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**DEAN COURT HOTEL,  
DUNCOMBE PLACE,  
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2002 FIELD REPORT  
NUMBER 5**

**DEAN COURT HOTEL,  
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## ABSTRACT

*Intermittently through January 2002 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on the excavation of a new lift pit in the cellar of the Dean Court Hotel, Duncombe Place, York. The work was undertaken for the Dossor Group, Consulting Engineers and Surveyors on behalf of the Dean Court Hotel. The watching brief revealed organic dumps and levelling deposits thought to be dateable to the Anglo-Scandinavian period below post-medieval cellar disturbance and walls, and the modern foundations and concrete floor of the Dean Court Hotel cellar.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Between 10<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2002 York Archaeological Trust (YAT) carried out a periodic watching brief on the excavation of a lift pit at the Dean Court Hotel, Duncombe Place, York (NGR SE 6219 5216) (Figure 1). The work was undertaken for the Dossor Group on behalf of the Dean Court Hotel under an operations notice submitted to the City of York Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2002.

### 1.1 Methodology

The lift shaft was hand excavated, under archaeological supervision, by the building contractor, Transcore Limited, to a depth of c.1.6m below the existing concrete floor of the cellar. The deposits revealed were cleaned, drawn, measured and recorded. Recording followed procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust *Context Recording Manual* (1996).

Site records and finds are currently stored with YAT under the Yorkshire Museum accession code: YORYM:2002.420.

### 1.2 Geology and Topography

The site lies on glacial boulder clay on top of a natural glacial moraine, and is situated close to its highest point. The solid geology is Bunter and Keuper Sandstone laid down in the Triassic period (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) 1967). In general the area surrounding the hotel is relatively flat at c.16.30m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The cellar had truncated the archaeological deposits, the base of cellar disturbance being situated at c.13.75m AOD, and the cellar floor is at c.14.65m AOD.

### 1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

The area in which the Dean Court Hotel is situated is an interesting one from an archaeological point of view.

The lift pit would have been situated within the Roman legionary fortress just to the south of the main north-west to south-east aligned Roman road known as the Via Principalis the route of which is followed by High Petergate. Little work has been done in this sector of the Roman fortress and it is difficult to predict what buildings may lie below the Dean Court Hotel.

The earliest two phases of the Roman fortress from 71/79-100 AD and c.100-160 AD involved the construction of buildings in timber although the layout of these is not well understood.

These early timber phases were superseded by stone built barrack blocks which were built in c.160 AD and were adapted and modified through to c.400 AD. Large stone built barrack blocks appear to line the north-eastern side of the street, and these, along with the forum, were uncovered during the excavations at York Minster between 1966 and 1973 (RCHM 1995). Excavations at Blake Street (Hall 1997) revealed smaller stone barrack blocks flanking the southern side of a road and residential and perhaps officers quarters to the north of it. There does appear to be space for a series of small barrack blocks, of the size located in Davygate (Wenham 1962) between the south side of the Via Principalis and the backs of the officers quarters located at Blake Street. This hypothesis is, however, not grounded on any archaeological evidence at present.

The fortress is believed to have been occupied in the Anglian periods (c.400 AD to 900 AD). Anglian finds have been located in the eastern corner of the deteriorating Roman fortress and St. Leonard's place as well as under York Minster. However the location of the Anglian Minster is still uncertain.

In the medieval period Duncombe Place was known as Lop Lane, a street that ran from High Petergate to the site of St. Leonard's Hospital which was situated in the eastern corner of the former Roman fortress. Lop Lane was first mentioned in 1346. Large portions of St. Leonard's Hospital still survive close to the Deans Court Hotel, fragments of walling have been located in St. Wilfrid's Catholic Church, a 12<sup>th</sup> century undercroft is still visible in the Theatre Royal, and the Red House on the corner between St. Leonard's Place and Duncombe Place has substantial visible walls as well. Lop Lane may have been lined with timber-framed houses, examples of which are still visible in High Petergate.

Houses 4, 5 and 6 Duncombe Place, which are part of the Dean Court Hotel, contain timber framing (undated), incorporated in two mid 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings (RCHM 1981, 130). Lop Lane was widened in 1785 to 15ft (c.4.6m) and was known as Little Blake Street in c.1800. In 1859-64 it was enlarged again to its present width of over 100ft (c.30.5m) by demolishing the south-eastern side of the street completely. It was renamed after Dean A. W. Duncombe. The Catholic Church of St. Wilfrid's was built in 1864 near the site of a chapel that had been opened in 1760.

At York Minster Roman archaeological deposits were located at c.13.2m AOD in the west tower underpinning works and close to the south transept, Roman was at c.12.6m AOD and the top of Anglo-Scandinavian deposits were found at c.14.0m AOD. At Blake Street Roman deposits were located at a higher level at c.14.0m AOD.

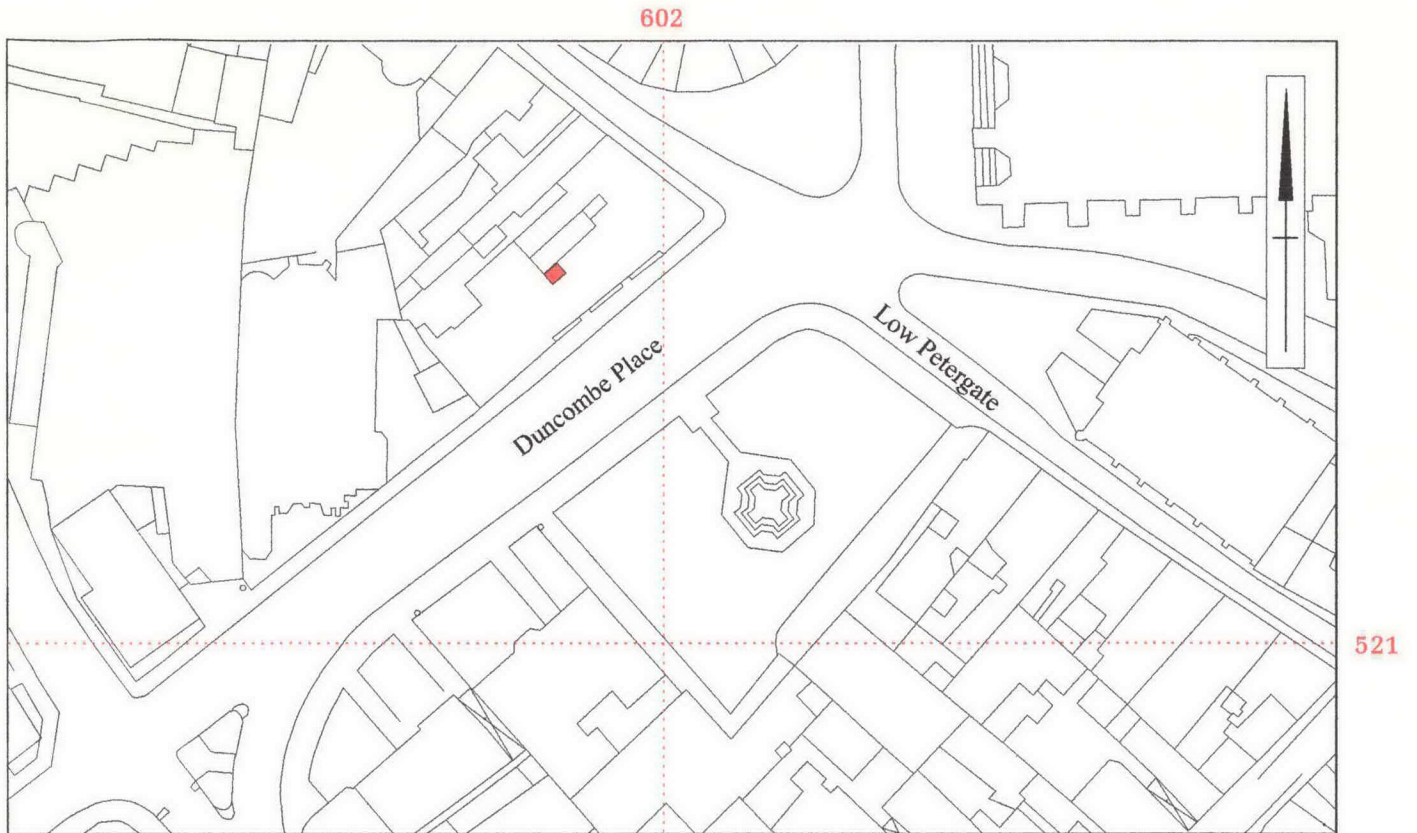


Figure 1 Trench location

0 30 metres

BASED UPON THE 1995 ORDNANCE SURVEY DIGITAL DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO1 7PG. LICENCE NUMBER AH00018343

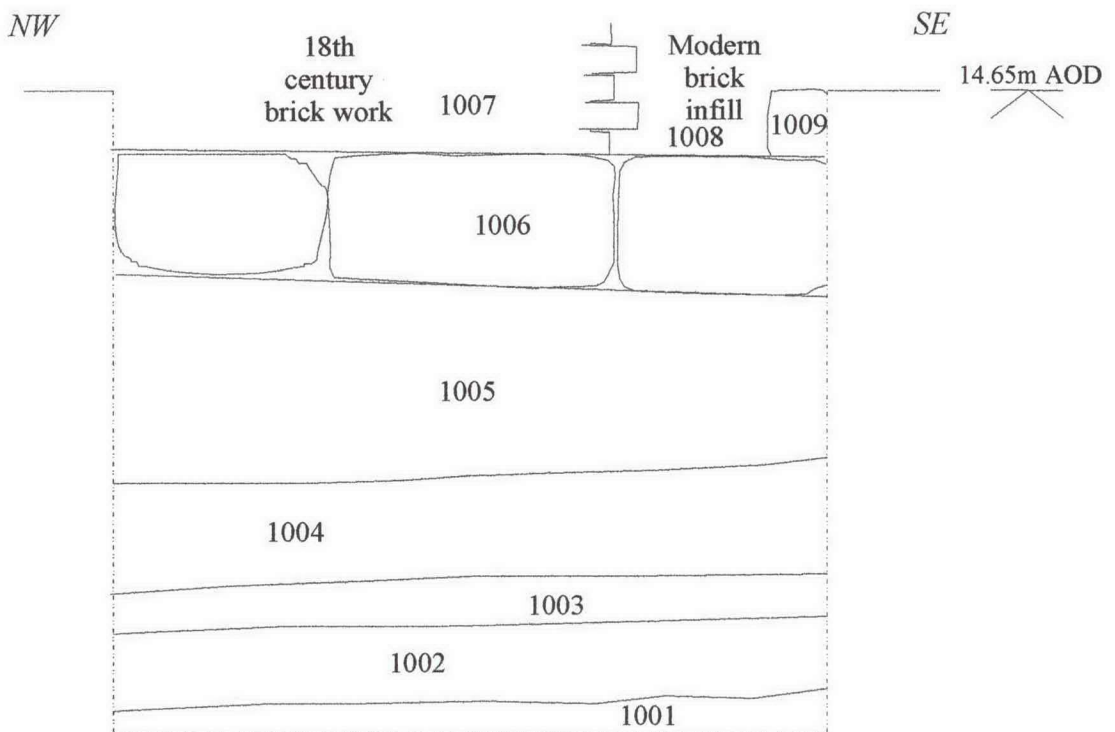


Figure 2 South west facing section

0 1 metre

## **2. RESULTS**

The deposits are considered in chronological order from the bottom (earliest) to the top (latest). No stratified pottery was recovered from any of the deposits, so all dates are hypothetical based on comparisons of depth with the York Minster excavations.

The earliest archaeological deposit was a dark grey clay (1001) which contained moderate dark brown to black organic silt spotting and occasional cobbles. This was located at c.13.13m AOD. This may be a disturbed Roman layer or an Anglo-Scandinavian levelling deposit or floor layer.

This was sealed by a dark brown to black organic clay silt (1002) which was up to 0.22m thick and contained occasional bone and wood fragments. No structures were visible within this deposit and so it is interpreted as a build-up or dump, probably of Anglo-Scandinavian date.

On top of this a second levelling layer or floor of mid grey clay (1003) was located. This was up to 0.10m thick and it contained occasional sandstone fragments. It was not clear whether these deposits were interior to a building or represent levelling and dumping within a yard area. A deposit (1004) very similar in composition to (1002) was then laid down. This contained moderate bone fragments, identifiable as large mammal. None of the bone was retained as no fragment appeared to show signs of working. This deposit represents the top of preserved archaeology, which was situated at c.13.75m AOD.

The truncation cut for the construction of a post-medieval cellar was observed to have removed all later archaeological deposits at this point. The cut contained up to 0.50m of brick rubble, tile and mortar hard-core (1005). All of the walls surrounding the lift-shaft appear to have been founded on large limestone blocks (1006) which may have been robbed and reused from St. Leonard's Hospital close by. The earliest brick walls (1007) within the lift shaft appear to be of 18<sup>th</sup> century date, suggesting that the building that is currently standing simply reused the foundations and cellars of earlier structures on the site. Modern brick infill (1008) and a concrete floor for the cellar (1009) were also observed. The concrete cellar floor is situated at c.14.65m AOD.

## **3. FINDS ASSESSMENT**

Two joining sherds of unstratified wheel-thrown pottery with a spalled burnished surface were recovered. The fabric is reddened and the sherd has been burned. It is likely to be either Roman or 11<sup>th</sup> century Stamford ware.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Significant organic deposits have been located beneath the cellar floors of the Dean Court Hotel. These probably relate to Anglo-Scandinavian levelling and dumping, but may also be interpreted as floors and occupational build-up within a building. It is difficult to be certain which of these possibilities is most likely as no dateable stratified Anglo-Scandinavian material was recovered. These deposits probably seal Roman occupation relating to the stone buildings within the fortress.

## 5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This watching brief has proved the existence of organic deposits within an area of the City not normally associated with them. If further ground works are undertaken in the future it would be useful to excavate them archaeologically to determine their full nature and character.

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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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