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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
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**FORMER FOSS ISLANDS
FILLING STATION,
FOSS ISLANDS ROAD,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2002 FIELD REPORT
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**FORMER FOSS ISLANDS FILLING STATION,
FOSS ISLANDS ROAD,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

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ABSTRACT

On March 14th and 15th 2002 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on land at the former Foss Islands Filling Station, Foss Islands Road, York, during which the drilling of five boreholes was observed. In all of the boreholes thick relatively modern dumps were observed. Below these were thick deposits of silt which were damp or wet and in places contained noticeable amounts of moderately to well preserved organic material. The profile obtained from these boreholes indicated that the underlying clay sloped downwards from south to north and that the site may lie astride the edge of the King's Fishpool, known from documentary and cartographic evidence to lie partly in the area of the site.

1. INTRODUCTION

On March 14th and 15th 2002 York Archaeological Trust maintained an archaeological watching brief during the drilling of a series of boreholes to test for soil and water contamination at the site of the former Foss Islands Filling Station, Foss Islands Road, York (NGR: SE 6108 5173, Figure 1). These works entailed the drilling of five boreholes (Figure 2) to a nominal depth of 5m below modern ground level in order to sample the soils and water on the site for any contaminants. The works were carried out by HB Boring and Co Limited as requested by ARCADIS, Geraghty & Miller International Inc, of Cambridge who commissioned the archaeological watching brief.

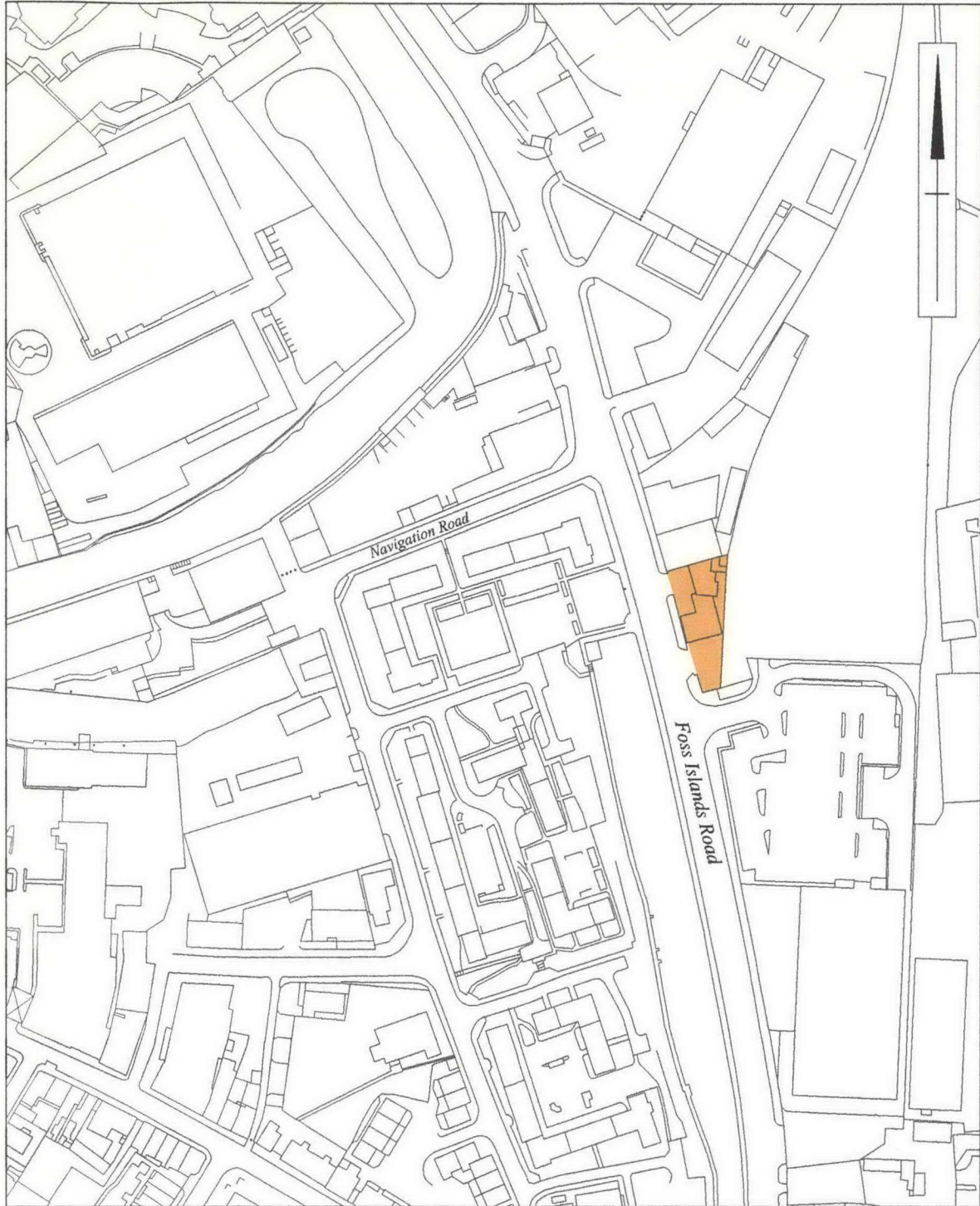
All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 2002.450.

2. METHODOLOGY

The watching brief entailed recording any deposits, features, or structures recognised in the boreholes. These notes, including measured sketches, were entered into a site notebook and processed into form where they could be used for the preparation of this report during March 2002. The location of all drawn borehole profiles were measured in and subsequently transferred to a large scale Ordnance Survey map. The work was monitored continuously until the completion of the planned drilling. A total of five borehole profiles were drawn up from the site notes and these are described in Section 5 of this report.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The drift geology of the area is of Boulder Clay above Warp and Lacustrine Clay with sand and gravel that overlies a solid geology of Bunter and Keuper Sandstone, (Geological Survey 1967). The site was roughly trapezoid, measuring a maximum of c.45m north-south by c.25m east-west and was roughly level lying at a height of approximately 9.2m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum).



0 50 metres

Figure 1 Site location

BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY DIGITAL DATA WITH
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4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 This background to the site has been compiled from the results of previous archaeological investigations and observations, easily accessible historical sources, and from cartographic evidence. The site lies c.40m east of the Red Tower, part of the city walls in this area. Only a limited amount of archaeological work has been done in the area but this includes an excavation on the city walls, 1985.12, and one at the corner of Foss Islands Road and Lawrence Street, 1989.8. An excavation has also taken place at the Eclipse Copper Works in James Street, 1989.13. Watching briefs in the area include those at Walkers Yard, Foss Islands Road, 1985.1027, Allied Carpet Stores, 1986.13, Tower 35, the City Walls, 1995.0297 and two in James Street, 1979.1021 and 1995.0285 (YAT 1997).

4.2 Prehistoric and Roman periods (pre 1st century – 5th centuries AD)

There is currently no firm evidence from the immediate area for any activity belonging to the prehistoric period. Evidence of Roman date is, however, known from the area. A lead coffin enclosing a wooden coffin containing a skeleton was found east of Foss Islands Road and south of Layerthorpe (c.SE 6100 5200) in the mid 19th century and a stone coffin, Roman pottery and unspecified finds were found near to the lead coffin during the 19th century (RCHM 1962). More recently the excavation at Foss Islands Road/Lawrence Street (1989.8) located a pit, dump, and ditch of the Roman period.

4.3 Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th – 11th centuries)

There is little archaeological data from the immediate locality pertaining to the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods although the excavations at the City Walls site (1985.12) produced an Anglian surface and a pit. The work at Foss Islands Road/Lawrence Street located a palisade believed to belong to the Anglo-Scandinavian period and investigations within the walls in the Walmgate area have often produced material of this period.

4.4 Medieval Period (11th – 16th centuries)

Material of this period is quite frequent in the area. The adjacent city walls and Red Tower are of this period and have been investigated at the City walls site and at Tower 35 (1995.0297). A medieval building, pit, and hearth were examined at Foss Islands Road/Lawrence Street, medieval pottery was recovered from a site at Lawrence Street/James Street (1979.1021), and possible medieval build-ups were seen at a site off James Street (1995.0285).

4.5 Post – medieval period (16th – 19th centuries)

Archaeological evidence for this era is not common in the area but includes a post-medieval rampart from the City Walls site and a structure at the Allied Carpets Store (1986.13).

4.6 Modern (19th – 21st centuries)

Evidence for this period is quite abundant, both above and below ground. The buried evidence includes deposits at Walker's Yard (1985.1027), a wall at the City Walls site, a building at Foss Islands Road/Lawrence Street, a drain and building at the Eclipse Copper Works (1989.13), and build-up deposits at the site off James Street.

4.7 Historical Evidence

There is no certain documentary evidence for any activity in the area prior to the medieval period but it is known that when the King's Fishpool was created in the later 11th century it flooded meadow, arable and garden land as well as destroying two new mills. At this point in time there is also some evidence to suggest that a gate existed on the site of Walmgate Bar and that there was an earthen rampart topped by a wooden palisade defending the city in this area. The main part of the city wall hereabouts was constructed in the mid 14th century although the Red Tower is a later addition of c. 1490 and there is a reference, of 1501/2, to the construction of a new piece of wall connecting the Red Tower with the existing wall. The whole area suffered considerably during the Civil War and the walls required repairs. Repairs to the wall and the Red Tower were also undertaken during the mid 18th century after which the city wall in this area was used as a walk. In the first half of the 19th century there were numerous attempts to demolish the entire circuit of the walls but they were saved and restored and by the end of the 19th century open to the public. Although the actual King's Fishpool had gone by the late 18th century the area remained very wet and marshy until it was purchased by York Corporation in 1853 and subsequently drained, the resulting land being used for gas, railway, and later, electricity works. Both the electricity station and the extensive railway sidings along Foss Islands Road are now gone having been replaced since the 1970's by various retail developments which continue to dominate the area.

4.8 Cartographic Evidence

All of the early maps of York that show the area, from John Speed's map of 1610 to those of the mid 19th century, show much the same thing. They all indicate that the present site lay close to, or within, a river channel created where Tang Hall and Osbaldwick Becks join the River Foss. Although the first Ordnance Survey map, of 1853, shows the area apparently drained with a towpath beside the River Foss, the area is still marked as open, undeveloped land. By the early 20th century much of the area had been developed and the O.S. map of 1909 shows possible buildings of uncertain function on the site together with many railway sidings to the east and north. Also to the north is shown the electricity station and closer to the site the Corporation Depot, still present today. To the south-east is Foss Islands Tannery and some 200 yards to the east is St Lawrence's Brick and Tile Works. All these, with the exception of some railway sidings to the east, had gone by the publication of the 1979 O.S. map of the area which appears to show the Foss Islands Filling Station, only very recently demolished. The most modern maps show the retail developments that cover much of the immediate area.

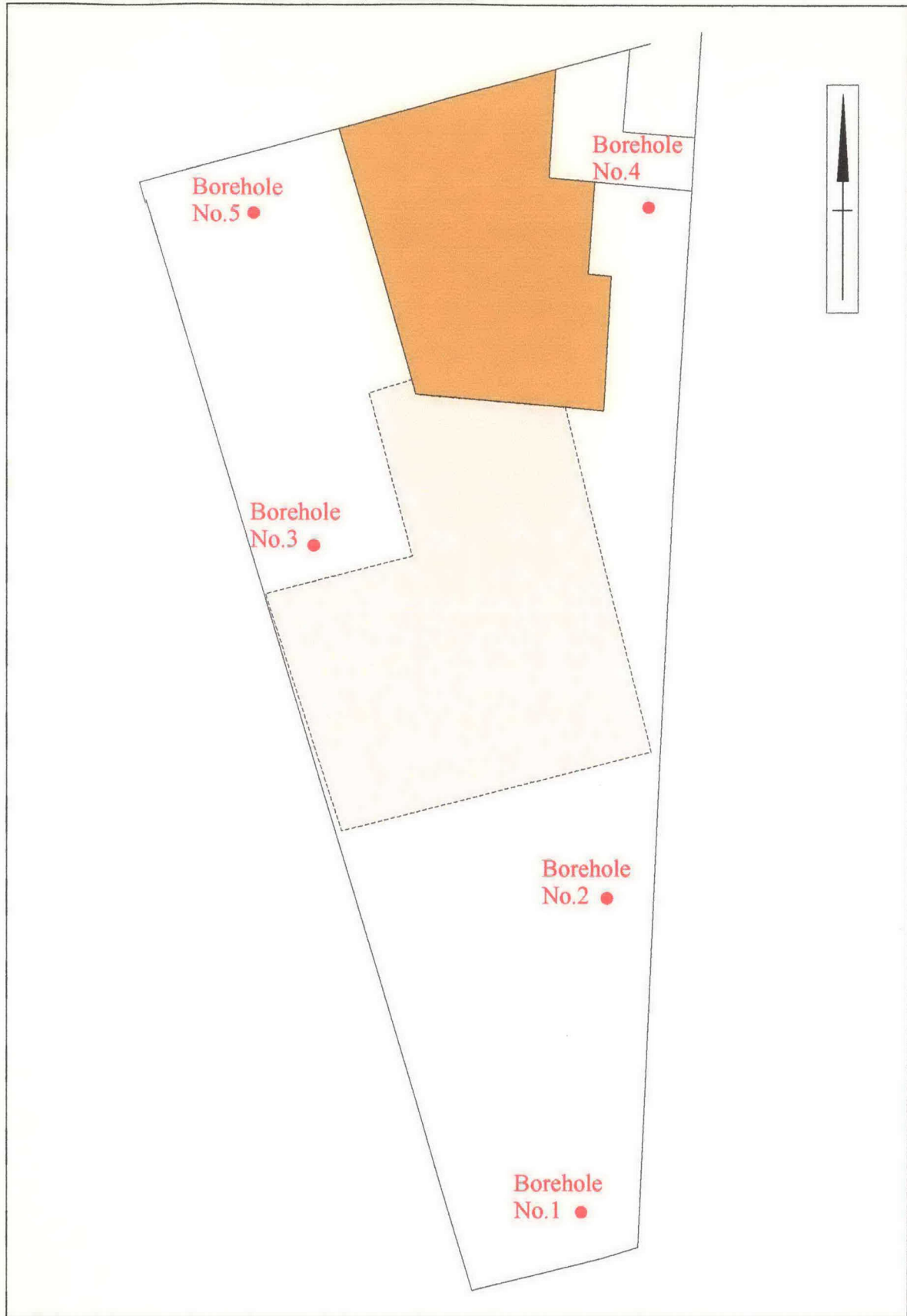


Figure 2 Borehole location

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 Borehole 1 (Figure 3)

The lowest recorded deposit seen in this borehole, at c.4.2 to 5m below ground level (BGL), c.4.2m to 5m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), was firm mid brown silty clay (106) which is believed to be the natural in this area. It was overlain by a naturally formed deposit, or build-up, of damp very dark grey slightly organic, slightly clayey silt (105) which contained moderate amounts of small wood fragments. This was sealed by a probable capping deposit of firm mid brown clay (104) above which lay a build-up or dump deposit composed of mid brown loam (103).

Overlying context 103 was a dump of black clinkery loam (102) which was sealed by a probable demolition or dump deposit consisting of dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (101) with moderate quantities of tile and brick. This was capped by a thin, c.0.05m, layer of tarmac which formed the modern ground surface at c.9.2m AOD.

5.2 Borehole 2 (Figure 3)

In this borehole the lowest deposit recorded was at c.4.8m BGL, c.4.4m AOD. It was firm, slightly greyish, mid brown clay (204) thought to be natural. Overlying it was wet black, slightly clayey, slightly organic, silt (203) thought to have been formed naturally. It was sealed by a build-up or dump deposit that was mainly a mixture of mid brown clay, mid brown silt, and dark greyish-brown loam (202).

Above context 202 was a very mixed layer, probably a dump, of dark greyish-brown loam (201) containing brick, tile, patches of brown clay and lenses of mid brown sand. Overlying this was the modern ground surface of tarmac (200) which lay at c.9.2m AOD.

5.3 Borehole 3 (Figure 3)

In this borehole the earliest recorded deposit was at c.6.1m BGL, c.3.1m AOD. It was firm light greyish-brown clay (305) and is believed to be natural. Above it was a layer of wet dark greenish-grey slightly clayey silt (304) which was probably a naturally formed deposit or build-up. Overlying it was a very dark grey, slightly clayey, silt (303) which was up to c.3.2m thick and also a naturally formed deposit or build-up.

Overlying 303 was a deposit of mid brown loam (302) with moderate amounts of gravel, brick, and small concrete fragments which was probably a dump or demolition deposit. It was sealed by a levelling deposit of pale grey concrete (301) above which lay the modern ground surface of tarmac (300) at c.9.2m AOD.

5.4 Borehole 4 (Figure 4)

The lowest deposit in this borehole was a slightly laminated, light to mid grey, clay (404) which was seen at c.5m BGL, c.4.2m AOD and interpreted as natural. Overlying it was a black, slightly organic, waterlogged silt (403), probably a build-up or naturally formed deposit. This was sealed

by a layer of very dark grey, slightly clayey, silt (402) again probably a build-up or naturally formed deposit.

Overlying context 402 was a dump of loose black clinkery loam (401) with some crushed brick and mortar. Above this, and forming the modern ground surface at c.9.2m AOD, was a very mixed dump or demolition deposit consisting of mortar, concrete fragments, brick, and dark grey loam (400) with some crushed limestone.

5.5 Borehole 5 (Figure 4)

The lowest deposit in this borehole was firm mid greyish-brown clay (505) at c.5.9m BGL, c.3.3m AOD. This was probably natural. Overlying it was dark brown organic silt (504), probably a build-up or naturally formed deposit. This was sealed by a deposit of mid greenish-grey, slightly clayey, silt (503) also a probable build-up or naturally formed deposit. Overlying context 503 was very dark grey, slightly clayey, silt (502), again, probably a build-up or naturally formed deposit.

Sealing 502 was a mixture of brick, mortar, crushed limestone and dark greyish-brown loam (501), probably a demolition deposit forming the bedding for the modern ground surface of tarmac (500) which lay at c.9.2m AOD.

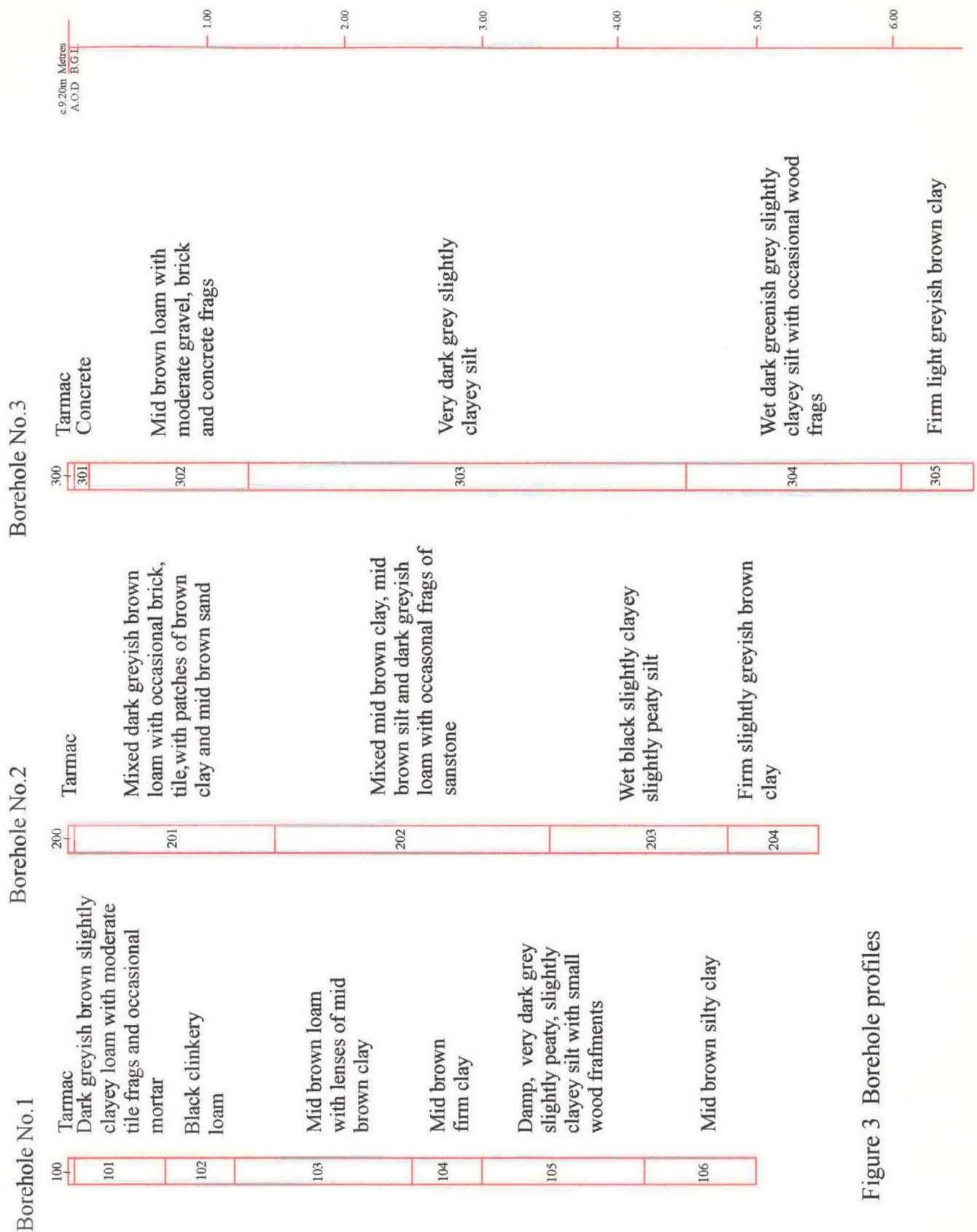


Figure 3 Borehole profiles

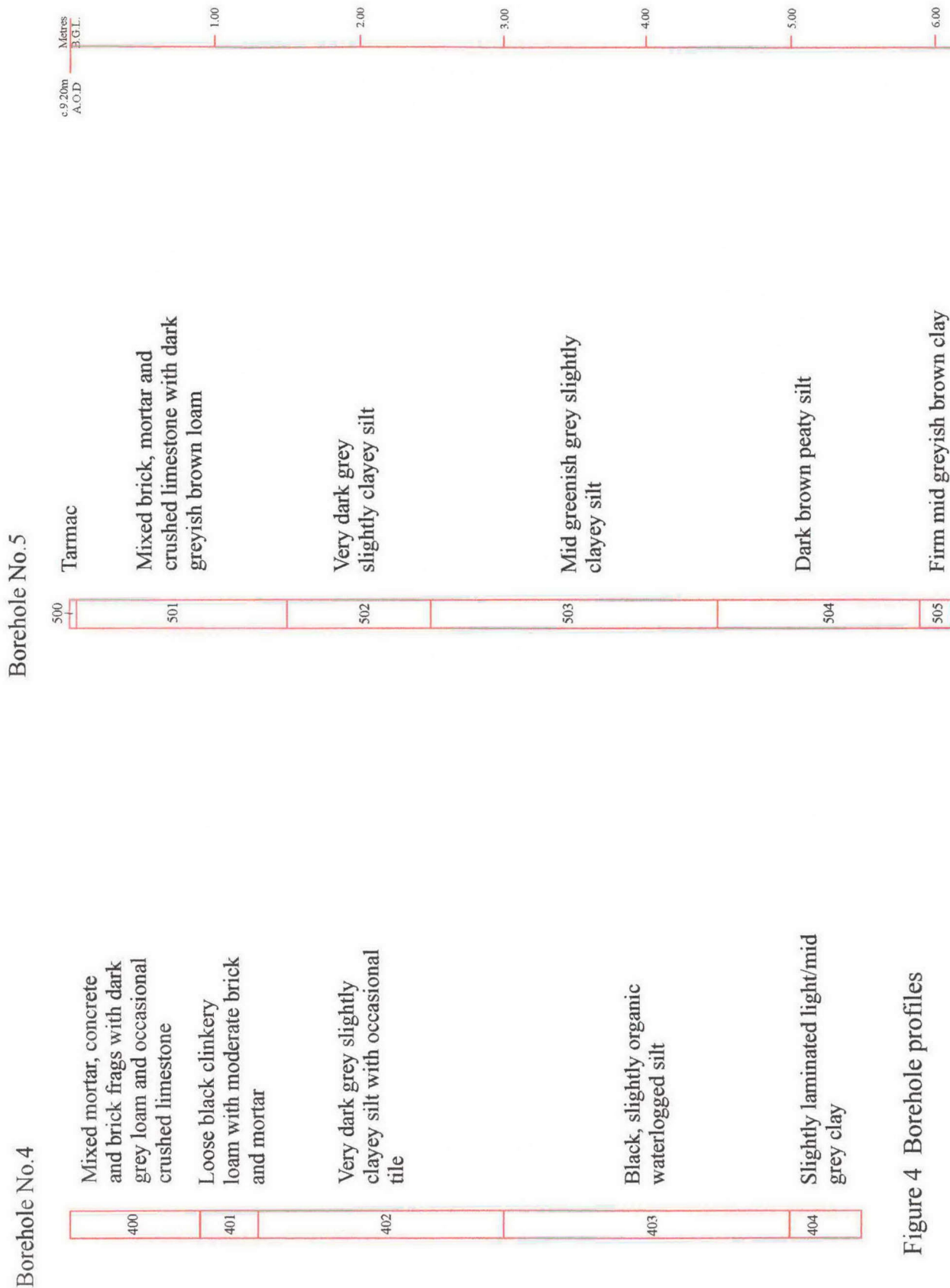


Figure 4 Borehole profiles

6. CONCLUSIONS AND PERIOD ANALYSIS

The extraction of useful archaeological information from boreholes is not easy but the observations made during this watching brief have been of some considerable archaeological interest and value. Evidence from the boreholes clearly indicates that the natural sub-soil dips down considerably from south to north across the site and that the depth of silts increases in the northern boreholes. These silts also become noticeably more organic towards the north of the site and Borehole 3 produced a small fragment of wooden plank. These observations, when taken with the available cartographic evidence, strongly suggest that much of the site lies, at least partly, over a documented but silted-up and buried, river channel in which the Tang Hall and Osbaldwick Becks meet the River Foss. No dating evidence was recovered from the boreholes but taking all the evidence together it seems likely that the lower silts and organic silts belong to the medieval period when the King's Fishpool occupied much of the area to the west, east and north. Further investigation of these in-situ silts may provide much environmental information about the area over a period of many centuries and would be a most desirable feature of any further archaeological work in the area.

6.1 Prehistoric and Roman periods (pre 1st – 5th centuries AD)

There was no evidence for any prehistoric activity on the site but this is rare in York. There was also no convincing evidence for any Roman activity on the site although there is evidence for Roman burials nearby.

6.2 Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods (5th – 11th centuries AD)

No evidence for either period was noted from this site but Anglian activity in this area of York is rare. There was no evidence for any Anglo-Scandinavian activity on this site but is known from nearby sites and some riverside activity of both periods might be expected.

6.3 Medieval (11th – 16th centuries AD)

The lower wet grey silts, recorded from all the boreholes, probably belong to this period although there is no dating evidence to confirm this. A piece of plank from within these silts could be part of a jetty or a riverside revetment.

6.4 Post – medieval (16th – 19th centuries AD)

Although no definite evidence for this period was noted from the site it possible that some of the deposits recorded, such as 103 and 202, might possibly belong to this period although this cannot be confirmed.

6.5 Modern (19th – 21st centuries AD)

Evidence for this period was quite common and deposits of this period are thought to occupy the uppermost 1.2 to 1.5m of all the boreholes. These deposits appear to be mainly dumps, levelling deposits, and demolition deposits which were probably laid down to reduce the risk of flooding.

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8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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