

# **FORMER CO-OP WAREHOUSE NORTH STREET YORK**

## **A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

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## 1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during work on the redevelopment of the warehouse building on the west side of North Street, York. (National Grid Reference SE 6011 5167) (Fig. 1), as the result of an Operations Notice which was served on the City of York Council.

This watching brief, starting on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998, was undertaken by Russell Marwood on behalf of the York Archaeological Trust. All records of the watching brief are stored under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM: 1998.690.

## 2.0 Methodology

The watching brief consisted of the observation of ground works and the recording of any archaeological deposits, with the aim of establishing their nature, character and date. Recording followed the procedures laid down in the York Archaeological Trust *Context Recording Manual* (1996).

The work was undertaken in several phases. The first was the recording of the section faces of trenches excavated within the warehouse. The actual excavation of the trenches was undertaken without prior notice being given to the archaeologist.

The second phase of work was the observation of the sinking of a series of piles. The third phase of work was the excavations required for the siting of an electrical sub-station on the street front.

## 3.0 Historical and Geological Background

North Street is situated within the Roman civilian settlement area and is along the alignment of roads running along the west bank of the River Ouse. Reference is made to it c.1090 when it was called *Nordstreta* and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century it consisted of the whole of the street running north from Micklegate, taking in what is now Wellington Row. It then turned west on a line parallel to Micklegate, taking in what is now Tanner Row, as shown on R.H.Skaife's 1864 map of York (Fig. 2).

The work force for the tanneries along Tanner Row was housed along North Street by the 14<sup>th</sup> century and in later times the street had some association with the building trades: bricklayers, joiners, masons, sand and timber merchants all had their yards along North Street.

The first known recorded plan of York, drawn up in 1545 (Fig. 3), shows *The Northe Streite* running along the riverbank with a postern at the north-west end. Speed's plan of York, drawn c.1610, (Fig 4) shows vessels moored alongside what is probably a quay.

Baines' 1822 map of York shows more detail of the form of buildings erected along North Street and the build up of properties further north along Wellington Row (Fig. 5). It is clear, that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century a few persons of high standing had properties along North Street. Peter Atkinson, the architect, built his own house at No. 26, (now demolished) in 1776. The important yard of William Stead (1752-1834) stone and marble merchant was at No.36/38 from 1802 until his death.

Soil surveys have shown that underlying geology consists of alluvium overlaying glacial boulder clay.

#### **4.0 Archaeological Background**

North Street and its immediate surrounding area has seen much archaeological activity over recent years (Fig. 7). It is clear from these excavations that archaeological deposits remain in various locations very near to the current ground surface.

An observation on 6 December 1993, (accession code 1993.19) at National Grid Reference SE 6008 5177, showed alluvial silt 2.80m below ground level and above it various levelling deposits. A small area of cobbling of medieval date was also observed, associated with a building, together with timber piles set in clay. Overlaying all this was 0.80m of sand and a 15<sup>th</sup> century brick culvert.

Observations during a repair to the main sewer at N.G.R. SE 6011 5165 on 19 July 1993 (1993.10), revealed at approximately 3.70m below ground level a timber lined sewer. It was lined with a layer of floor tiles thought to be Roman in date. It was aligned north-west/south-east, the same alignment as the Roman buildings found along Skeldergate.

A major archaeological excavation took place from March to July 1993 at N.G.R. SE 6009 5178 (1993.1). This being in preparation for the construction of a 6m diameter pumping station. It revealed a 2<sup>nd</sup> century, robbed, deeply piled foundation trench for a Roman river wall. This in turn was found to be under successive Anglian, Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval river bank revetments.

Observations on 29 June 1992, (1992.1008) at N.G.R. SE 6016 5171 revealed mostly modern deposits but later medieval walls and drains were recorded during preliminary work for the major flood prevention scheme on North Street. Contractors trenches were observed on 30 April 1991, (1991.1008) at N.G.R. 6013 5174 and build-up, thought to be medieval in date, was observed 0.50m below ground level. Part of the inner face of the river wall was revealed in another trench.

On 20 November 1989 contractors trenches at N.G.R. 5159 5173 (1989.1031) exposed deposits thought to be medieval in date, down to a depth of 1m, whilst a section of trench was photographed in 1985 at N.G.R. SE 6008 5207 (1985.5) and unidentified medieval and post-medieval deposits were observed below a modern drain.

Post medieval stratification to a depth of 2m below ground surface was observed in August 1979 at N.G.R. SE 6014 5171 (1979.1017). This comprised of warehouse stone walls and wooden block floors beneath which was dumped material interpreted as medieval reclaimed riverside land. This sealed dumped organic deposits and alluvial sand. This stratification was observed from borehole cores which extended to a depth of 20m.

It seems therefore, in the light of this past archaeological evidence for the area around North Street, and its general location within the city centre that the current refurbishment would offer an opportunity to observe the nature and stratigraphy of a potentially archaeologically rich site.

## 5.0 Observations

The archaeological work to be undertaken was the recording of two north-west facing trench sections within the body of the warehouse (Fig. 8). The excavations however, were not observed archaeologically and material removed from the excavations was initially dumped outside the building and then transported away.

The first section, A-A, (Fig. 9) was recorded with the following stratified contexts:

Context Number	Description
1000	Concrete.
1001	Crushed concrete and brick rubble.
1002	Cut containing 1003.
1003	Fill of 1002. Loose brown sandy loams. 50% concrete & brick rubble, cobbles.
1004	?Cut. containing 1005.
1005	?Fill of 1004. Loose dark brown silty loams. 70% crushed brick & mortar rubble .
1006	Limestone hardcore.
1007	Sandstone blocks.
1008	Sand.
1009	Mortar.
1010	Loose brown silty loam. 60% brick rubble.
1011	Cut containing 1012.
1012	Fill of 1011. Friable brown silty clayey loam. Occasional charcoal fragments. 30% Brick rubble.
1013	Mid/dark brown sandy silts. Lenses of orange/brown clay. Patches of crushed mortar. Occasional cobbles & timber fragments. 10% charcoal fragments & flecking.
1014	Black silt.
1015	Cut containing 1016.
1016	Fill of 1015. Grey silty clay. Occasional charcoal flecking, ash & small pebbles.
1017	Cut containing 1018.

1018	Fill of 1017. Grey silty clay. Occasional oyster shell.
1019	Brown, slightly damp silty clay. 20% charcoal.
1020	Cream silty sand.
1021	Black silt.
1022	Grey silty clay. Occasional charcoal fragments, timber fragments, pebbles and gravel.
1023	Mid/dark grey clayey silts. Lenses of orange/brown clay. Patches of white mortar & 5% burnt daub. 25% charcoal fragments & flecking.
1024	Black, slightly organic silt.

The second section, B-B, (Fig. 10) was recorded with the following stratified contexts:

Context Number	Description
2000	Grey sandy silts. 75% limestone, brick rubble & hardcore.
2001	Cut containing 2002.
2002	Fill of cut 2001. Grey sandy silts. 50% limestone, brick rubble & hardcore.
2003	Limestone hardcore.
2004	Crushed brick rubble.
2005	Compact, small pebbles.
2006	Hard white mortar.
2007	Black organic silt.
2008	Very dark brown damp silty clay. Occasional ash & charcoal flecking.
2009	Cut containing 2010.
2010	Fill of 2009. Very dark brown silty clay mottled with dark grey silty loams. Occasional brick rubble, charcoal fragments and flecking, ash & small pebbles.
2011	Grey silty clay.
2012	Cream mortar.
2013	Brown sandy silt.
2014	Olive sandy silt.
2015	Very dark grey, fine silt.
2016	Firm, sticky dark orange clay.
2017	Cut containing 2018.
2018	Fill of 2017. Mid brown clayey silt. 40% charcoal, brick rubble.
2019	Mid brown, sticky clay. 20% crushed brick rubble.
2020	Dark grey silty clay. Occasional brick rubble, crushed mortar & charcoal fragments & flecking.
2021	Black silt.
2022	Olive clayey silt. Occasional animal bone, crushed mortar & charcoal flecking.
2023	Black silt.
2024	Cream silty sand. 20% pebbles.
2025	Laminated, sticky orange brown clay. Redeposited sub-soil.

2026	Black organic silt.
2027	Many alternate laminated layers of very dark grey , damp, silty sands and black silt.
2028	black organic silt.
2029	Cream, coarse sand.
2030	Very dark brown silt.
2031	Black, slightly organic silt.

The next work to be observed consisted of the sinking of a series of piles to support the new extension to the current building (Fig. 11). These were c.0.30m in diameter and sunk to an average depth of 15m. The very nature of this operation however, made it virtually impossible to identify any stratigraphic deposits during the proceedings.

It was observed however, that the first 0.75m to 1.00m of deposits removed during the piling contained frequent amounts of modern building debris, pottery and scrap iron. This was clarified when ground beams were dug along the line of the pile caps to similar depths and the sections observed. No other archaeological deposits were recorded at a specific depth, but sherds of green glazed pottery were noted, together with Samian ware. No structures or obstructions were encountered during the drilling process.

The final piece of observed work was the excavations undertaken to form a hard standing for an electrical sub-station on the street front. This consisted of the removal of deposits by machine over an area 5.30m back from the street front by 3.70m wide (Fig. 11).

Tarmac to a depth of 0.10m was removed to expose a 0.20m thick layer of limestone hardcore. Below this was a concrete surface which ended c.0.60 short of the west edge of the trench. A trench was cut along this edge to facilitate the insertion of a ground beam. This excavation was c.1.00m deep from the original tarmac surface and the deposits removed from the lower 0.30m consisted of layers of laminated silty sands and slightly organic silts. There was also an occasional sherd of green glazed pottery together with a moderate amount of animal bone.

Photographs were taken of the inside and outside of the building before refurbishment took place. These can be viewed in the Trust's photographic archive under the catalogue entry; 1998, Volume IV, 980068:03 to 980068:26.

## 6.0 Conclusions

The excavations produced very little in the form of datable evidence although the recorded sections were of limited value. No structures were encountered although limited dating evidence was gained from the small assemblage of finds. The discovery of such abraded pottery, the green glazed sherds being ostensibly from the 12/13<sup>th</sup> century and the Samian from the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, seems to point to continued activity on the site from at least the Roman to the medieval period.

The large sandstone blocks [1007] recorded in Section A-A seemed to have formed the floor of a warehouse during some earlier period. Perhaps they were the floor of the Ebor Works, noted on the 1889 Ordnance Survey (Fig. 6). Below this were various levelling deposits, [1010] & [1013], sealing a series of natural build-up/floor layers, [1014], [1019] & [1021]. Possible post holes [1015] & [1017] were probably associated with these floors. The remainder of the section seems to be made up of dumped material which may have been placed as a levelling deposit.

Section B-B was slightly different to A-A. If any stone blockwork did previously exist, it had been removed at some earlier date to be replaced by modern backfill and dump, [2000], [2010] & [2018]. These deposits were both cut into and sealing various layers of gravel, sand and silt, [2011] to [2016].

The conclusion therefore, drawn from these sections is that the deposits which were recorded in Section B-B were probably to be found outside a building. It may be that they have been more exposed to the direct influence of the forces of nature. Those recorded in Section A-A however, seem to have been located inside a building.

The excavations undertaken on the site of the sub-station revealed that archaeological deposits may well have been present towards the ground surface, but had been removed during the construction of the concrete slab discovered under the hardcore.

## 7.0 List of sources

York Archaeological Trust, (1998): *Gazetteer Project*.

Geology Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) (1973): *sheet 63*.

Various historical maps including: *Ordnance Survey (1889)*, *Skaipe (1864)*, *Baines (1822)*, *Speed (1610)*.

York Archaeological Trust, *Site Reports 1979.1017, 1985.5, 1989.1031, 1991.1008, 1992.1008, 1993.1, 1993.10 & 1993.19*.

Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, (1922): *City Of York, Vol. I Eboracum*.

Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, (1972): *City Of York, Vol. III South-west of the Ouse*.

## 8.0 List of Contributors

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Editor: Martin Stockwell

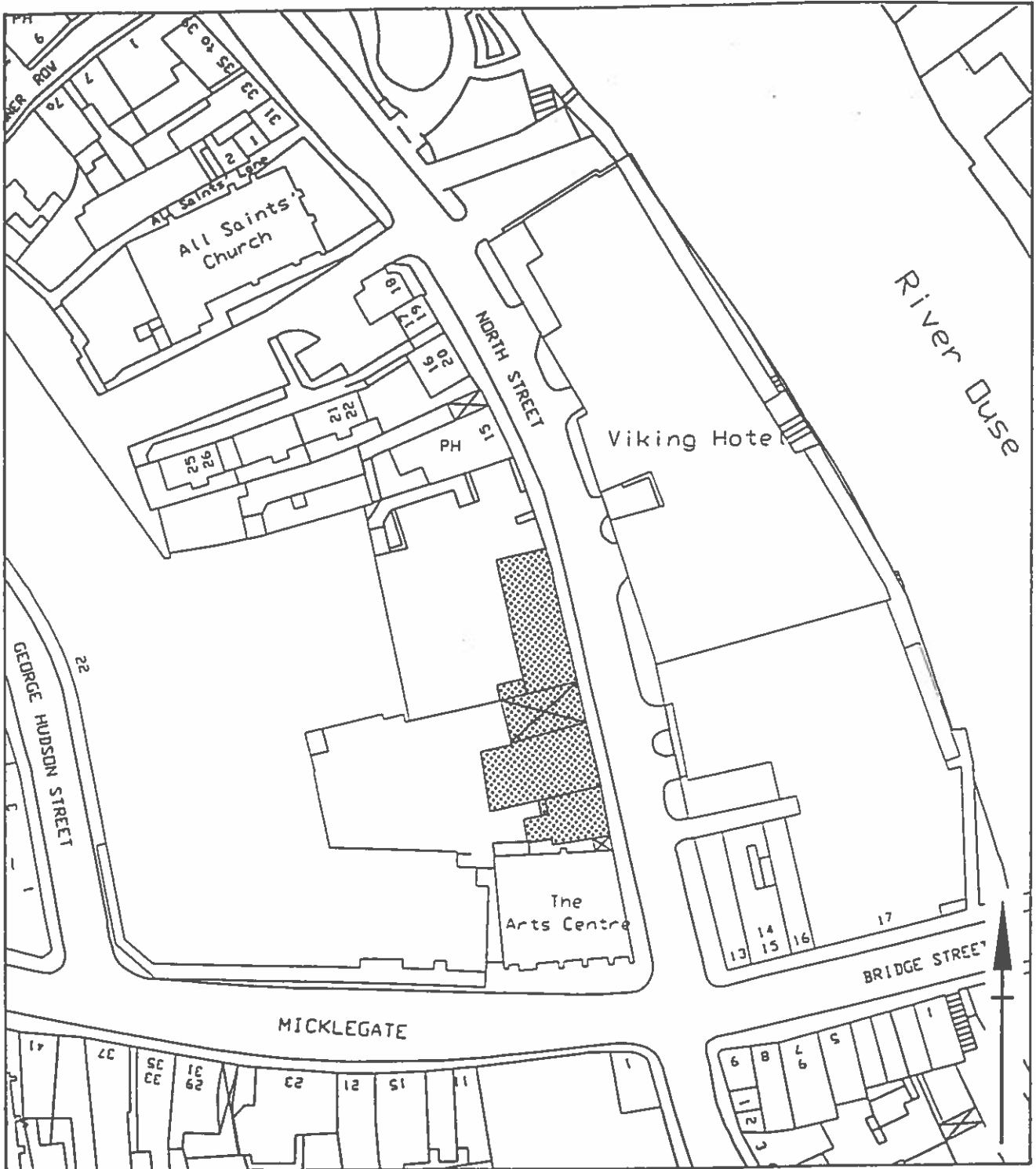


Figure 1. Site location

BASED UPON THE 1988 ORDNANCE SURVEY DIGITAL DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK YO1 7FC. LICENCE NUMBER ALA54123





Figure 2. Section of Skaife's 1864 plan of York

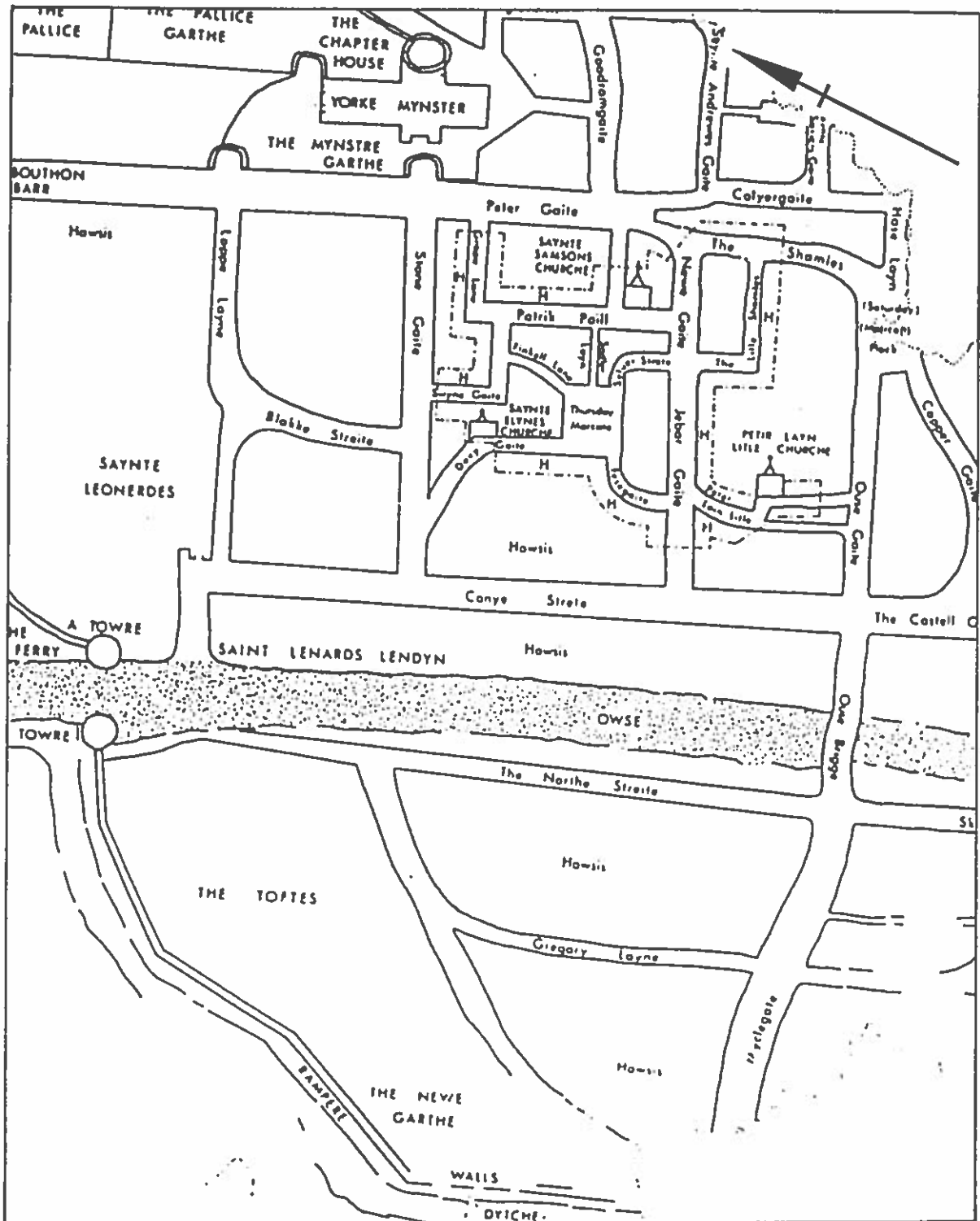


Figure 3. Part of the 1545 plan of York

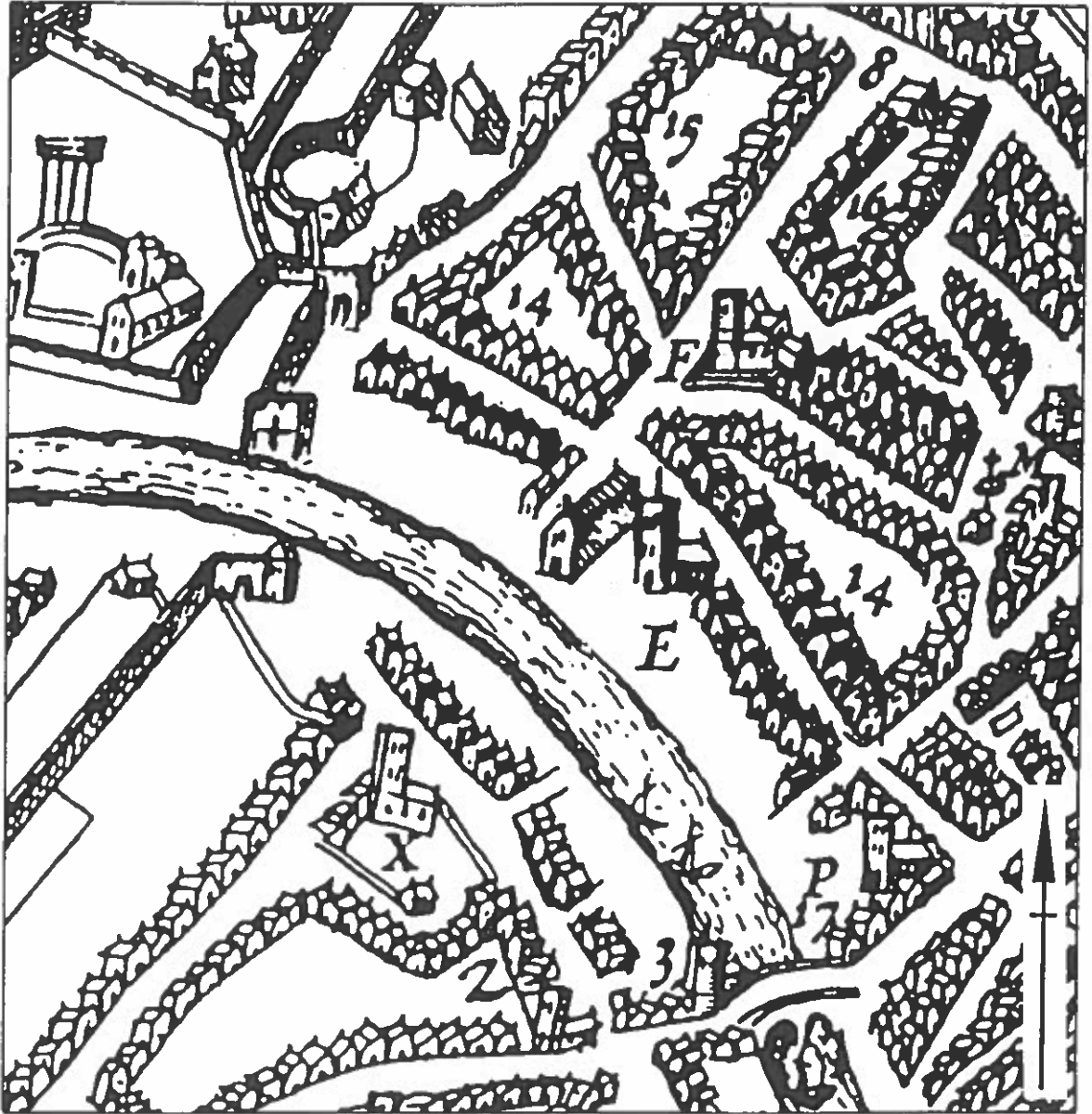


Figure 4. Section of Speed's 1610 plan of York

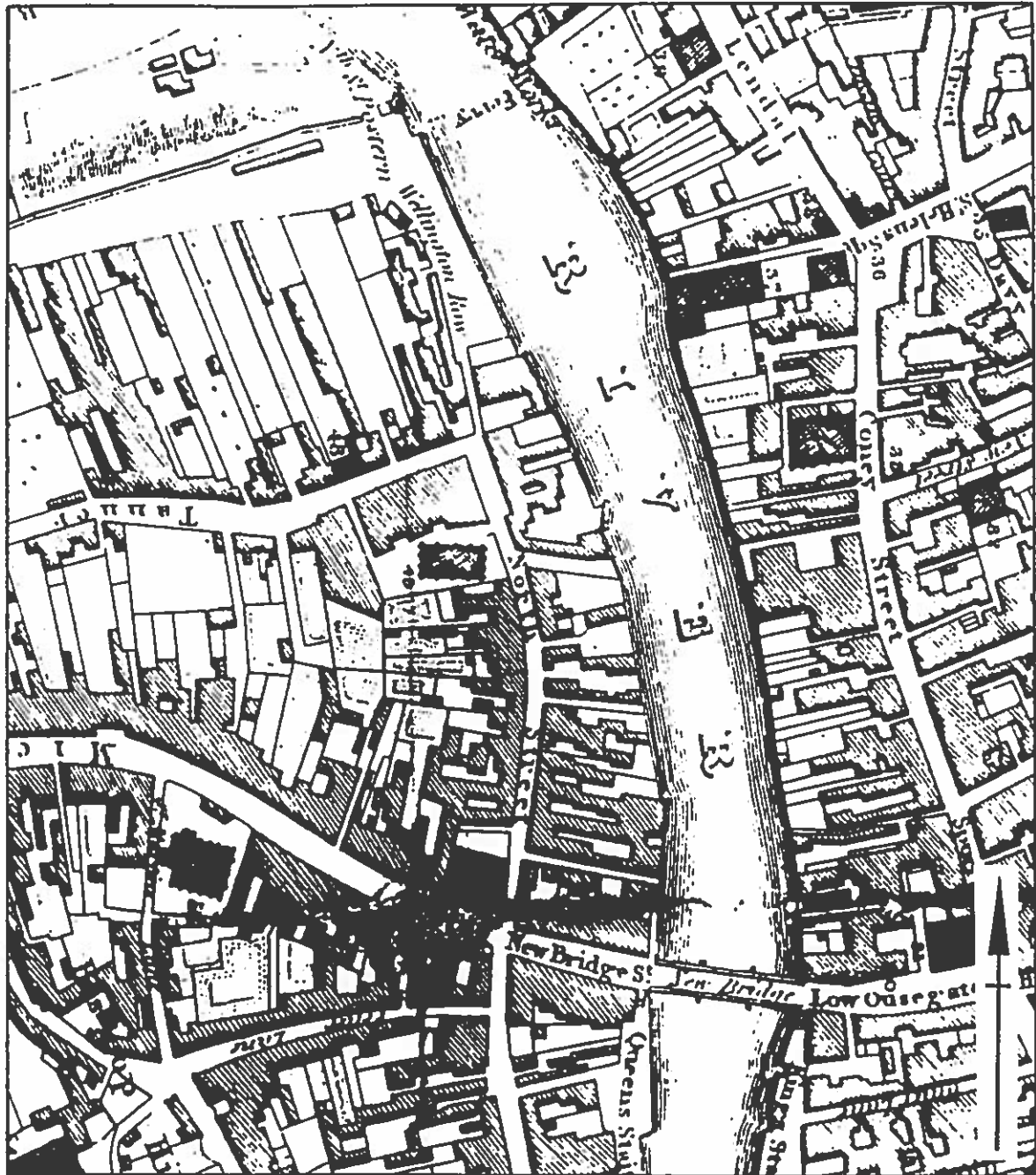


Figure 5. Section of Baines' plan of York, c.1822



Figure 6. Buildings listed in RCHM York, Vol. III

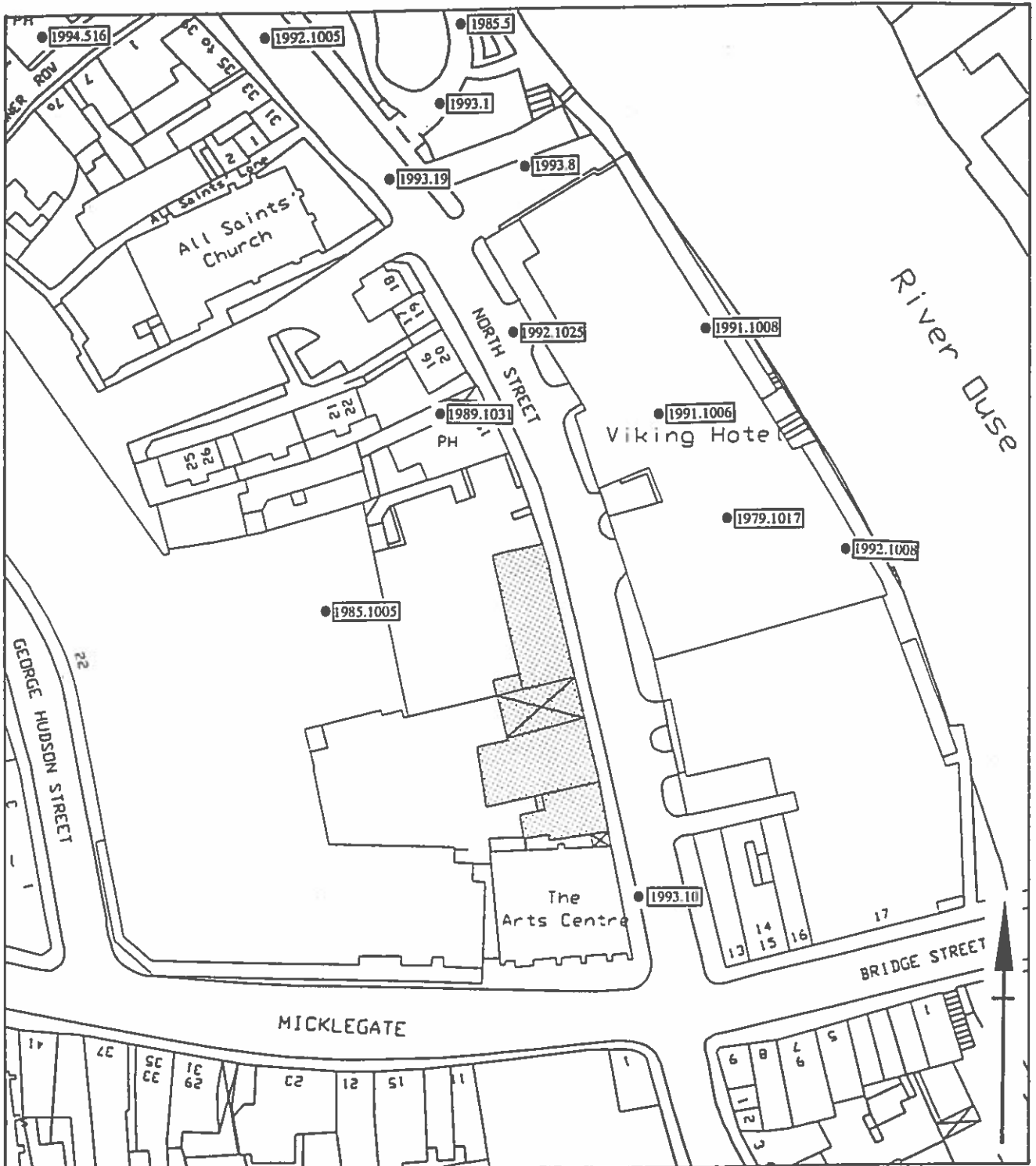


Figure 7. Recent archaeological observations

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Figure 8. Location of recorded sections

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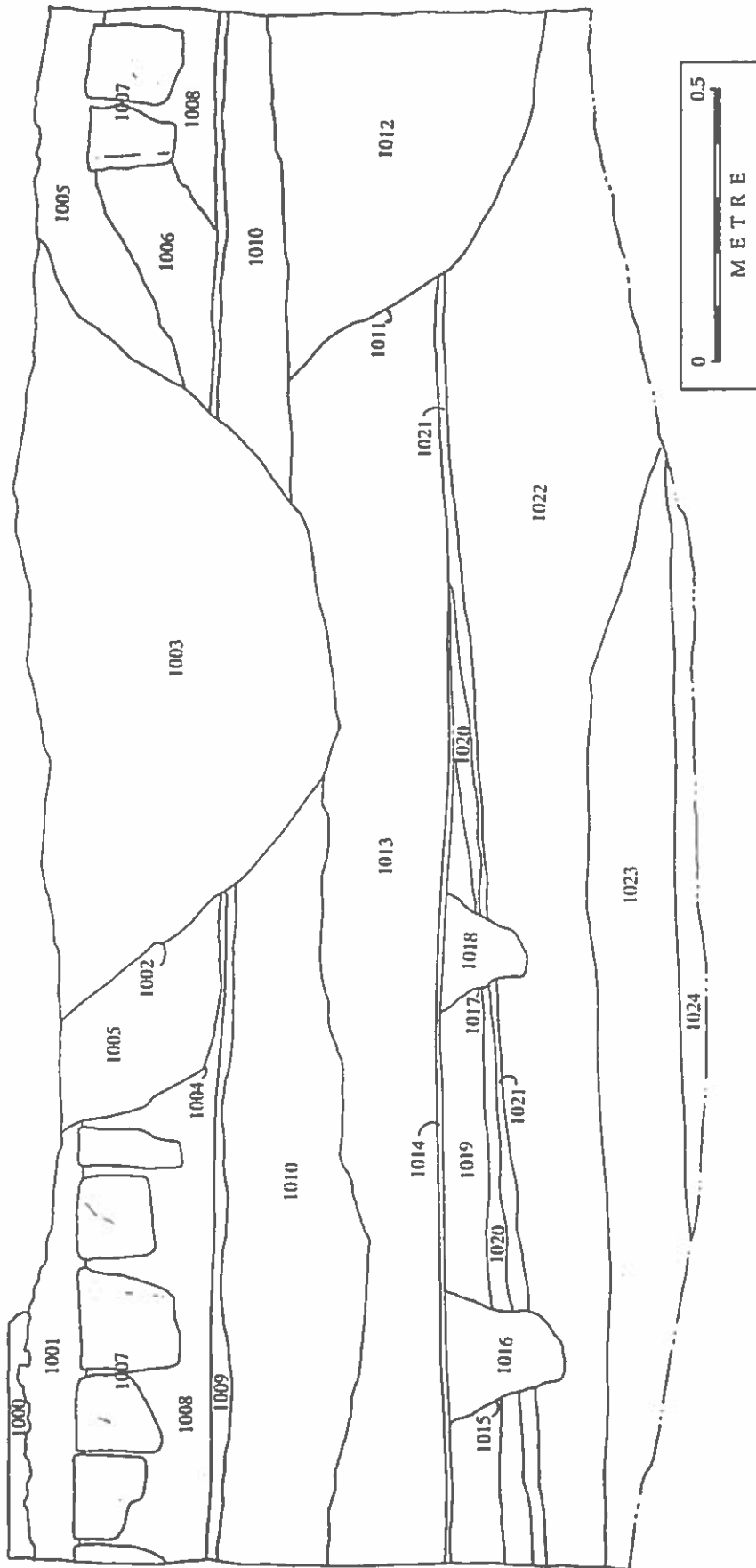


Figure 9. Section A-A

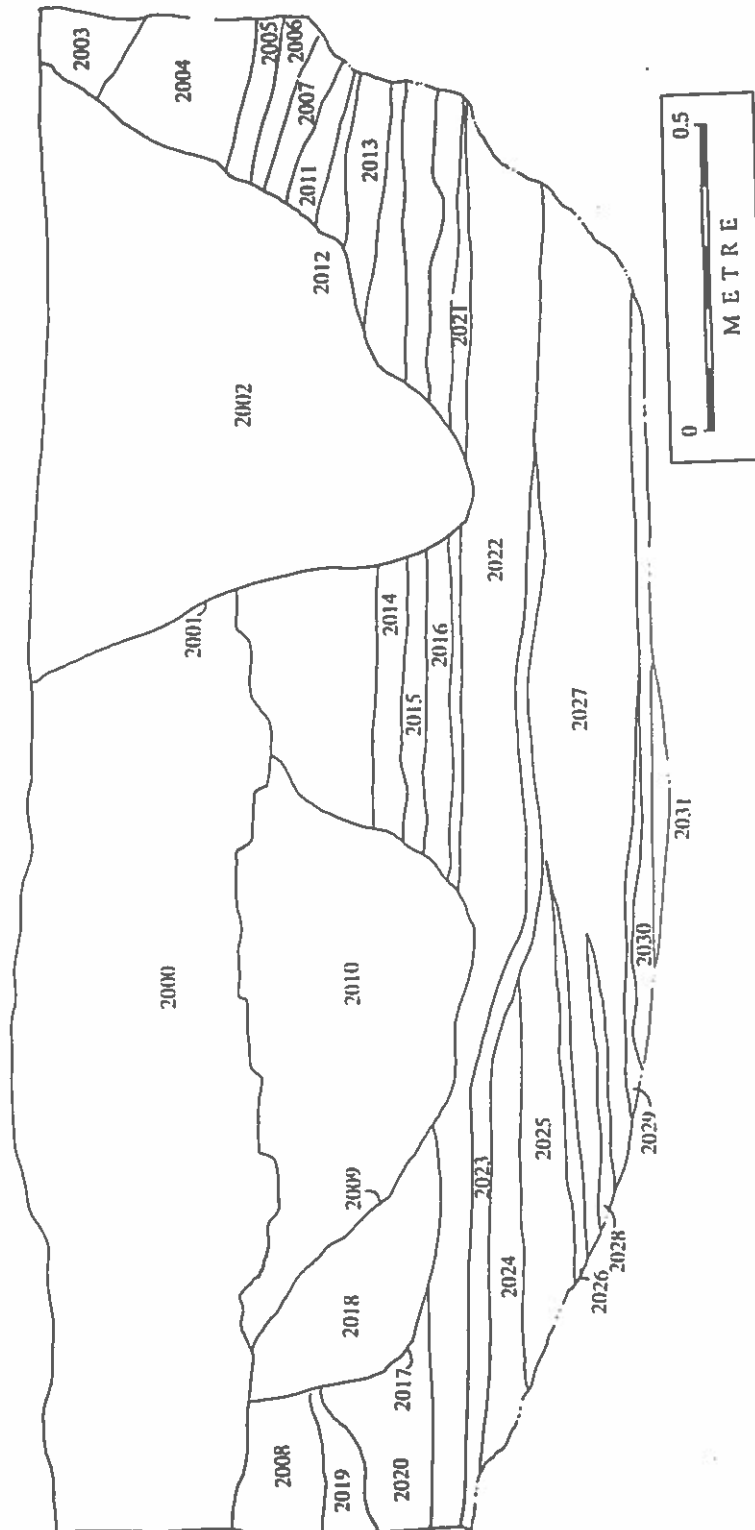


Figure 10. Section B-B

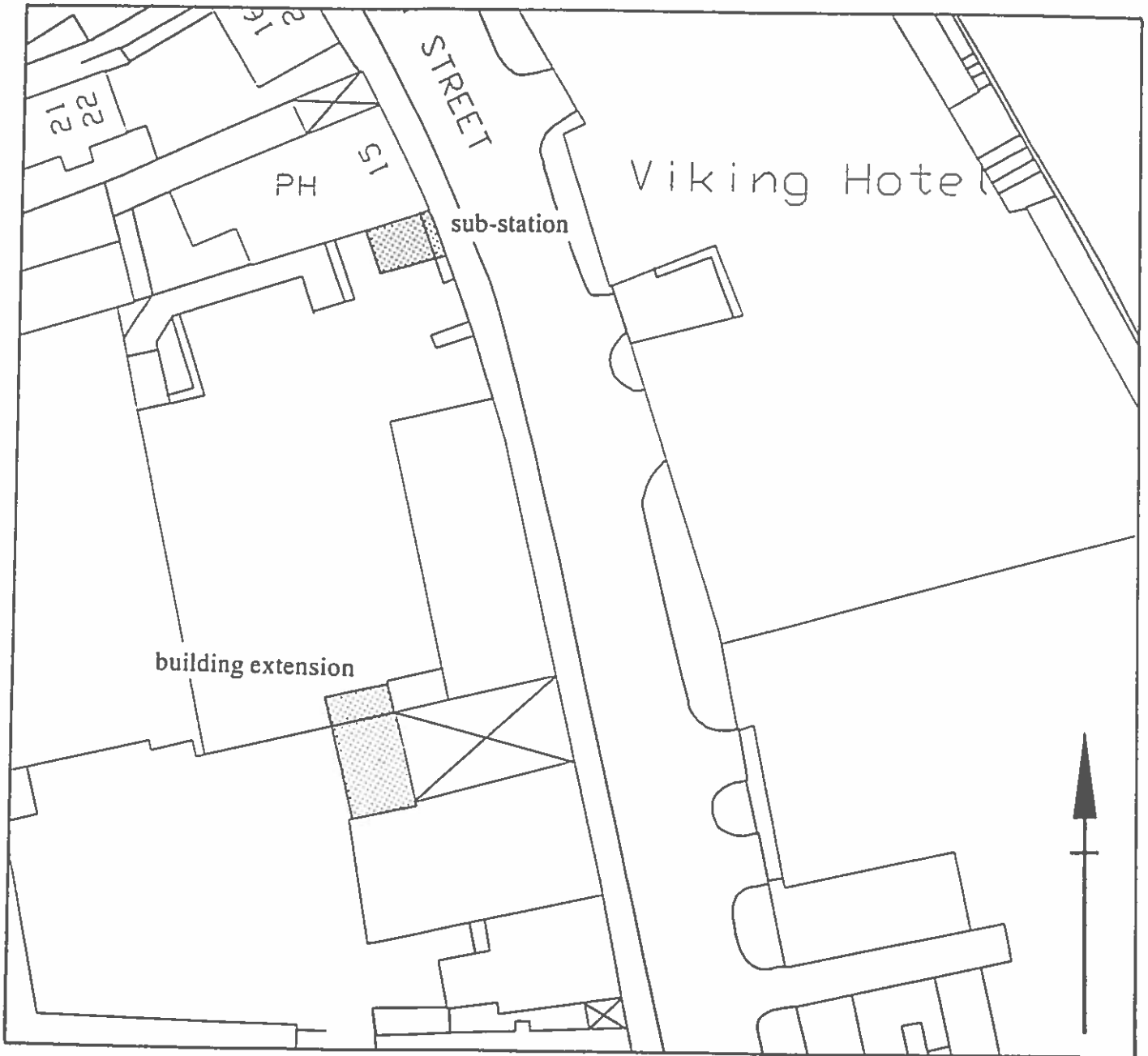


Figure 11. Location of building extension and sub-station excavations

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