



111956

345

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
TRUST

**GRAY'S COURT,
CHAPTER HOUSE STREET,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**



**2001 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 55**

**GRAY'S COURT,
CHAPTER HOUSE STREET,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

CONTENTS

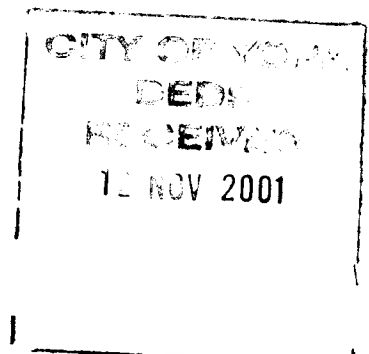
ABSTRACT

1. INTRODUCTION
2. METHODOLOGY
3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY
4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND
5. THE WATCHING BRIEF
6. CONCLUSIONS
7. LIST OF SOURCES
8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

List of Figures

- | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| Figure 1 | Site location |
| Figure 2 | Location of trench |
| Figure 3 | North-west facing Section 1 |
| Figure 4 | South-east facing Section 2 |

© York Archaeological Trust: A registered charity
Cromwell House, 13 Ogleforth, York YO1 7FG
Tel. (01904) 663000 Fax. (01904) 663024
e-mail:enquiries@yorkarchaeology.co.uk



ABSTRACT

In October 2001 York Archaeological Trust undertook an archaeological watching brief at Gray's Court, Chapter House Street, York. A single trench was observed during work to replace a broken drain close to the main entrance of Gray's Court. Modern service trenches had damaged or destroyed much of the stratigraphy to a depth of 2m or more below the modern ground level. Dumps and build-up deposits, possibly associated with post-medieval building activities were recorded as were possible post-medieval garden soils. In the lower part of the northern corner of the trench there was a thick deposit of clean dark loam, possibly of Anglo-Scandinavian or medieval date, and thought also to be an accumulation of garden soils despite the proximity to the main entrance. There was no evidence for features or structures other than those of modern date.

1. INTRODUCTION

Between October 9th and 11th 2001 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at Gray's Court, Chapter House Street, York (NGR SE 6044 5227, Figure 1).

This watching brief was initiated by the need to repair or replace a damaged drainpipe close to the main entrance to Gray's Court. Since the site lies within the area of the cathedral close of York Minster, a scheduled ancient monument, it was deemed necessary for the work to be undertaken under close archaeological supervision.

An initial small excavation revealed that the pipe had failed completely having sunk into a large void below it causing the pipe to also fracture as well as subside by at c.0.5m. At this point work was halted in order to plan and cost the extra work needed for the repairs. It was decided to expand the initial excavation and then dig out the loose soils around the void until firm soil, or a depth of 2m, was reached. The lower part of the shaft would then be filled with concrete, the drain replaced, and the upper part of the shaft filled with more concrete in order to minimise any future problems with the drain.

The initial work was undertaken by D & A Construction Ltd. The subsequent expansion of the excavation, horizontally and vertically, and the repairs to the drain were undertaken by H. Watson and Son (York) Ltd on behalf of the College of York St John.

All records of the watching brief are currently stored with the York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum site code YORYM 2001.12912.

2. METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork consisted of the observation of the excavation of the shaft dug to allow the repairs to take place. Most deposits were removed by machine but the installation of shoring required a certain amount of hand digging. An archaeologist was present on site at all times that digging was in progress to note and record any archaeology revealed within the trench.

Recording followed the procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust *Context Recording Manual* (1996). Two of the standing sections, regarded as representative of the trench, were recorded as measured sketches on site and drawn up at a scale of 1:10 as soon after the site visit as possible.

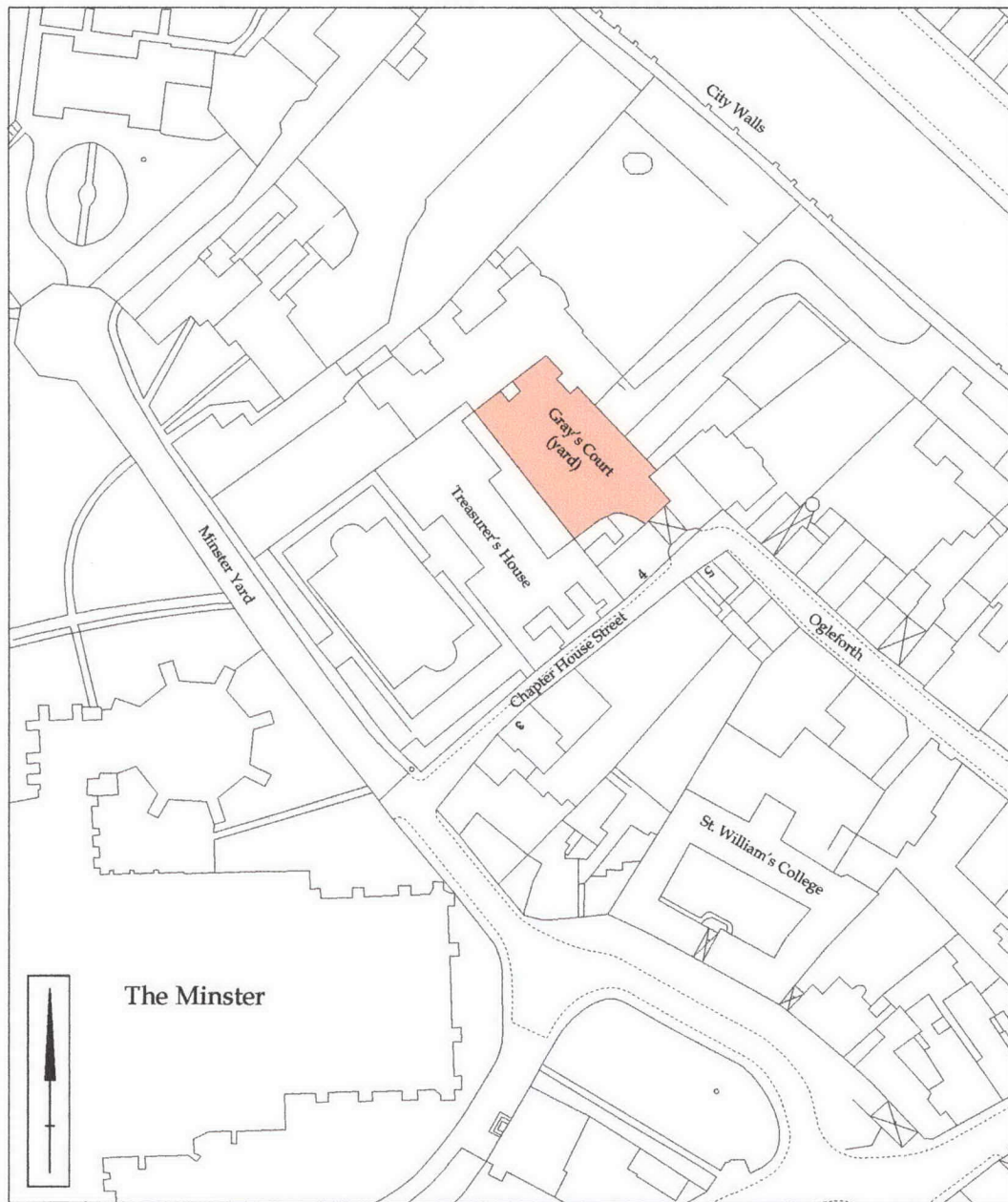


Figure 1 Site location

BASED UPON 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 7FG.
LICENCE NUMBER A1100018343

0 50 metres

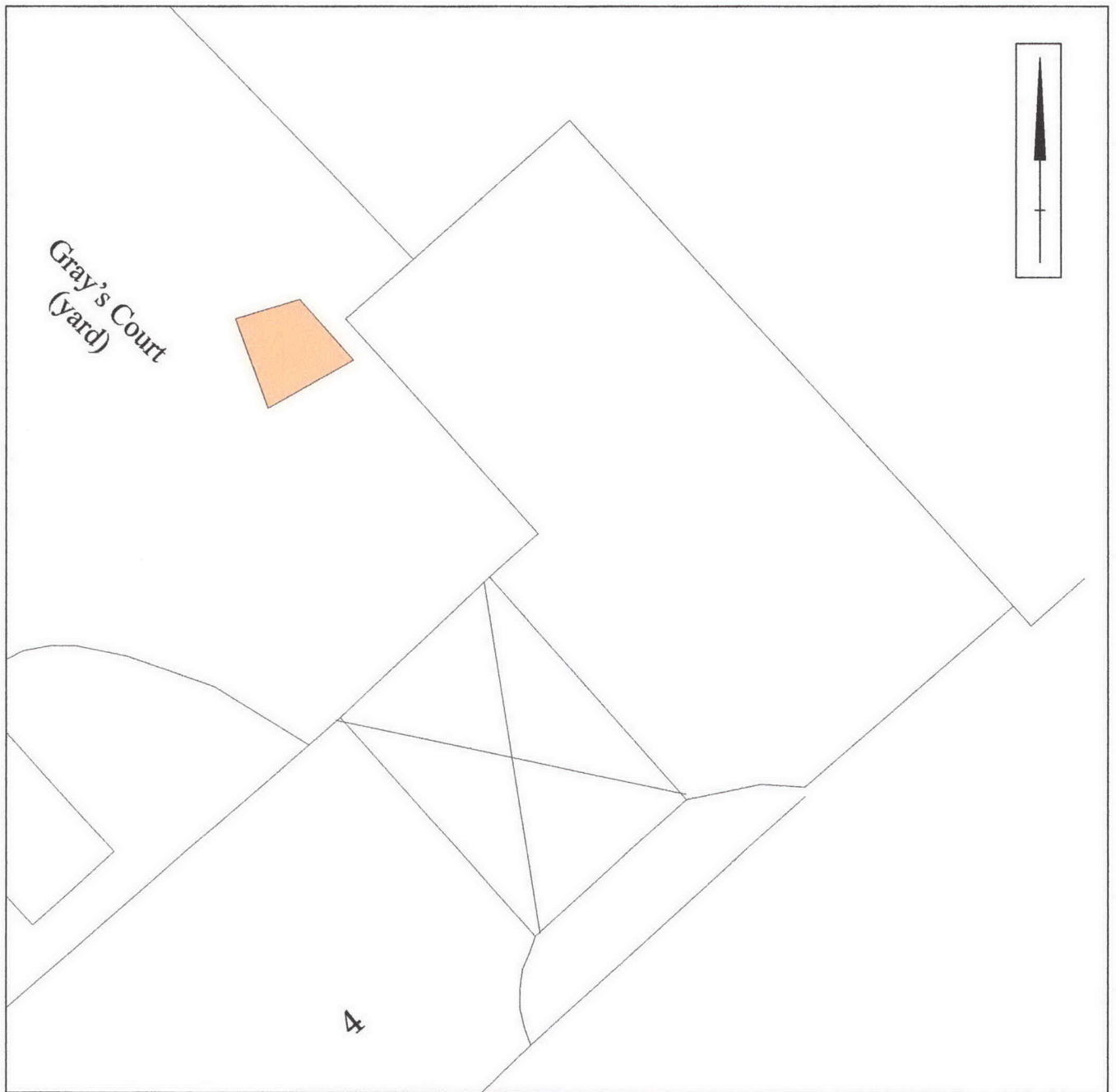


Figure 2 Trench location

0 5 metres

3. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The underlying drift geology of the site is Boulder clay over lacustrine clays with deposits of sand and gravel overlying 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

Gray's Court lies immediately north-west of the north-east end of Chapter House Street, c.75m north-east of the Minster Chapter House and c.65m south-west of the medieval city wall. The ground surface is quite level in this area and lies at c.15.25m AOD in the immediately vicinity of the watching brief trench.

4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 This background to the site has been compiled using easily accessible historical sources, from the results of previous archaeological investigations, and from cartographic evidence.

4.2 The site is relatively well documented since it includes the area occupied by the Treasurers of York Minster, an office established by the first Norman Archbishop of York, Thomas of Bayeux c.1080. There are a number of references to the Treasurers from the late 11th century onwards which suggest that even at this early date they occupied a substantial and well constructed building (RCHM 1981, 69). Although early holders of the office tended to be resident in York later incumbents were often absent for much or all of the time but the office survived until 1547 when it was resigned to the crown although the post of Minster Treasurer was revived in the 20th century. The present Treasurer's House is not the original and not on the site of the original structure but occupies a close-by house which may have been in existence as early as 1419. By this date it appears the Treasurers were in residence although the building was not commonly known as the Treasurer's House until the 16th century. During the second half of the 16th century the property, then consisting of a single unit comprising what is now referred to as the Treasurer's House and Gray's Court, was sold off, initially to the Archbishop of York. Several archbishops and relatives owned the property until in 1648 it passed into private hands and was owned by persons such as Sir William Belt, Sir Thomas Fairfax, George Aislaby, and Robert Squire. It was Robert Squire's daughter, Jane, who split up the property and let it out to tenants. The northern wing, Gray's Court, passed into the hands of William Gray in 1788 and was divided up during the 19th century but restored as a single house by Edwin Gray in 1900. This was bought by the Minster chapter in 1945 and let out but since 1959 it has been almost exclusively occupied by departments of St John's College, now known as York St John College. Part of the building was between 1947 and the 1960's used as a studio by the noted glass painter, Harry J. Stammers, some of whose work, The Passion Emblem's Window, can be seen in The Choir, South Aisle, of York Minster. The part now the Treasurer's House was also split up but between 1897 and 1900 the various parts were bought up by Francis Green and restored as a single structure to display Green's collection of antique furniture. In 1930 he presented the house and contents to the National Trust who remain the owners to this day. Both buildings area now listed as Grade 1 and Gray's Court is especially noted for its painted glass of the late 17th to 19th centuries.

4.3 The earliest cartographic evidence, from an anonymous map of York, c.1545, is not very informative. Although both Chapter House Street (not named) and Ogleforth are shown on this map there is no detail. The first map showing any detail, Speed 1610, shows the street fronts built up with gardens, or perhaps orchards, between Gray's Court and the city rampart to the north-east. All later maps, right up to the present day, show a similar picture.

4.4 There is a considerable amount of archaeological evidence both from and around the site due in part to its location within both the Roman legionary fortress and the walled medieval city north-east of the River Ouse. The line of the main Roman road from the fortress to the north-east, the Via Decumana, is believed to cross the site and the proximity of the area to the Minster may have attracted activity.

There have been a number of archaeological investigations in the area one of the earliest being Miller's work behind Gray's Court in 1927 (RCHM 1962, 33) although some earlier work had been undertaken by William Gray as far back as 1860 in the same area. Excavations in and near to the Treasurers's House took place in 1898, 1952, and 1954. More recent investigations by the York Archaeological Trust have taken place at Gray's Court, 1985.1041, at 3-5 Ogleforth, 1979.1009, at Ogleforth Mews, 1987.5, at 14 Ogleforth (Church House) 1987.1001, 1988.1, 1993.1013, at the Treasurer's House, 1976.1001, 1981.1037, and in Chapter House Street, 1996.412. The most recent work in the area has been at St William's College, YM 1998.1 and YM 1999.4.

4.5 Prehistoric and Roman period (pre 1st century AD to 4th century AD)

Although no definite pre-Roman remains have been found in the immediate area, the archaeological excavation of a lift shaft forming part of the redevelopment of 1-5 Davygate in 1998-1999, revealed a linear ditch or gully and a fence line of stake-holes which may belong to the late Iron Age (Macnab 2000).

Evidence for the Roman period is by contrast relatively common. Two column bases found below the Treasurer's House and Chapter House Street are known to have stood beside the Via Decumana which was seen and partly cut through in 1954. A portion of this road is preserved in a cellar of the Treasurer's House where it was found in 1898. Miller's excavations of 1927 uncovered a stretch of the fortress wall behind Gray's Court immediately below the bedding of the medieval city wall and another stretch, immediately to the south-east, had been found by William Gray in 1860. His excavations also located a store building adjacent to the fortress wall. A carved gritstone block found in the city wall near the garden of Gray's Court sometime before 1884 is believed to be Roman and may have come from a temple. A sewer repair in Chapter House Street in 1996 (1996.412) located cobble surfaces which were probably part of the Via Decumana. Possible Roman deposits were recorded during a borehole observation at 14 Ogleforth (1993.1013).

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

Despite documentary evidence for settlement in York in the Anglo-Saxon period remains are very scarce and there is no archaeological evidence from the site itself. There is, however, some evidence for occupation of the Roman headquarters building, lying below the Minster, of this period and since it is likely that the Via Decumana would continue to be a main road some

activity in the general area might be expected. The known areas of intensive Anglo-Scandinavian occupation lie principally to the south and south-east of the site but possible build-up deposits of the period were observed in the 1996 Chapter House Street sewer repair.

4.5 Medieval period (11th-16th centuries)

Archaeological investigations in the general area have not produced large amounts of evidence for this period but incorporated within the fabric of the present-day Gray's Court is a first floor medieval hall house which may date back as far as c.1080 and form part of the very first Treasurer's House. The present Treasurer's House contains, in its lower parts, 12th century masonry but it is not clear if this is in-situ or reused. Work at 14 Ogleforth (1988.1) included the recording of the foundations of a late medieval stone structure and the Chapter House Street sewer work may have cut through medieval deposits of undefined origin.

4.6 Post-medieval period (16th-19th centuries)

There is some evidence for this period in the area with spreads of brick and limestone rubble and deposits of uncertain function being observed at 14 Ogleforth (1987.1001). A watching brief at the Treasurer's House (1976.1001) recorded a floor, drain, building, and deposits belonging to this period. Parts of Gray's Court were built or repaired during this period as the documentary evidence makes clear. The investigations at St William's College, 1998.1 and 1999.4, revealed evidence for occupation deposits, dumps, brick structures and floors, pits, and postholes of the 16th to 18th centuries

4.7 Modern (19th-21st centuries)

Archaeological work in the area has not found much of modern origin but a recent dump and 19th century building foundations recorded in Ogleforth Mews (1987.5) can be assigned to the period. The road and pavement surfaces in the area are also, at least in their present form, of this period

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 The Trench (Figures 3 and 4)

5.1.1 The earliest context seen in the trench, at between c.1.55m and 2m below ground level (BGL), c.13.7m and 13.25m above Ordnance Datum (AOD), was a build-up deposit of clean very dark grey slightly clayey loam (1017). This layer, seen only in the south-east facing section (Figure 4), produced the only stratified find from the trench, a rim sherd of a Stamford Ware pitcher dated to the 10th or early 11th century. Sealing this was a build-up deposit of mid brown slightly clayey loam (1016) containing moderate amounts of brick and mortar. In the north-west facing section (Figure 3) the earliest deposit was a probable build-up deposit of mid brown slightly clayey loam (1010) with moderate amounts of brick and mortar. The stratigraphic position of 1016 and 1010 taken with their descriptions make it very likely that they are the same deposit.

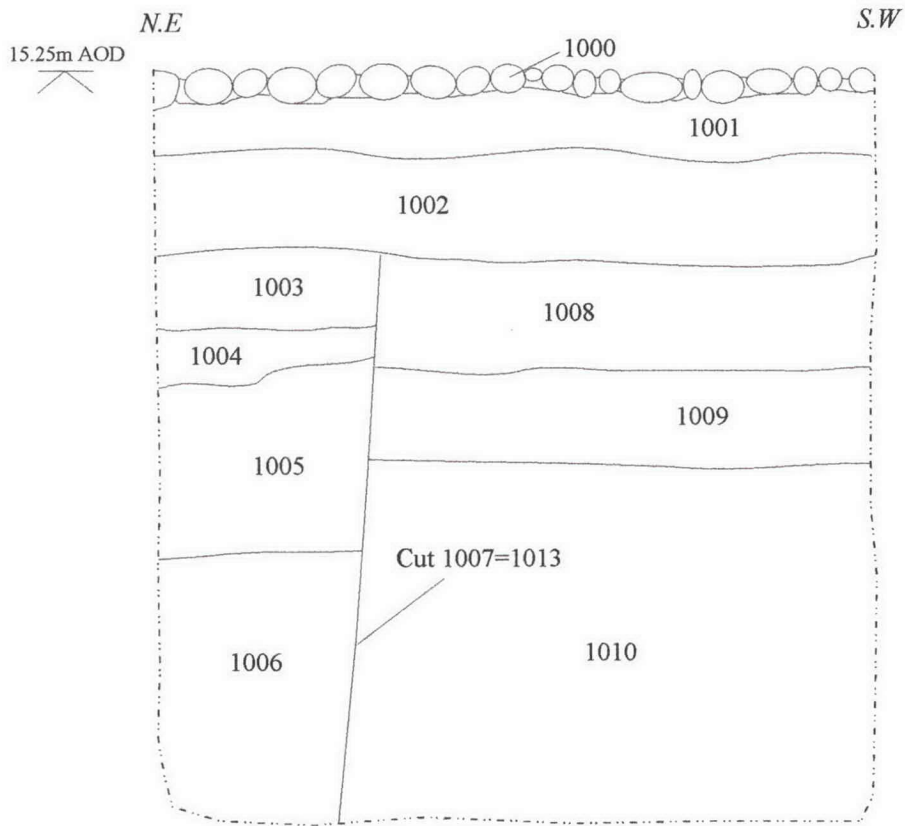


Figure 3 Section 1 - north west facing section

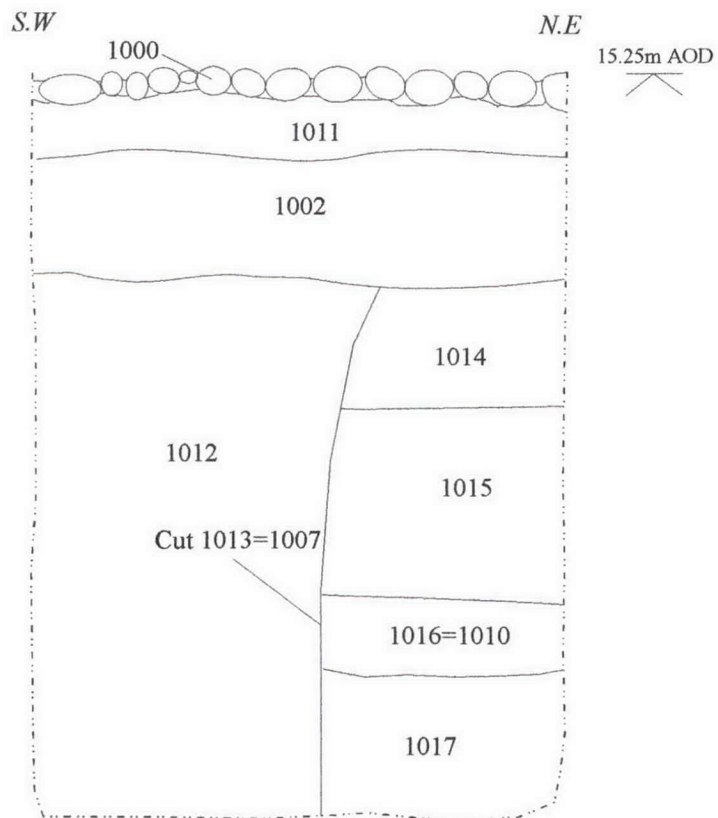


Figure 4 Section 2 - south east facing section

0 1 metre

5.1.2 Sealing 1010 was a layer of dark brown loam (1009) with occasional mortar thought to be a build-up deposit. Overlying this was another build-up deposit of dark grey loam (1008) with occasional pale brown mortar. Above 1016 in Section 2 (Figure 4) there was a c.0.5m thick deposit of dark brown clay loam (1015) with very occasional charcoal. This was probably a build-up deposit and it was sealed by another build-up layer of dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (1014) with occasional charcoal and mortar.

5.1.3 Cut into 1014, 1015, 1016 and 1017 in Section 2 (Figure 4) was a feature (1013) of uncertain size, shape and function. It was at least 0.8m wide and 1.4m deep with a very steeply sloping north-east side and may have been aligned approximately east-west. This feature may well be the same as feature 1007 in Section 1 (Figure 3). The base of 1013 was not reached and the only backfill identified was a dark brown slightly clayey loam (1012) with moderate amounts of pale brown mortar.

5.1.4 In Section 1 (Figure 3) a substantial feature (1007) cut 1008, 1009 and 1010. This feature was of uncertain shape, size, and function but was at least 0.6m wide and 1.5m deep with a very steeply sloping south-west side. The base of 1007 was not defined but in the part of 1007 observed four distinctly different backfills were recorded. The lowest was a dark greyish-brown slightly clayey loam (1006) with moderate pale brown mortar. Above this was a mid greyish-brown clay loam (1005) containing a moderate amount of limestone rubble. It was overlain by a layer consisting purely of broken tile (1004) up to 0.15m thick. The uppermost backfill was a mixture of pale brown mortar and light brown loam (1003). Feature 1007 may be the same as 1013.

5.1.5 Features 1007 and 1013, together with deposits 1008 and 1014, were sealed by a c.0.3m thick deposit of dark greyish-brown loam (1002) containing moderate quantities of mortar and small brick fragments. In Section 1 (Figure 3) this was sealed by a layer of mid orange-brown sand (1001) but in Section 2 (Figure 4) it was overlain by a c.0.2m thick layer of reinforced concrete (1011). The uppermost context in both sections was the modern ground surface composed of cobbles set in a light grey cement (1000). In the area of the trench this surface lay at c.15.25m AOD.

6. CONCLUSIONS (including period by period analysis)

Despite reaching a depth of c.2m below ground level very little of archaeological significance was recorded in the trench. The only deposit believed to be of some interest was 1017 seen in the northern corner of the trench. The clean nature of this deposit suggests that it built up gradually and perhaps naturally. It may represent a medieval garden soil within the courtyard of the property but there is some evidence to suggest a pre-conquest date.

Contexts 1010 and 1016 both contained moderate quantities of brick and mortar perhaps representing building work of some sort in the past. Above both of these were noticeably cleaner build-up deposits, 1008, 1009, 1014 and 1015, perhaps again representing garden soils although it is interesting to note such deposits so close to the main access point to Gray's Court where one might expect paving of some sort in such a heavily used area.

A significant proportion of the stratigraphy in the trench had been disturbed or destroyed by the drain under repair and also the features or feature 1007 and 1013 which are also likely to be drain trenches although other possibilities have been suggested. It would appear that post-medieval and modern activity in the immediate area has destroyed most of the stratigraphy of significance but it is probable that much archaeology survives in good condition close by.

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

There was no evidence for the prehistoric period from the trench but this is rare in and around central York. Based on previous observations in the area any such material would lie at a greater depth than that reached by the trench. The known Roman material in the area also lies at greater depth than that reached. No finds of Roman date were noted from this trench and this may suggest that the Roman deposits in this area are relatively undisturbed.

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

There was no evidence of the Anglian period from this site and although material of this period is not common the site lies adjacent to one of the presumed principal roads out of York at the time and also close to the Roman Headquarters building partly below York Minster. Activity of the period in the Minster area is known from archaeological and documentary evidence and may have spread the short distance to the present site. A single rim sherd of Stamford Ware was recovered from the clean dark deposit, 1017, in the northern corner of the trench and although it could be residual it may be in-situ and thus date the deposit to the 10th or early 11th century indicating activity of the Anglo-Scandinavian period within the immediate area. A very similar clean dark deposit was seen in a sewer repair (1996.412) in Chapter House Street at 1.7m BGL. Here it overlay the latest surfaces of the Via Decumana and was believed to date to the Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian period.

6.3 Medieval (11th - 16th centuries AD)

There were no finds of this period recovered from the trench and the presence of modern brick at the base of the trench within modern cuts indicated that in this area much, if not all, of the medieval stratigraphy has been destroyed by post-medieval and modern activity, in particular 19th and 20th century service trenches.

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

The lack of dating evidence from this work makes it difficult to interpret the observed stratigraphy within the trench but it is felt that some of the deposits containing brick and mortar may be derived from the building work known to have taken place during this period. Some of the truncation of medieval deposits probably took place at the same time since at least one of these probable post-medieval construction deposits directly overlies the clean dark loam tentatively dated to the 10th or 11th century.

6.5 Modern (19th - 21st centuries AD)

There was plentiful evidence for this period within the trench with modern surfaces, features and deposits all being present. It is thought that at least two modern service trenches crossed the trench. One of these appeared to go below the 2m depth of the trench and both service trenches have caused considerable damage to earlier deposits in the immediate area.

7. LIST OF SOURCES

Geological Survey of Great Britain, solid and drift (1967), sheet 71

Macnab, N. (2000) Interim, Archaeology In York, Volume 23 Number 3, More On The Roman Fortress.

RCHM (1962) An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume 1, Eburacum, Roman York

RCHM (1981) An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume 5, The Central Area.

Stacpoole (ed) (1972) The Noble City of York.

VCH (1961). Tillot, P.M. (ed.). Victoria County History, City of York.

Wenham, L.P. Gray's Court (St John's College), York

8. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Watching Brief	David Evans
Report production:	David Evans
Illustrations:	Russell Marwood
Editor:	David Brinklow



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.



York Archaeological Trust
Cromwell House
13 Ogleforth
York YO1 7FG

Telephone: 01904 663000
Fax: 01904 663024
E-mail: dbrinklow@yorkarchaeology.co.uk
Internet: <http://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk>

York Archaeological Trust is a
Registered Charity, No. 509060

A company limited by
guarantee without share capital
Registered in England No. 1430801