



**YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT 12-18  
SWINEGATE, 14 LITTLE STONEGATE AND  
18 BACK SWINEGATE**

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*WEB BASED REPORT*

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# YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



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## CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>THE HISTORY OF THE SWINEGATE AREA.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	The Roman period.....	3
2.2	Swinegate in the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods.....	3
2.3	Swinegate from the Norman Conquest to the present.....	4
<b>3</b>	<b>THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SWINEGATE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	The archaeological potential of the site.....	7
3.2	The background to the redevelopment.....	7
<b>4</b>	<b>EXCAVATION AND POST EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	The Excavation.....	8
4.2	Post-excavation analysis.....	9
<b>5</b>	<b>TRENCH SUMMARIES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
5.1	Trench 1.....	10
5.2	Trenches 2 and 3.....	10
5.3	Trench 4.....	12
5.4	Trenches 5-15.....	12
<b>6</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF THE EXCAVATION RESULTS BY PERIOD.....</b>	<b>17</b>
6.1	Natural.....	17
6.2	The Roman remains.....	17
6.4	The early 5 <sup>th</sup> century to the Norman Conquest.....	19
6.5	The Norman Conquest to the mid-15 <sup>th</sup> century.....	32
6.4	Post-medieval and modern remains.....	34
<b>7</b>	<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS.....</b>	<b>34</b>
	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 1 HARRIS MATRICES FOR TRENCHES 14 AND 15.....</b>	<b>38</b>

### Plates

Cover: The excavation of Trench 3

Plate 1	The 1852 OS map of York showing the location of Benet's Rent's.....	5
Plate 2	The Roman walls in Trench 2. Scale unit 0.1m.....	19
Plate 3	The metallised surface in Trench 3 together with later posts. Scale unit 0.1m.....	23
Plate 4	A wooden coffin lid and burial with the coffin lid removed. Scale unit 0.1m.....	25
Plate 5	Burial 3489 showing the grave marker stone. Scale unit 0.1m.....	26

Plate 6 Burial 3489 after the skeleton was removed showing the stones within the grave. Scale unit 0.1m .....	26
Plate 7 The Nine Men’s Morris game carved onto a plank above burial 14007. Scale unit 0.1m .....	27
Plate 8 Skeletons 3492 and 3495 (the uppermost skeleton) showing the staining on the bones. Scale unit 0.1m.....	28
Plate 9 A brass at Aylsham church, Norfolk, and tomb at Fenny Bentley church Derbyshire , showing bag like shrouds.....	29
Plate 10 The tenement divisions in Trench 3. Scale unit 0.1m. ....	32
Plate 11 Two of the mid 14 <sup>th</sup> century writing tablets from Swinegate following conservation.	33
Plate 12 Excavation of the late medieval buildings on Grape Lane .....	34

**Figures: Pages 40-43**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This report relates to two of York Archaeological Trust's excavations, the first at 12-18 Swinegate and the second at 14 Little Stonegate and 18 Back Swinegate (Figure 1). These excavations took place between October 1989 and July 1990, and they represent two of the most interesting, though little known of the Trust's excavations. A total of fifteen trenches were excavated (Figure 2), and these revealed a complex sequence of deposits dating from Roman times to the post-medieval period, together with a number of exceptional artefacts including a collection of well-preserved wooden coffins of late 9<sup>th</sup> to early-11<sup>th</sup> century date, and a group of writing tablets of mid-14<sup>th</sup> century date.

This report was prepared with a grant from the Museum's Resilience Fund; it aims to give an overview of the sites highlighting the importance of the excavations and providing the archaeological context for research into both the wooden coffins and the writing tablets recovered from the excavations.

## 2 THE HISTORY OF THE SWINEGATE AREA

### 2.1 The Roman period

The Swinegate area lies within the southernmost quarter of the legionary fortress of *Eboracvm*, which was founded c. AD 71. The fortress housed the ninth legion (*Legio IX Hispana*), until they were replaced by the sixth legion (*Legio VI Valeria Victrix*) c. AD 120. *Eboracvm* remained the base of the sixth legion until the demise of the Roman Empire.

The Swinegate area was located to the south-west of the *Via Principalis* and to the south-east of the *Via Praetoria* (the two principal roads through the fortress). To the south-east and south-west of the Swinegate area lay the fortress wall and an associated *inter-vallum* road, which lies approximately beneath the present roads of Church Street and Davygate.

Swinegate is located close to a number of sites that have yielded well-preserved remains relating to the legionary bath-house (Figure 3): a lead water pipe was found beneath the junction of Church Street and Patrick Pool in 1854 (Whitwell 1976, 1); the remains of a *hypocaust* from the legionary bath-house was uncovered on St Sampson's Square in 1931 (RCHM 1962, 42-4); a further *hypocaust* was excavated on the site of the former Talbot Hotel on Church street in 1972-3 (Whitwell 1976, 1); and an associated stone-built sewer system beneath Church Street was examined in 1974 (Whitwell 1976, 1).

### 2.2 Swinegate in the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods

The precise development of York in the immediate post-Roman period is little understood. It is clear that by 627 York was already a royal centre, as King Edwin of Northumbria was baptised in York, and he appointed Paulinus as bishop of York (Kemp 1996, 1; Rees Jones 2013, 5). It is clear that the presence of the church was a major factor in the development of York, with a large portion of the former Roman fortress being granted to the Minster church (Rees Jones 2013, 30). York became a Viking city in 867 (the Anglo-Scandinavian period), but it has been suggested that the archbishopric remained the dominant authority in the city (Rees Jones 2013, 10). In 927 the city became part of a united England (Rees Jones 2013, 10). It is thought that following the creation of the kingdom of England there was only a limited royal presence in the city, and that it was the Minster, the earls of Northumberland and the leading Anglo-

Scandinavian families that were the dominant landowners within the fortress (Rees Jones 2013, 25).

Relatively little is known of the Swinegate area in the Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian periods. The occupation deposits of this date that are characteristic of the waterfront sites in York, such as Coppergate, Fishergate and Dixon Lane (Hall et al. 2014, Kemp 1996, McComish 2015), have not been seen on excavated sites within the fortress. Indeed, in some places within the fortress, only a thin layer of black soil has been revealed between the occupation levels of the late Roman period and those of the later 11<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the fortress area was not intensively settled (Rees Jones 2013, 38).

The dominant building in the Swinegate area was the church of St Benedict (or Benet). The name Benet is a known contraction for the name Benedict Biscop, a Northumbrian saint who lived from 628-689 (Dean 2012, 109; Farmer 1996, 46-7). The dedication to a Northumbrian saint suggests that the church was founded before the Norman Conquest, possibly as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Dean 2012, 109). It was clearly in existence by the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, as coffins of that date are known from the site (Bagwell and Tyres 2001). St Benet's church went out of use and was demolished in the medieval period, but it was thought to be located to the north of the junction of the present streets of Back Swinegate and Swinegate. Dean (2013, 114) suggested that the area of the fortress south-west of the *Via Principalis* was divided between two early churches, St Benet's and St Wilfrid's both of whom were Northumbrian saints. In addition, Dean (2012, 114) suggested that St Benet's served as the church of an urban estate held by a single landowner.

At the south-eastern end of Patrick Pool lies the church of St Sampson. This church is located directly above the line of the south-eastern Roman fortress wall, which had clearly gone out of use before the church was established. St Sampson is a unique dedication in England; Geoffrey of Monmouth reported that Sampson was installed as archbishop of York by King Arthur's uncle Ambrosius Aurelianus c. AD 466 (Wilson and Mee, 1998, 147). The date at which this church was founded is unclear. The dedication to St Sampson has been used to argue that this church was founded before the Norman Conquest (Palliser 1976, 3). In addition, part of an early 11<sup>th</sup> century cross-shaft is built into a house in Newgate which lies within the area of the former churchyard, again suggesting a pre-Conquest foundation date (RCHM 1981, 44). It is possible, however, that this church is of post-Conquest origin (see 2.3 below).

(It should be noted that there are a few churches in the south of England dedicated to another St Sampson or Samson, a 6<sup>th</sup> century Welsh saint who became the first bishop of Dol in Brittany).

### **2.3 Swinegate from the Norman Conquest to the present**

In common with much of the centre of York, Swinegate developed throughout the medieval period into a densely settled area, criss-crossed by streets and narrow lanes. The various properties, known as burgage plots or tenements, consisted of buildings fronting onto the streets with associated yards to the rear.

The two dominant buildings in the Swinegate area were the churches of St Benet and St Sampson. It has recently been suggested (Dean 2012, 132) that St Sampson's is a post-Conquest church. Excavations by York Archaeological Trust in 1974 beneath the south arcade

of St Sampson's church uncovered a stone wall, which seemed to be of Norman date (RCHM 1981, 44). The churches of St Benet and St Sampson were first recorded in 1154 when they were given by William Rainer, the king's clerk, to Pontefract Priory (Rees Jones 2013, 94). By the 1220s these two churches had been paired and were considered as a single parish, with St Sampson's being the parish church; this was a very unusual parochial structure (Rees Jones 2013, 37). The church of St Benet was pulled down in the time of Dean William of Hambleton c. 1299-1307 (Wilson and Mee 1998, 60). An inquiry of 1316 into the former St Benet's church noted that coffins were visible on the site, but that no one had actually seen a burial at the church or within the churchyard before it was closed (Dean 2012, 111). By the 1320s the churchyard of St Benet's was falling into disrepute as a place of prostitution (Rees Jones 2103, 304), and in 1337 the churchyard was described as "lying waste and covered with rubbish" (Wilson and Mee 1998, 60). In 1361 the site of the former church was acquired by the Vicars Choral, who demolished the church and built a row of houses there to rent out (Wilson and Mee 1998, 60). These houses became known as 'Benetplace' or 'Benetrents' (Wilson and Mee 1998, 60; Rees Jones 2013, 305). By 1364 the Vicars Choral were collecting rents from 12 tenants living in these houses (Wilson and Mee 1998, 60). The location of Benet Rents, and therefore of the earlier church, is shown on the 1852 Ordnance survey map of York (Plate 1).



**Plate 1 The 1852 Ordnance Survey map of York showing the location of Benet's Rent's**

The street layout in the Swinegate area clearly evolved throughout the medieval period, and in its final form it comprised a network of streets and narrow alleys located behind the major streets of Petergate and Stonegate. Many of the present day street names in this area differ from those used in the medieval period. For clarity therefore, any medieval street names which differ from those used today are in *italicised bold* text throughout this chapter. Taking each of these streets in turn:

**Patrick Pool** (the present day streets of both Swinegate and Patrick Pool) formed the main street in the Swinegate area, and it gave access from Newgate to the churches of St Sampson and St Benedict. The street may have originally continued as far as Stonegate, with the narrow **Langton Lane** (now Coffee Yard) representing the continuation of the street (Palliser 1976, 3). The street name implies that water collected here, possibly due to subsidence caused by the collapse of Roman buildings in the area (Palliser 1976, 3). **Patrick Pool** is of late 11<sup>th</sup> century origin. The north-westernmost portion of the street post-dates the cemetery of St Benet's church, which went out of use in the later 11<sup>th</sup> century. The south-easternmost portion of the street post-dates the demolition of the south-eastern Roman fortress defences, which took place in the late 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century (Dean 2012, 122). The tenements on the northern side of the south-easternmost end of the street are laid out in widths suggestive of a post-Conquest foundation date (Dean 2012, 124). The first reference to the street dates to c. AD 1200 (Palliser 1976, 3).

Grape Lane may represent a modification of a former Roman street or may have followed the alignment of standing Roman buildings in the area (Rees Jones 2013, 36). Grape Lane is first recorded in c. 1201 as **Lane of St Benedict's** or simply **Towards St Benedict** (Rees Jones 2013, 304). This name was recorded again in 1329 and 1384 alongside the new street name of **Grapcunt Lane** (Dean 2012, 103). This new street name referred to the association of the area with prostitution in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. By 1364 the street name had been shortened to **Grapple** (Rees Jones 2013, 305). The street originally continued beyond the junction with Swinegate, as seen on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map (Plate 1). Dean (2012, 104) has suggested on the basis of property boundary evidence that Grape Lane may have originally continued as far west as Davygate, while Rees Jones (2013, 31) suggests it originally continued as far as Little Stonegate.

**Swinegate/Swinegayl** comprised the present streets of Little Stonegate and Back Swinegate. **Swinegayl** is first recorded in 1276 (Palliser 1978, 13). Little Stonegate may preserve the line of an earlier Roman road (Rees Jones 2013, 36), and as such probably represents an early medieval street connecting the former Grape Lane to Stonegate (Dean 2012, 114). Back Swinegate post-dates the cemetery of St Benet's church (Dean 2013, Figure 27) suggesting that it represents a later medieval adaptation of the street pattern, which occurred sometime after the closure of the church c. 1299-1307.

Church Street was originally known as **Girdlergate** or **Glovergayl**. This street may represent the continued use of part of the inter-vallum road of the Roman fortress (Rees Jones 2013, 36).

A narrow alley called Lund's Court (formerly Mad Alice Lane) connected Petergate and Swinegate. The alleys of Finkle Street and Nether Hornpot Lane gave access between Back Swinegate and the **Thursday Market** (now St Sampson's Square), while **Sadler Lane** gave access from the market to **Patrick Pool**. **Sadler Lane** has been known as Three Cranes Lane since at least 1750 (Palliser 1976, 3).

The **Thursday Market** is first mentioned in 1234 (Rees Jones 2013, 263), and it is possible that Finkle Street, Nether Hornpot Lane and Three Cranes Lane were created at the same time as the laying out of the market (Dean 2012, 137). Finkle Street also post-dates the cemetery of St Benet's church (Dean 2013, Figure 27) suggesting that it is of later medieval date.

It is clear from these street names that the Swinegate area was associated with various crafts. The Girdlers of **Girdlergate** made a variety of goods including leather girdles, dagger-sheaths, book clasps, harnesses and dog collars (Palliser 1976, 3), while **Sadler Lane** was associated with leatherworking, particularly saddles, and Hornpot Lane is indicative of hornworking (Rees Jones 2103, 304).

Intensive urbanization to the south of Petergate and in the Stonegate area seems to have been firmly established from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Rees Jones 2013, 38). Documentary evidence suggests that substantial tenements were created along the Petergate and Stonegate frontages, with associated back-yards that extended as far as Swinegate and Grape Lane respectively (Rees Jones 2013, 143). These long back yards were eventually subdivided and houses fronting onto Grape Lane and Swinegate were built in the new sub-plots.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the street frontages in the area housed a mixture of late medieval, post-medieval and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Images of the area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century can be viewed on the City of York Council's 'Imagine York' website (available on line at [https://cyc.sdp.sirsidynix.net.uk/client/en\\_GB/yorkimages/](https://cyc.sdp.sirsidynix.net.uk/client/en_GB/yorkimages/)).

### **3 THE REDEVELOPMENT OF SWINEGATE**

#### **3.1 The archaeological potential of the site**

The archaeological potential of the Swinegate area was well known prior to the 1989 excavations. Given that the site lay within both the Roman legionary fortress and the heart of the medieval city it had the potential to reveal a sequence of deposits spanning the entire history of York.

It was hoped that the Swinegate excavations would reveal further evidence for the legionary baths complex, or possibly for the domestic quarters of military officials or *tribunes*. In addition, the excavations offered the chance to recover deposits relating to the use of the fortress in the immediate post-Roman period, which was (and still is) a subject of much debate.

The large size of the area available for excavation in 1989 also offered the opportunity to examine several medieval tenements on Grape Lane, Back Swinegate and Little Stonegate. It was also hoped that the excavations would reveal evidence for the location of the lost medieval church of St Benet and its related churchyard.

#### **3.2 The background to the redevelopment**

In 1989 proposals were submitted to the City of York Council for the redevelopment of a substantial portion of Swinegate, Grape Lane, Back Swinegate and Little Stonegate. Given the known archaeological potential of the area it was clear this redevelopment would require a programme of archaeological excavation and recording.

An initial research programme was drafted by York Archaeological Trust which focussed on the Roman remains in the area, as it was hoped that a basement-level Roman museum could be incorporated into the redevelopment designs. The designs for the new buildings were for low rise structures above concrete raft foundations, underpinned by a grid of concrete piles, making the siting of a basement museum impractical. As a result a new programme of

excavation was devised, which aimed to target the Roman remains by excavating a complete sequence of deposits, from the founding of the fortress to the present day, in three deep trenches (Trenches 1-3).

## **4 EXCAVATION AND POST EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 The Excavation**

The excavations at 12-18 Swinegate and 14 Little Stonegate/18 Back Swinegate were generously funded by the developers of the site, the General Accident Insurance Company, who also funded a predetermined amount of research. In addition, the excavation of Trench 4 was funded directly by York Archaeological Trust. The excavations were directed by N. F. Pearson and the two site supervisors were J. M. Lilley (Trenches 2-3 and 5-15) and M. Whyman (Trenches 1 and 4).

It had originally been intended to excavate three deep trenches (Trenches 1-3) to examine the complete sequence of deposits from the present day down to the underlying naturally occurring clay. This original design was subsequently adapted for two reasons, one in relation to the medieval remains and the second in relation to the medieval cemetery of St Benet.

When excavation of Trench 1 commenced it was clear that there were exceptionally well-preserved late medieval and early post-medieval remains directly below the modern ground surface on the Grape Lane street frontage. These deposits would have been totally destroyed by the construction of a concrete raft for the new buildings at the site. The design and function of Trench 1 was therefore changed. Instead of being a 3m x 3m trench designed to reach Roman deposits, the trench was extended in area to 27m x 7m in size, with the aim of examining the medieval deposits relating to three adjoining tenements. In addition, the number of piles in this area was reduced to avoid damaging the underlying Roman levels.

A new trench (Trench 4) was also opened up to the immediate north of the junction between Back Swinegate and Little Stonegate to assess the late medieval and post-medieval buildings in this area.

While it had been thought prior to excavation that medieval burials relating to the church of St Benet would only be present to the south of Swinegate, on excavation this cemetery proved to be more extensive, extending beneath the present street and continuing as far as Trench 3. In the light of this it was clear that the pile-holes of the proposed development would destroy portions of the medieval cemetery. The pile-holes were therefore excavated with the specific goal of recovering any human remains. Each of the new trenches in the location of a pile-hole (Trenches 5-15) was just 3 x 3m in size. The depth at which the burials occurred was already known from the excavation of Trench 3. Given that pressure of time was acute, the decision was taken to clear all the post-cemetery levels by machine, after which the burials were removed archaeologically. Once the burials were removed no further excavation could take place due to lack of time. This was very frustrating, given that Roman walls could be clearly seen beneath the burials in some of the trenches.

The site was excavated using a system called "single-context excavation" whereby every deposit of soil, cut feature, or structure on site is given an individual reference number called a context number. The excavator identifies the upper-most deposit, allocates the context

number and draws a 1:20 scale plan of the upper surface of the context. The context is then excavated, and a description of it is written on a pro-forma card. The stratigraphic relationships between the various contexts are noted on a Harris Matrix, and the artefacts recovered are cross-referenced to the relevant context from which they came.

Two reports were written at the time of excavation in York Archaeological Trust's in-house magazine, *Interim*, detailing the progress of the excavations (Pearson 1990a and 1990b). In addition, there were two reports on the writing tablets recovered from the excavations (O'Connor 1990a and 1990b).

## 4.2 Post-excavation analysis

In 1989 sites were excavated in accordance with a document prepared by the Ancient Monuments Board for England entitled 'Principles of Publication in Rescue Archaeology' (Frere 1975) which defined four separate levels of research:

Level I = the site itself and the excavated finds

Level II = the records produced on the site during excavation

Level III = a detailed description of the structural, stratigraphic, artefactual data and environmental data with relevant illustrations. This usually took the form of a series of separate specialist reports, but these were not synthesised into a single coherent text.

Level IV = a synthetic publication with supporting illustrations based on the Level III reports

In the case of the Swinegate sites the post-excavation analysis was taken to Level III. A detailed analysis of the stratigraphic sequence was prepared, as were Harris Matrices detailing the stratigraphic relationships between the various contexts. Research was undertaken into the pottery, bone, artefacts and ceramic building material from the excavations, together with geological identifications of the stone samples. Conservation work was also undertaken on various artefacts from the site, including the writing tablets and coffins.

Since the excavations finished several aspects of the site have been fully published, the Roman artefacts are published in Cool et al. (1995), the Roman pottery is published in Monaghan (1997), the leatherwork is published in Mould et al. (2003), while rosary beads from the site are published in Ottaway and Rogers (2003). A summary of research into the writing tablets is published in Kyriacou et al. (2004). The stratigraphic sequence for these sites has never been published, due to insufficient funds being available.

Some further research has taken place since the completion of the original post-excavation work. Seven of the medieval coffins recovered during the excavations were subjected to dendrochronological dating (Bagwell and Tyres 2001) and a selection of environmental samples from the site were also analysed (Carrott et al., 2008).

The sites have also been used in wider-ranging studies including J. Buckberry's (2004) PhD research into later Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and G. Dean's (2012) PhD research into the Swinegate and Petergate area. To facilitate Dean's research there was a re-examination of the pottery, ceramic building materials and artefacts from the excavations by staff from York Archaeological Trust (A. Mainman, N. Rogers and J. M. McComish respectively).

## 5 TRENCH SUMMARIES

The following brief summaries detail the size of each trench, the reasoning behind its excavation, the extent of machine clearance prior to hand-excavation and a brief summary of the findings. The information regarding burial practices was prepared for this report, and unless otherwise stated the remaining information is based on the Level III archive report.

### 5.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was 27m x 5-7m in size. The uppermost 0.4-0.5m of deposits, comprising the modern ground surfaces were removed by machine at the start of excavation, after which hand-excavation continued to a depth of approximately 0.7m below the present ground surface. The medieval deposits in the central-south-eastern portion of the trench had been removed by a post-medieval cellar 3m x 5m in area and about 1.3m deep. In addition, a series of south-east to north-west aligned modern pipe trenches 1.35m deep had damaged the medieval deposits, effectively dividing the trench into discrete areas. Apart from these modern disturbances the late medieval deposits in the area were exceptionally well preserved.

As only two months was available for the excavation of this particular trench, the decision was taken that each of the three buildings visible after the machine clearance of the site would be excavated to its foundation level. This would reveal detailed evidence of the function and date of the latest phase of medieval or early post-medieval buildings.

The earliest deposits reached during the excavation were of 14<sup>th</sup> century date (Dean 2012, 144). By this stage it is known that this portion of the Grape Lane frontage belonged to Newburgh Priory, who owned ten tenements in the area which they rented out (Dean 2012, 144). It is clear that what began as three discrete properties with buildings fronting onto Grape Lane underwent several phases of alteration, being variously extended, reduced, integrated, separated and partially demolished. These buildings were associated with metalworking from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16th centuries, with evidence of both copper-working and iron-working being present (Dean 2012, 147-8, 156-63).

### 5.2 Trenches 2 and 3

Trenches 2 and 3 were designed to target the Roman remains in the area. Given that complex structural remains of medieval date were most likely to be encountered on the Swinegate street frontage, Trenches 2 and 3 were deliberately positioned slightly back from the street so that the area under excavation would be located in the backyards of the medieval tenements. This would ensure the excavation team could rapidly deal with any medieval deposits, and have sufficient time to investigate the Roman remains in the area.

Trench 2 was 3m x 3m in area, and was approximately 4.3m deep when finished. The modern deposits in the trench were machine cleared at the start of the excavation after which all deposits were hand-excavated to underlying naturally occurring clay. Trench 2 was dug slightly in advance of T3 so as to identify the depth of the Roman remains and of any important stratigraphic horizons likely to be encountered in T3.

Trench 3 was 17.6m x 3.1m in size and was approximately 4.3m deep when finished. It was intended from the outset that the entire sequence in T3 would be excavated by hand to give a complete stratigraphic sequence, with particular emphasis on the Roman and early post-Roman periods.

The earliest deposit seen in both these trenches was naturally occurring clay. The upper surface of the clay was cut by a number of features relating to timber buildings of late 1<sup>st</sup> century date, i.e. the early fortress. In the case of Trench 3 the timber buildings were replaced by a stone building. This was in turn replaced by a second stone building dating to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, which was visible in both Trenches 2 and 3. Activity continued in and around this building until the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The stone building was robbed out, and Trench 3 was then used for burials associated with St Benet's church, while Trench 2 lay beyond the limits of the cemetery. There were 20 burials over the westernmost two thirds of Trench 3 which included 10 in wooden coffins, one which had a plank over the top, stones by the left ear and a limestone marker, one burial with a wooden plank laid over the top, two un-coffined burials in grave cuts and two burials surrounded by stained soil suggestive of a shroud. For the remaining four burials there was no coffin and no clear trace of either a grave cut or shroud. Coffins from this group of burials were dated by dendrochronology from the last decade of the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the first decade of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Bagwell and Tyres 2001). The only instances of intercutting were of a coffin clipping the feet of a nearby shroud burial, and a coffin removing the skull of an adjacent shroud burial.

Most of the burials were adults, but an infant and two juveniles were present at the westernmost end of the trench. The orientation of the burials varied, with four being on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment, eight burials in the westernmost two thirds of the trench being on a north-east to south-west alignment, and four burials in the westernmost half of the trench being on a north-east-north to south-west-south alignment; one of these was C14 dated with a 95% degree of probability to the period 1076-1154. It was impossible to determine the alignment of the remaining four burials as they lay largely beyond the area of excavation.

According to the original Level III archive report a metalled surface (Context 3374) was laid down above the earliest phase burials, after which seven more burials were interred (Bonner et al. 1991, 188-191, 240, 572). Five of these burials were at the eastern end of the trench and two at the western end. Five of these burials were in coffins and two lacked coffins. The alignment varied with one example at the western end and one near the eastern end of the trench being north-east to south west, one at the western end being north-east-north to south-west-south and the remainder at the eastern end being east-north-east to west-south – west. One of the coffined burials just clipped the corner of a nearby coffin but without damaging the earlier skeleton. One of the coffins was dated by dendrochronology to AD 892 or later, while one of the skeletons was C14 dated with a 95% probability as 893-1018.

Dean (2012, 112) disagreed with the sequence of events suggested in the Level III report, arguing that all the burials predated the metalled surface 3374. This does not accord well with the original site plans, which clearly show the metalled surface as being truncated by three of the grave cuts in question, while the remaining four burials in this group were excavated three to four days before the metalled surface was uncovered and excavated.

The cemetery went out of use and was replaced by a series of fences which did not respect either the alignment of earlier Roman buildings in the area or of the later medieval tenements (Bonner et al. 1990, 240). The area was subsequently divided up into a series of tenements at

right angles to the Swinegate street frontage, with the area of Trenches 2 and 3 lying in the back yards of these tenements. Organic deposits accumulated within these back yards throughout the later medieval and post-medieval periods. A modern brick cellar was present within Trench 3.

### 5.3 Trench 4

Trench 4 was L shaped, extending approximately 20m along the Back Swinegate street frontage and 10m along the Little Stonegate street frontage, and the trench was between 6m and 8m in breadth. The modern ground surface, which comprised the uppermost 0.6m of deposits, was removed by machine prior to hand-excavation. A post-medieval cellar 5m x 4m in size was also removed by machine. Trench 4 was excavated under extreme time pressure, with the aim of exposing and recording the latest phase of medieval or early post-medieval buildings on the site. In addition, the area of the post-medieval cellar was utilised to position a test trench 3m x 3m in size (Area JJ) which was excavated to a depth of 3.4m to examine any Roman deposits in the area.

The earliest feature was a stone building and associated surface dating to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. A new surface was laid down in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century, after which time organic deposits accumulated over the Roman remains.

On the Back Swinegate frontage the earliest buildings were of mid- to late 14<sup>th</sup> century date. These buildings appear to represent the first medieval buildings in this area, and they were associated with evidence for metalworking, both copper-working and the production of nails (Dean 2012, 153). The earliest buildings on the Little Stonegate frontage were of mid-13<sup>th</sup> century date and continued in use until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These buildings were associated with the production of copper alloy dress-fittings (Dean 2012, 155).

### 5.4 Trenches 5-15

Trenches 5-15 ranged from 2m x 2.1m to 3m x 2.8m in size. These trenches were excavated with the sole aim of recovering any burials that would otherwise have been destroyed by the piling operations of the proposed redevelopment. Due to extreme pressure of time all post-cemetery deposits had to be removed by machine, prior to the hand-excavation of the burials. Inevitably given the small size of the trenches many of the burials were located partly within, and partly beyond the limits of excavation. It was rarely possible to excavate any deposits pre-dating the burials, again due to pressure of time, though in the case of Trench 9 some investigations of the Roman deposits were made.

Trenches 14-15 were the most intensively used portion of the cemetery, and in both cases the burials were heavily intercut. Due to limited time available for the excavation of these trenches the following methodology was adopted: the cemetery soils in both Trenches 14 and 15 were removed in arbitrary spits until burials could be seen; these burials were then excavated and recorded; this process was then repeated until all the burials had been excavated. In the case of Trench 14 eight arbitrary spits of cemetery soil were removed, while in Trench 15 three arbitrary spits of cemetery soil were excavated. This pragmatic method of excavation did ensure all the burials were excavated quickly, but the recording of burials in relation to arbitrary spits does not necessarily reflect the true stratigraphic sequence. For the purpose of this report new Harris Matrices were prepared for Trenches 14 and 15 which recorded only the direct stratigraphic relationships between the burials, i.e. ignoring the spits

of soil (Appendix 1). These new matrices form the basis of the following discussion of these trenches.

#### 5.4.1 *Trench 5*

A wall of Roman date was seen at the base of the trench, and although it could not be fully excavated it was possible to determine a number of external and internal surfaces that had accumulated to either side of this wall. Demolition deposits for this building were also seen, but these could not be accurately dated.

The area was then used for burials associated with St Benet's church. Eleven skeletons were recovered from the trench. In addition, there was part of a coffin which lay largely beyond the limit of excavation. The original site plans suggest that there were two phases of burial. The earlier burials (three adult skeletons buried in grave cuts, one adult skeleton in a wooden coffin and the partial remains of a second coffin) were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment. The later burials in the trench (three adult skeletons within coffins, one infant in a coffin, an adult with a possible shroud, a juvenile buried in a grave cut and an isolated skull) were on a north-east to south-west alignment. The later burials intercut both one another and the earlier burials in the trench. One of these later coffins (Context 5032) was dated by dendrochronology to the second quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Bagwell and Tyres 2001).

The burials were sealed by a metalled surface, with an associated post and length of wattle fencing. The uppermost 2m of deposits in Trench 5 were removed by machine at the start of excavation. The machine cleared deposits included evidence for well-preserved medieval buildings fronting onto Swinegate.

#### 5.4.2 *Trench 6*

No burials were present in Trench 6. The earliest deposit seen in this trench was a thick build-up of cultivated soil. This was sealed by a metalled surface with two associated fence lines. Organic soil indicative of cultivation built up over the fence lines. The organic deposit was beneath the remains of a modern brick building. The uppermost 0.5m of deposits were removed by machine at the start of excavation.

#### 5.4.3 *Trench 7*

Four burials in coffins were present in Trench 7, three of which were adults and one of which was an adolescent. These burials did not intercut, and they were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment (similar to the earliest burials in Trench 5). The burials were sealed by a metalled surface with associated wattle-fences. Organic soils accumulated between these fences, indicating that the area lay in the back-yards of tenements. The remains of a building comprising a floor surface, rubbish pit and wall were present above the organic soils. This building was probably associated with copper working. The uppermost 0.25m of deposits were machine cleared at the start of excavation, these comprised a mixture of rubble, clay and silt.

#### 5.4.4 *Trench 8*

The earliest feature observed in Trench 8 was a wall of uncertain date; this could not be excavated due to lack of time. A deposit of soil had accumulated over the wall, above which were five burials from the St Benet's cemetery, none of which were intercut. Two of the burials were adults in coffins, while the remaining three burials (one adult and two infants)

lacked coffins. The coffined burials were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment (similar to the earliest burials in Trench 5 and the burials in Trench 7), while the remaining three burials were too fragmentary to accurately determine the alignment. The burials were sealed by a metallised surface. The uppermost 2m of deposits, comprising garden-soils were removed by machine at the start of the excavation.

#### 5.4.5 *Trench 9*

Upstanding Roman remains were observed at the base of Trench 9, and given that no burials were present within this trench the opportunity was taken to investigate these Roman remains. A wall was present which differed from others seen at the site in terms of its foundations, being above a hard-standing, rather than within a foundation trench. This wall and hard standing were interpreted as the base for a heavy piece of machinery. A contemporaneous mortar mixing pit was seen nearby. A construction cut was also present, but it was impossible to determine what this related to, as it lay largely beyond the limit of excavation. There were later construction cuts for two parallel walls, which were subsequently adapted by the insertion of a cross-wall. All these walls had been robbed out at some stage. There were also two later linear cuts aligned north-west to south-east, the original Level III report interpreted these as either drains or possible further robber trenches. Dean (2012, 112), however, felt that these ditches represented a boundary feature for the St Benet's cemetery. There are, however, problems with Dean's interpretation which are outlined in 5.4.7 below.

Sealing all of these remains was a build-up of garden soil. The uppermost 1.5m of deposits were removed by machine at the start of excavation, and this comprised garden soils.

#### 5.4.6 *Trench 10*

Trench 10 clearly lay beyond the limits of the St Benet's cemetery, as only garden type soils were present. The uppermost 2m of deposits in the trench were removed by machine at the start of the excavation, and only mixed soils were observed, with no structural remains being present.

#### 5.4.7 *Trench 11*

The earliest deposit seen in Trench 11 was a build-up of garden soil. Above this were four burials from the cemetery of St Benet's. Two of the burials were adolescents in coffins, one was an adult in a coffin, and one was an un-coffined adults. Three of the burials were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment, while the fourth burial may have been on an east-west alignment, though it is difficult to be sure as most of the burial was beyond the limit of excavation. There were also some fragments of timber which were probably from another coffin, but these were very badly preserved.

The partial coffin was truncated by a cut (Context 11021) which was interpreted at the time of excavation as a pit with a stepped south-eastern side, though it was noted that there were problems with this interpretation as the feature had to be excavated very rapidly. It is possible that this pit in fact represents the continuation and merging of two ditches seen in Trench 9 to the north-west.

Dean (2012, 112) interpreted 11021, together with the associated ditches in Trench 9, as the boundary ditch marking the north-western limit of the cemetery. There are problems with this

interpretation. At least two burials (one in Trench 11 and one in Trench 12) and a charnel pit (in Trench 12) lay to the north-west of cut 11021. It is possible that there may originally have been even more burials in Trench 12, as much of this trench had been removed by a Victorian cellar. The ditches clearly therefore do not delimit the area of burial. In addition, it is clear from the site plans that 11021 clearly truncated a partial coffin, and the pit/ditch must therefore post-date the cemetery.

The cemetery was sealed by a metalled surface associated with a wicker fence marking a tenement boundary. The uppermost 2m of deposits were removed by machine at the start of the excavation, and these comprised garden soil and brick rubble.

#### 5.4.8 *Trench 12*

The earliest feature observed in Trench 12 was a Roman stone wall with associated use and floor deposits. This wall was abutted by a small chamber, similar to those seen in Trench 2. The wall had subsequently been robbed out. A single infant burial was present in this trench which was aligned north-east to south-west. In addition, there was a charnel pit which lay largely outside the area of excavation. The uppermost 2.5m of deposits were machined out at the start of the excavation, which revealed garden soils and a Victorian cellar that had clearly removed most of the medieval features in the area.

#### 5.4.9 *Trench 13*

Trench 13 clearly lay beyond the limits of the St Benet's cemetery as no human remains were present. This trench lay directly across the site entrance, and to enable unimpeded access to the site the trench was infilled as soon as it was clear that no burials were present.

#### 5.4.10 *Trench 14*

The earliest feature seen in Trench 14 was a robbed out stump of Roman walling, dating to the first half of the second century, with an associated occupation surface of sandy clay. This wall was subsequently robbed out.

The area was then used for burials relating to the church of St Benet. There were 21 burials, the partial remains of an additional two coffins with no associated skeletons, and a grave cut where the skeleton lay largely beyond the limit of excavation. Six of the burials were adults, eight were infants and seven were juveniles, pre-adolescents or adolescents.

The four earliest burials in the trench (Skeletons 14053, 14064, 14069 and 14071) were on a north-east-north to south-west-south alignment. None of these burials had coffins. These burials were clearly laid in relation to the Roman wall, which must still have been visible at this time. One of these burials was C14 dated with a 95% probability to AD 861-991. Dean tentatively suggested (2012, 109-110, Figure 28) that the Roman wall may have been incorporated into the south wall of the fabric of St Benet's church, or may have been reused as a cemetery boundary stating that no burials were present of the northwest side of the wall. There are problems with both these interpretations. The idea that the wall was part of the church seems odd given that the wall was partially demolished and the area above it was then used for further burials. It is also unclear if this wall really did mark the boundary of the cemetery; the area excavated to the north-west of this wall was less than one square metre in area, too small to be entirely sure that no burials were located further north.

At some stage the wall was robbed out (Contexts 14057-14058) and the area was then used for further burial. A group of sixteen burials and the remains of a partial coffin in a grave cut were present, and these were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment. The only exception was Skeleton 14001, which was on a north-east-north to south-west-south alignment. Six of these burials were in coffins, two had a plank over the skeleton, one had a plank under the skeleton and the remainder lacked coffins. There was also one infant (Skeleton 14007) with a plank over the skeleton and stones to either side of the head; the plank had a Nine-Mens-Morris board carved into its' upper surface; whether this was carved specifically for the burial or represented re-use of a convenient plank is impossible to determine. One of the later coffins in this group of burials was dated by dendrochronology to the last decade of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Bagwell and Tyres 2001).

Although it was not always possible to see clear grave cuts in this portion of the cemetery, many of the coffins were clearly originally in grave cuts, as they truncated earlier skeletons. There were numerous examples of intercut graves and superimposed burials. The longest stratigraphic sequence of intercut graves involved seven burials (Skeletons 14007, 14041, 14054, 14052, 14061, 14069 and 14071, see Appendix 1).

Above the burials there were two small pits. The uppermost 1.3m of deposits were machined out at the start of excavation.

#### 5.4.11 Trench 15

The earliest deposits in Trench 15 were of Roman date and could not be properly excavated due to a lack of time. These remains included a wall, various levelling deposits, and occupation deposits including charcoal and plaster.

Above the Roman levels were remains associated with St Benet's cemetery. It is quite clear that the earlier Roman wall had gone out of use and been completely buried prior to the development of the cemetery in this area. There were 25 burials and what was interpreted at the time of excavation as a large charnel pit (Context 1016). It is clear, however, that 15016 was in fact a large grave cut intended for skeleton 15015 and its associated coffin 15006. The earlier burials disturbed by the digging of this grave had been carefully placed within the grave cut, packed around the southern and eastern sides of the coffin. The Trench 15 burials were heavily intercut, with all burials being either intercut or overlain with the exception of just two skeletons (Contexts 15028 and 15031). Eight of the burials were infants, four were children, one was an adolescent and thirteen were adults.

The three earliest burials were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment, and one of these had an iron knife blade and buckle adhering to the pelvis. The remaining 24 burials were on a north-east to south-west alignment. Five of the burials were in coffins and one was in a hollowed out log. In addition one of the un-coffined skeletons was above a stain suggestive of a coffin. One of the coffins was dated by dendrochronology to the second quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. No clear grave cuts were visible for the remaining twenty skeletons, but at least six of these must have been in grave cuts as they clearly truncated earlier skeletons.

A metallised surface was then inserted above 25 of the burials. A butt-ended cobble and limestone wall foundation in a construction cut (Contexts 15008-9) truncated the metallised

surface. It should be noted that the original archive report (Bonner et al. 1990, 408-9) incorrectly stated that the wall was earlier than the metalling, even though the original site plans clearly show this was not the case. A single burial (Context 15003) was recorded at the time of excavation as being directly above the metallated surface. The original site plans clearly show that the burial was excavated first, and that the metalling was present beneath the skeleton. Dean has argued (2012, 117) that this relationship is incorrect and that the burial was sealed by the metalling. Context 15001 was a small collection of human bone found above the metalling, which can be interpreted either as a further badly damaged burial, or as bone which was disturbed and discarded after the cemetery went out of use.

The uppermost 1.25m of deposits were machined out at the start of the excavation. The upper portion of the machining was of brick rubble and large limestone blocks, while the lower 0.45m of machine cleared deposits were of garden type soil.

## **6 SUMMARY OF THE EXCAVATION RESULTS BY PERIOD**

### **6.1 Natural**

The earliest deposits seen on the site was naturally occurring clay, which was only observed in Trenches 2 and 3 approximately 4.3m below the present ground level.

### **6.2 The Roman remains**

It should be remembered that the Roman deposits on the site were only observed in a number of separate trenches, most of which were 3m x 3m in area or smaller. Even the largest trench excavated to examine Roman deposits (Trench 3) was only 17.6m x 3.1m in area. The intermittent nature of the observed Roman remains hampered interpretation, a problem which was compounded by the fact that it was not possible to fully excavate the Roman remains in Trenches 5, 8, 12, 14 and 15, due to lack of time.

#### *6.2.1 Period 1 – The third quarter of the first century.*

This period comprises the initial use of the site, and clearly relates to the creation of the Roman legionary fortress by the ninth legion c. AD71. The only trenches excavated to a sufficient depth for such remains to be uncovered were Trenches 2 and 3. Two distinct phases of activity were seen over a relatively short time-span. In the first phase a ditch like feature was present in Trench 2, while within Trench 3 there was a series of stake-holes, a possible post-hole and a single large pit. In addition, there was a shallow construction cut, packed with clay and cobbles in the eastern half of Trench 3 that had clearly supported a plaster faced structure, presumably built of timber. The second phase in Trench 2 comprised a number of small timber posts interpreted as possible scaffold-poles, while in Trench 3 there was a short-lived building and a series of dumped deposits.

#### *6.2.2 Period 2 – The last quarter of the first century.*

The last quarter of the first century saw a further four phases of short-lived structures in Trenches 2-3 and 5. The first phase of Roman activity involved the construction of new buildings across the site. In Trench 2 there was a beam-slot and post-holes. Trenches 3 and 5 contained an 'L' shaped wall (which was later robbed out). The wall was interpreted as possibly representing the perimeter wall for an open enclosure. Trench 5 contained a beam-slot. The second phase of activity was only seen in Trench 3, where two beam slots were dug,

one of which was lined with plaster. The third phase of activity, again only seen in Trench 3, comprised a turf spread. This could have come from clearance works in other parts of the fortress, or represent the disposal of stockpiled turf. The final phase of late first century activity comprised the robbing out of the building seen in Trenches 3 and 5.

#### 6.2.3 *Period 3 – The first half of the 2nd century.*

The early second century saw a major rearrangement of the area, possibly relating to the time when the sixth legion took over the fortress from the ninth legion. Buildings or deposits relating to this period were present in Trenches 2-5, 9, 12 and 14. In Trench 2 a major wall and smaller internal wall were built, and associated flooring was present. A stone lined hearth or flue was also associated with these walls. In Trench 3 a timber and plaster floor was present, which may represent a mortar mixing floor. This area was subsequently covered by a metalled surface. Part of a stone building with external surfaces was present in Trench 4, while in Trench 9 there was a cobble and mortar foundation interpreted as being a machine base. Roman stone walls were observed in Trenches 12 and 14 which were interpreted as being of this phase, but as it was not possible to excavate these structures fully, their precise date is unclear.

#### 6.2.4 *Period 4 – The second half of the second century.*

The early second century buildings continued to be used throughout the second half of the second century. In the case of Trench 2 a succession of floor deposits accumulated, while a post-hole suggests some structural alterations. Subsidiary walls were then added inside the building dividing the internal space into small booths (Plate 2). Trench 3 had a series of levelling deposits and metalled surfaces, suggesting it was an open space. Levelling deposits and dumps in Trench 5 suggest that it was also an exterior space. In Trench 9 the hard standing was replaced by two pits, one a rubbish pit and the second for mixing mortar. The wall seen in Trench 12 remained in use. New walls were constructed in Trenches 9 and 12, while a single wall was present in Trench 15.



**Plate 2 The Roman walls in Trench 2. Scale unit 0.1m.**

**6.2.5** *Period 5 – The late 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century*

Activity in and around the early second century buildings seems to have continued into the later 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Within the Trench 2 building there were a series of dumps and also a small pit cut. Trenches 3 and 5 continued in use as external areas, and a new surface was laid down in Trench 4.

**6.4 The early 5<sup>th</sup> century to the Norman Conquest**

A number of features were present that could not be closely dated, but which may be of post-Roman date. Three sandstone blocks were present in Trench 8 which did not align to the Roman buildings, and these may therefore represent post-Roman re-use of earlier masonry. In Trench 3 there were a series of driven posts and post-holes, together with a sill- beam trench, the layout of which did not respect either the Roman remains or the later medieval tenements. Driven posts in Trench 6 may be related to those seen in Trench 3. It is possible that these represent Anglian activity.

**6.4.1** *Period 6 – Robbing of the Roman buildings*

The next major activity on the site was the robbing of the various Roman walls in Trenches 3-4, 9, 12 and 14-15. It is unclear precisely when this happened, or whether this represents a single episode, or several different phases of robbing.

**6.4.2** *Period 7 – The establishment of St Benet's church and its associated burial ground*

**The church of St Benet**

The precise date at which the church was founded is unknown, but it had to be after St Benedict Biscop's death in 689 and before the late 9<sup>th</sup>/early 10<sup>th</sup> century, as coffins of that date were present in the churchyard. No conclusive evidence of the church building was seen in the 1989/1990 excavations. It is possible, however, that a group of limestone blocks seen during the machine clearance of Trench 15, originated from the fabric of the church. If so, these blocks must have been reused in houses known as Benet's Rents, which are known to have existed on the site following the demolition of the church c. 1361.

**The size of the churchyard**

Burials were present in Trenches 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14 and 15. The south-eastern limit of the cemetery lay somewhere between Trenches 3 and 8 and the property at number 20 Swinegate (no burials were present at this property when it was excavated in 1990). The south-western side of the cemetery was located between Trenches 4 and 14. The north-eastern limit of the cemetery is unclear. The north-western limit was somewhere between the southern sides of Trenches 13 and 2, and the northern sides of Trenches 12 and 3. Dean (2012, 112) has suggested that the north-western side of the cemetery was marked by a pair of ditches seen in Trench 9 and a ditch seen in Trench 11, but this seems doubtful (see 5.4.7 above).

**Cemetery planning**

It is difficult to comment on evidence of deliberate planning within the cemetery, as it was not fully excavated. There is some tentative evidence for burial rows being present, though most of the burials do not seem to have been in rows.

In Trench 3 skeletons 3428, 3450, and 3441 seem to be laid in a row. In Trench 5 skeleton 5026 and coffin 5024 may represent the earliest row of burial, which was then truncated by burials 5038 and 5005; all the later burials in this trench are clearly not in rows. Trench 7 has a clear row of burials (Contexts 7059, 7067 and 7061), neatly separated from a fourth burial (Context 7062) which may be all that remains of the next row of burials. No clear rows of burial were seen in Trenches 8 or 11. In Trench 14 it would seem that the arrangement of graves was always somewhat chaotic, though burials 14007, 14054, 14065 and 14067 may represent a row, but if so two of the burials within this row intercut. In Trench 15 skeletons 15031, and 15021, 15032 and 15041, 15030 and 15013, and 15033, 15037 and 15024 may represent rows, but these are again so heavily intercut it is difficult to be sure.

Comparative sites in York show a variety of layouts. At Dixon Lane, York (McComish 2015, 52) there were no clear rows or patterns within a group of 13 pre-Conquest burials that were suggestive of deliberate cemetery planning. This is in contrast to the burial rows seen at the pre-11th-century cemetery at York Minster (Phillips and Heywood 1995, 81) and at the 10th- to 11th-century cemetery at St Andrew's Fishergate, York (Kemp and Graves 1996, Figures 154-155).

### **Burial alignments**

It was impossible to determine the alignments of some of the burials as they were either too fragmentary, or lay largely beyond the limit of excavation. Despite this it was clear that there were a number of differing burial alignments present within the cemetery, ranging from north-north-east to south-south-west, north-east to south-west, and east-north-east to west-south-west. Buckberry (2004, 170) noted that burials are usually aligned east-west in cemeteries of this date, though in some cases such as York Minster, burials could be on differing alignments as they respected Roman buildings. The unusual alignment at Swinegate suggests that they too were placed in relation to the surviving Roman remains in the area.

### **The density of burial**

The location of the burials in the cemetery is shown on Figure 4. There was clearly a difference in the density of burials present across the St Benet's churchyard. Trenches 3, 7 and 11 were the least densely used, with 0.79, 0.47 and 0.8 burials per metre square respectively. Burial was slightly denser in Trenches 5 and 8 at 1.3 and 1.2 burials per square metre. It was impossible to determine the original density of burial within Trench 12 as much of this area had been truncated by a Victorian cellar. Trenches 14 and 15 were by far the most intensively used with 2.6 and 3.5 burials per metre square respectively.

It would be expected that burials would be densest within, or immediately outside the church, decreasing in density with distance from the church. This implies that St Benet's church was located close to Trenches 14-15.

The total lack of burials in Trench 6 is hard to explain as this must have been within the cemetery. Either any burials within this trench were removed at a later stage, or for some reason this area of the cemetery was not used for burial.

### **The location of adults and children within the cemetery**

The proportion of adults to infants, children, sub-adults and juveniles varied across the site. In the trenches to the north-east of Swinegate the proportion of adults ranged from 60% to 85% of the total number of burials present (85% in Trench 3, 81% in Trench 5, 75% in Trench 7, 60% in Trench 8 and 76% in Trench 11). The percentage of adult burials was much lower in the trenches to the south-west of Swinegate, with only 23% of the burials in Trench 14 and 51% of the burials in Trench 15 being adults. Clearly the infants, children, juveniles, adolescents and sub-adults were concentrated to the south of Swinegate, particularly in Trench 14. As noted above the original composition of the cemetery in Trench 12 is unknown.

Buckberry (2004, 162-163) noted that clusters of infant graves have often been identified close to the walls of churches in 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries, citing Raunds (Northamptonshire), Jarrow (Northumberland), Winchester Old Minster (Hampshire), Cherry Hinton (Cambridgeshire) and Compton Bassett (Wiltshire) as examples. This pattern is by no means universal as other cemeteries lack clusters of infants, such as Barrow-on-Humber (Lincolnshire) or St Nicholas Shambles (London) (Buckberry 2004, 162-163).

### **The location of males and females**

Buckberry (2004, 159) noted that at Raunds (Northamptonshire) more males were buried in the area of the cemetery immediately to the south of the church, close to the church entrance, while at Winchester Old Minster more males than females were buried close to St Swithun's grave. There was, however, no clear pattern in terms of where male and female adults were buried within the St Benet's cemetery (Buckberry 2004, Figure 6.73)

### **The development of the cemetery over time**

Phasing the cemetery was exceptionally difficult due to a number of factors. Firstly the entire area of the cemetery was not excavated, making it difficult to relate the trenches to one another. For example, it is impossible to determine whether a group of north-east-north to west-south-west aligned burials in Trenches 14 and 3 were related, or whether a group of east-north-east to west-south-west aligned burials in Trenches 14 and 15 were related, or whether the similarity of alignments was purely coincidental.

Secondly, the lack of intercutting between the graves in Trenches 3, 7, 8, 11 and 12 made it difficult to determine any chronology of burial within these areas of the cemetery.

Thirdly, the only horizon which could be clearly seen across the site was a metallised surface. Seventy-eight burials were sealed by this deposit, while nine burials post-dated the metallising. At the very least these burials could therefore be phased in relation to the metallising. Unfortunately, the 22 burials in Trenches 12 and Trench 14 could not be phased in this way, as the metallised surface was not present in these trenches.

The fourth problem relates to the significance or otherwise of the changes in burial alignment seen within the Swinegate cemetery, with burials on three differing alignments being present (north-east-north to west-south-west, east-north-east to west-south-west and north-east to south-west). Changes in alignment relating to phasing have been seen at other sites. For example, at York Minster the pre-Conquest graves were aligned to the underlying Roman buildings while the later burials were aligned to the Anglo-Norman and later cathedral (Phillips

and Heywood 1995, 81). At Wells, Somerset, burials post-dating AD 1200 were aligned to the present cathedral, while earlier burials followed the alignment of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral (Rodwell 1989, 147). A change in alignment was also seen at Dixon Lane, York, between pre- and post-Conquest burials (McComish 2015, 51). Changes in alignment are not, however, necessarily related to chronological change. Daniell (1997, 148) noted that the church building exerted the primary influence on grave alignment, but that other cemetery features such as crosses, walls and pathways were also influential. Boundaries certainly played a role in the alignment of graves at the Jewish cemetery at York dating from 1170 to 1290, where the rows of burials curved reflecting the south-western boundary of the site (Lilley et al. 1994, 305 and Figure 187)

In the case of Swinegate the significance of the changes in alignment is unclear. In Trench 14 the earliest group of burials were aligned north-east-north to west-south-west with the later burials being aligned east-north-east to west-south-west, while in Trenches 5 and 15 a group of definitely earlier burials were aligned east-north-east to west-south-west with the later burials being aligned north-east to south-west. While it would be tempting to say on the basis of this that the north-east-north to west-south-west burials were the earliest (Group A), followed by the east-north-east to west-south-west aligned burials (Group B), followed by the north-east to south-west aligned burials (Group C), such a sequence would contradict the dating evidence recovered through dendrochronology. One coffin from Group A dated to 933 or later, while three coffins from Group B dated to 992, 996 and 1001 or later, and two coffins from Group C dated to 913 and 939 or later. It would seem from the dendrochronological evidence that the changes in alignment at Swinegate do not therefore reflect changes in chronology.

Given these problems the present study suggests that there were four phases of cemetery development (three of burial and one comprising the laying down of a metallised surface), but without further large-scale excavation the process of development in the cemetery cannot be fully understood.

### ***Phase 1***

There were four burials in Trench 14 that were definitely the earliest burials in that trench. The burials were on a north-east-north to west-south-west alignment and they had clearly been placed in relation to upstanding Roman masonry. One of these burials was dated by C14 dating as AD 861-991±32.

### ***Phase 2***

The next phase of burial seems to include groups of burials on differing alignments. It is impossible to know how most of these related to one another chronologically.

There were four burials in the western half of Trench 3 that were on a north-east-north to south-west-south alignment. Two of these burials lacked coffins, while two had coffins. There were no stratigraphic links between this group and any other burials in Trench 3, it was therefore impossible to determine how they related to the other alignments present.

Some burials were on an east-north-east to west-south-west alignment (four in Trench 3, four in Trench 5, four in Trench 7, two in Trench 8, four in Trench 11 and the three earliest burials

in Trench 15) Eleven of these lacked coffins, ten were within coffins, and there was an additional coffin where the body lay beyond the limit of excavation.

There were 64 burials on a north-east to south-west alignment (nine in the western two-thirds of Trench 3, seven in Trench 5, one in Trench 12, twenty-four in Trench 14 and twenty-four in Trench 15). Twenty-four of these burials were in coffins, 26 lacked coffins and one was buried in a hollowed out log. The remaining burials in this group lacked coffins.

### ***Phase 3***

A number of non-burial features were present across the site. In Trench 12 there was an accumulation of domestic refuse in a pit cut, while in Trench 3 there was a large post-hole and some wooden stakes. Trench 15 contained a shallow cut with cobble packing that may represent part of a structure. In Trench 9 there were two ditches with organic fills which were also seen in Trench 11, where the ditches merged. Collectively these features may imply that the cemetery to the north-east of Swinegate was being less intensively used.

A metallised stone surface was then laid down across much of the site, being visible in Trenches 3, 5-8, 11 and 15 (Plate 3). The only trenches within the cemetery which lacked evidence for this surface were Trenches 12 and 14. The metallising clearly represents a major change within the cemetery, but it did not mark the cessation of burial in the area.



**Plate 3 The metallised surface in Trench 3 together with later posts. Scale unit 0.1m.**

### ***Phase 4***

The final phase of burial occurred above the metallised surface, and comprised seven burials in Trench 3 (Contexts 3334, 3335, 3336, 3327, 3331, 3379 and 3381) and two in Trench 5 (Contexts 15003 and 15001).

The alignment of the burials within Trench 3 varied considerably, with one example at the western end and one near the eastern end of the trench being north-east to south west, one

at the western end being north-east-north to south-west-south and the remainder at the eastern end being east-north-east to west-south-west. Clearly alignment was not carefully controlled at this stage. On the basis of the alignments it is possible that Skeleton 14001 in Trench 14 (currently classed as Phase 3) may also belong to this group, as it was on a north-east-north to south-west-south alignment despite being one of the last burials to be interred.

One of the skeletons in this group was dated by Carbon 14 dating as 1081±32 (with a 95% probability). It should be noted, however, that one of the coffins in this group was dated by dendrochronology to AD892, despite being in a cut which clearly truncated the metallated surface. This may suggest that there is a problem with the stratigraphy of this individual coffin as recorded on site.

It should be noted that the sequence given above differs from that in Dean (2012, 110-3) who suggested that there were three phases of cemetery use all of which pre-dated the metallated surface. The first phase being un-coffined burials located just 0.3-0.4m above the latest possible Roman levels, and in the case of Trench 14 reusing standing Roman masonry either within the church or as a churchyard wall. Dean's second suggested phase was of coffined burials on a slightly different alignment, while third phase saw the cemetery contract with the area to the north-east of Swinegate being abandoned, with burial only continuing in Trenches 14-15. Even here there were changes with the Roman wall in Trench 14 going out of use and being partially robbed out, after which burial recommenced. Dean places these changes in the late 10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> century (Dean 2012, 116). Dean (2012, 126) argued that the cemetery in T14/15 continued to at least the early 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **The types of burial present**

Numerous different burial practices were seen within the St Benet's cemetery, taking each of these in turn:

- *Burials in wooden coffins*

The excellent preservation of wood at the site meant that wooden coffins were present (Plate 4). Preservation of such quality is exceptionally rare, making this a highly unusual and valuable collection. A total of 38 burials in wooden coffins were present, which were located across the entire cemetery (fifteen in Trench 3, five in Trench 5, four in Trench 7, two in Trench 8, two in Trench 11, four in Trench 14, and six in Trench 15). There were fragments of a further four coffins in Trenches 5, 11 and 14 (one example, one example and two examples respectively). While most of the coffins were for adult burials (29 examples), there was also one sub-adult, two adolescents and five infants buried in coffins. The age of the remaining coffined individual (in Trench 5) is unknown as the body lay beyond the limit of excavation.

The coffins are currently being researched as part of the Museum Resilience Fund. One thing of note regarding the Swinegate coffins is that they were held together with wooden dowels rather than nails. The coffins also had a rather flimsy appearance, and were presumably custom made to transport the body a short distance for burial, as they were not robust enough for long journeys. A typical coffin prior to excavation, with the lid clearly visible, and of a burial once the coffin lid had been removed is shown on Plate 4.

The most directly comparable group of coffins are 34 from St Peter's church, Barton-upon-Humber, North Lincolnshire which date to the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries; most, though not all, of

these coffins were also made entirely of wood (Rodwell and Rodwell 1982: 301; Panter 1994, 26-31).

It should be noted that even on sites where wood was not preserved the position of the burial or the presence of coffin-nails can be used to infer the original presence of coffins. For example, at Dixon Lane, York twelve of the thirteen pre-Conquest burials seem to have been in wooden coffins, three had associated nails while the position of the remaining skeletons indicated a coffin (McComish 2015, 54).



**Plate 4 A wooden coffin lid and burial with the coffin lid removed. Scale unit 0.1m.**

- *Burial below a wooden plank with stones by the head and a limestone grave marker*

A single adult (Skeleton 3489) in Trench 2 was buried in a grave cut beneath a plank. This burial had a limestone grave marker 0.26m wide and roughly 0.15m high at the head end of the grave (Plate 5). Within the base of the grave there were further stones next to the left ear (Plate 6).

Other examples of grave markers are known on pre-Conquest burials in York. A single 12<sup>th</sup> century child's burial at St Andrew's, Fishergate had a plain stone marker (Kemp 1996, 80). Three pre-Conquest burials at Dixon Lane, York, may also have had marker posts as indicated by soil stains at the head of two graves and at the foot of a third grave; though it was unclear if these markers had been of wood or stone (McComish 2015, 32). Upright stone markers are known from a pre-11th-century cemetery at York Minster (Phillips and Heywood 1995, 84). Post-holes for wooden markers were excavated at Raunds Furnells, Northamptonshire, and at St Mark's Wigford, Lincoln (Daniell 2002, 242).

Stones placed behind the head of a burial or to either side of the ears are commonly known as 'ear-muffs' and 'pillow stones', and these are commonly found in cemeteries of pre-Conquest to 12th-century date, with examples known at Kellington, Yorkshire (Mytum 1993, 16), Raunds

Furnells, Northamptonshire (Boddington 1996, 39), Fillingham, Lincolnshire, and Newark, Nottinghamshire (Hadley 2001, 106), Repton, Derbyshire (Hadley 2002, 214) and Dixon Lane, York (McComish 2105, 54). Buckberry (2004, 190) also noted that pillow stones were known on many of the Anglo-Saxon burial grounds in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire that she examined.

It is unclear if the Swinegate example represents a single ear-muff or a badly positioned pillow stone.



**Plate 5 Burial 3489 showing the grave marker stone. Scale unit 0.1m**



**Plate 6 Burial 3489 after the skeleton was removed showing the stones within the grave. Scale unit 0.1m**

The precise function of pillow stones and ear muffs is unclear; they may have been intended to keep the head facing upwards towards heaven, or east to face the risen Christ on the day of resurrection. Alternatively, they may have been intended to cause discomfort, as a sign of penitence and humility. Against this, evidence has been found which shows that such stones could support pillows stuffed with organic materials (Rodwell 2005, 188), which may suggest that the stones were designed for comfort and support. Such stones could also be purely practical, given that the skull frequently detaches from the body during the processes of decay, the stones may simply represent an attempt to keep the skull in place. The fact that stones were used to hold a decapitated skull in the correct position on a 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century burial at St Andrew's, Fishergate, York, may lend weight to this idea (Kemp 1996, 77).

- *Burials with a plank above the skeleton and stones to either side of the head*

One of the infants (Skeleton 14007) in Trench 14 had a plank over the skeleton and stones to either side of the head, the so called 'ear-muffs'. The plank over the skeleton had a Nine-Mens-Morris board carved into the upper surface (Plate 7). This game is clearly ancient, but it is unclear at what point it was introduced into Britain. The St Benet's example is pre-Conquest in date. The game was certainly widely known after the Norman Conquest as there are 18 different examples of this game being carved as graffiti into later medieval churches (Harris 2006, 210-11).



**Plate 7** The Nine Men's Morris game carved onto a plank above burial 14007. Scale unit 0.1m

- *Burials in a hollowed out log*

A single adult burial (Skeleton 15037) in Trench 15 was buried in a hollowed out log. Another example of such a burial was found on a 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century cemetery at St Peter's church Barton-upon-Humber, Lincolnshire (Panter 1994, 30).

- *Burials with a plank above the skeleton*

Three burials had a plank laid over the skeleton. One of these was an adult burial in Trench 3 (Skeleton 3516), and the remaining two were two infants and a pre-adolescent in Trench 14 (Skeletons 14008, and 14020). The use of a single plank above a grave is known from the pre-conquest cemetery at Dixon Lane, York, where there was a single burial with nails and clench bolts above the burial, suggestive of a wooden cover (McComish 2015, 30).

- *Burials with a plank beneath the skeleton*

Three burials in Trench 14 had a plank beneath the skeleton as opposed to a full coffin, two of these burials were of infants and one was an adult (Skeletons 14001, 14035 and 14067). It is possible that the planks acted as a bier upon which the skeleton was brought to the cemetery for burial. Similar pre-Conquest burials are known from York Minster (Phillips and Heywood 1995, 81–7).

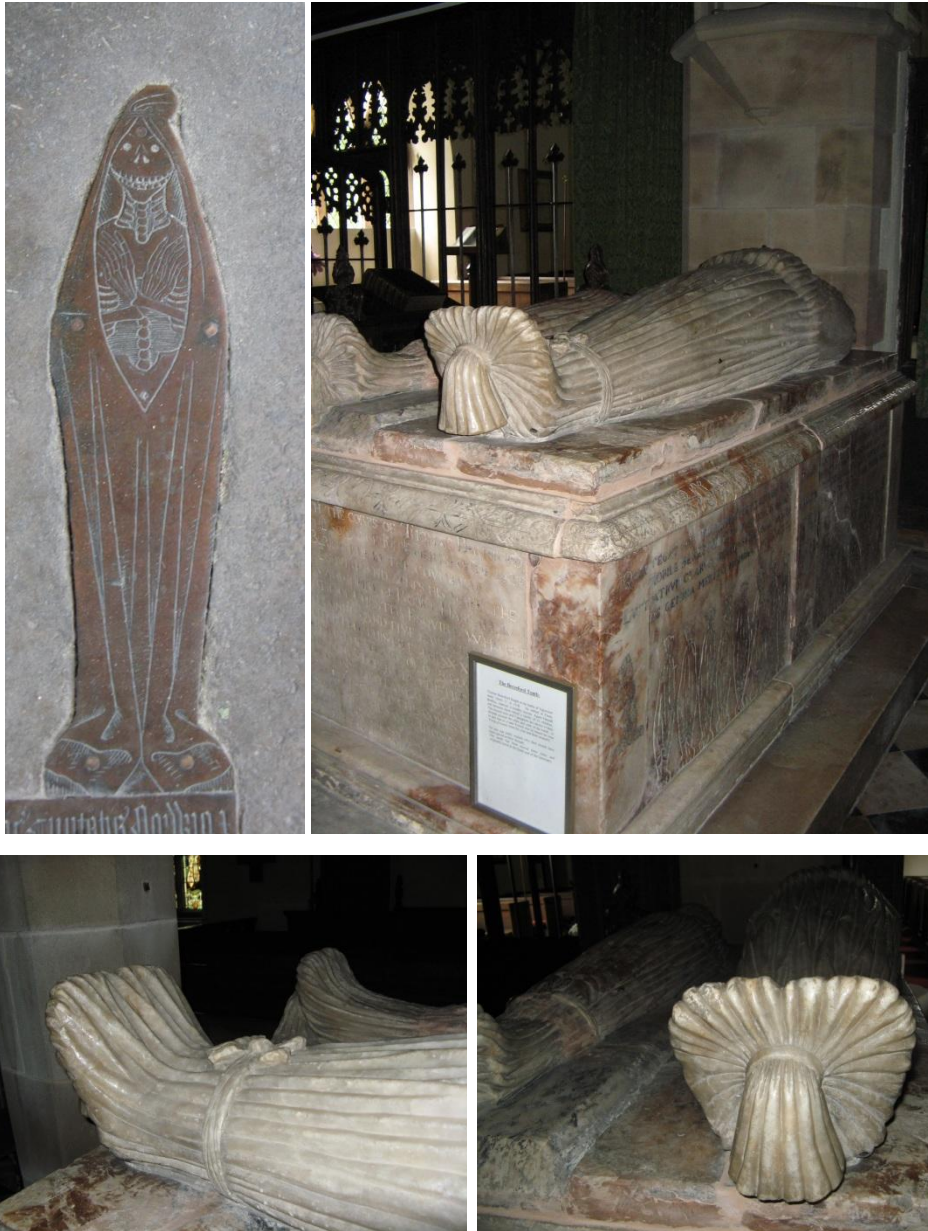
- *Burials in shrouds*

Two adult burials in Trench 3 were surrounded by soil-stains suggestive of shrouds (Skeletons 3440 and 3495, Plate 8). No forms of pins or fasteners were present, suggesting that the cloth was tied or stitched together. Shroud pins seem to be rare on pre-Conquest sites. No shroud pins were seen on a group of six pre-Conquest cemeteries in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire examined by Buckberry (2004, 172).



**Plate 8 Skeletons 3492 and 3495 (the uppermost skeleton) showing the staining on the bones. Scale unit 0.1m.**

Although of a much later date there are depictions in various churches of bodies in bag like shrouds, tied in knots above the head and feet of the body. A 15th century brass at Aylsham, church in Norfolk shows a skeleton partially peeping out of such a bag, while a tomb at Fenny Bentley church in Derbyshire dating to 1473 depicts two adults in bags knotted above the head and feet and tied around the lower legs (Plate 9).



**Plate 9 A brass at Aylsham church, Norfolk, and tomb at Fenny Bentley church Derbyshire , showing bag like shrouds.**

- *Un-coffined burials*

Fifty burials at St Benet's lacked any evidence for coffins or shrouds. All of these burials were presumably originally within grave cuts, though it was often difficult to determine such cuts when the burials were excavated. These burials were scattered across the cemetery with eight in Trench 3, six in Trench 5, three in Trench 8, two in Trench 11, one in Trench 12, 11 in Trench 14 and twenty in Trench 15. There were 27 adults, four adolescents, three juveniles, four children, and 13 infants buried in this way. Assuming that a coffin represented a more up-market burial type, these un-coffined individuals could be seen as representing the simplest, and possibly the cheapest, form of burial. While 45% of the adult burials lacked coffins, 65% of pre-adults lacked coffins, perhaps suggesting that children were more likely to have a simple burial.

## Burial positions

It was impossible to determine the original burial positions of many of the skeletons, as they were incomplete, either because they lay partially beyond the area of excavation, or due to intercutting. Despite this, it is clear that all the skeletons were all supine and extended, and that there was considerable variation in the position of the hands. The various positions seen were:

- both arms fully extended (4 examples)
- both arms extended but with slightly flexed legs (1 example)
- the left arm extended the right arm flexed (1 example)
- both hands under the body (1 example)
- the left hand on the pelvis the right hand on chest (1 example)
- both arms across the stomach (1 example)
- both hands on the abdomen (1 example)
- both hands on the right pelvis (1 example)
- the hands crossing on the pelvis (4 examples)
- the right hand on the pelvis the left arm extended (2 examples)
- the right hand under the pelvis (1 example)
- the right hand on the right thigh (2 examples)
- the right hand under the pelvis and the left hand by the side (1 example)
- the right hand on the right pelvis and left hand on the left pelvis (2 examples)
- the left hand on the right pelvis the right arm extended (2 examples)

It is often difficult to comment on burial positions in pre-Conquest cemeteries, as the burials tend to be incomplete, but a similar variation in hand position was seen at Dixon Lane, York, where six different arm positions on just thirteen pre-Conquest burials (McComish 2015, 32). Buckberry (2004, 171) found that most burials on six pre-conquest cemeteries that she examined in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (which included St Benet's) were supine and extended.

## Grave goods

The only burial at the site to be accompanied by grave goods was Skeleton 15042 which was one of the earliest burials in Trench 15. There were two iron objects, one fused to each pelvis, and these were identified as a knife and a buckle (Small Find 945 and 949). A perforated hone stone (Small Find 948) was also found in association with this skeleton, but it is unclear from the original site records precisely where the hone was located within the grave. The presence of the buckle may indicate that both the knife and a hone were originally hanging from a belt. If so, this represents the only evidence for clothing seen at the cemetery.

Tenth and eleventh century burials across England typically lack grave goods, except for a few examples with knives (Hadley 2001, 37).

## Grave depth and size

Very few of the burials had clearly recognisable grave cuts, though logically all the burials must originally have been placed in graves. Most of the visible grave cuts were rectangular and designed to neatly fit the individual or coffin concerned, and these cuts ranged from 0.08m to 0.32m in depth. The shallowness of the graves may be misleading as the upper portions of the

graves may not have been recognised during excavation. There is however, evidence that other pre-Conquest graves in York were shallow, with the grave cuts at Dixon Lane, York, ranging from 0.22m to 0.45m in depth (McComish 2015, 53). This may suggest that shallow graves were the norm.

Three of the grave cuts were different. Grave cut 5039 was decidedly dog-legged, with the body laid diagonally across the grave. This grave was 0.64m wide, in excess of 1.7m long and 0.25m deep. Its peculiar shape was presumably an error on the part of the grave-digger. A single grave cut (Context 4063) was notably wider at the shoulders, and this may have been to accommodate the individual concerned. This grave ranged from 0.4m to 0.6m in width, it was in excess of 1.76m long and it was 0.13m deep. By far the largest grave cut was Context 15016 which was 1.10m wide, in excess of 2.10m long, and 0.34m deep. This cut housed not just the burial in its coffin, but also charnel which was neatly arranged to the south and east of the coffin. Whether the size of the grave related to the status of the individual in life, or not, is unclear. Dixon Lane, York, also produced a single wider pre-Conquest grave (McComish 2015, 53), providing a parallel for the Swinegate example.

The skeletons were all clearly originally buried individually, with no evidence for shared grave cuts. This is standard for burials between the 7th and 11th centuries, though exceptions are known such as at Ailcy Hill, Ripon, and St Andrew's, Fishergate, York (Hadley 2001, 106).

#### **Burial types on comparable sites**

Buckberry (2004, 171) noted that there is striking variation in burial practices in the late Anglo-Saxon period, particularly in the types of containers used for the body including coffins, iron-bound chests, boat parts, wooden planks or biers, sarcophagi and grave linings made of stone or other material. Hadley's summary of 9th to 11th-century burial practices includes a number of cemeteries, such as St Mark's, Lincoln, Newark (Nottinghamshire) and Barton-upon-Humber (Lincolnshire), each of which exhibited a variety of burial practices including wooden coffins, un-coffined burials, stone cists or grave linings, head-support stones, charcoal burials, upright stone markers and post-holes for wooden markers (Hadley 2002, 219–20).

This diversity of burial types is seen at other sites in York. The pre-11th-century cemetery at York Minster included evidence for burials with stone markers (both recumbent and upright), wooden coffins, possible re-use of domestic chests as coffins, a burial with possible re-used boat timbers and head-support stones, burial on a plank or bier, burials (both coffined and uncoffined) on beds of charcoal, burials on a bed of mortar, the use of head-support stones, and stone-lined graves (Phillips and Heywood 1995, 81–7). At St Andrew's, Fishergate, York, a 10th to 11th-century cemetery, though less diverse than that at York Minster, contained double burials, a triple burial, evidence for wooden coffins, a burial in a re-used domestic chest that seems to have been covered with a pall, a tightly bound burial, a decapitated burial with head-support stones, and an infant with a stone grave marker (Kemp 1996, 131, 133, 153). At Dixon Lane, York, a group of 13 pre-Conquest burials included one with head-support stones, one with a possible grave marker, one with timber/s above the body and a possible grave marker, one un-coffined burial, one with a possible stone lining and two grave cuts were backfilled with pure clay (McComish 2015, 56).

It is clear, therefore, that the St Benet's pre-Conquest burials fit into a widespread pattern of variable burial rites within a single cemetery which is seen across England from the 9th to 11th centuries. A lack of legislation relating to burial practices suggests that the Church was not especially concerned about the precise method of burial at this time (Daniell 1997, 174).

## 6.5 The Norman Conquest to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century

### 6.5.1 *Period 9 – Division of the area to the north-east of Swinegate into tenements*

Remains of this period were present in Trenches 2-3, 5-7, and 9-12. The area of the former St Benet's cemetery to the north of Swinegate clearly went out of use, and the area assumed a more domestic character being divided into tenements, separated by wooden and wicker fences (Plate 10), within which organic soils typical of back yards and gardens accumulated. There were a number of features such as cess pits and rubbish pits (seen in Trenches 9, 11 and 12); such features are typical of medieval back yards in York. An area of compact metalling in Trench 3 may indicate a small alley. The creation of the tenements above the cemetery seems to date to the late 11<sup>th</sup> to early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The medieval street of Patrick Pool (the present Swinegate) was presumably also laid out at the same time as the tenements.



**Plate 10 The tenement divisions in Trench 3. Scale unit 0.1m.**

### 6.3.5 *Period 10 – 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century activity*

During the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries further organic deposits accumulated in Trenches 2-4 and 6-7. It should be noted that in some areas deposits of this date may have been removed by machine at the start of the excavation.

### 6.3.6 *Period 11 – 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century activity*

The earliest buildings on the Little Stonegate frontage were of mid-13<sup>th</sup> century date. These continued in use until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and they were associated with the production of copper alloy dress-fittings (Dean 2012, 155).

Further organic accumulations of 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century date, together with features typical of back yards were seen in the area north-east of Swinegate, but there were also hints of structures in this area. In Trench 2 there was a barrel lined well and a pit. Trench 3 contained a considerable build-up of organic soil, interspersed with pits and spreads of domestic rubbish. The property boundaries established in this area during the late 11<sup>th</sup> century were largely maintained, and one of the Trench 3 tenements contained a rough stone sill that may have represented the threshold of a small building. In Trench 6 there were well-made hearths of edge set tiles and a small beam slot, suggesting that the trench was possibly within a building at this stage. Trench 7 contained a wall at right angles to the Swinegate street frontage together with associated floors; this building was subsequently demolished.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century writing tablets from the excavations were recovered from a Period 11 deposit in Trench 3 (Context 3187). It was impossible to tell at the time of excavation if this context represented the backfill of a pit cut, or a later deposit which had settled into the top of an earlier pit. The writing tablets were found by excavation assistant Martin Bartlett, who saw the tablets protruding from the leather pouch that contained them. The tablets reminded Martin of a pack of playing cards or a large matchbox when he first saw them. The tablets are currently being researched as part of a Museum Resilience Fund project, but to provide the reader with some idea of their form, the tablets (Plate 11) were made of wood with recessed surfaces designed to accommodate wax. The wax acted as a writing surface when used with a stylus. The tablets were in a leather pouch which was decorated with leaf patterns. The writing on the tablets includes part of a poem written in Middle English, some sort of list or set of accounts, and part is a part of a legal document in Latin. Clearly the owner of the tablets was not just literate, but bi-lingual. These tablets date to c. 1350 and they are considered to be the finest set to have been found in Europe.



**Plate 11 Two of the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century writing tablets from Swinegate following conservation.**

### 6.3.7 *Period 11 – 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century activity*

Organic accumulation which could be dated to the 14-15<sup>th</sup> century were seen in Trenches 2 and 7, but in many other trenches the remains of this date were removed by machine at the start of the excavations.

The earliest deposits reached during the excavation of Trench 1 were of 14<sup>th</sup> century date (Dean 2012, 144), and comprised three discrete properties with buildings fronting onto Grape Lane (Plate 12). These properties were associated with copper and iron working, and underwent various phases of alteration from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dean 2012, 147-8, 156-63).

In Trench 4 the earliest buildings along the Back Swinegate frontage were of mid- to late 14<sup>th</sup> century date, and these appear to represent the first medieval buildings in this area. In common with the buildings on Grape Lane these were associated with evidence for metalworking, in this case copper-working and the production of nails (Dean 2012, 153).



**Plate 12 Excavation of the late medieval buildings on Grape Lane**

## 6.4 **Post-medieval and modern remains**

Period 12 comprised the machine cleared deposits across the site and dependent upon the trench concerned these deposits were of 16<sup>th</sup> century to modern date.

## 7 **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The excavations at 12-18 Swinegate, 14 Little Stonegate and 18 Back Swinegate were of immense interest, providing a rare example of a sequence of excavated deposits spanning the entire history of York from the Romans to the present day. There were many highlights on this excavation, too many to describe in full in this report, but the collection of wooden coffins and the wooden writing tablets stand out as being of national importance. The coffins represent

one of the few collections of pre-Conquest coffins known in Britain and as such are of immense use both for the study of burial practices at this time, and in terms of the carpentry techniques used in their construction. The writing tablets are similarly rare and fascinating, providing a rare glimpse into the everyday life of a 14<sup>th</sup> century inhabitant of York, who was clearly a well-educated person being fluent in both English and Latin.

York Archaeological Trust is grateful to the Museum Resilience Fund for providing the opportunity to further research these exceptionally important objects, which deserve to be more widely known.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

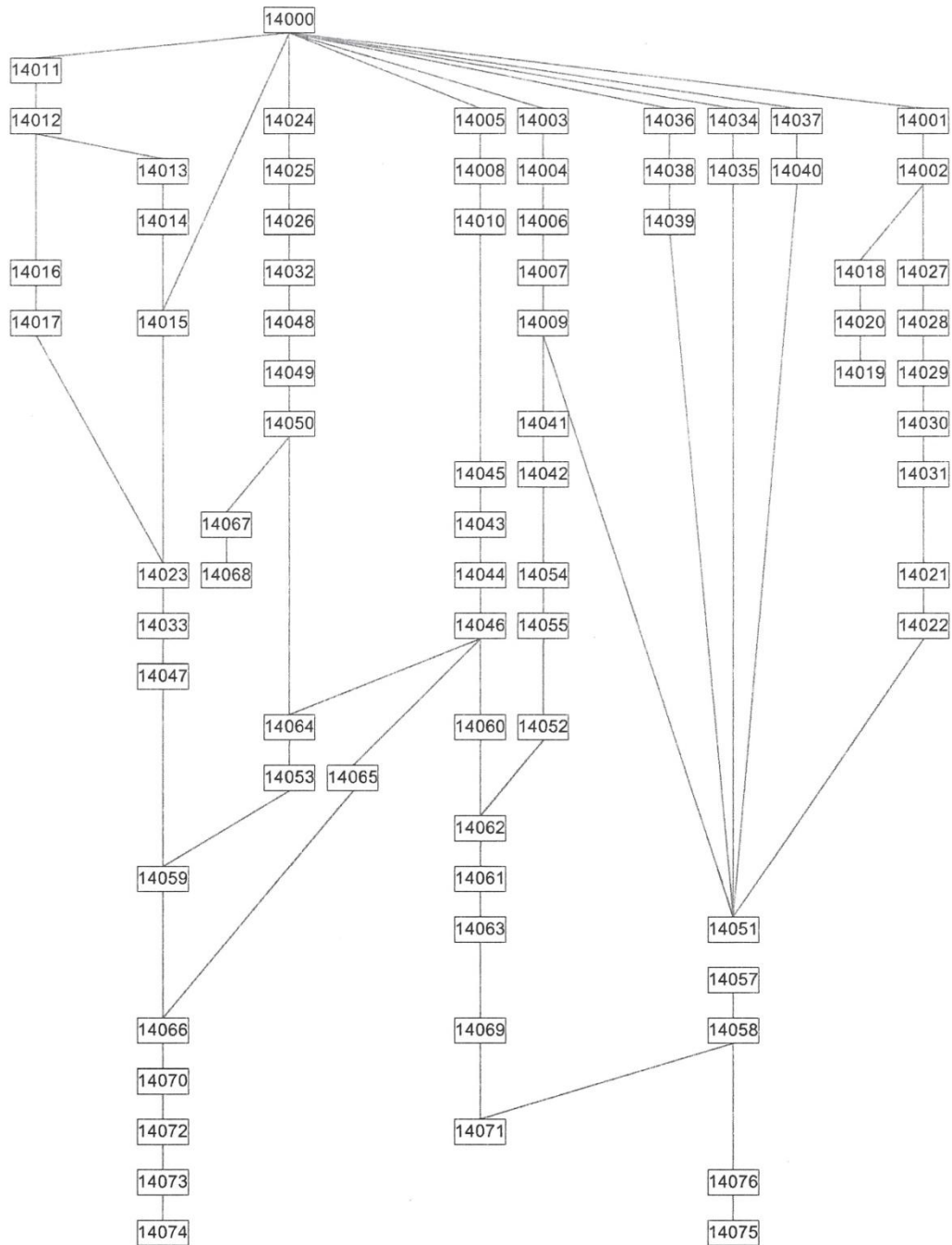
The figures were prepared by K. Weston.

The photographs in Plate 9 are from the collection of J.M. McComish.

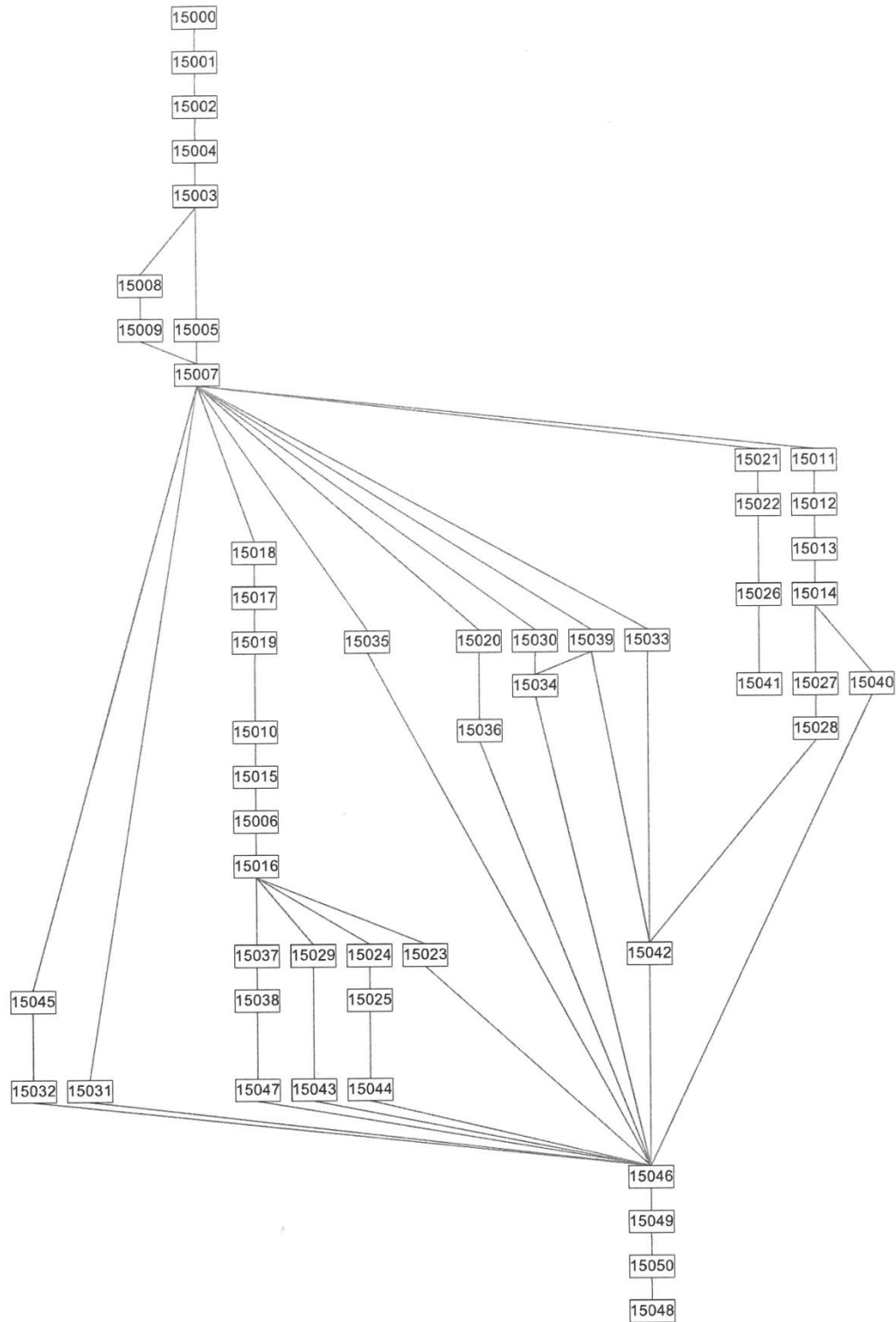
**APPENDIX 1 HARRIS MATRICES FOR TRENCHES 14 AND 15**

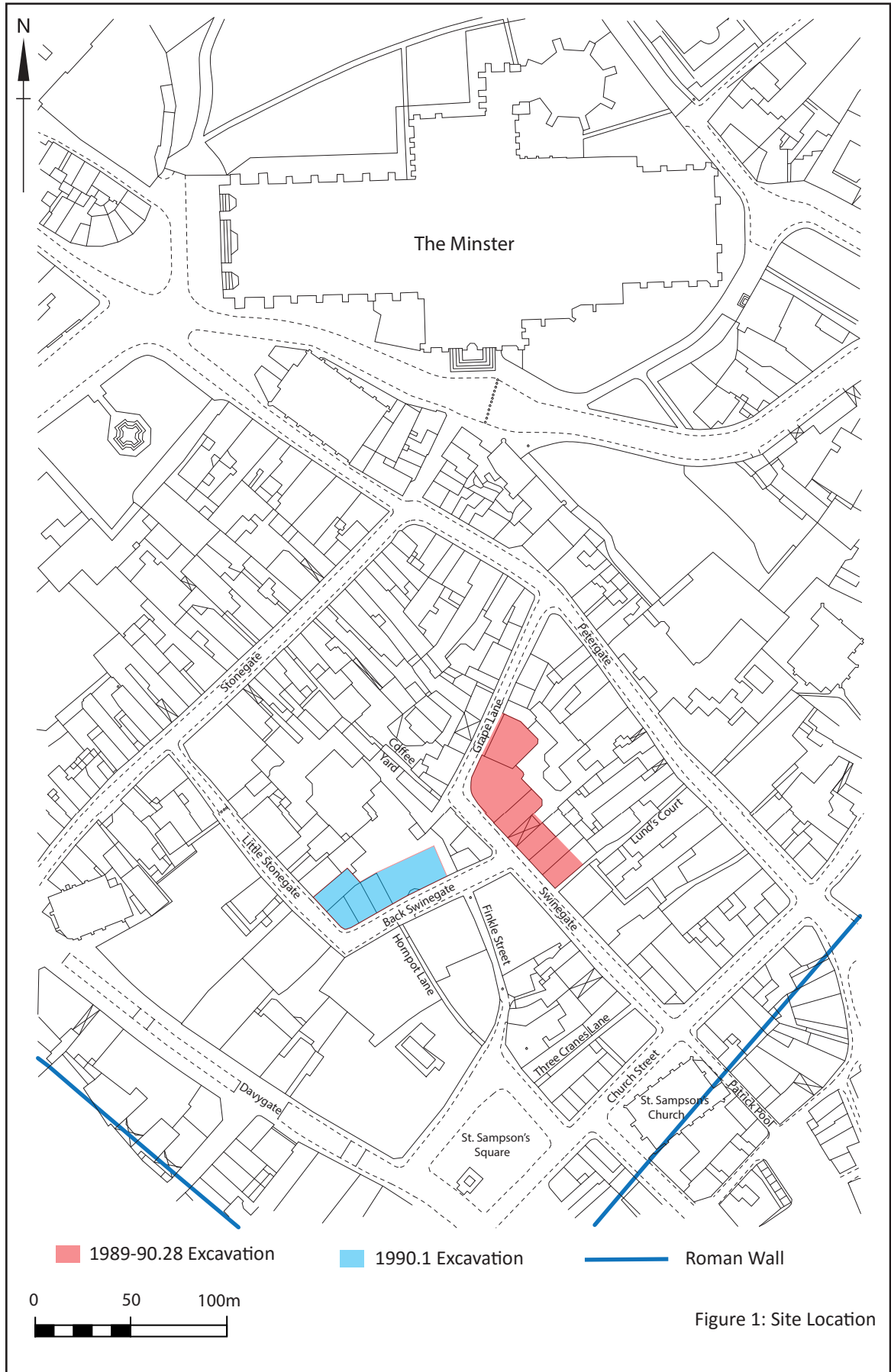
The following appendix includes revised Harris matrices for Trenches 14 and 15 based solely on the intercutting of the burials, rather than in relation to the arbitrary spits of cemetery soil as shown on the original site matrices.

**Trench 14**



**Trench 15**





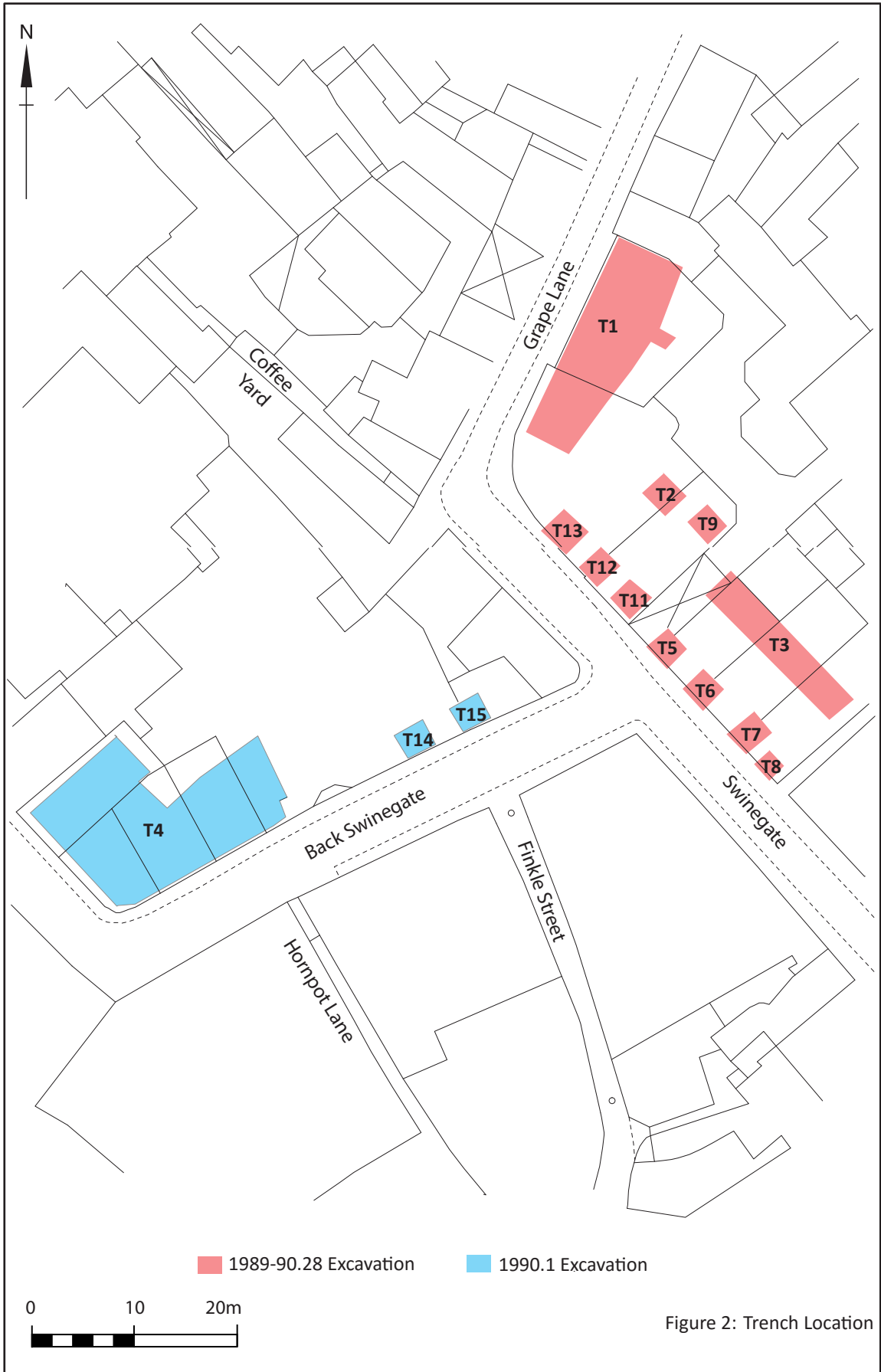


Figure 2: Trench Location

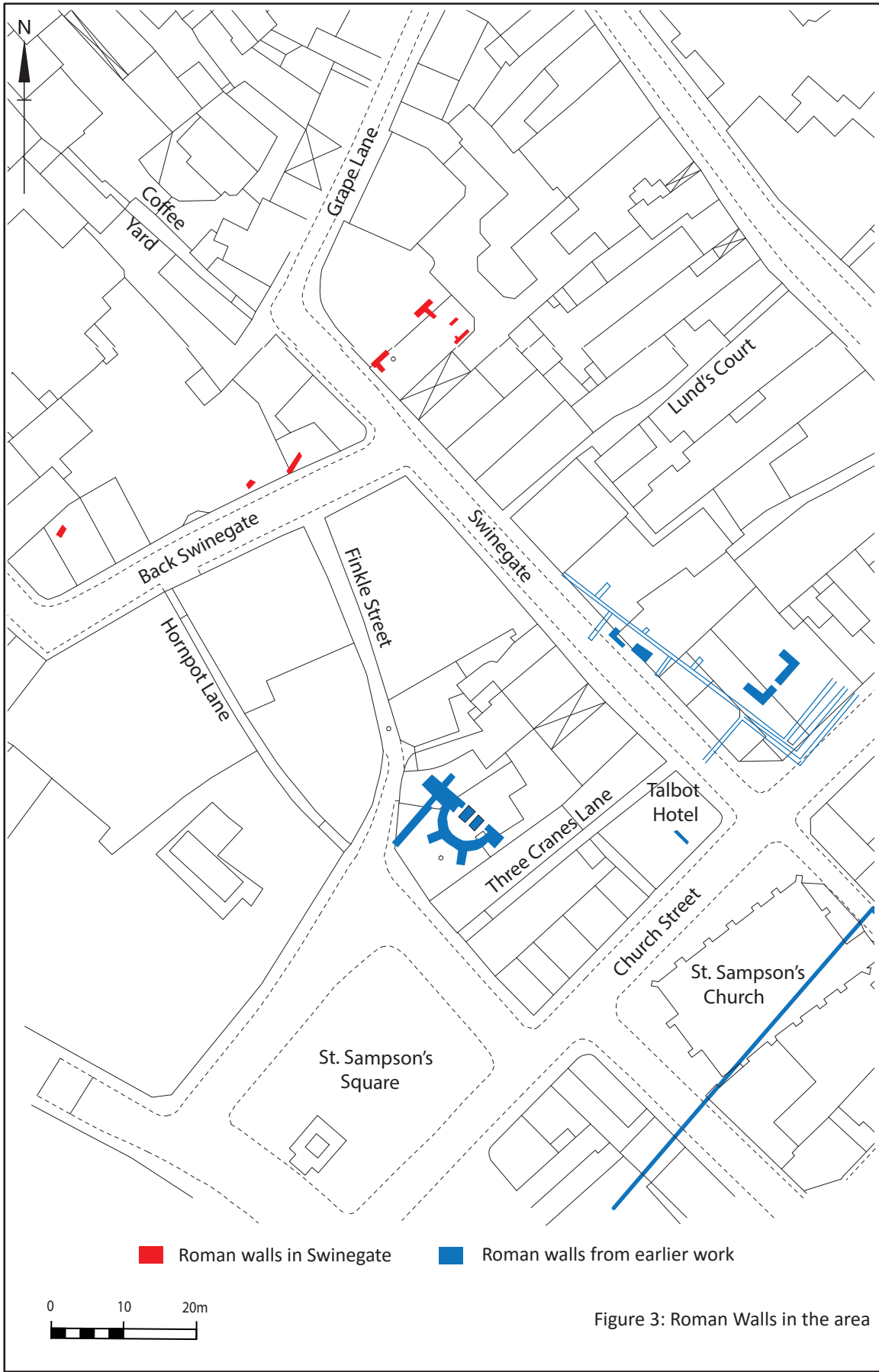


Figure 3: Roman Walls in the area

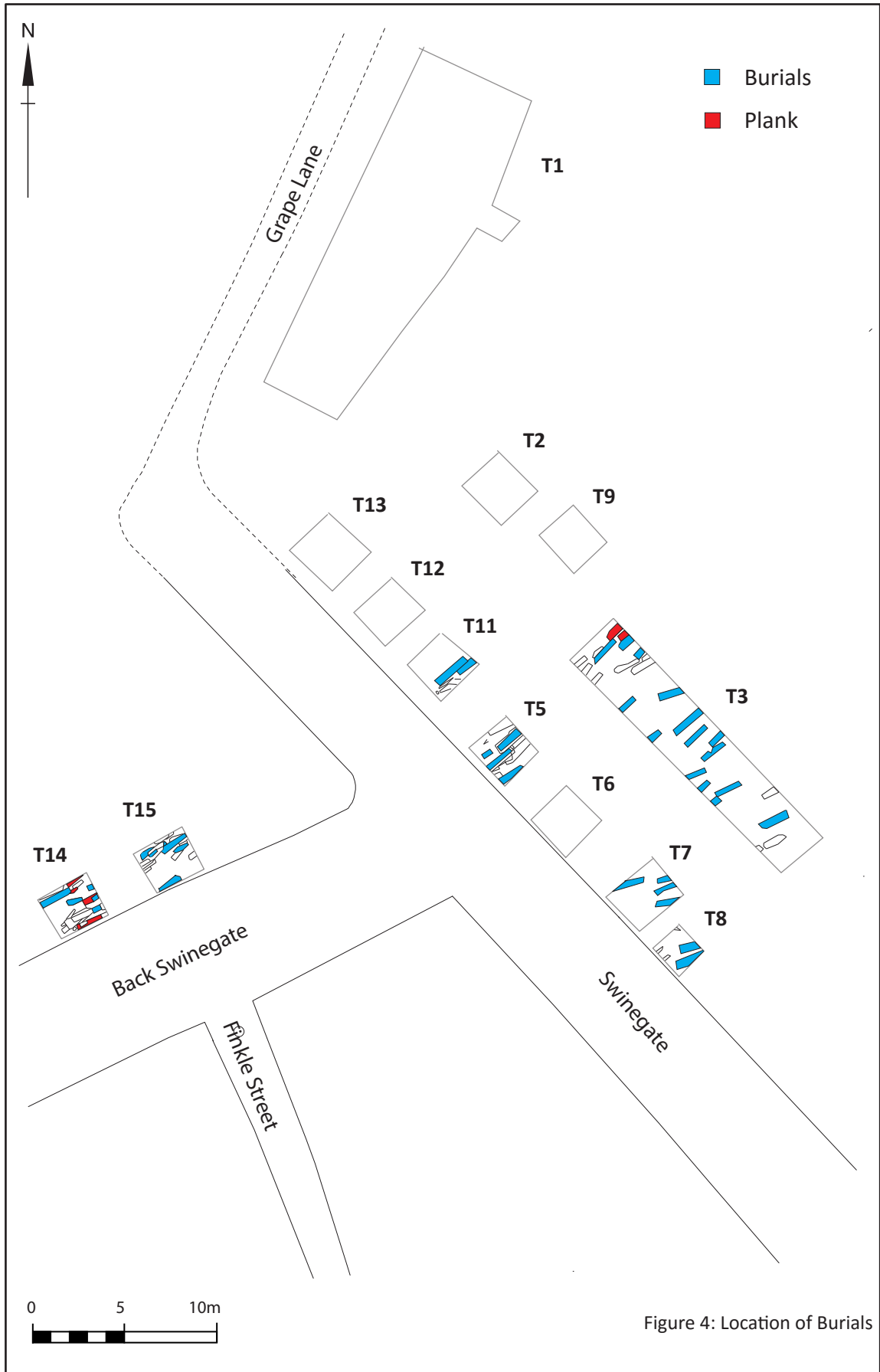


Figure 4: Location of Burials