

Y O R K



ARCHAEOLOGICAL
T R U S T

**9 MINSTER GATES /
11 MINSTER YARD,
YORK**

**REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

**2000 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 14**

9 MINSTER GATES/11 MINSTER YARD,

YORK

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL

WATCHING BRIEF

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ABSTRACT

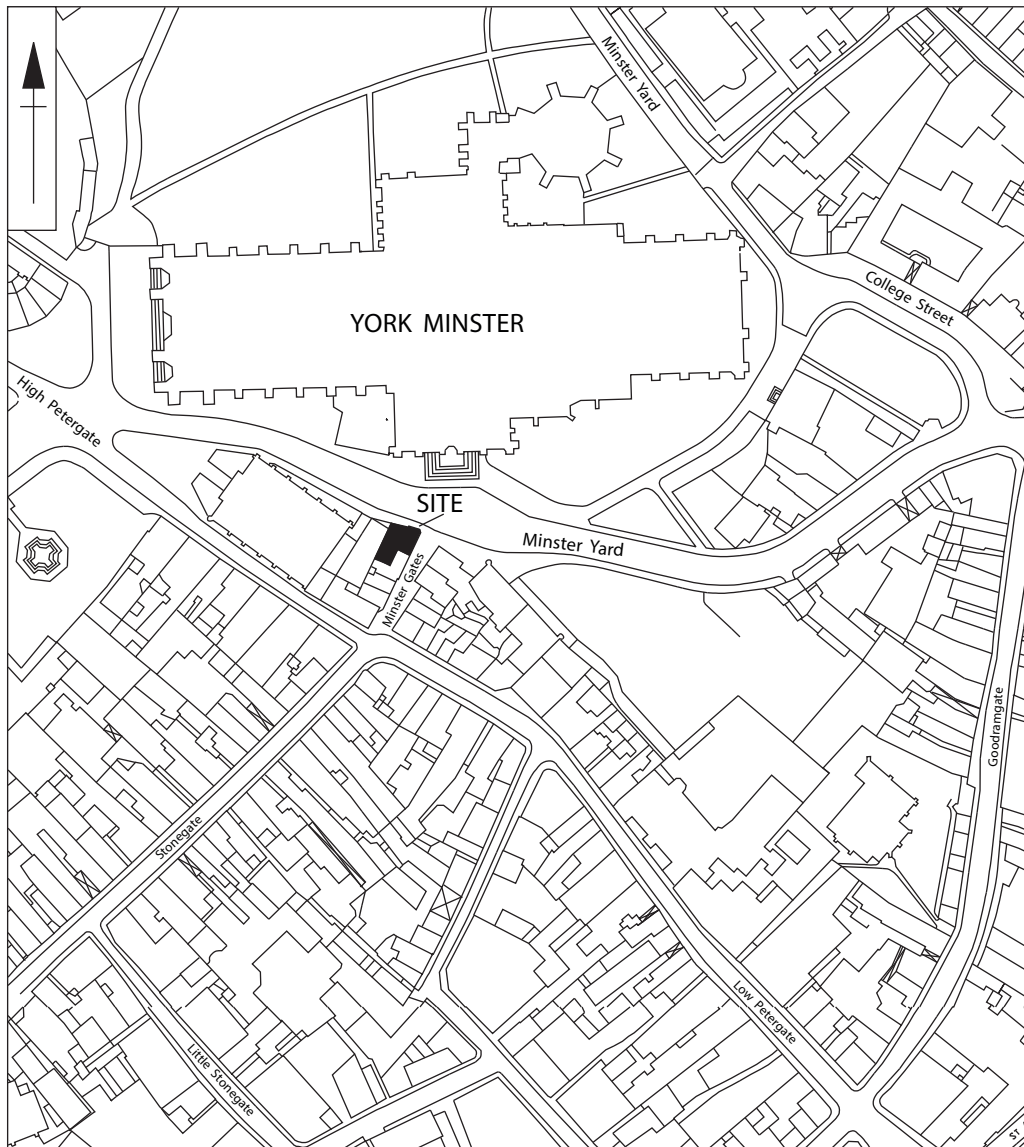
An archaeological watching brief at 9 Minster Gates, York carried out during ground-works associated with underpinning revealed largely post-medieval and modern deposits. No evidence for a cellar was seen. A number of timbers from the floor and shop-front were also recorded. Two of the floor joists were clearly re-used, presumably from a nearby timber-framed building.

1. INTRODUCTION

On a periodic basis between March 3rd and 16th March 2000, York Archaeological Trust (YAT) carried out a watching brief on building works at 9 Minster Gates/11 Minster Yard, York, (NGR SE 60312 52124) (Figure 1, Site location map). This property forms the north-east corner of a range of five premises three storeys high with attics that are said by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments to have probably been built between 1710 and 1734. The north-easternmost of these, 9 Minster Gates/11 Minster Yard, is formed of two properties that have been combined. The original ground floor elevation to the property was altered in the early 19th century by the insertion of a shop-front, (RCHM 1981, 161).

The watching brief was necessitated by renovation works at the property. These involved the underpinning of the north-east corner with two piles connected by a reinforced concrete ground beam, the insertion of a shallow concrete footing strip around the exterior wall, the replacement of certain structural timbers of the shop-front and some internal ground reduction associated with the replacement of floors. All site records are presently held by YAT under the York Minster accession code YM: 2000.1

The property lies within the Principia (headquarters building) of the Roman Legionary Fortress and in the heart of the medieval city some 25m south of the south transept of York Minster. This still forms a core area of the modern city. With the exception of the extensive programme of archaeological works under the Minster (Phillips and Heywood 1995) there has been little in the way of excavation in the immediate vicinity of the site. Most archaeological field enquiry in this area has been limited to “observations” and this primarily to standing buildings (YAT Gazetteer 1997). The drift geology of the area is of Boulder Clay with Warp and Lacustrine Clay with sand and gravel above a solid geology of Bunter and Keuper sandstones (Geol. Surv. 1967).



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scale 1:2000

Figure 1, Site location map

2. RESULTS (Figures 2, 3 and 4)

2.1 Internal ground reduction.

The ground floor of the building was at two levels. The eastern of these was approximately 0.20m above exterior ground level. That to the west was approximately 0.30m above the former.

The removal of the floor in the eastern (lower) area of the building was not observed. However, information provided by the contractors allows the sequence to be described. The eastern floor surface was of wooden floorboards supported on floor joists aligned north-east to south-west. The joists themselves were laid directly over a light - mid brown, loose, dry, sandy silt that contained an amount of brick, tile and mortar rubble, context 1001. Only around 0.10m of 1001 was removed; with the exception of a small area around the internal pile (pressure pile sunk to a depth of approximately 8.0m below ground level). In the region of 0.65m of this deposit was removed around the pile which showed 1001 to be fairly homogeneous, to this depth at least. A number of sherds of pottery were recovered from this deposit which proved to span the medieval to later post-medieval periods with a noted bias towards the latter. Also recovered from this deposit were two magnesian limestone architectural fragments of uncertain date. Reduction around the pile also enabled a greater depth of the dwarf wall, context 1002, which supports the shop front to be examined. This wall, which is some 0.49m wide was constructed of coursed bricks of a size 240mm x 120mm x 47mm. That part visible within the reduced area around the pile cap was seen for its full depth of 0.75m and proved to be less well laid and coursed below floor level. The base of the wall sat on a foundation consisting of a single course of poorly mortared limestone blocks, context 1015. Clearly there has never been a cellar in this part of the building.

Only two of the joists that lay on the upper surface of 1001 were present on-site for examination by an archaeologist, timbers 1003 and 1004, both of which were partially decayed. Timber 1003 measured 1.92m long and was of sub-square section, this being 0.18m at one end and tapering down slightly to around 0.14m at the other. A mortice joint some 0.09m deep was cut into the narrower end of the timber whilst two peg holes (thought not to penetrate fully through the timber) were present along its length. An elaborate variety of tenon joint was present at the end of the timber opposite to the mortice joint. Timber 1004 measured 2.04m long and was again of tapering sub-square section, this ranging from 0.13m to 0.20m. A single joint, a variety of tenon similar to that of 1003, was present at the wider end. No tooling marks were obviously visible on either timber. It seems clear that both floor joists were re-used timbers and that they may originally have formed components within a timber framed building.

The western floor was reduced by a total of 0.42m. The extant surface of this was comprised of modern quarry tiles, context 1011, laid directly over 0.08m – 0.10m of concrete, context 1012, this having been cast over a 0.08m thick bedding of brick fragments, context 1013. Beneath these modern flooring materials only a single deposit was observed, context 1014. This context was pale brown, loose, sandy silt in which large quantities of mortar, brick and stone fragments were present. Deposit 1014 can be correlated with 1001 in the eastern part of the building. Examination of an area of the lowest part of the western wall of the property, adjacent to the reduced area, showed an absence of foundation. This again argues for the absence of a cellar in this western part of the building.

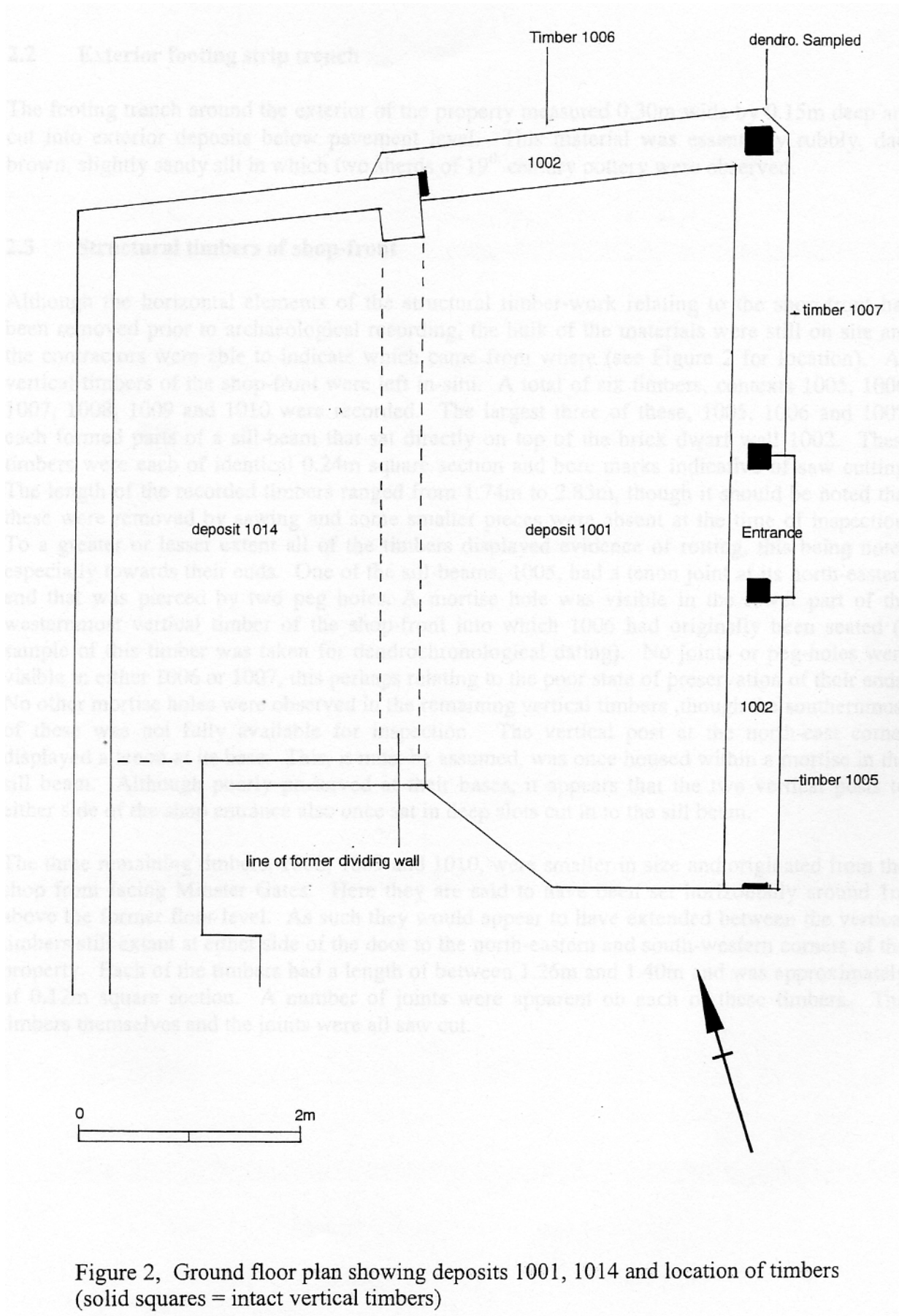


Figure 2, Ground floor plan showing deposits 1001, 1014 and location of timbers (solid squares = intact vertical timbers)

2.2 Exterior footing strip trench

The footing trench around the exterior of the property measured 0.30m wide by 0.15m deep and cut into exterior deposits below pavement level. This material was essentially rubbly, dark brown, slightly sandy silt in which two sherds of 19th century pottery were observed.

2.3 Structural timbers of shop-front

Although the horizontal elements of the structural timber-work relating to the shop-front had been removed prior to archaeological recording, the bulk of the materials were still on site and the contractors were able to indicate which came from where (see Figure 2 for location). All vertical timbers of the shop-front were left in-situ. A total of six timbers, contexts 1005, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009 and 1010 were recorded. The largest three of these, 1005, 1006 and 1007, each formed parts of a sill-beam that sat directly on top of the brick dwarf wall 1002. These timbers were each of identical 0.24m square section and bore marks indicative of saw cutting. The length of the recorded timbers ranged from 1.74m to 2.83m, though it should be noted that these were removed by sawing and some smaller pieces were absent at the time of inspection. To a greater or lesser extent all of the timbers displayed evidence of rotting, this being noted especially towards their ends. One of the sill-beams, 1005, had a tenon joint at its north-eastern end that was pierced by two peg holes. A mortise hole was visible in the lower part of the westernmost vertical timber of the shop-front into which 1006 had originally been seated (a sample of this timber was taken for dendrochronological dating). No joints or peg-holes were visible in either 1006 or 1007, this perhaps relating to the poor state of preservation of their ends. No other mortise holes were observed in the remaining vertical timbers, though the southernmost of these was not fully available for inspection. The vertical post at the north-east corner displayed a tenon at its base. This, it must be assumed, was once housed within a mortise in the sill beam. Although poorly preserved at their bases, it appears that the two vertical posts to either side of the shop entrance also once sat in deep slots cut in to the sill beam.

The three remaining timbers, 1008, 1009 and 1010, were smaller in size and originated from the shop front facing Minster Gates. Here they are said to have been set horizontally around 1m above the former floor level. As such they would appear to have extended between the vertical timbers still extant at either side of the door to the north-eastern and south-western corners of the property. Each of the timbers had a length of between 1.26m and 1.40m and was approximately of 0.12m square section. A number of joints were apparent on each of these timbers. The timbers themselves and the joints were all saw cut.

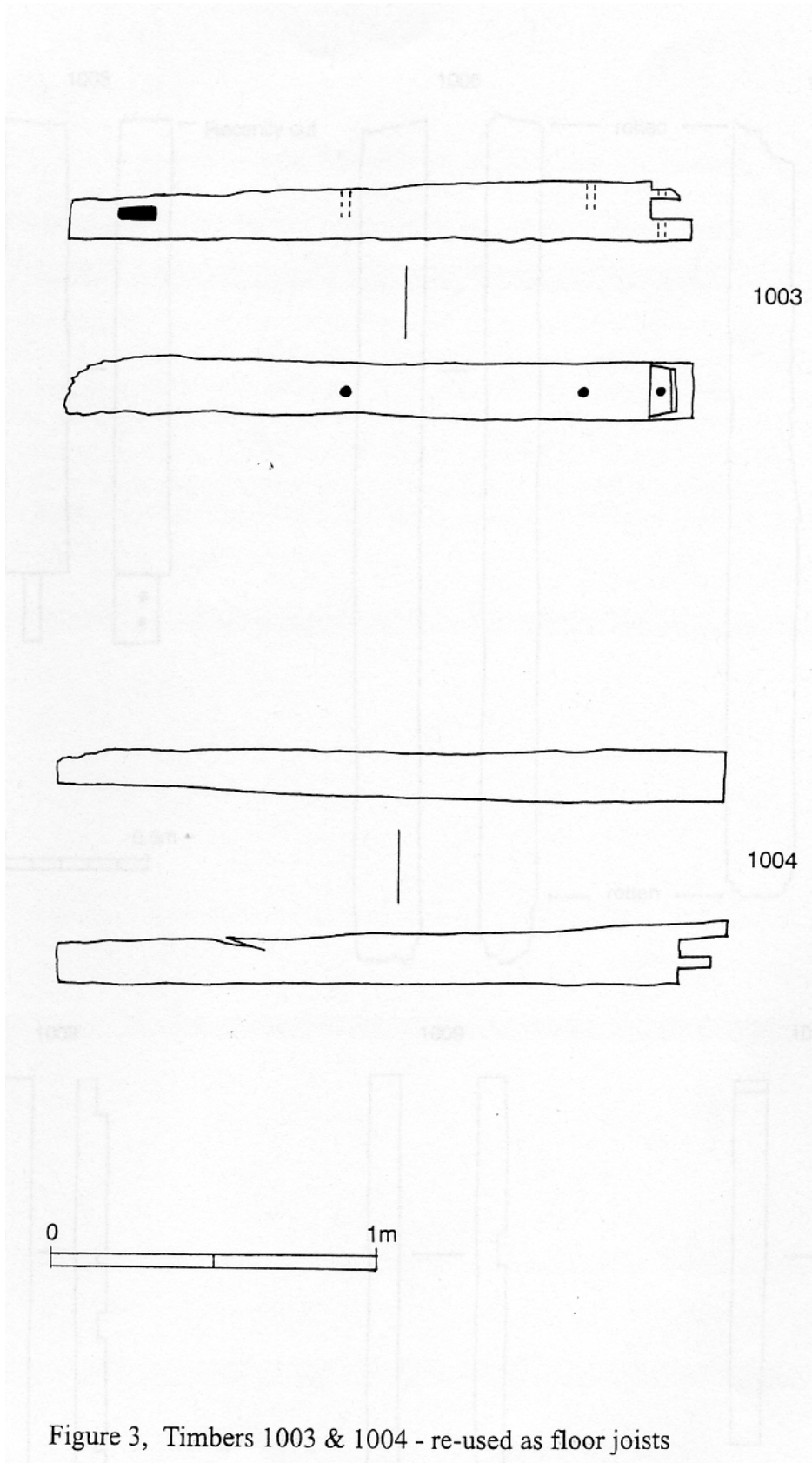


Figure 3, Timbers 1003 & 1004 - re-used as floor joists

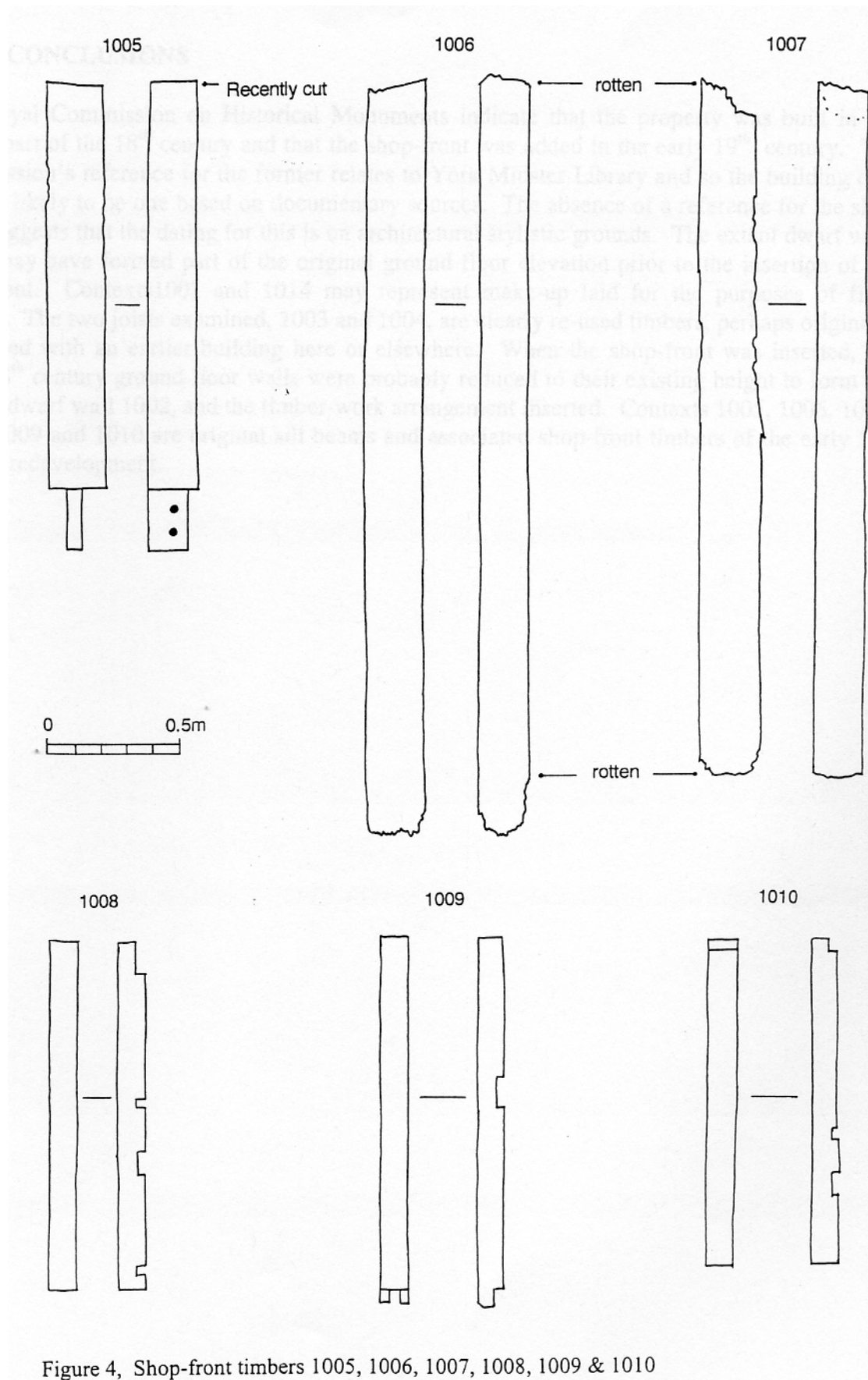


Figure 4, Shop-front timbers 1005, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009 & 1010

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments indicate that the property was built in the earlier part of the 18th century and that the shop-front was added in the early 19th century. The Commission's reference for the former relates to York Minster Library and so the building date appears likely to be one based on documentary sources. The absence of a reference for the shop front suggests that the dating for this is on architectural stylistic grounds. The extant dwarf wall, 1002, may have formed part of the original ground floor elevation prior to the insertion of the shop-front. Contexts 1001 and 1014 may represent make-up laid for the purposes of floor support. The two joists examined, 1003 and 1004, are clearly re-used timbers, perhaps originally associated with an earlier building here or elsewhere. When the shop-front was inserted, the early 18th century ground floor walls were probably reduced to their existing height to form the present dwarf wall 1002, and the timber-work arrangement inserted. Contexts 1005, 1006, 1007, 1008, 1009 and 1010 are original sill beams and associated shop-front timbers of the early 19th century redevelopment.

4. LIST OF SOURCES

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| Phillips, D. and Heywood, B. 1995 | Excavations at York Minster Vol. I. <i>Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England.</i> |
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5. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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