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ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**FORMER STONEGATE ARCADE,
BLAKE STREET,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2002 FIELD REPORT
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FORMER STONEGATE ARCADE,

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ABSTRACT

Between the end of April and August 2002 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at the former Stonegate Arcade, Blake Street, York. During various ground works it was observed that much of the area between Blake Street and the approximate centre of the site had been heavily disturbed by construction activity of the late 20th century. In the north-east part of the site a number of probable post-medieval dump and build-up deposits were recorded and at the extreme north-east of the works a possible clay floor overlain by a burnt deposit was noted. This may have been a small workshop in a backyard area and may also be of post-medieval date. The well should indicate an open area outside any structure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between April 30th and mid August 2002 York Archaeological Trust maintained an archaeological watching brief during the demolition of and subsequent redevelopment of the Stonegate Arcade in the centre of York (NGR SE 6019.5204, Figure 1). The work included the observation of the excavation of new service trenches, ground beam trenches, and holes for pile caps. The stratigraphy seen within a new lift shaft excavation was also recorded. Some notes were also made during the demolition of the existing buildings and the general site clearance and the results of these observations are included in this report.

All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 2002.452.

2. METHODOLOGY

The watching brief entailed recording any deposits, features, or structures encountered in the works. These notes, including measured sketches, were entered into a site notebook and processed into a form where they could be used for the preparation of this report during August 2002. The location of all drawn sections and areas of interest were measured in and subsequently transferred to a large scale Ordnance Survey map. The work was monitored at regular intervals until the completion of the groundwork.

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying drift geology of the site is Boulder clay over lacustrine clays with deposits of sand, known in places to be waterlogged, lying within and over the clay in places. Beneath this the solid geology is of Bunter and Keuper sandstones laid down in the Triassic period some 225 million years ago (Geological Survey 1967).

The site lies within the Roman Legionary Fortress and within the core of the medieval and modern city, north-east of the River Ouse. Access to the site was from Blake Street but much of the site lay away from and behind the Blake Street frontage in the south-western half of a block bounded by Blake Street to the south-west, Duncombe Place to the north-west, High Petergate to the north-east, and Stonegate to the south-east. The site is somewhat irregular, but measures c.55m north-south and c.30m east-west. Much of the site is level and lies at c.15.5m AOD.

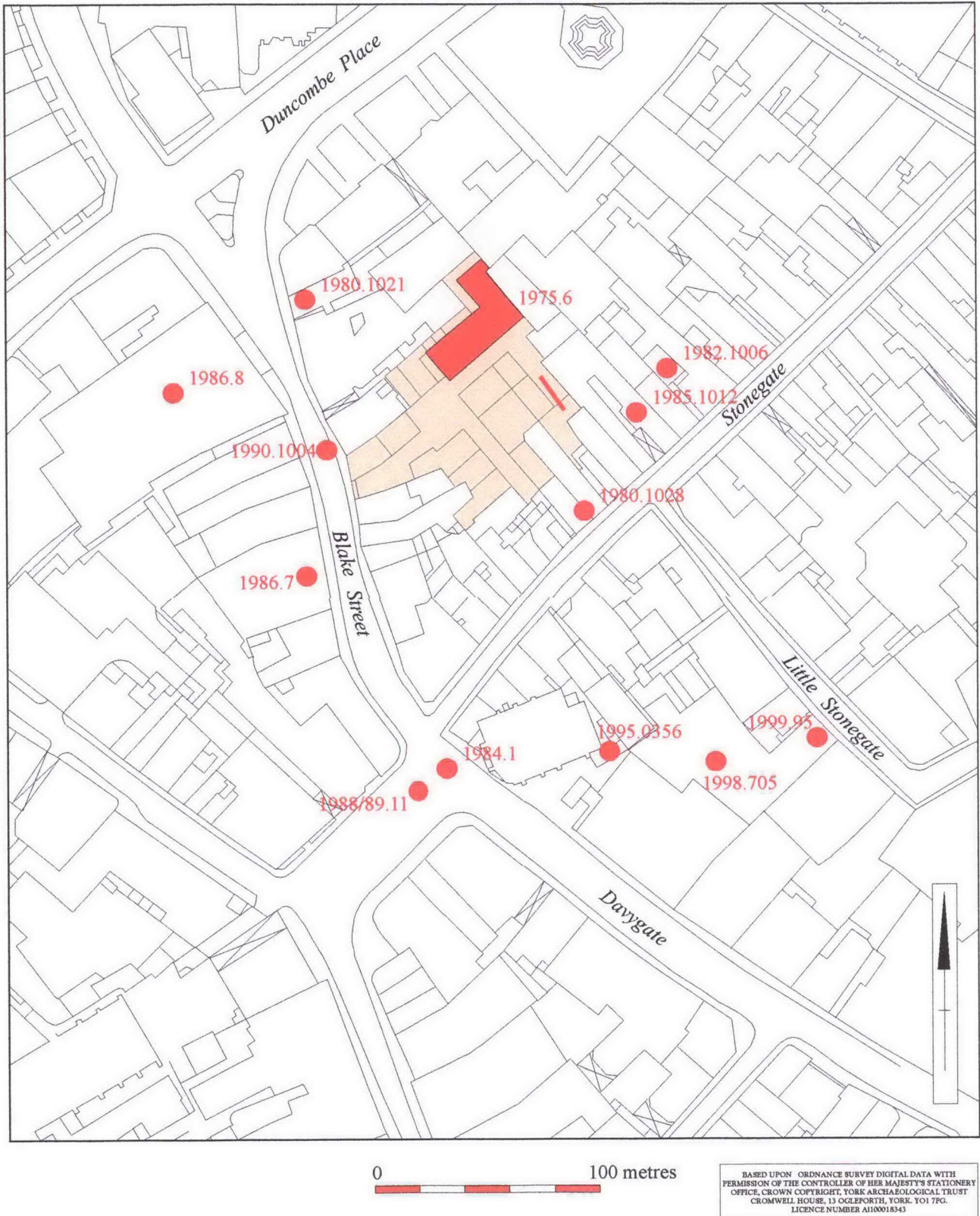


Figure 1 Location of site and archaeological sites in area

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. There have been quite a number of archaeological investigations (Figure 1) in the general area of the site. These include watching briefs and excavations, accession numbers 1975.1, 1980.1021, 1984.1, 1985.1012, 1986.7, 1986.8, 1988-89.11, 1990.1004, YORYM 1997.102, YORYM 1998.705, and YORYM 1999.95 carried out by the York Archaeological Trust (YAT 1997). Evidence from these investigations and an examination of the documentary and cartographic evidence for the site is discussed below period by period.

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

Although archaeological deposits of prehistoric date have not been found in central York, it seems that the York Moraine was a focus of prehistoric activity. Prehistoric finds, particularly Neolithic stone axes, are widely distributed on the high ground south-west of the River Ouse, and possible burials of Bronze Age and Iron Age date have also been found nearby (RCHM 1972, xxxvii-xxxix). Very recently, pottery of the Bronze Age has been recovered from the Holgate area of the city and possible Late Iron Age features may have been located at 1 – 5 Davygate.

No modern observations along Stonegate appear to have recorded in-situ Roman structures or deposits although Roman pottery has been recovered from contractors trenches along the street. A limestone altar base was found in Stonegate in 1883 but no details are available as to the precise location and depth of it (RCHM, 1962). A twice life-size head, identified as Constantine 1, in magnesian limestone, was found in Stonegate before 1823, but again no precise details of the circumstances are known.

C. Wellbeloved, writing in 1842, noted “the discovery of a Roman Street, with channel tiles, about forty years ago, when a deep sewer was made along the middle of Stonegate”. In 1892 Canon J. Raine described this road as being 6 feet deep, paved and concreted, and as having “a channel of grooved stone down the centre”. One of these central stones is in the Yorkshire Museum.

More recent observations, by York Archaeological Trust, include many timber and stone structures, features, occupation deposits, and build-up deposits at 1–5 Davygate (YORYM 1997.102, YORYM 1998.705, YORYM 1999.95) and a cobble surface and part of a possible Roman timber building at the Assembly Rooms site (1986.8). Earlier excavations by YAT on the present site, 9 Blake Street (1975.6, Hall 1997) revealed a deep and complex sequence of timber and stone structures, various features including a ditch, and many well-stratified occupation deposits. A series of Roman road surfaces were also excavated and recorded on this site.

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

No certain material of the Anglo-Saxon period is known from the immediate area although archaeological and documentary evidence suggest activity in the Minster area at this time. It is possible that some of “dark earths” seen overlying definite Roman material at 1–5 Davygate and at the present site, 9 Blake Street, belong to this period. There is, however, slight but clear evidence for activity of the Anglo-Scandinavian period in the area. Pottery of the period from 1–

5 Davygate suggested that some of the features and deposits observed and recorded are of Anglo-Scandinavian date and at 9 Blake Street robbing of a number of Roman walls could be convincingly dated to the period although the site did not appear to be occupied on a permanent basis.

4.4 Medieval Period (11th – 16th centuries)

Extensive features, structures, and occupation / build-up deposits of this date were excavated and recorded at 1–5 Davygate and build-up deposits of the period at the Assembly Rooms site were cut by a late medieval well. Two watching briefs in St Helen's Square have found human bones (1984.1) and human burials (1988-89.11) probably of medieval date. The previous excavations at 9 Blake Street produced pits, postholes, a well, a stone-lined pit filled with glaziers waste, and many dump deposits and build-up deposits belonging to this period.

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

There is much evidence for this period in the area. A stone built cellar, probably of the 16th century, was recorded at 1-5 Blake Street (1980.1021), and a dump deposit was noted at 14–16 Blake Street (1986.7). At 18–20 Stonegate (1980.1028) a well was discovered and deposits of the period have been recorded from 32–34 Stonegate (1982.1006) and 28 Stonegate (1985.1012). Many features, structural remains, and deposits are known from 1–5 Davygate and the present site, 9 Blake Street, produced extensive dumps and build-up deposits of the period.

4.6 Modern (19th – 21st centuries)

Much of the present ground level in the area is modern in origin but buried modern remains have been found in various locations. Deposits, features, and structural remains were identified at 1 – 5 Davygate and Victorian construction levels at St Helen's Church (1995.0356). A modern drain was recorded at sewer repairs adjacent to 7 Blake Street (1990.1004) and modern deposits have been noted from the present site.

4.7 Historical Evidence

Blake Street is first mentioned in a manuscript of 1150-1160 when it was recorded as Blaicastret (Palliser 1978, 6). The name could be derived from the Old Norse word *bleikr* meaning pale or white and if a derivative of this word it may suggest bleaching. An alternative could be from the personal name Bleiki. It has also been suggested that the name could derive from the nearby white buildings of St. Leonard's Hospital. By the 13th century a number of properties in Blake Street were owned by ecclesiastical institutions including York Minster, St. Leonard's Hospital and Whitby Abbey. The property owned by Whitby Abbey may have been a prebendary house, and if so, may have been quite large and well-built. During the 18th century, road improvements in Blake Street, probably associated with the construction of the Assembly Rooms, involved the demolition of some properties and alterations to others. In 1827 an establishment devoted to hot, cold, vapour and shower baths opened and this may have been quite a substantial building, perhaps with cellars. During the later 19th century and the 20th century most of the ground floors along the street became shops or offices.

Stonegate is first definitely recorded, as Steingate, in 1148-1175 although it may be mentioned in an earlier manuscript of 1118-1119 (Palliser 1978, 15). The name is usually believed to be

derived from the possibility that the stone paved *via praetoria*, the principal street of the Roman Fortress, was still in use in the early medieval period. Another possibility is that the name comes from the transporting of large quantities of stone for the construction of the Norman (or ?Anglo-Saxon) minster. The upper part of Stonegate was in the Liberty of St. Peter and many of the properties belonged to the church and, as in Blake Street, included prebendary houses. During the medieval period Stonegate extended from Minster Gates to the river assuming its present length after the creation of St Helen's Square in the first half of the 18th century. Goldsmiths and glass-painters are known to have worked in or near Stonegate in the medieval period and printers, engravers and bookshops are documented from the 16th century onwards. By the early 18th century these crafts and trades dominated the street and Francis Drake records that the only property occupied by any member of the clergy was the old deanery (Drake 1736). At least one warehouse existed in Stonegate in the 18th century since the parish church, St. Helen, Stonegate, received an unspecified amount from renting it out.

4.8 Cartographic Evidence

The earliest map of York, dating to around 1545, gives no indication of the extent of development in the area at that time. On Speed's 1610 map of York buildings, presumably houses, are shown lining Stonegate and Blake Street with apparently open ground to the rear. Maps of the 18th century, such as Jefferey's of 1772 and Chassereau's of 1750, show the street frontage fully occupied with gardens and possibly orchards to the rear. Some maps, such as those of White in 1785 and Ward 1785, show the entire area as built up, but this may have been a convention used on these maps, which are by no means as accurate or detailed as the modern Ordnance Survey maps.

The 1852 Ordnance Survey map shows the study area almost entirely built up. Several passageways between buildings on the street frontages lead from Stonegate and Blake Street to narrow courtyards possibly lined with poor-quality housing or workshops. Most of the buildings shown on the 1852 O.S. map along Stonegate are still there. Before the construction of the Stonegate Arcade in 1977 the site was largely occupied by the City Garage, a purely 20th century structure. After at least one major rebuild the Stonegate Arcade was demolished during the first half of 2002.

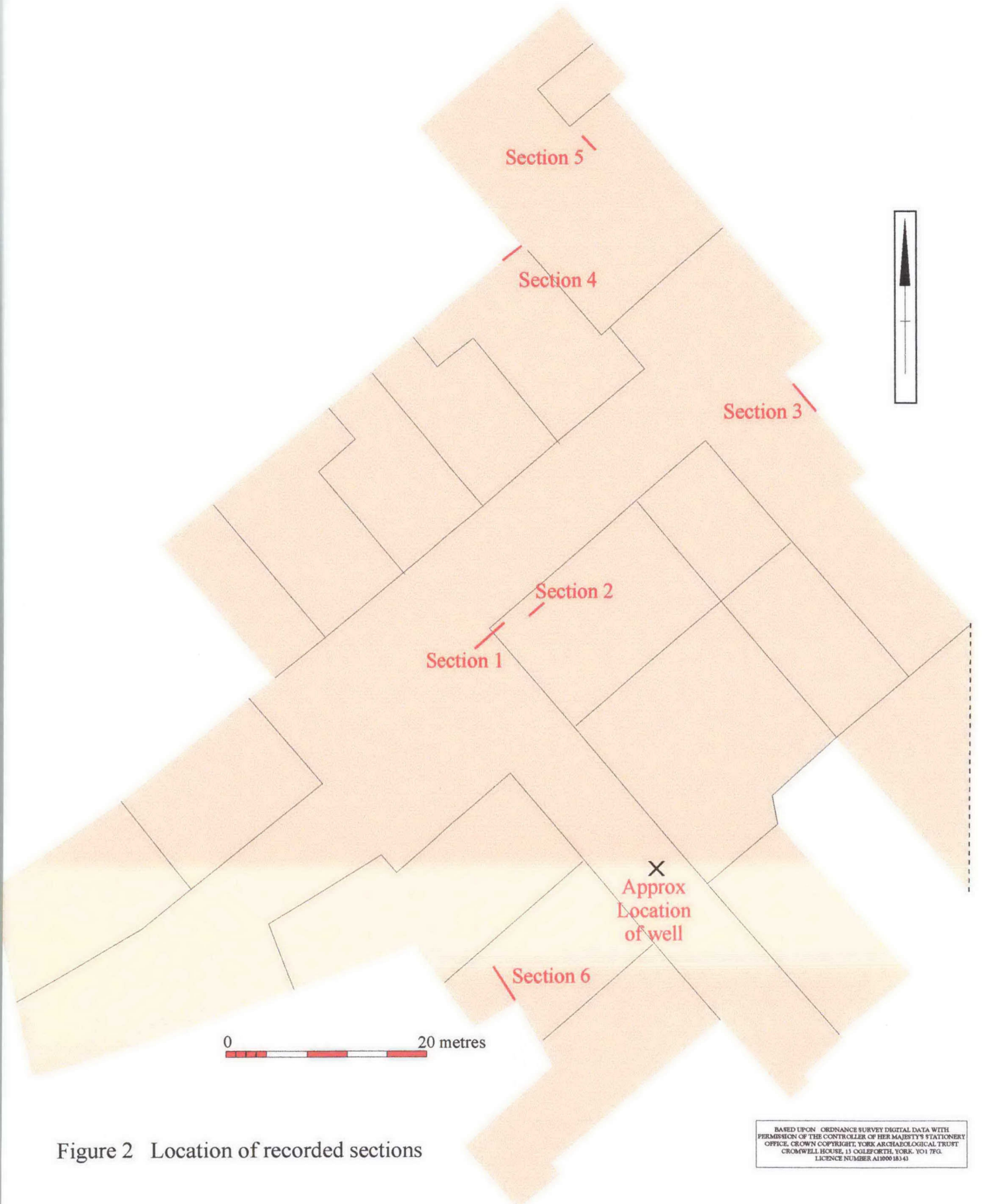


Figure 2 Location of recorded sections

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 Section 1 (Figure 3)

5.1.1 The lowest recorded deposit seen in this section, at c.0.85m – 1.6m below ground level (BGL), was a probable build-up deposit of mid greyish-brown loam (1008). The base of this layer was not seen and it is possible that it was a thick dump. It was partly sealed by dark brown loam (1007), also probably a build-up deposit. Above 1007 was a dark greyish-brown loam with moderate amounts of white mortar (1006). This may have been a demolition deposit. Overlying it was a probable demolition deposit composed of broken tile and white mortar with some brick and dark grey loam (1005).

5.1.2 Cut into 1008, 1007, and possibly 1006 and 1005 was a feature (1004) of uncertain shape, size, and function. It was at least 1.3m across and 0.4m deep with a steeply sloping north-east edge and a gently sloping base. It is probably best interpreted as a clearance cut associated with the Stonegate Arcade and it had been backfilled with pale yellow crushed limestone (1003). It had been cut, to the south-west, by a foundation trench (1002) which was at least 0.8m wide and 0.7m deep with a vertical north-east side. It had been filled with light grey concrete (1001) which was probably part of a ground beam from the Stonegate Arcade. Sealing this, and contexts 1003 – 1006, was the uppermost layer seen at this point, a mixture of crushed limestone, brick, concrete, and dark grey loam (1000). This was probably a demolition deposit reused as a levelling deposit.

5.2 Section 2 (Figure 4)

5.2.1 In this section the lowest deposit recorded was seen at between c.1.7m - 1.9m BGL, although it did appear to go deeper. It was a dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (2006) and was probably a build-up deposit. Overlying it was a layer of fairly clean mid brown loam (2005). This was up to 1.1m in thickness where seen and may have been a substantial dump. Above it was a moderately clean dark brown loam (2004), probably a build-up deposit.

5.2.2 Cut into 2004 was a probably linear feature (2003) which may have been aligned north-west to south-east. It was c.0.7m across and at least 0.5m deep with near vertical sides curving very quickly into a flat base. It was probably a drain trench. It had two backfills the lower of which was a fine light grey gravel (2002) and the upper was a pale yellow crushed limestone (2001). The topmost deposit recorded in this section was a dark greyish-brown loam with moderate tile and mortar (2000). It may have been a levelling deposit.

5.3 Section 3 (Figure 5)

5.3.1 The earliest deposit in this section was dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (3004) the base of which was not seen but lay greater than 1m BGL. The top of this deposit, probably a build-up deposit, was at c.0.6m BGL. Overlying 3004 was a layer of clean mid brown sandy clay (3003) which was up to 0.2m thick. The north-west part of 3003 was fairly level but the south-east part sloped gently downwards. Although this clay may have been a dump, levelling deposit, or capping deposit it is also possible that it was a floor. Immediately overlying it was a layer of charcoal containing fragments of burnt daub (3002). This deposit was generally between 0.05m and 0.1m thick and is interpreted as a dump or levelling deposit although other functions may be possible.

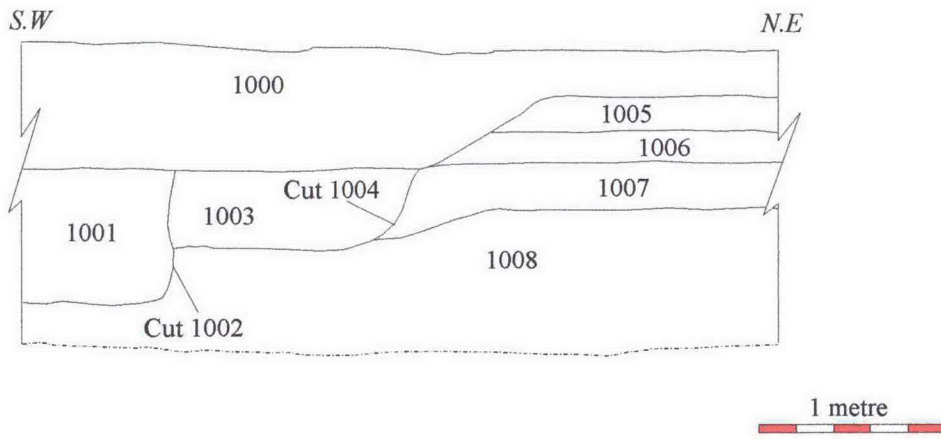


Figure 3 Section 1. South-east facing

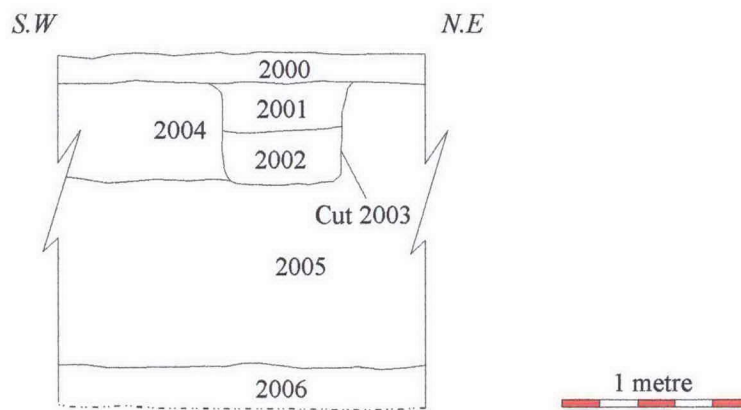


Figure 4 Section 2. South-east facing

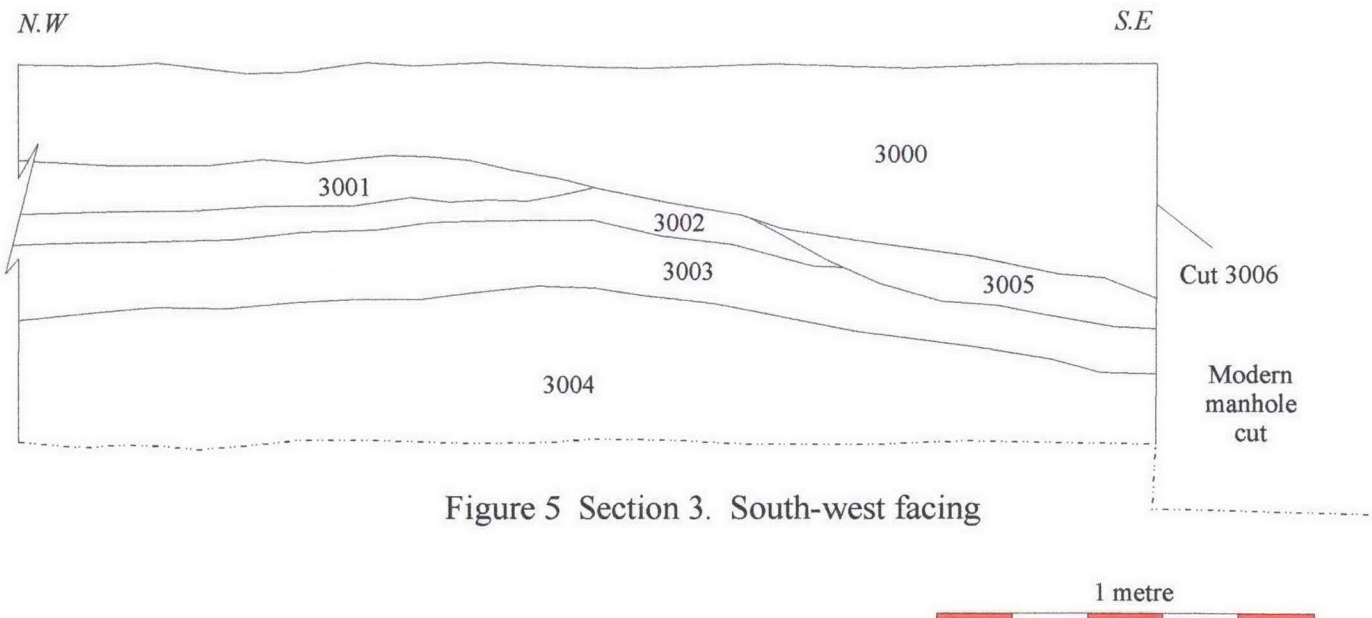


Figure 5 Section 3. South-west facing

5.3.2 Overlying the north-western part of 3002 there was a layer of mid brown loam containing moderate quantities of mortar and tile (3001). The function of 3001 is uncertain but it may have a dump or demolition deposit. Sealing parts of 3002 and 3003, and possibly cutting them, was a deposit of soft cream mortar (3005), which may have been a dump or levelling deposit since it roughly filled the depression left by the suspected subsidence of 3003. The uppermost context was a fairly clean dark brown loam (3000). This was probably a build-up deposit although it could possibly have been a dump or even a levelling deposit.

5.4 Section 4 (Figure 6)

5.4.1 The stratigraphy in this section was more complex than elsewhere and open to a certain amount of interpretation but the sequence is probably as follows. The earliest context noted in this section was a semi-decayed post of uncertain shape and function. It was c.0.2m across and may be an isolated structural timber. It was, however, located a short distance, c.0.2m, below the wall of a standing building and may be part of its foundations. If so, then contexts 4005, 4006, and 4007 would all be earlier than 4008. Possibly overlying 4008 was a dark grey loam containing moderate quantities of white mortar (4007). This may have been a build-up deposit, a dump, or a demolition deposit.

5.4.2 Cutting away the south-west extent of 4007 was a feature (4006) of uncertain shape, size, and function. It was at least 0.3m wide and 0.45m deep with a near-vertical north-east edge. The only backfill identified was a fairly clean mid brown loam (4005). Possibly cutting away the north-east extent of context 4007 was a short, c.0.55m, length of mortared brick (4002). This was possibly part of the foundations for an above ground wall (4000) which was part of a building on the boundary of the development. Repointing and machine damage made it difficult to see detail in the brickwork but the bricks were generally c.0.22m by 0.06m

5.4.3 Believed to be later than context 4000, and confined to the south-west end of the section, was a layer of pale yellow crushed limestone (4004) thought to be a levelling deposit associated with the current works. Overlying it was a deposit of pale grey gravel (4003), very probably another similar levelling deposit or possibly a dump. The latest context identified in this area was a reinforced concrete pile (4001) known to be part of the current work.

5.5 Section 5 (Figure 7)

5.5.1 The earliest deposit in this section, at c.0.85m BGL, was a fairly clean dark brown very slightly clayey loam (5006). The base of this deposit was not seen in the lowest part of this section, at c.1m BGL. Context 5006 was probably a build-up deposit. Overlying it was a fairly clean probable build-up deposit of mid brown loam (5005). Sealing it was a dark greyish-brown loam (5004), again quite clean and probably a build-up deposit.

5.5.2 Overlying 5004 was a mixture of pale yellow crushed limestone and dark grey loam (5003), probably a levelling deposit. The south-east extent of 5003 had been cut away by a shallow feature (5002) of uncertain function. The full profile of 5002 was not seen but it was at least 0.5m across and 0.25m deep with a moderately sloping north-west edge. It had a backfill of brick, tile, and dark grey loam (5001). The uppermost context was a layer of concrete (5000) laid down during the current works.

5.6 Section 6 (Figure 8)

5.6.1 The lowest deposit recorded in this section, at c.1.8m BGL and forming the base of the lift shaft, was a damp dark greyish-brown loam with moderate amounts of light to mid brown structured organic loam (6004). This may have been a dump or build-up deposit although it is possible that the organic patches were the backfills of rubbish pits. Overlying 6004 was a very dark grey slightly clayey loam (6003). Above it was a dark grey slightly clayey loam (6002). Both 6003 and 6002 were thought to be build-up deposits.

5.6.2 Sealing 6002 there was a deposit of dark greyish-brown loam with moderate amounts of brown clay and white mortar (6001). The function of this deposit is uncertain but it is possible that it may represent superimposed occupation deposits. The uppermost context in this section was a mixture of mid brown clay and dark grey loam containing some crushed limestone and brick (6000). This was probably, at least partly, formed by the churning up of the upper layers of 6001 by the current building work.

5.7 The Well

5.7.1 A well was exposed during demolition work and when seen by the site archaeologist was two thirds covered by modern concrete and brick demolition rubble (7003). It was, however, c.1.2m across and at least 1.5m deep. It was constructed of medium sized limestone blocks (7000), each c.0.15m square on the external face, and c.0.2m in length, with sharp arris's and no mortar bedding. When originally uncovered it was apparently capped by a slab of York Stone (7001). Some of the modern demolition rubble had fallen into the inside but it was possible to ascertain that the uppermost ancient fill within this well was dark silt (7002). For safety reasons it was not investigated in detail.

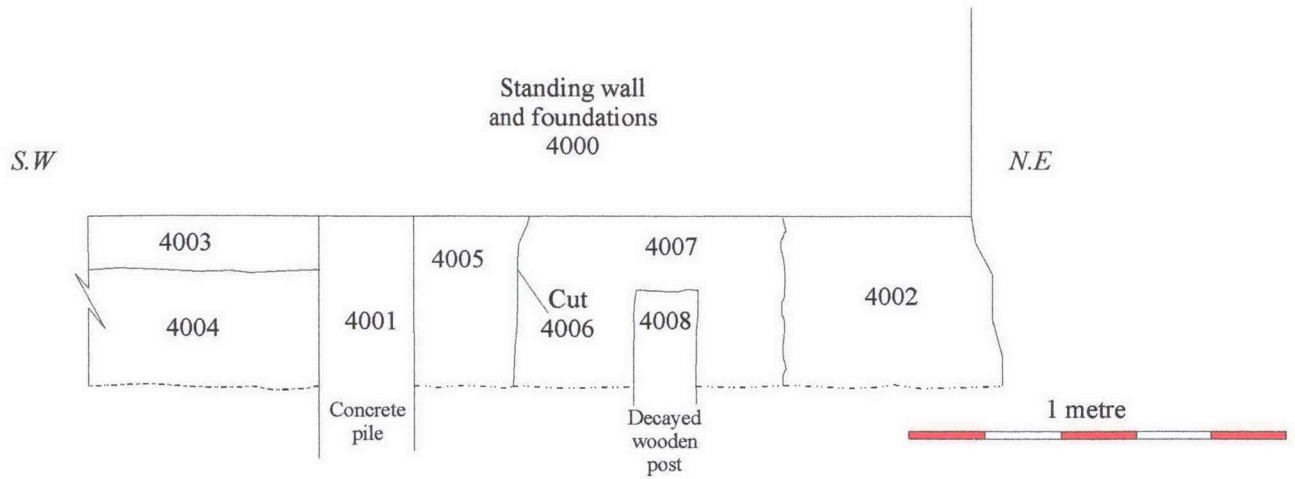


Figure 6 Section 4. South-east facing

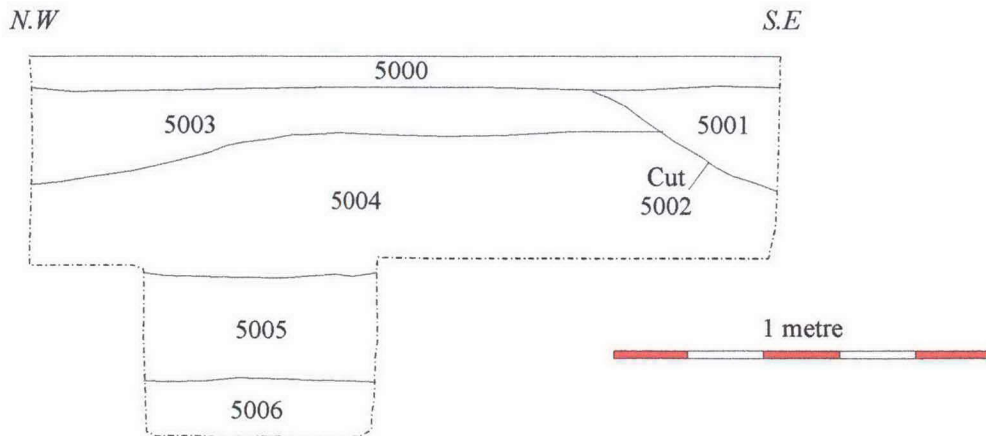


Figure 7 Section 5. South-west facing

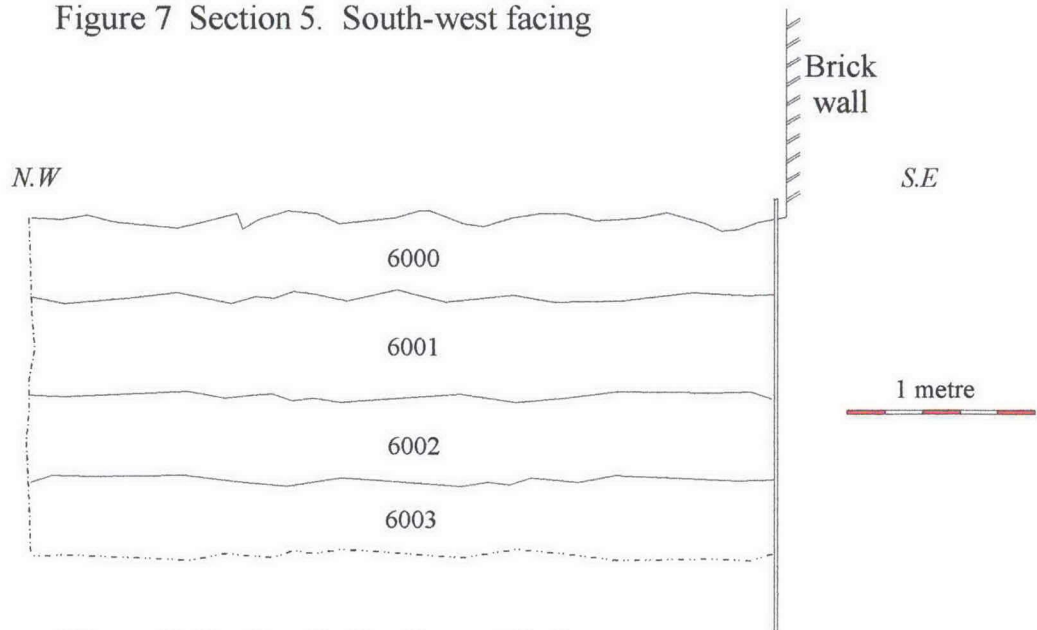


Figure 8 Section 6. South-west facing

6. CONCLUSIONS AND PERIOD ANALYSIS

Only two finds, both pot sherds, were recovered during this watching brief which makes dating difficult but comparison with the adjacent and underlying excavations of 1975–6 enable a number of broad conclusions to be made. Disturbance to archaeological deposits was limited and for the most part involved thick build-up deposits in backyard areas away from street fronts. However, the possible clay floor 3003 and its overlying burnt debris, 3002, may indicate some form of heat-intensive semi-industrial activity in the vicinity. It is possible, but cannot be verified, that the well may be associated with the activity noted above although it could belong to a building fronting onto Stonegate, or just possibly Blake Street. The possible subsidence of these two contexts may point to underlying pits or similar features of some size, a not unusual occurrence in an area such as this. The organic content in the lowest deposit in the lift shaft is of interest since deposits of this nature have not previously been noted in this 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 and the works did not penetrate far enough down to have reached any remains of this period. Roman remains are known to be abundant on this site but again in the areas observed the depth reached was not considered to have disturbed and Roman material. One of the pieces of pot from the lift shaft was from a mortarium (mixing bowl) possibly of the 2nd century. It was, however, clearly residual at the level at which it was found.

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 and the known areas of substantial Anglo-Scandinavian activity do not at present include this particular part of central York. It is also considered that the depth reached should not have damaged any material of this period had it been present.

6.3 Medieval (11th – 16th centuries AD)

The paucity of finds from this watching brief makes dating of the observed deposits uncertain but by referring to the previous work on the site it is possible to suggest that some medieval deposits, such as 1008, 2005, and 2006 may have been encountered during the current work. A piece of medieval pot, possibly 13th century, from 6004 suggested that some of the deposits, such as 6004, 6003, and 6002, belong to this period. Judging by the size of the limestone blocks making up well 7000 it could belong to this period.

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

Again the lack of dating evidence makes it difficult to be certain about assigning deposits to this period. However, the relative lack of previous modern disturbance towards the north-east end of the site suggests that many of the obviously non-modern deposits close to the modern ground surface should be of this date. These may include contexts 1005 – 1007, 2004, 3001, 3002, 3003, 3004, 4005 – 4008, 5004 – 5006, and 6000 and 6001. It is possible that well 7000 belongs to this period although the lack of any brick in the fabric may suggest a medieval date rather than a post-medieval one.

6.5 Modern (19th – 21st centuries AD)

Evidence for this period was abundant and deposits of this period are thought to occupy the upper part of Sections 1, 2, 4, and 5. Most of these were thought to be directly related to the current redevelopment.

7. LIST OF SOURCES

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Hall, 1997.	Excavations in the Praetentura. <i>The Archaeology of York</i> , AY 3/4.
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RCHM, 1972	City of York, South-West of the Ouse. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.
RCHM, 1975	City of York, North-East of the Ouse. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.
YAT Gazetteer, 1997	York Archaeological Trust

8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. It can manage projects, provide professional advice and monitor archaeological works to ensure high quality, cost effective archaeology. Its staff have a considerable depth and variety of professional experience and an international reputation for research, development and maximising the public, educational and commercial benefits of archaeology. Based in York its services are available throughout Britain and beyond.



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