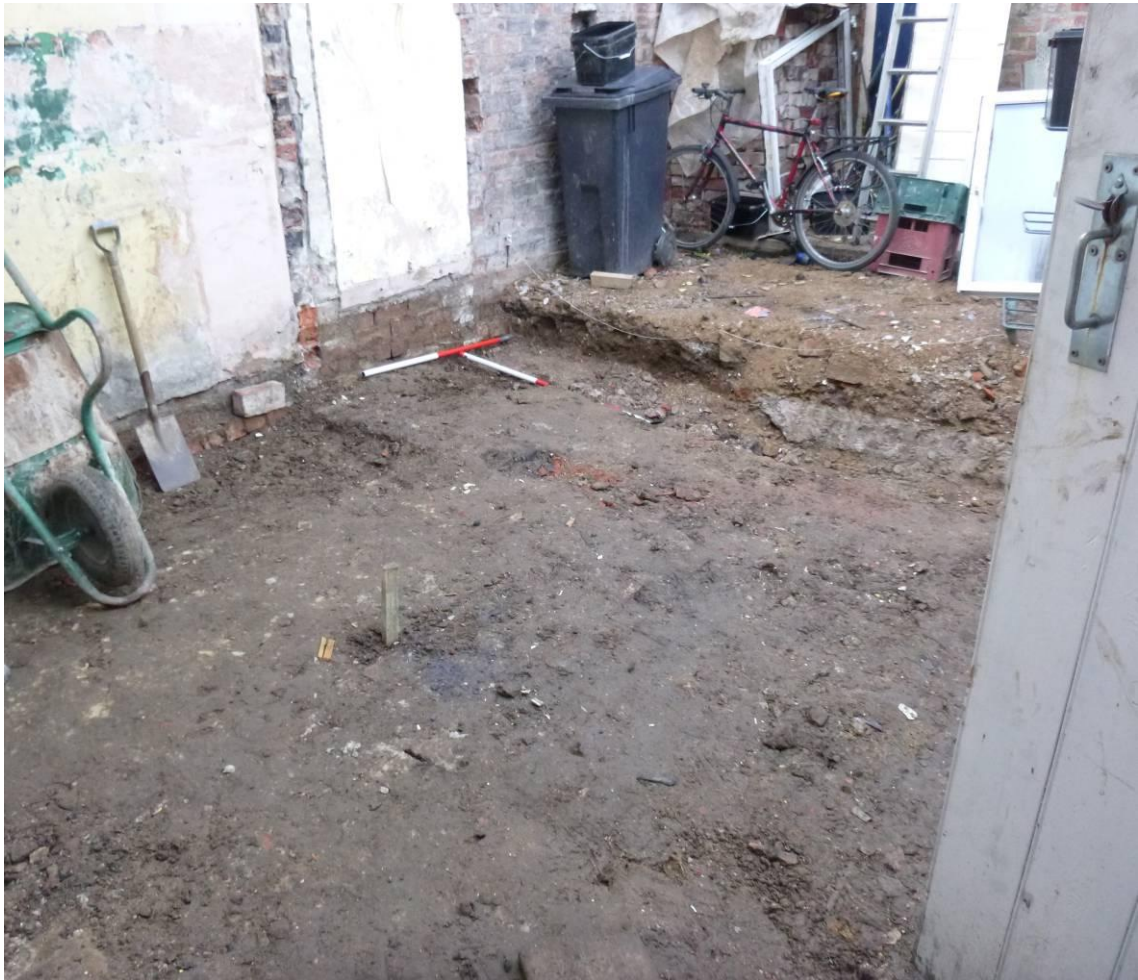




**YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**



**4 COLENZO STREET, YORK,**

**WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

*by Steven J Allen*

**REPORT NUMBER 2017/36**



# YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Registered Office: 47 Aldwark, York, UK, YO1 7BX

Phone: +44 (0)1904 663000 Fax: +44 (0)1904 663024

Email: [archaeology@yorkat.co.uk](mailto:archaeology@yorkat.co.uk) Internet: <http://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk>

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## CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT	1
1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. METHODOLOGY	2
3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY	2
4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	2
5. RESULTS	3
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	5
APPENDIX 1: Osteological Analysis	19

### Figures

1. Site location	7
2. Site locality	7
3. Plan of excavated footings and observations	8
4. SK 01 (1013) as exposed prior to lifting	9
5. Stratigraphic Matrix	10

### Plates

Cover: View of site on arrival, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016

1. Overview of site looking south west	11
2. SK 01 prior to archaeological excavation	12
3. SK 01 exposed- location	13
4. SK 01 detail overhead photograph	14
5. South west corner of site after removal of SK 01	15
6. East end of C19th service trench at completion of groundworks	15
7. Intersection of C19th service trench with C20th footing trench	16

8.	20 <sup>th</sup> -century footing trench	17
9.	20 <sup>th</sup> -century footing trench after completion of groundworks	18

## **List of Abbreviations**

YAT	York Archaeological Trust
OD	Ordnance Datum
CBM	Ceramic Building Material

## **ABSTRACT**

*A disturbed human inhumation of probable medieval date and unstratified human and animal bone from the backfill of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century features were recorded and recovered during a watching brief. The human material probably derives from the cemetery of the Benedictine Priory of St Clement, founded as a nunnery in about 1130 and dissolved in 1536.*

## **KEY PROJECT INFORMATION**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Commencing on October 24, 2016 YAT undertook a watching brief to monitor a house extension to the rear of No. 4 Colenso Street, York. A possible human burial had been exposed by ground workers during preliminary works and the archaeologist was asked to attend to record and recover the human remains before monitoring the continuing works.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The *in situ* burial was excavated by hand, exposing the extant bones with a trowel and dental tools. The burial was planned at a scale of 1:10, photographed and lifted. Identifiable parts of the body were bagged and labelled separately. Context numbers were assigned as necessary and written recording was carried out using standard YAT recording methodology. The extent of the footings was identified and a measured sketch prepared. Sections were recorded as measured sketches. Additional photographs were taken to illustrate particular features. Unstratified bone from the backfill of recent trenches was recovered and bagged by context. On completion of the watching brief the skeletal material was deposited with YAT's Curatorial Department for processing. The remains were subsequently sent to Malin Holst of York Osteoarchaeology for analysis (Appendix 1).

## **3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The site (NGR SE 6034 5107) lies uphill from the river, at an elevation of 13.5 m OD, on the west bank of the river Ouse, outside and south-east of the medieval wall enclosing the Micklegate suburb of the historic city core. The underlying bedrock, as under most of York, is interbedded sedimentary sandstone and conglomerate of the Triassic period (c. 200–251 million years ago). The superficial or drift geology is just on an edge of the York Moraine member comprised of deposits of clays, sands and gravels formed during and after the end of the last Ice Age (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016). The site is on the edge of the river terrace which now slopes downhill towards the river to the east and south-east. This area is currently occupied by streets of terraced houses of late nineteenth and early twentieth century date.

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

There is little evidence for prehistoric activity nearby. The site is close to a known Roman cemetery (HTAY 2015, sheet F). The precise extent of the Clementhorpe Roman cemetery is unknown but Roman burials found in the vicinity of Bishopthorpe Road suggest it covered a substantial area.

A YAT excavation less than 20 metres to the south-west at the site of the former Clementhorpe Nunnery in 1976–1977 uncovered the remains of a Roman masonry building of third- to fourth-century date, with sufficient status to include a mosaic pavement, set on a terrace of second century date (Brinklow and Donaghey 1986, 55).

During the same 1976–1977 excavation the cobblestone foundations for a probable pre-Conquest timber-framed building were identified along with a small pit, approximately 0.50m deep suggesting possible Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian occupation in the area (Brinklow 1984, 5; Brinklow 1986, 57–61).

4 Colenso Street is situated within the former precinct of the nunnery excavated by YAT in 1976–1977. Documentary sources record the founding of a priory of Benedictine nuns dedicated to St Clement, in about AD 1130 on land given by the Archbishop of York (Brinklow 1984, 5). The priory church is thought to have stood in the area immediately west of the site although its exact location, and that of the other buildings within the precinct, is uncertain. Colenso Street probably lies to the east of the priory church and would therefore be a prime location for the burial of members of the religious community. Indeed, around 250 inhumations were identified in the course of the Clementhorpe excavation including several west-south-west of our site and within less than 10 metres distance of the current property boundary.

The priory was dissolved in 1536, and its land and buildings were sold off, subsequently passing through the hands of various lessees and tenants. The buildings seem to have fallen into ruin, were robbed to provide stone for other structures (Dobson and Donaghey 1984, 30) and the grounds largely turned over to agriculture with some evidence for lime burning in kilns (Brinklow 1984, 6).

The fields and enclosures are shown on the OS 6" map of 1851 (sheet 174). The current street layout and terraced housing dates from the later nineteenth and early twentieth century and is shown as essentially complete on the OS 6" 1907 edition. Apart from minor replacements of individual housing plots and small-scale redevelopment the area has essentially retained that same character.

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1 TRENCH 1**

On arrival at the site, a protective plastic cover was found to have been placed over the exposed portion of a human skull adjacent to a partially dug out concrete footing. A few

loose bones disturbed at the initial moment of discovery had been kept in an adjacent plastic container.

Cleaning around the exposed bones showed that several articulated vertebrae were present but that the skull and several other bones were not in their correct anatomical position. Despite careful cleaning, no grave cut could be identified. This partial articulation suggests that the burial had been cut into and then rapidly backfilled with the same material. However, both ends of the grave had been disturbed by later intrusions which might also account for the disarticulation of elements of the body.

The deposit into which the grave was cut (1014) was a dark greyish-brown silty clay with fragments of CBM present, extending across the whole of the site except where it had been cut away by later intrusions. A small amount of animal bone was also observed but not recovered. A context number (1013) was assigned to the Skeleton (SK 01) but as no grave cut or fill could be distinguished no number was assigned to the grave.

Within the exposed area of the back yard Context 1014 was cut by narrow straight sided trenches into which the brick footings of No. 4 Colenso Street had been laid. These continued as standing brick walls to the north (Wall 1011; Cut 1012) between the back yards of No. 2 and No. 4, and to the south between No 4 and No. 6 (Wall 1009; Cut 1010). A scar on the north face of 1009 corresponds to the location of a third wall (1007 in cut 1008) which represents the back wall of the original half extension to No.4 and which had cut way the foot end of SK 01.

Parallel to the north boundary wall was a service trench (Cut 1006; Backfill 1005). Parallel to this service trench, a section of concrete footing (Cut 1004, Concrete 1003) was observed in the western footing trench excavation. This appeared to be on the same alignment as the north wall of the original half extension (1007). At the western end of the site the concrete footing, Context 1003, had been partially cut through by a shallow foundation trench (Cut 1002) which had also truncated the head of SK 01. Cut 1002 contained a shallow concrete footing containing large amounts of brick rubble (Context 1001). The whole of the area of the back yard of No. 4 Colenso Street was covered by a layer of hardcore topped by a concrete slab (1000).

#### **5.1.1 DISCUSSION**

The skeleton was very close to the modern ground surface and it appears that later deposits had been removed as part of the ground preparation for the building of Colenso Street in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. The orientation of the body suggests



but does not confirm that this was a Christian burial. No grave goods were identified. Intrinsically, there is no dating evidence for the body and grave other than that the grave predates Colenso Street. While the feet were carelessly cut away when the current property was built, the builders who placed the concrete footing 1003/1004 treated the body with greater respect- placing the bones they disturbed back over the rest of the skeleton before completing their ground works.

There are two known cemeteries in the vicinity to which this grave might belong; the Roman cemetery and the Cemetery belonging to St Clement's Priory where around 250 inhumations were recovered in 1976–1977 discussed in Section 4. That disarticulated remains of at least three adults and one juvenile (Appendix 1) were also recovered from the backfills of service trench 1006 and foundation trench 1001, indicates the *in situ* burial was one of a larger group of burials in the area. The condition of the disarticulated remains was similar to that of the *in situ* grave and this suggests they were broadly contemporary in date and the osteological report demonstrates both sexes and a range of ages are represented in the assemblage.

The eastern extent of St Clement's cemetery was not identified within the 1976–1977 excavation area and its boundaries remain uncertain. The skeletons recovered during the 1976–1977 excavation have yet to be analysed and published. No dateable artefacts were found with the *in situ* burial, so the possibility that the remains are of Roman date cannot be completely ruled out. However, it seems more likely that the remains represent part of the medieval community associated with the Priory of the 12th– mid-16th century AD. If this reasoning is accepted then the eastern edge of the priory cemetery extends at least as far as the current back wall of Nos. 2–6 Colenso Street.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research and author	Steven J Allen
Illustrations	Steven J Allen
Editor	B. Reeves

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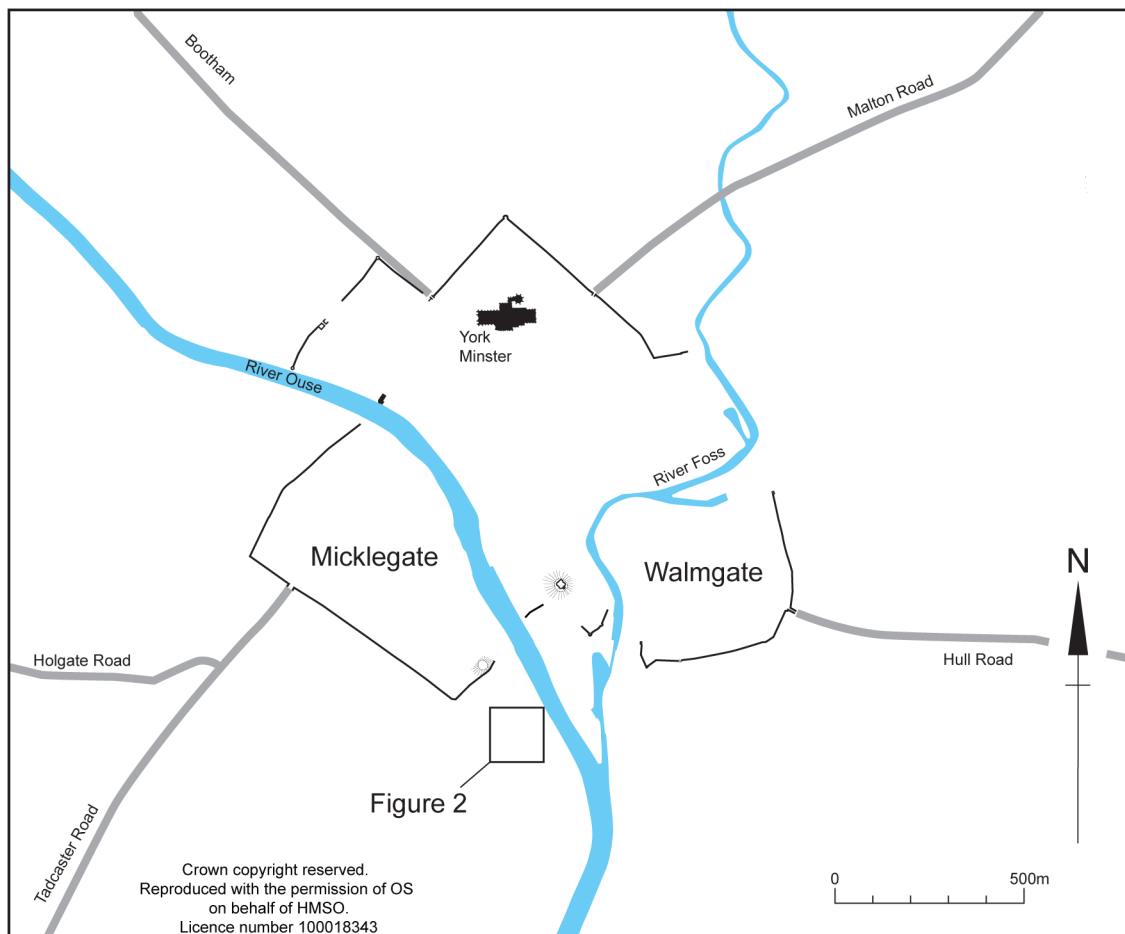
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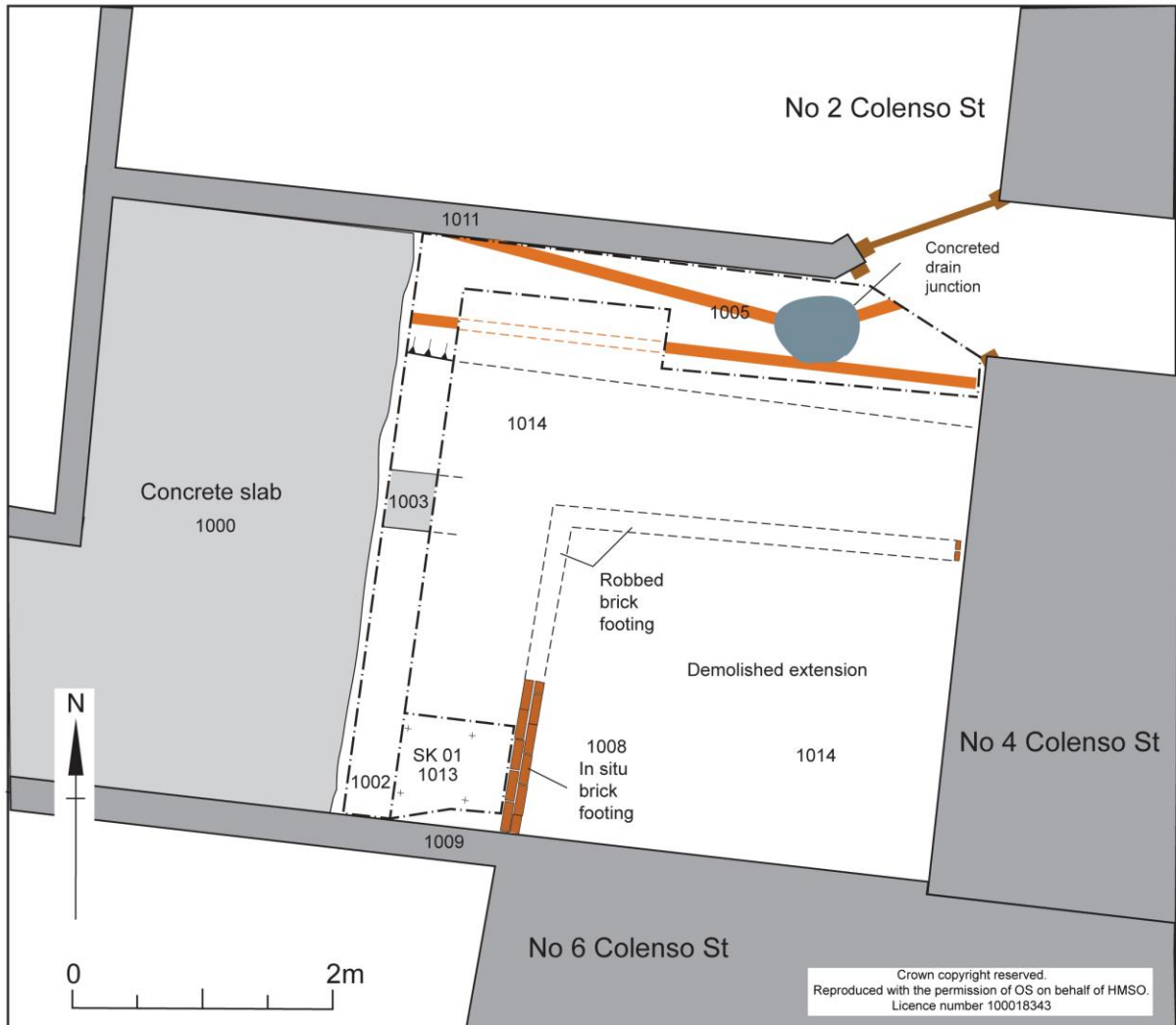
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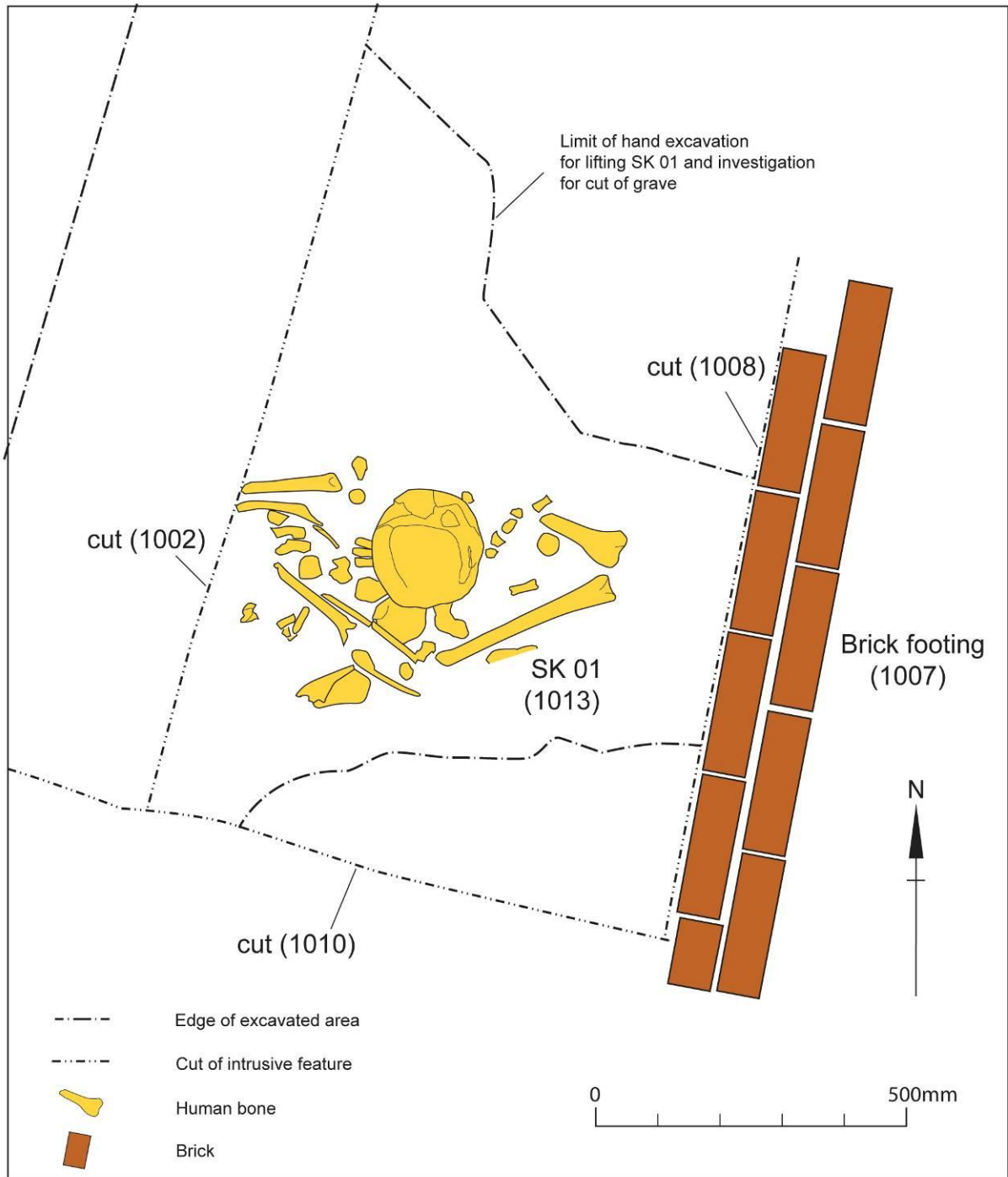
**Figure 1** Site location



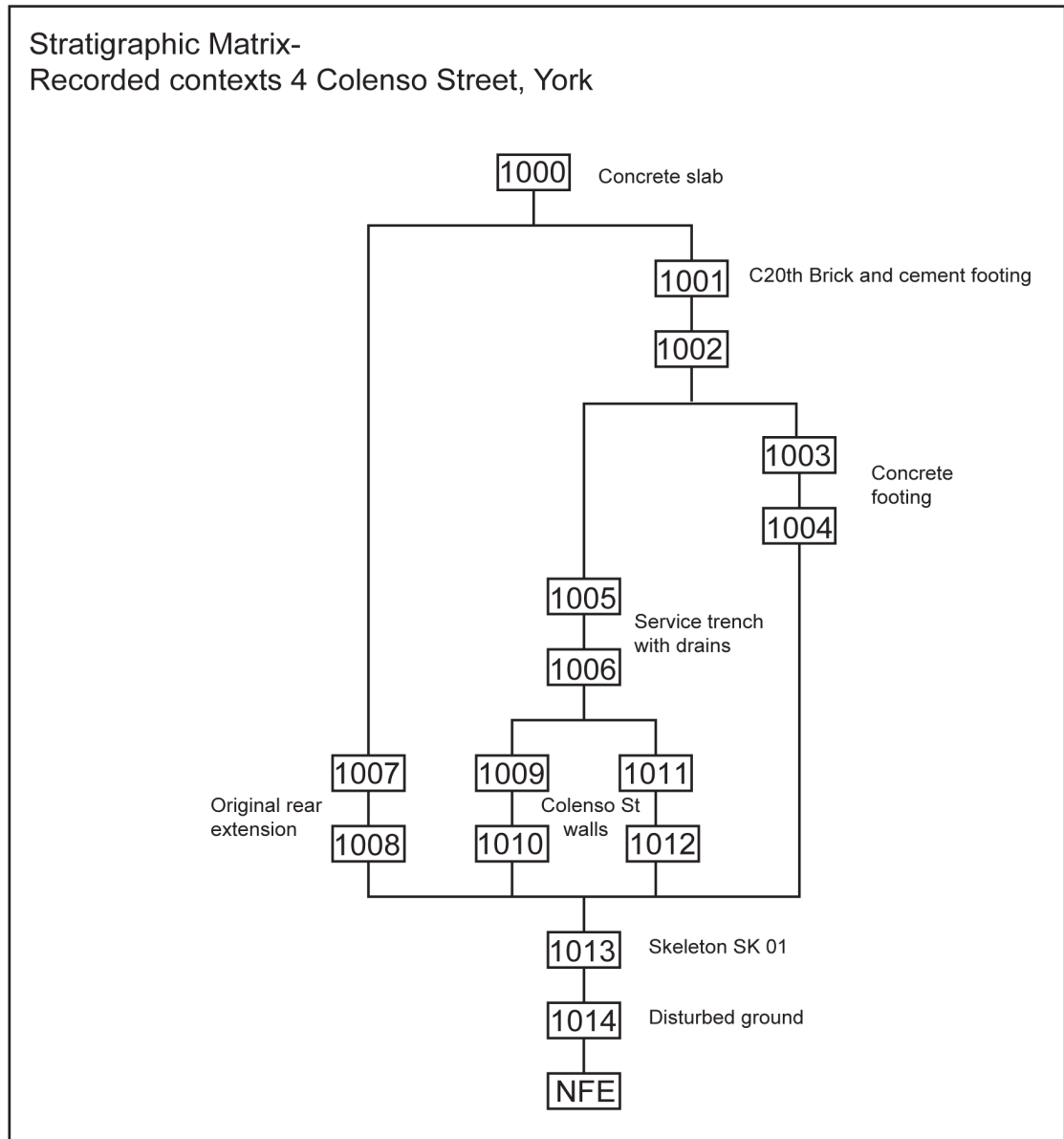
**Figure 2** Site locality



**Figure 3** Plan of excavated footings and location of observed features



**Figure 4** Skeleton 01



**Figure 5** Stratigraphic Matrix

## PLATES



**Plate 1** Overview of site looking south-west





**Plate 2** SK01 (1013) as found on arrival. South to top of image, scale bars 1m in 0.5m divisions





**Plate 3** SK 01 (1013) exposed, looking west. Scale bars 1m in 0.5m divisions



**Plate 4** SK 01 (1013) exposed. West to top of image. SK truncated to east by brick wall (1008), and disturbed to west by concrete footing (1002).





**Plate 5** SK 01 (1013) removed. No definable grave cut into (1014)



**Plate 6** East end of service trench (1006) after removal of ceramic pipes. Feature not bottomed. No further excavation.



**Plate 7** *Intersection of service trench (1006) with later footing trench (1002) looking north. Features not bottomed. No further excavation. Scale rod 1m, 0.5m divisions.*





**Plate 8** Footing trench (1002) looking east, concrete footing (1004) exposed in section to right of scale. Scale rod 1m, 0.5m divisions.



**Plate 9** Footing trench (1002) looking south. Concrete footing (1004) exposed in section to right. Feature not bottomed. No further excavation.

## **APPENDIX 1: OSTEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**