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Archaeological Investigations at Stonebow House To Piccadilly Electric Main Installation

By Thomas Coates

YAT Watching Brief Report 2018/3 March 2018





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Abbreviations

AAI – Area of Archaeological Importance

BGL – Below Ground Level

BGS – British Geological Survey

OD – Ordnance Datum

WSI – Written Scheme of Investigation

YAT – York Archaeological Trust

Non-technical Summary

Between the 27th October 2017 and 15th February 2018 2017 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) conducted a watching brief at Stonebow House to Piccadilly, York (SE 6050 5183).

The work was undertaken for Northern Powergrid under an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice (Operations Notice no. 17009). Standard York Archaeological Trust recording methodologies were used.

The works involved the excavation and recording of any archaeological deposits or structures exposed by the ground works prior to the instalment of ducting for the cable to be pulled through post-backfill.

Archaeology was revealed at the trench excavation between Pavement and Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate, in the form of a possible medieval to post-medieval archaeological horizon. This contained the remains of four skeletons and elements of a sandstone rubble of unknown origin, before reaching a substantial thickness of ashy rubble make up layer and concrete made ground for the modern road & flagstone pavement. Elsewhere on the scheme were various modern deposits of made ground and brick chambers from previous disused services.

KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name	Stonebow House to Piccadilly, York
YAT Project No.	6015
Document Number	e.g. 2018/03
Type of Project	Watching Brief
Client	Northern Powergrid
Planning Application No.	AAI Oerations Notice - 17009
NGR	SE 6050 5183
Museum Accession No.	N/A
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REPORT INFORMATION

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1 INTRODUCTION

Between the 27th October 2017 and the 15th February 2018 YAT conducted a watching brief at Stonebow House to Piccadilly, York (SE 6050 5183) (Figure 1).

The work was undertaken for Northern Powergrid to help fulfil the requirements of an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice. In turn this was part of the Operations Notice System which is co-ordinated by City of York Council (Operations Notice no.17009).

Observations were made during the machine excavation of the trench along the approximately 280m strip and a width of approximately 400mm. All phases of excavation were monitored, photographed and recorded where necessary prior to the placement of ducting and subsequent backfilling.

2 METHODOLOGY

An Operations Notice was submitted ahead of proposed works on the instalment of an electric main between Stonebow House and Piccadilly.

The position of the trench and jointing stations followed the proposed plan of works supplied by Northern Powergrid, apart from the crossing from the Pavement road to the pedestrian walkway on Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate, where it was decided that the crossing should be approximately 7-8m south-west of the original position to avoid cutting into the stone setts on the main road.

The work entailed using a using a stihl saw to cut into the tarmac where necessary as well as lifting the flagstones on the pedestrian footpath at Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate.

A 3 tonne rubber tracked excavator was used to strip the trench, with a hydraulic breaker attachment for the concreted areas and a 230mm wide utilities ditching bucket for the softer/looser material. The trench was stripped to a depth of 750mm BGL to reach the base of where the ducting was to be placed in accordance with the Northern Powergrid specification.

All stripping was monitored by a YAT archaeologist, though in some areas this was reduced to intermittent monitoring due to the nature of the results. Standard YAT recording methodologies were used.

Photographs and notes were taken on site at various stages of the scheme, as well as plans/sections for any deposits that were encountered.

The excavation of human remains was only carried out following the issue of a licence by the Ministry of Justice on 24th January 2018, Licence Number 18-0011. The skeletons were recorded and photographed, but were left *in situ* as they were below the impact level of the works.

The excavated trenches have been backfilled and reinstated by O'Conner Utilities.

3 LOCATION, GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY

The trench began outside 11 Piccadilly, York, and headed north-west towards the crossroads with Pavement. It turned 90° north-east and continued along the northern side of Pavement

before turning north-north-west onto the flagstone pavement at Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate and Colliergate. The trench turned north-east towards the southern side of the road along St Saviourgate, and finally headed south-east towards Hungate down the north-eastern side of Stonebow House.

The Bedrock geology in this area is sandstone, overlain by superficial deposits of clay, sand and gravel moraine (York Moraine Member) (BGS <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/> accessed 27/02/18). A further significant depth of archaeological deposits overlay the undisturbed natural in this area.

The topography varies along the pipeline trench with the ground level at Piccadilly approximately 12m AOD, at Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate approximately 14m AOD and at the north of Stonebow House approximately 11m AOD.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistory

There is very little evidence of prehistoric activity within the vicinity and the surrounding area of the trench excavation.

Roman

Approximately 130m north-west of Pavement and Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate is the south-eastern side of the known trajectory of the Roman fortress wall. The projected line of the Roman Road 2 is thought to cross into York from the east, possibly crossing St Saviourgate and the line of the trench (RCHMY 1962).

It is thought that this area is within the *canabae*, an area of civilian settlement situated between the fortress and the River Foss.

Anglian & Anglo-Scandinavian

Excavations in the surrounding area, such as the Lloyds Bank deep urban excavations in 1972, the Coppergate excavations of the same decade and more recently in the Hungate Regeneration Development and various watching briefs to the south on Fossgate, all prove that remains from this period are quite substantial at various depths below ground level and quite often in waterlogged preservation.

Medieval – Post-medieval

The section of the trench between Pavement and Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate was adjacent to the former St. Crux (known as the *Holy Cross*) Parish Church, regarded as the largest medieval parish church in York after it had been rebuilt in 1424. It was demolished in 1887 due to the instability of the tower but was rebuilt using the demolished stonework to serve as the extant St. Crux Parish Hall.

There are burial registers for St. Crux which date to 1539-1851; however, any graves on the south side of the church are likely to be pre-1770 as the land was sold to the York City Corporation at this time to be levelled and flagged for the roadway expansion of Pavement.

5 RESULTS

On the 19th - 24th January 2018, excavations for the narrow trench were monitored along the Pavement to Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate section of the scheme. This produced a sequence of road tarmac with an associated concrete make up layer at a thickness of approximately 700mm - 800mm along the length of the trench. The modern deposits overlay a post-medieval horizon, in which there were four rough-faced sandstones, the largest measuring 400mm x 200mm. Due to the width of the trench, it was difficult to determine the nature of this stonework; it is thought that it may be associated with the demolition of the St Crux Parish Church prior to being downsized to the extant Parish Hall in 1887 (Plate 1).

There were also a total of four articulated skeletons immediately below the proposed limit of excavation within the Pavement to Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate section of the trench (Plate 2). Since the skeletons were below the maximum depth of the ground works, they were recorded in situ and covered over, prior to the laying of fine sand bedding for the ducting to be placed on top of.

The location of these skeletons can be seen in Figure 2.

Skeleton 1

Skeleton 1 was located on the northern side of Pavement, close to its junction with the Shambles. The skeleton consisted of an articulated right leg in the northern section of the trench with the rest of the skeleton extending beyond the northern limits of the trench.

Skeletons 2-3

Skeletons 2-3 were in a similar location to Skeleton 1, but lay slightly further to the north-east. Both skeletons consisted mainly of the lower torso and leg bones, with the upper body truncated by later activity (Plate 3). No grave cuts were seen, but it is likely that these represent two separate burials, the upper skeleton truncating the lower.

Skeleton 4

Skeleton 4 was located where the trench crossed from Pavement through to the pedestrian path leading to Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate. It consisted of the upper half of a skeleton as well as the remains of the coffin.

6 CONCLUSION

Archaeological monitoring of the Pavement to Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate section of the trench revealed four inhumations and four sandstone blocks.

The location of the skeletons close to the former church of St. Crux, indicates that they are highly likely to be associated with the graveyard of that church. The orientations of the graves match the orientation of the church at approximately east-north-east/west-south-west. The inhumations pre-date 1770, when the southern edge of the graveyard was sold to the York City Corporation for the leveling and expansion of Pavement. All four skeletons were left *in situ*.

The four rough-faced sandstones uncovered in the Pavement to Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate area were potentially from post-medieval deposits. It is possible that these sandstones relate to the demolition of the church of St. Crux in 1887.

Other than the discovery of the skeletons encountered in Pavement and Whip Ma Whop Ma Gate, the rest of the trench excavations revealed modern deposits from ground level to the maximum depth of 750mm. This mostly consisted of modern made ground of compacted dark brownish-grey, clayey sand soil and concrete bedding for road tarmac surfaces.

No accessionable finds were discovered.

LIST OF SOURCES

1852 Ordnance Survey First Edition York

REFERENCES

RCHME, (1962) *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume I, Eboracum: Roman York*

YAT Gazeteer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Northern Powergrid and O'Conner Utilities for their co-operation during the works.

APPENDIX 1 – INDEX TO ARCHIVE

Item	Number of items
Context sheets	0
Levels register	0
Photographic register	0
Sample register	0
Drawing register	0
Original drawings	2
B/W photographs (films/contact sheets)	0
Colour slides (films)	0
Digital photographs	144
Written Scheme of Investigation	0
Report	1

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PLATES



Plate 1 View of the worked sandstone south of St. Crux Parish Hall. Facing north-west. Scale unit 100mm



Plate 2 View of trench along Pavement with graves SK1 & SK2 covered over. Facing north-east.



Plate 3 Shot of SK1. Facing north. Scale unit 100mm



Plate 4 Shot of SK2-3. Facing south-west. Scale unit 100mm



Plate 5 Shot of SK4. Facing north-east. Scale unit 100mm

FIGURES



Figure 1 Site location



Figure 2 Location of skeletons



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