



**YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**



**LAND TO REAR OF FESTIVAL FLATS,  
FISHERGATE, YORK**

**EVALUATION REPORT**

*by I.D. Milsted*

**REPORT NUMBER 2010/90**



## YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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## Abbreviations

YAT York Archaeological Trust

AOD Above Ordnance Datum

## **ABSTRACT**

*Two evaluation trenches encountered possible Roman terracing cut into natural deposits. Also present were a probable Roman ditch and occupation soil, which was truncated by medieval activity including rubbish pits which produced 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century pottery. A substantial 19<sup>th</sup> century ground make-up deposit sealed all earlier activity and there was some limited evidence of later structures.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

An archaeological evaluation was conducted on land behind the Festival Flats, York, between 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2010 (Figure 1). The work was carried out on behalf of the City of York Council in advance of a proposed ground reduction to create a new car-park.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Two trenches measuring 2m x 2m were located on a raised paved area (Figure 2, Plate 1). In accordance with the specification, these trenches were initially excavated by mechanical excavator until archaeological deposits were encountered. In trench 1, these were identified at 12.45m AOD, 0.70m below ground level; in trench 2, machine excavation ceased at 12.30m AOD, 0.60m below ground level. Excavation continued by hand from this point until the depth limit of 1.25m below ground level was reached, or undisturbed natural deposits identified, whichever was higher. In trench 2, the discovery of a substantial concrete footing necessitated the extension of the initial machined area; the hand-excavation was continued in a 2m x 2m area, leaving soil baulks at the western and southern sides of the trench.

The aims of the evaluation were to establish if there was evidence for Roman occupation, the nature of the post-Roman land-use, and whether there were any human burials present. The evaluation was also designed to show if there are any anoxic, wet or dry deposits in this area, and to create a deposit prediction for the Roman, Anglian, Anglo-Scandinavian, medieval and post-medieval strata.

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

The site is located at SE 6073 5122, in a courtyard formed by the Festival Flats buildings, with Paragon Street to the north, Fawcett Street to the east, part of Kent Street to the south and Fishergate to the west. The courtyard slopes from east to west, reflecting the general

trend in the local landscape towards the River Foss at Castle Mills. The geology of the area consists of glacial sands and clays overlying sandstone.

The excavation area was a level area of paved yard approximately 0.70m higher than the rest of the courtyard (Plate 1), which has been earmarked for ground reduction to create a new car-park.

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

The site lies in an area immediately outside the medieval wall circuit, between Fishergate and Walmgate bars (Figure 1). Until 35 years ago, this area was very poorly understood; a series of archaeological interventions since then has contributed to a better deposit model that has informed the current work, reflecting in the evaluation aims set out above.

A Roman cremation cemetery was discovered during the construction of Escrick Street, Melbourne Street and Winterscale Street during the nineteenth century (RCHMY 1, 69), disturbed traces of which were encountered nearby between Escrick Street and Kent Street during evaluation work ahead of the Barbican Leisure Centre in 1987 (Brinklow, 1988, 6). Agricultural activity has also been discovered across a wide area, with cultivation soils and ditches interpreted as land divisions identified at Paragon Street (Brinklow and Redmond in Brinklow *et al*, 1986, 76), Kent Street (Brinklow, 1988, 5-8), Escrick Street (Oakey, 1989, 32), 46-54 Fishergate (Kemp, 1996, 12) and at Fawcett Street (Johnson, 2001, 6). The area is also close to the proposed line of the Roman road between York and Throlam, designated road 1 by the Royal Commission; little evidence has ever been found for its alignment east of the city walls (Brinklow *et al*, 1986, 84-87), and none at all emerged during any of the excavations cited above.

This area is one of the few in York to have yielded archaeological evidence for the Anglian period. A collapsed wattle and daub wall and refuse deposits, along with an 8<sup>th</sup> century copper alloy enamelled cross-brooch, were found at Paragon Street in 1973 during excavations for the Barbican Baths (Tweddle *et al*, 253). Further Anglian activity was encountered during the trial trenching for the Barbican Leisure centre, in the form of a copper alloy belt end and a single pit containing comb fragments (Brinklow, 1988, 5); subsequent excavation yielded a single residual Anglian coin (Tweddle *et al*, 267). Significant in their own right, these discoveries are also notable by their relative paucity compared with the extensive Anglian deposits encountered at 46-54 Fishergate. Here, a sequence of Anglian pits, ditches and post-holes dating from the late 7<sup>th</sup> to the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century were identified (Kemp, 1996, 15) and interpreted as evidence of a *wic*-type trading settlement (Kemp and Groves, 1996, 68-9;

Tweddle *et al*, 1999, 263). The disparity between the density of Anglian activity either side of modern Fishergate potentially places the current site near the boundary of the Anglian settlement area, with the possibility that it could help define its limits.

Anglo-Scandinavian activity in this area is very sparse (Richard Hall pers. comm.), with little evidence surviving from the 46-54 Fishergate site, where the former Anglian settlement appears to have been abandoned until c.1000 (Kemp, 1996, 12). The next clear evidence from the 46-54 Fishergate site is medieval, and includes the possible late 10<sup>th</sup>-early 11<sup>th</sup> century origins of the church of St Andrew, which was superseded in 1195 by the new Priory of St Andrew of the Order of St Gilbert of Sempringham. The extensive evidence for this comprised the church and other priory buildings, as well as a cemetery (Kemp and Groves, 1996, 72-73). The current site lies to the north-east of this area, but within the supposed precinct of St Andrew's, which is argued to have extended to the line of medieval Fishergate, now known as Fawcett Street (Ibid, 44).

A further medieval church, All Saints, has been discovered at the junction of Kent Street and Fawcett Street, and is thought to be pre-conquest (Johnson, 2001, 4) but the majority of the evidence recovered for this church and its graveyard is medieval. Burials relating to this church were found during the Barbican works (Brinklow, 1988, 5). All Saints was closed and sold in 1549 (Johnson, 2001, 36).

The Gilbertine Priory was dissolved in 1538 and the site abandoned soon thereafter, reverting to orchards before the establishment of a glass factory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kemp and Groves, 1996, 73). The cartographic evidence shows the Festival Flats area as open ground until at least 1750, when Chassereau's map shows the current outline of it as a recognisable block of land, subdivided into gardens. A pub, the Woolpack Inn, was built in this block by 1845 (RCHMY 4, 69) and the Ordnance Survey of 1853 shows housing around an open yard that broadly correlates with the open space behind the current buildings. These were constructed in the 1950s (John Walker, City of York Council, pers. com.) following clearance of the earlier structures.

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1 TRENCH 1**

Trench 1 was located to the east of the raised area of paving, the surface of which lay at c.13.10m AOD (Figures 2 and 3).

The earliest identified deposit, 1014, was encountered at c.0.65m BGL (12.45m AOD) and consisted of a clean, soft, mid-orange sandy clay that was interpreted as natural. This was cut by 1015, a 0.30m deep feature aligned north-east – south-west, the top edge of which ran right across the trench with fairly steep sides, to a flatter base that sloped down to the north-west (Plate 5). This may be a large tree-throw hole or other natural feature, but it could also be the remains of an agricultural terrace, exploiting the general sloping profile of natural deposits in this area. This feature was in-filled with 1013, a friable yellow sand containing occasional flecks of charcoal, creating a ground level that sloped down to the north-east from around 0.65m BGL (12.45m AOD) to around 0.80m BGL (12.30m AOD) (Figure 3, Plate 4). A single small sherd of late 14<sup>th</sup>/early 15<sup>th</sup> century Hambleton ware recovered from 1013 is considered intrusive, as this deposit was truncated by later service cuts.

Cut into 1013 were four distinct features. Two of these, 1006 and 1007, were possible post-holes, located in the southern half of the trench, measuring up to 0.40m across and containing packed cobbles; these may well have been truncated as they were fairly ephemeral. In the south-west corner a pit (fill 1009, cut 1012, Plate 4) at least 0.60m across and 0.30m deep was identified that extended beyond the limit of excavation. Unfortunately, no datable material was retrieved from the backfill. In the north-west corner, a linear cut feature aligned NNE-SSW was identified (fill 1008, cut 1011, Plate 4); this was at least 0.50m wide and 0.35m deep. This had very steep sides and was interpreted as a gully of probable nineteenth century date on the basis of the artefacts, which included an eighteenth century floor tile and a nineteenth century brick (Jane McComish, pers. com.).

These features were sealed by 1003, a c.0.45m thick make-up deposit of compact, dark grey-brown, sandy silt containing moderate CBM fragments, the upper surface of which lay at c.0.20m BGL (12.90m AOD) (Plate 3). This was considered to be nineteenth century at the earliest, and was cut by a modern ceramic drain with a concrete setting (1005/1005, Plate 2), which had in turn been sealed beneath a 0.15m thick cinder and mortar bedding deposit (1002) that lay beneath the 0.05m thick concrete paving slabs (1001) of the current paved surface (Figure 3).

#### 5.1.1 DISCUSSION

The only securely dated feature was the gully, which produced nineteenth century brick. The backfill of this feature appeared to be sealed by the nineteenth century make-up deposit, although it is possible that it was cut from higher up and backfilled rapidly with the same material; it is possibly therefore contemporary with the concrete and ceramic drain setting. The small amount of residual medieval pottery amongst an assemblage largely consisting of

later wares recovered during initial machining (1000) probably derives mainly from the make-up deposit 1003.

The features securely sealed beneath this make-up deposit were all undated and could therefore derive from any earlier period of the City's past. The possibility of a terrace may hint at Roman agricultural activity, as suggested elsewhere in this area by the ditches and soils found in earlier excavations.

## **5.2 TRENCH 2**

Trench 2 was located in the western part of the raised paved area, the surface of which lay at c.12.90m AOD (Figures 2 and 4).

The earliest identified deposit, 2022, was encountered at around 1.05m BGL (11.85m) and consisted of a clean, sandy clay similar to that identified in Trench 1. Accordingly, this was also interpreted as natural. This was overlain by 2021, an irregular deposit of compact, very gravely, mixed orange and dark grey, sandy clay with frequent cobbles, the upper surface of which lay at 0.65 – 0.90m BGL (12.25 - 12.00m AOD) (Plate 16). Although probably natural in origin, this material was possibly re-deposited as it was not very well sorted and the upper surface undulated considerably, with a general downward slope to the west. As in trench 1, it is possible that this represents the in-fill of a former terrace.

These deposits were sealed by 2018/2023, a soft, pale grey slightly silty sand up to 0.40m thick which created a fairly level surface at around 0.60m BGL (12.32m – 12.25m AOD). Although devoid of any cultural material, this material was heavily mottled and was interpreted as a possible buried soil (Plate 15). Cut into it was a straight ditch, aligned east-west, 0.40m wide and 0.45m deep with fairly straight sides that in places exhibited a slot-like profile at the base similar to the 'ankle-breaker' typical of Roman military ditches (fill 2019, cut 2020, Figure 4, Plate 16). This ditch was sealed beneath 2017, a 0.10-0.15m thick layer of compact clayey silt containing charcoal fragments and an assemblage of late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century pottery, including fragments of Ebor flagon and mortaria. 2017 was interpreted as an occupation deposit, the upper surface of which lay at c.0.50m BGL (c.12.48 – 12.30m AOD, Plate 14); whether this is actually Roman is not certain as the earlier may be truncated, and it may be that 2017 is medieval. This is discussed further below.

Cut into 2017 were four distinct features. In the centre of the trench, an east-west aligned gully, 2014, was identified (Plate 13). The fill (2013) was a mixture of mid grey sandy silt and compact pink sandy clay, and produced a tiny amount of Samian ware. South of this a large shallow pit, 2012, measuring 1.5m across and 0.15m deep, produced late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup>

century pottery and was interpreted as a truncated refuse pit (Plate 12). To the north-east of the gully, a small pit or truncated posthole, 2015/2016, was cut by a larger pit, 2010, that contained three fills, 2007-2009 (Figure 4, Plates 11 and 17) which produced animal bone and medieval pottery of late 11<sup>th</sup> to late 12<sup>th</sup> date, with some residual Roman material (see appendix 2).

These features were sealed beneath 2003, a 0.30m thick compact, dark grey sandy silt that was interpreted as a nineteenth century make-up deposit similar to that encountered in trench 1 (Plate 10). The upper surface of this lay at around 0.20m BGL (c.12.70m AOD). A modern concrete footing, 2005, had been cut through this deposit to the north, the discovery of which during machining had necessitated the southward extension of the trench to avoid having to remove it (Plate 10). This consequently formed the northern limit of excavation, and had cut through all the lower deposits into natural. Overlying this was 2002, the 0.15m thick cinder and mortar bedding deposit for the 0.05m thick concrete paving slabs, 2001, of the modern surface (Figure 4, Plate 17).

#### 5.2.1 DISCUSSION

The possibility of terracing, raised in trench 1, has potentially been bolstered by evidence from trench 2. The height of 2021, at around 0.70m BGL (c.12.20m), approximates to the base of the terrace in trench 1; it is possible therefore that this represents the upper level of a terrace below that tentatively suggested for trench 1, demonstrating that some evidence of agricultural landscaping has been found during this excavation. This can only be confirmed with further fieldwork, and rests on fairly slender evidence following this assessment.

The buried soil, 2018/2023 and ditch 2019/2020 in trench 2 are felt to be Roman and would fit with the pattern of Roman ditches and soils found across this area. The possible occupation layer, 2017, sealing the Roman ditch may also represent a clearance event, followed by the digging of gully 2013/2014 and a pit 2011/2012 during the Roman period as the probable agricultural landscape developed. However, the other pits cut into 2017 in this area are medieval, and moreover are late 11<sup>th</sup>-late 12<sup>th</sup> century in date. The lack of any intervening strata from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century could be explained by a clearance cut, but it should be born in mind that the excavation area was very small, with a low sherd count (see appendix 2); it may be that a wider excavation area would have produced medieval pottery from 2017, rendering the Roman material in 2017, 2013 and 2011 residual and those cut features medieval in date, along with pits 2007-2010 and 2009/2010. An 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century clearance has been identified in this area previously, particularly in the Barbican/Paragon Street excavations (Mark Whyman, pers. com.); this would seem to fit the spatial arrangement and stratigraphy more logically, but the question remains open.

No evidence was found for any Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian occupation.

The large pit 2007-2010 produced securely medieval material, including a relatively unusual splash glazed type (see appendix 2). This pit was cut through a smaller one, 2015/2016, and together they may represent 'back-land' activity such as rubbish disposal. No firm connection could be made with any known medieval locations in the area, such as the churches of All Saints and St Andrews, or the Gilbertine Priory. No human bone was identified on-site, and on the basis of these two trenches, it is not believed that any burials are present in this area.

The post-medieval period may be represented by the make-up deposit 2003, although this was felt to be nineteenth century in date, and all features cut through this are clearly modern, possibly relating to structures present prior to the construction of the Festival Flats in the 1950s.

### **5.3 GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Natural deposits have been securely identified at 0.65m BGL/12.45m AOD in Trench 1 and at 1.05m BGL/11.85m AOD in Trench 2. These are overlain by possible re-deposited natural deposits which may be by in-filling a former series of terraces, although this is a little speculative. Overlying these are probable Roman soils and a ditch, which in turn are sealed by sequence of occupation deposits and later cut features discussed above. Whether the occupation is Roman, with a Roman gully and pit, followed by a much later medieval clearance and more pits, or whether the occupation and all subsequent activity are medieval, is open to question, but the relatively large quantities of residual Roman pottery in most of the cut features does suggest the presence of Roman material in this area which a more extensive excavation could define. The medieval activity, consisting of 'back-land' rubbish disposal with no evidence for the cemeteries known to lie nearby, lies beneath a thick make-up deposit of probable nineteenth century date. A modern drain and footing lay immediately beneath the paved surface.

It would appear from the above sequence that the car-park surrounding the raised paved area, which is approximately 0.70m lower, has been cut into the original ground level rather than the paved area being raised. Accordingly, deposits of Roman and medieval date are certainly contained within the upper 1m of the material beneath the paved area, with the possibility that other periods may also be represented elsewhere in this area.

## 6. LIST OF SOURCES

Geological survey 1967

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research and author	I.D. Milsted
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Editor	M.R. Stockwell
Site staff	I.D. Milsted, G. Erskine

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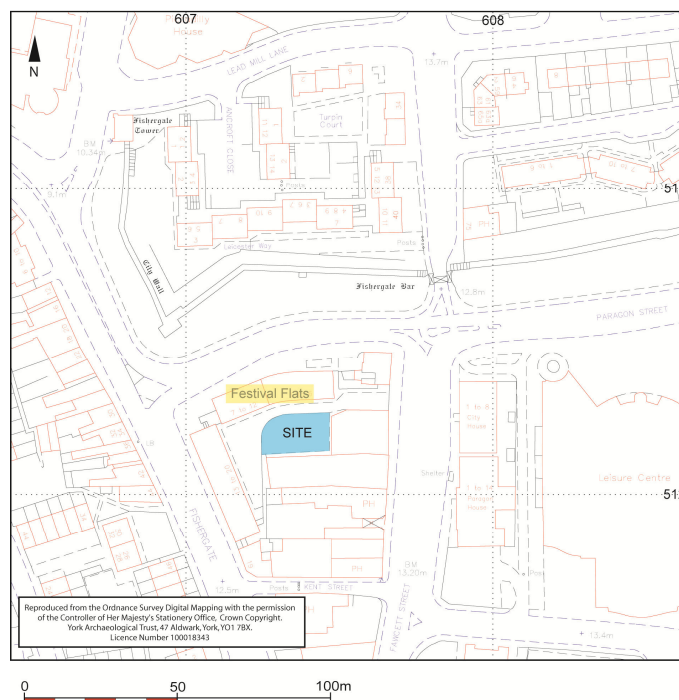


Figure 1 Location of site

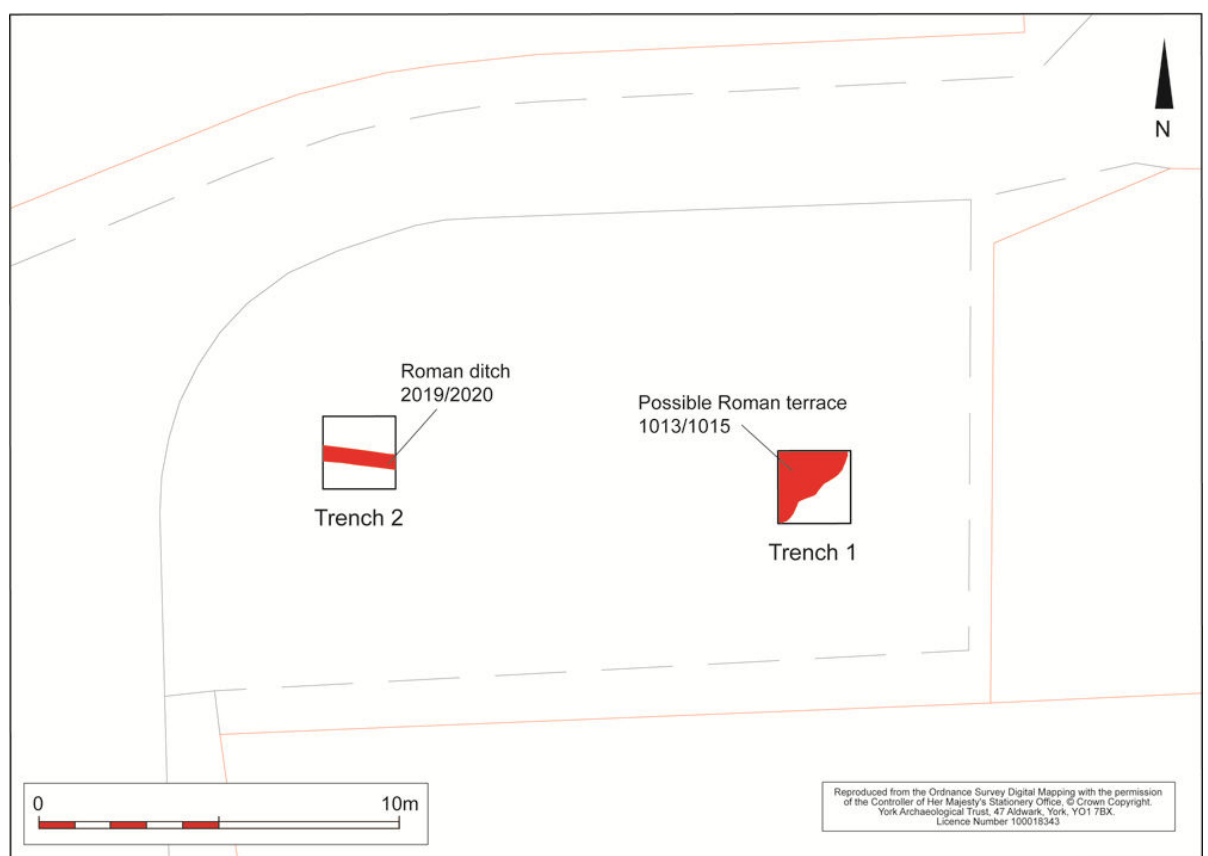


Figure 2 Trench locations with Roman features

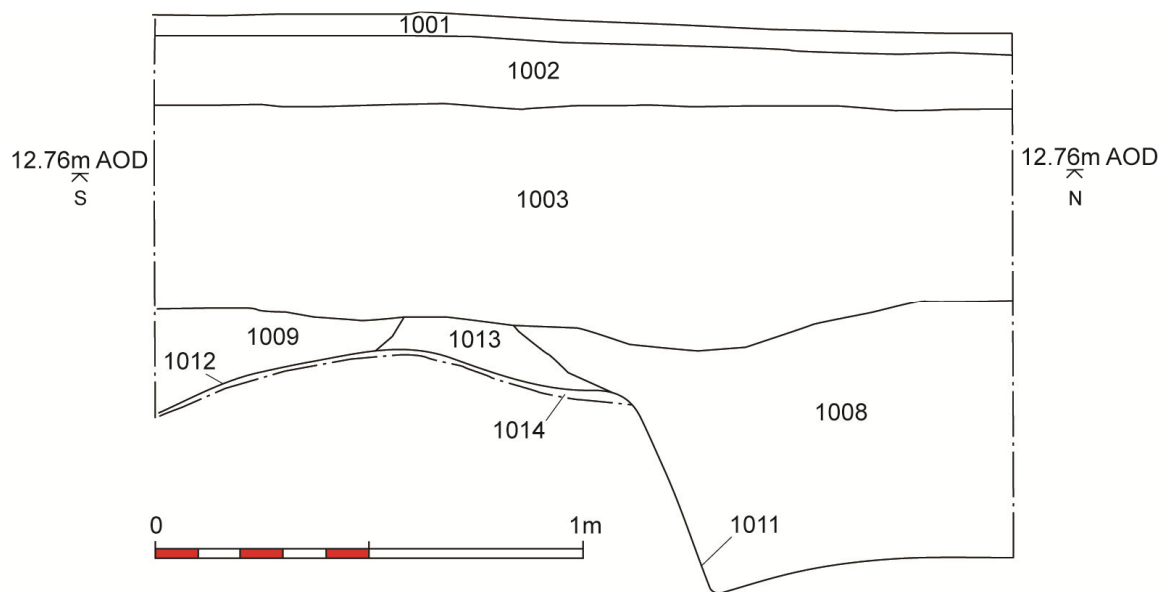


Figure 3 Trench 1: Section 3, east facing

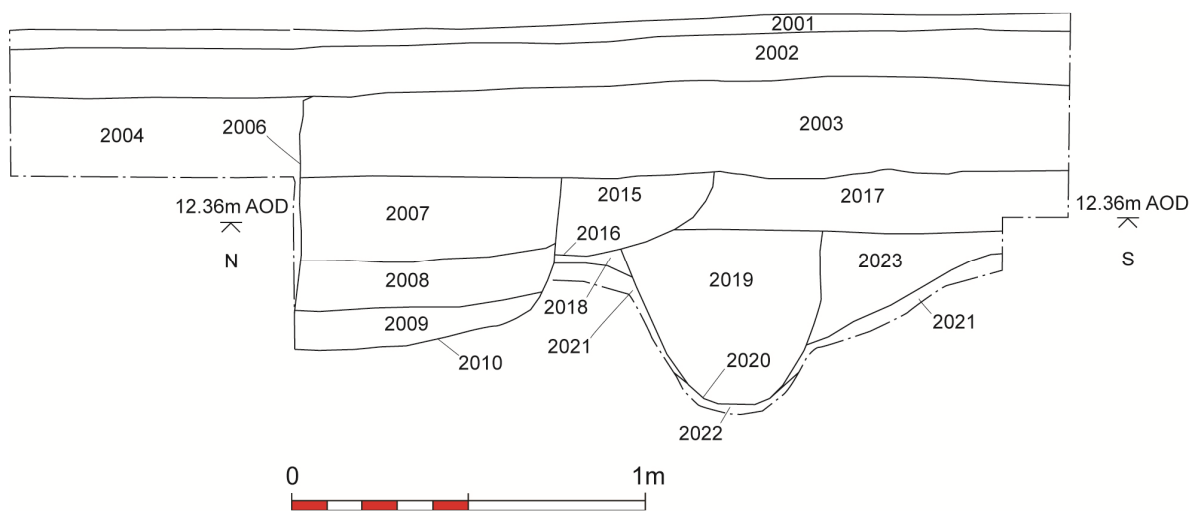


Figure 4 Trench 2: Section 1, west facing



*Plate 1 General view of excavation, looking south-west*



*Plate 2 Trench 1: Nineteenth century drain structure 1004, looking south*



*Plate 3 Trench 1: make-up deposit 1003, looking south*



*Plate 4 Trench 1: Gully cut 1011 with pit cuts 1010 (left of board) and 1012 (back corner), cut into re-deposited natural 1013, looking south-west*



*Plate 5 Trench 1: Natural 1014 with cut feature 1015, looking south*



*Plate 6 Trench 1: Section 1, west facing*



*Plate 7 Trench 1: Section 2, north facing*



*Plate 8 Trench 1: Section 3, east facing*



*Plate 9 Trench 1: Section 4, south facing*



*Plate 10 Trench 2: Make-up deposit 2003 with footing 2005 in foreground, looking south*



Plate 11 Trench 2: Pit cut 2010 with fills 2007-2009, looking east



Plate 12 Trench 2: Pit cut 2012 with baulk, looking south



Plate 13 Trench 2: Gully cut 2014, looking west



Plate 14 Trench 2: Occupation deposit 2017 with later cuts, looking north



*Plate 15 Trench 2: Ditch fill 2019 with buried soil 2018/2023, looking north*



*Plate 16 Trench 2: Ditch cut 2020, re-deposited natural 2021 and natural 2022 (in base of ditch), looking north*



*Plate 17 Trench 2: Section 1, west facing*



*Plate 18 Trench 2: Section 2, north facing*



*Plate 19 Trench 2: Section 3, east facing*



*Plate 20 Trench 2: Section 4, south facing*

## **APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT LIST**

### **TRENCH ONE**

1000	Unstratified
1001	Paving slabs
1002	Make-up beneath paving slabs
1003	Ground make-up deposit
1004	Concrete footing and drain
1005	Construction cut for 1004
1006	Spread/possible backfill
1007	Post-hole backfill
1008	Gully backfill
1009	Pit backfill
1010	Post-hole cut containing 1007
1011	Gully cut containing 1008
1012	Pit cut containing 1009
1013	Gravelly spread/re-deposited natural
1014	Natural
1015	?construction cut containing 1013

### **TRENCH TWO**

2000	Unstratified
2001	Paving slabs
2002	Make-up beneath paving slabs
2003	Ground make-up deposit
2004	Construction backfill
2005	Concrete footing
2006	Construction cut containing 2004 and 2005
2007	Pit backfill
2008	Pit backfill
2009	Pit backfill
2010	Pit cut containing 2007, 2008, 2009
2011	Pit backfill
2012	Pit cut containing 2011
2013	Backfill of gully
2014	Cut of gully containing 2013
2015	Pit backfill
2016	Pit cut containing 2015

2017	Occupation spread
2018	Possible buried soil (=2023)
2019	Backfill of ditch
2020	Cut of ditch containing 2019
2021	Re-deposited gravely natural
2022	Natural
2023	Buried soil (=2018)

## APPENDIX TWO: POTTERY BY DR. A.J. MAINMAN

This small assemblage consists of forty-eight sherds. They range in date from Roman to the modern period and are of a domestic nature. Sherds are mostly small (under 5cms at the widest point), though there are a few medium (5 to 10cms) and large (over 10cms). There is very little abrasion on any of the fragments which suggests that they are in primary contexts.

The most interesting sherds [2007] are splash glazed type with a pale reduced fabric which is perhaps not quite as common as the red and white splashed fabric types. They point towards a date somewhere in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, there are no recommendations for further work.

Context	Find	Quantity	Spotdate	Details
1000	BF2	5	19th/20th century	2 English stoneware jar including complete rim and neck large and small sherds 1 stoneware drain, small 1 English stoneware bowl with green glazed surfaces, small 1 mottled green glazed medieval fine reduced ware, small
1008	BF3	2	18th century +	1 Roman grey ware jar handle late 2nd/3rd century 1 slipware mug base, small
1013	BF4	1	Late 14th/early 15th century	1 Hambleton, small
2000	BF5	2	Late 12th century	1 Roman samian bowl fragment, small 1 gritty ware, small
2004	BF6	4	19th/20th century	1 white china dish with maroon band at rim, medium 1 transfer printed, small 1 late post medieval red earthenware with green glaze 1 sandy ware with reduced core and internal surface and buff external surface, small
2007	BF7	21	Late 12th century	7 splashed ware large and small 1 gritty white, small 1 splashed lightly reduced, small 1 Roman grey ware

				1 Roman colour-coated ware 4 Roman buff wares 2 Stamford base with yellow glaze, medium 1 York ware base, small 3 coarsely gritted hard fired wares similar to York ware, small
2008	BF8	4	Late 11th/12th century	1 Roman buff ware 1 samian sherd 1 white gritty hard fired, small 1 York ware base sooted ,medium
2011	BF9	3	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> century	1 rusticated ware 1 samian 1 Ebor ware Small sherds
2013	BF10	1	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> century	1 samian
2017	BF11	5	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> century	1 Ebor flagon sherd 1 Ebor mortarium spout 3 Ebor sherds 1 samian small sherds

Table 1 Pottery spot dates by context