



**YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**



## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT 24 FOSSGATE, YORK.**

By Toby Kendall and Jayne Rimmer

*WATCHING BRIEF REPORT*

Report Number 2015/23    May 2016



# YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



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### Abbreviations

BGL	Below Ground Level
WSI	Written Scheme of Investigation
YAT	York Archaeological Trust

## NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> April and the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by YAT during essential structural reinforcement, rebuilding, floor reinforcement and the insertion of services to a suite of buildings at 24 Fossgate, York. The area under observation ran the full length of the suite of buildings over the plot for 24 Fossgate (centred at NGR SE 60572 51756).

The archaeological observations were part of the initial structural element of work on the site and were to satisfy planning condition (15/00845/FUL ) 4: No work shall commence on site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with the specification supplied by the Local Planning Authority. Reason: The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Importance and the development will affect important archaeological deposits which must be recorded prior to destruction. The written scheme of investigation and watching brief methodology was agreed with the City Archaeologist prior to work commencing.

The resulting archaeological remains dated from the late medieval period onwards and followed the late and post-medieval development of the site up until its latest use as the Barbican Bookshop.

## KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Name	24 Fossgate, York.
YAT Project No.	5846
Report status	Final
Type of Project	Watching Brief
Client	Walker Nicholas Architects
Planning Application No.	14/01919/FUL, 14/01920/LBC & 15/00845/FUL
NGR	SE 60572 51756
Museum Accession No.	Pending
OASIS Identifier	yorkarch1-213578

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Between 23<sup>rd</sup> April and the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015 an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by YAT during essential structural reinforcement, rebuilding, floor reinforcement and the insertion of services to a suite of buildings at 24 Fossgate, York (NGR SE 60572 51756 figure 1 site location).

24 Fossgate is situated on the east side of Fossgate and is bounded on the south side by Straker's Passage, a public right of way between Fossgate and Carmelite Street. Prior to re-development, the standing buildings at 24 Fossgate comprised a house of three storeys dating to the early 19th century with later additions and a suite of buildings to the rear which front onto Straker's Passage. The buildings to the rear are a mix of single and double-storey structures dating from the 19th and 20th century. The structures were amalgamated and significantly altered during their most recent use as a book shop.

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken for Walker Nicholas Architects following a written scheme of investigation produced by YAT and agreed by the City Archaeologist. The archaeological observations were part of the initial structural element of work on the site and were to satisfy planning condition (15/00845/FUL ) 4; No work shall commence on site until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with the specification supplied by the Local Planning Authority

The areas under observation were located in the house, the structures to the rear which front onto the Passage and the building behind 25 Fossgate (Unit 5) (figure 2 works location).

The museum accession code is pending and the archive is stored by YAT under project 5846.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the watching brief was to identify and record any archaeological features revealed during intrusive groundwork across the site.

The nature of these works was flexible due to the previously unknown integrity of structural elements within the buildings; and thus was directed by the requirements of structural engineers. With this in mind the final working areas were slightly more extensive than those initially outlined in the written scheme of investigation. See figure 2 works location for the final areas where intrusive work was undertaken.

The principle contractors on site (William Birch and Sons Ltd) excavated areas using two different methods;

- Smaller areas for underpinning, service trenches and other ancillary works were excavated by hand using shovels
- Larger areas for floor reduction or with external access were excavated using a small, tracked, 360° excavator fitted with a toothed bucket. These were then finished by hand using shovels.

This excavation work was undertaken with an archaeologist present, or where this was not possible excavations were left open so they could be archaeologically recorded.

The results were recorded using a notebook, drawing film and digital camera. Recording was in accordance with the methodology described in the York Archaeological Trust Fieldwork Recording Manual (2009).

No finds were retained from identified features. Residual, unstratified, medieval pottery fragments which survived in later deposits were recovered by the construction team. These were retained for use as educational reference material.

### **3 LOCATION, GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY**

Fossgate, along with Walmgate, are thought to lie on the historic Roman road. They cross the River Foss at a point that takes advantage of a glacial moraine to the east. The street takes its name from the nearby River Foss and continued to serve as a principal route through York during the Middle Ages.

24 Fossgate is located on the east side of the street. It sits within an area of low-lying ground which continues to fall off down towards the River Foss. The current ground level is c.10.50m AOD and the site slopes downwards from the north to the south and southwest.

The underlying solid geology is of Sherwood group sandstones, this is covered by Vale of York Formation clays sands and gravels.

### **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Extensive excavations recently undertaken along the nearby street of Hungate (2000-12) have allowed a full archaeological deposit sequence of this area to be developed. Although this project has a significantly smaller scope, with the experience and knowledge of the excavations at Hungate it has allowed coherent interpretation of phases from restricted data.

The following is taken from the Archaeology and Heritage Statement compiled at pre-planning stage (Rimmer 2014).

*Fossgate is a well-enclosed street with a varied historic character as a result of piece-meal development over several centuries. Many of the long, compact medieval plots (burgage plots) are still intact and are clearly distinguishable within the street plan. The majority of the buildings date from the 17th to the 19th centuries, though several retain the timber-frame of an earlier medieval building behind the brick façade. Straker's Passage is a narrow alleyway first identified on Baines' map of 1822, though it may well have delineated a much earlier right of way. The current 24 Fossgate plot probably has origins in the Anglo-Scandinavian period. Numerous excavations in the area have demonstrated that this part of the city has been occupied largely uninterrupted since Roman times, and archaeological deposits some 5m thick overlie the natural ground surface.*

*The suite of buildings to the rear of 24 Fossgate would have originally formed a self-contained row of two-storey terraces. The cottages were originally self-contained with a single room to the ground floor and a single room to the first floor. The cottages are constructed out of orange-red brick in English garden-wall bond, with pantile roofs and brick chimney stacks. Recent large-scale excavations at nearby Hungate have exposed the remains of high-density*

*terraced housing dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, similar to those extant at 24 Fossgate. These buildings, limited in size and often poor in construction, were constructed to accommodate the city's growing working-class population.*

The OS maps of 1852 and 1891 show the arrangement of buildings across the plot in the second half of the 19th century. The 1852 map identified that both the house and the cottages were constructed by the mid-19th century and that Straker's Passage was built-up on both sides with small units.

## 5 RESULTS

The watching brief required numerous site visits to observe a varied and, sometimes quite complex, fragmented working schedule. Because of this the following results have been initially categorised by the general areas and intrusive excavations rather than date or specific building.

Room numbers are as per assigned during the Heritage Statement (Rimmer 2014).

A more traditional chronological review is put forward in section 6 Discussion below.

### 5.1 Front Range

Rooms 1, 1a & 1b (See Figure 3)

#### 5.1.1 Floor Reduction c2.2m long, 1.5m wide, 170mm deep (Room 1)

Excavations in room 1/1a for the toilet block encountered archaeology at a relatively shallow depth. The archaeology described below remained in-situ.

The earliest material encountered in this area was mixed dumping which had been used to raise the ground level before the construction of the extant buildings. This was predominantly cobbles and rubble in silt.

Cut into the dumping deposits were elements relating to the standing building. On the southeast side the standing wall of the building revealed a blocked up doorway threshold made from sandstone (Plate 1). Extending back into the property were traces for two brick walls which would have formed a corridor inside the entrance. At the northwest side a small area of brick paver flooring survived within the 'corridor' (Plate 2).

The corridor was subsequently cut into by the insertion of a salt glazed drain. This ran along the northeast side of the excavation and exited the building beneath the threshold stone of the doorway.

#### 5.1.2 Services Trench 400mm-600mm wide, 900mm deep (Rooms 1, 1a & 1b)

Due to problems with both access and the sheer volume of services already present the planned route for services to the new units was moved. The new route was within the front range of buildings near to the northwest wall. With the above ground junction terminating in room 1b

The first 4m of the service trench produced little in the way of notable archaeology with the profile being dominated by friable mixed dumping deposits. These were linked with the construction and subsequent alterations of the standing building. A small wall stub that was observed was probably linked with the chimney structure it was immediately adjacent to.

The archaeology changed considerably at approximately 5m back from the front of the building where the bottom of the services cut revealed a tile on edge hearth. This was encountered at c.800mm BGL and continued beyond the limits of the trench both north and south. Burnt material from this extended further to the west but it was not possible to determine precisely how far due to later disturbance. This can be seen in Plate 3 indicating the survival of the hearth in relation to a later drain. To the west of the drain, where it had not disturbed lower deposits, the hearth had been laid upon a flat limestone footing (Plate 4).

Once clear of the drain the hearth survived in better condition and the archaeological sequence became easier to establish. The northeast end of the tile on edge hearth appeared to have a deliberate border made up of medieval roof tiles laid flat. It is unclear as to how much of the whole hearth was bordered in this way.

The earliest deposits beyond the north east hearth were soft dark grey brown clays and silts with large charcoal fragments and possibly a degraded organic content. These were encountered at approximately 900mm – 700mm BGL. The finds within were made up of bone and medieval tile.

On top of this grey brown clay and silt a depth of 120mm was then taken up by a series of laminated deposits. These were characterised by thicker layers of sand, silt or mortar overlain by thin, black, occupation and trample layers (see Plate 5 for further detail). These continued up to and partially over the edge of the hearth described above. In one area there was a small (approximately 300mm wide) patch of in situ burning, perhaps linked with industrial activity, but no residues or waste were observed. These are likely to represent occupation contemporary with the hearth described above. No finds were recovered from these deposits.

Sealing the occupation deposits a further 120mm of dumping was present, taking the levels up to approximately 500mm BGL. This dumped material was a mixture of dark silt in brown clay lumps and was clearly used to seal in the previous occupation.

The uppermost 500mm of the sequence was the same layers of mortar and brick and tile rubble, cobbles with silt and rubble, and finally concrete, which had been observed elsewhere in this part of the building.

As the service trench continued into room 1b there was a subtle change in the earlier deposits as the laminated floors became thinner and the earlier material rose up the section.

The earliest deposits encountered in this area were slightly firmer greenish grey gritty clays and silts. There may have had a cress content to these clays and silts however, they were clearly present as layers rather than a uniform dumping event. These were observed between 800mm and 900mm BGL.

The next 150mm was made up of the same soft dark grey brown clays and silts as seen in room 1a.

Between 600m and 650mm a smaller sequence of occupation type deposits was recorded. This was obviously narrower than seen in room 1a, but also almost entirely black with only thin sand laminations between. It was uncertain if this was due to this being a different room or structure, or purely a different floor deposit further away from the hearth.

Once again the finds from these earlier deposits were limited to scraps of bone and medieval tile. Earlier pottery which may have assisted with closer dating of the sequence was only seen in unstratified materials.

The uppermost 600mm was again disturbance and construction linked with the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings.

#### 5.1.3 *Floor Reduction c.160mm deep (Room 1b)*

Excavation was required within room 1b to form modern floor surfaces and allow access for services. This was initially 160mm deep and subsequently cut into where required for services.

The excavation revealed a series of brick walls that appeared to form a possible boundary wall and two possible outbuildings, one with a doorway threshold still in-situ. These lime mortar bonded walls contained bricks consistent with the construction of the original property in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (See plate 6 for overall view).

## 5.2 **Rear tenement & outbuildings**

Rooms 7, 8, 9 & 9a (See Figure 4)

#### 5.2.1 *6 Underpinning trenches c.1m long, c.600mm wide & c.600mm deep (Rooms 7, 8 & 9)*

The initial work in the area of the outbuildings was to stabilise the northwest boundary wall and this was completed using a series of underpinning trenches.

These excavations revealed the minimal footings for the wall itself, hence the need for underpinning, and a developed horticultural soil. The horticultural soil was relatively uniform across the area and had a higher content of larger charcoal fragments lower down. Patches which had a slightly higher mortar or rubble content were linked with the wall construction or earlier pit digging which had become more diffuse through bioturbation.

#### 5.2.2 *Floor reduction c.600mm deep (Rooms 7, 8 & 9)*

Once the standing structure had been suitably stabilised the main floor reduction excavation took place.

As noted above (5.2.1) virtually all of the deposits excavated related to horticultural soils extending across this part of the site. Within room 7 it was possible to see 2 clear cut features pre-dating the building that were filled with a high percentage of mortar. These perhaps resulted from alterations to earlier structures at the front of the site.

The most interesting features revealed were the foundations of the standing buildings and boundary wall. Within room 7 the original doorway to the southeast had been blocked up, however the footings showed the re-use of large limestone blocks on either side of the door (Plate 7). Further reused limestone was revealed in the foundations of the northeast boundary wall in room 8 (Plate 8).

#### 5.2.3 *New Foundations 1m wide, up to 0.8m deep (Rooms 7, 8 & 9)*

The new foundations for the rebuilt rear terrace rooms (rooms 7, 8, 9 & 9a) was a continuation of what was observed with the underpinning and floor reduction (see above).

What had stood there previously had very superficial foundations and was removed during demolition. There was also significant disturbance linked with the modern services as well as the drains linked with the 19<sup>th</sup> century outhouse (room 11).

The earliest deposits encountered were seen in the bottom 100mm of the 850mm deep trench. The deposit varied, being made predominantly of soft brown clay with cassy lumps which contained medieval pottery and animal bone. It was possible to see what appeared to be pits cut into this deposit and these contained animal bone, medieval tile fragments as well as, in one case, clay mould fragments. This area of slightly deeper excavation in the rear terrace showed that stratified archaeological deposits exist at the site, though they were only slightly impinged upon by the present work. It seems likely that a sequence of pit digging may be present in this area, as would be expected at this distance from the medieval street front.

Sealing this pit digging activity was up to 450mm of the horticultural soils seen across much of the area occupied by the rear range of buildings. In this case the lower half of the horticultural soil had a higher concentration of large charcoal fragments.

Above the horticultural soil the uppermost 350mm was comprised of 100mm of disturbance, possibly linked with 19<sup>th</sup> century construction, then 150mm of rubble make up for a 100mm concrete slab (the present day ground surface). See Plate 9 for full soil profile.

The area immediately adjacent to Straker's Passage exhibited a slightly different profile. In this case the lowest deposit was the same, this was followed by a layer of soft orange brown silty sand followed by a thicker layer of disturbance, then rubble and concrete. It is unclear if this was due to greater disturbance in this area or if it was linked with routes or plot divisions prior to the fixing of Straker's Passage.

### **5.3 Building South of Straker's Passage**

#### *5.3.1 Building clearance*

Works in this area were dependant on the structural integrity of the extant buildings. Due to the poor condition they were in, significant consolidation and rebuilding was required. A separate building recording exercise was completed during these works (Rimmer 2016).

No observations were made during the intrusive groundworks in this area. The original floors and hearth structure for the building were recorded with digital photographs.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

During the monitoring of the development of the site archaeological deposits were observed in all interventions. In most cases the archaeology was of relatively low significance and due to its nature could offer relatively little towards the interpretation of the site. Where clear features were encountered only a small percentage was disturbed and thus they were largely preserved in-situ.

The earliest finds from the site were medieval in date, though were clearly residual in later deposits. At the base of the deeper areas of excavation, the service trench at the front of the building and strip foundation to the rear, medieval features may have been encountered.

However, no datable materials were recovered from these features so a definitive date was not possible.

It was interpreted that the archaeology encountered was from three distinct phases;

- *Pre-standing buildings (c.1600 – 1820's)*
- *Construction of standing buildings (c.1830-1850's)*
- *Use and alteration of standing buildings (1860's onwards)*

#### Pre-standing buildings

In the pre standing building phase the earliest features may have been medieval in date. They were characterised by occupational deposits towards the Fossgate street front and pit digging further back.

Within the deeper services trench in the front range of buildings part of a substantial tile on edge hearth, constructed of reused medieval roof tile fragments, was exposed. Linked with this were a series of thin laminated floor deposits that ended at roughly the same point where the original standing structure of the front range ended, between room 1a & 1b. Clearly there was a building which predated the present structure and the location and size of the hearth found indicates this had a substantial chimney at this point, or was potentially spanning across this plot and the one immediately northwest.

Subsequent archaeology was dominated by construction disturbed deposits from the standing buildings.

Further back from the street front, in the area of the rear tenement and outbuildings, there were no earlier structural remains. However, there were pits and disturbance that will have been linked with the people occupying the building on the street front. Virtually all of these pit features were abundant in brick, tile and mortar, indicating they were linked with structural alterations and activities. An isolated pit in the yard area contained what appeared to be discarded mould fragments, but this was below the formation level for the construction work and thus left in-situ. The date for these features will have ranged from possibly medieval through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In this area the later archaeology was horticultural soil deposits and existed as living soils until the construction of the standing buildings sealed them.

#### *Construction of standing buildings*

The previous heritage statement (Rimmer 2014) offered a comprehensive chronology of the building sequence across the site. Results from the watching brief tally well with the chronology put forward there, with new data relating primarily to how the structures were constructed.

The front range of buildings had been constructed at a raised elevation to their predecessors, with a significant (c.400mm deep) layer of 'soil' being dumped as a formation layer for the structures. All interventions in this part of the site revealed walls which were part of the original building, showing the expected smaller room sizes and subdivisions. In some areas potentially original brick paver flooring was encountered nearly 200mm below the modern concrete floor levels.

Further back into the area of the rear tenement and outbuildings there was the boundary walls showed extensive reuse of limestone in their foundations as did the original doorway into room 7. This was as would be anticipated with materials, potentially from the former Carmelite Friary to the east, being reused in buildings. The same building tradition can be seen in numerous buildings nearby, particularly along Black Horse Passage to the north.

A more subtle feature of the space to the rear of the site was the good survival of horticultural soils up to 450mm deep. This indicated that the open area to the rear of the original buildings will have been open ground, possibly a garden, before being sealed by solid yard surfaces.

#### *Use and alteration of the standing buildings*

In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century development of the site was characterised by alterations to the standing structures and construction over the yard to the rear. Within the buildings openings were blocked and or moved and floors overlain/skimmed with concrete. The yard was built over with relatively piecemeal wooden structures.

These elements were largely removed by the start of the groundwork observations and had virtually no impact on the earlier two phases. The only exception to this being the insertion of salt glazed ceramic drains in the front range. These were relatively shallow before they exited the building into Straker's Passage, thus revealing little of value relating to the archaeological sequence.

24 Fossgate and the development area is clearly situated upon archaeological deposits of considerable interest and importance. Through intelligent design, responsive archaeological monitoring, and working closely with the construction team on site, little impact upon significant archaeology has resulted from the alterations to the building.

## **REFERENCES**

Rimmer, J. (2014). *24 Fossgate, York: Archaeology and Heritage Statement*. York Archaeological Trust Report Number 2014/36.

Rimmer, J. (2016). *Building Survey & Analysis Roof Truss Unit 5, 24 Fossgate, York*. York Archaeological Trust Report Number 2016/36.

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**APPENDIX 1 – INDEX TO ARCHIVE**

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## PLATES

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**Plate 2 Wall footing and floor detail room 1. Facing northwest scale unit 100mm**



**Plate 3 Tile on edge hearth room 1. Facing north, scale unit 100mm**



**Plate 4 Base for tile on edge hearth, room 1. Facing North, scale unit 100mm**



**Plate 5 Service trench section room 1b. Facing northwest, scale unit 100mm**



**Plate 6 Walls and threshold in original yard, room 1b. Facing southeast, scale unit 500mm**



**Plate 7 blocked doorway room 7. Facing southeast, scale unit 100mm**

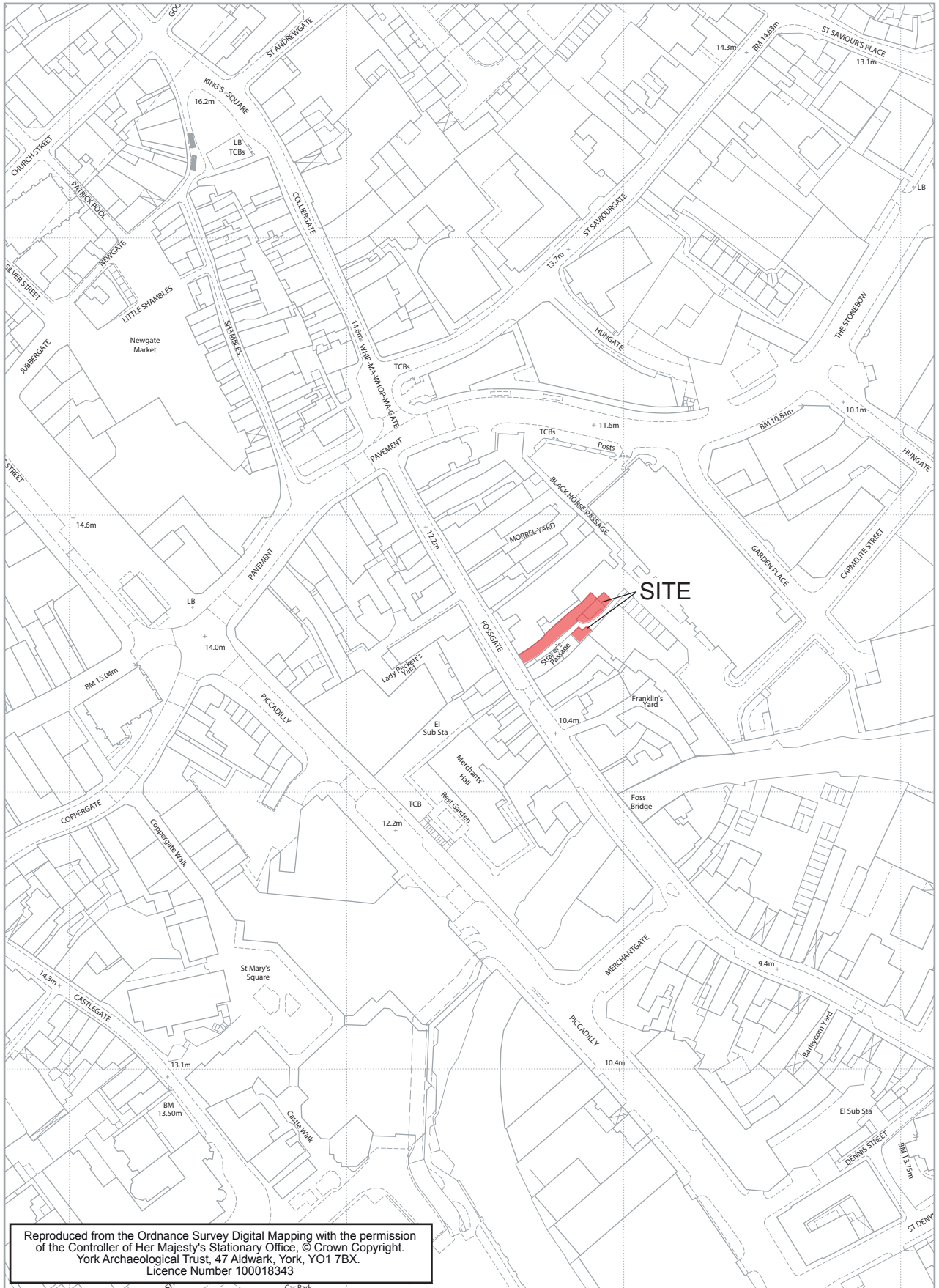


**Plate 8 Rear boundary wall, room 9. Facing northeast, scale unit 100mm**



**Plate 9 Footing section through horticultural deposits. Facing south, scale unit 100mm**





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Figure 1 Site Location



Figure 2 Works Location

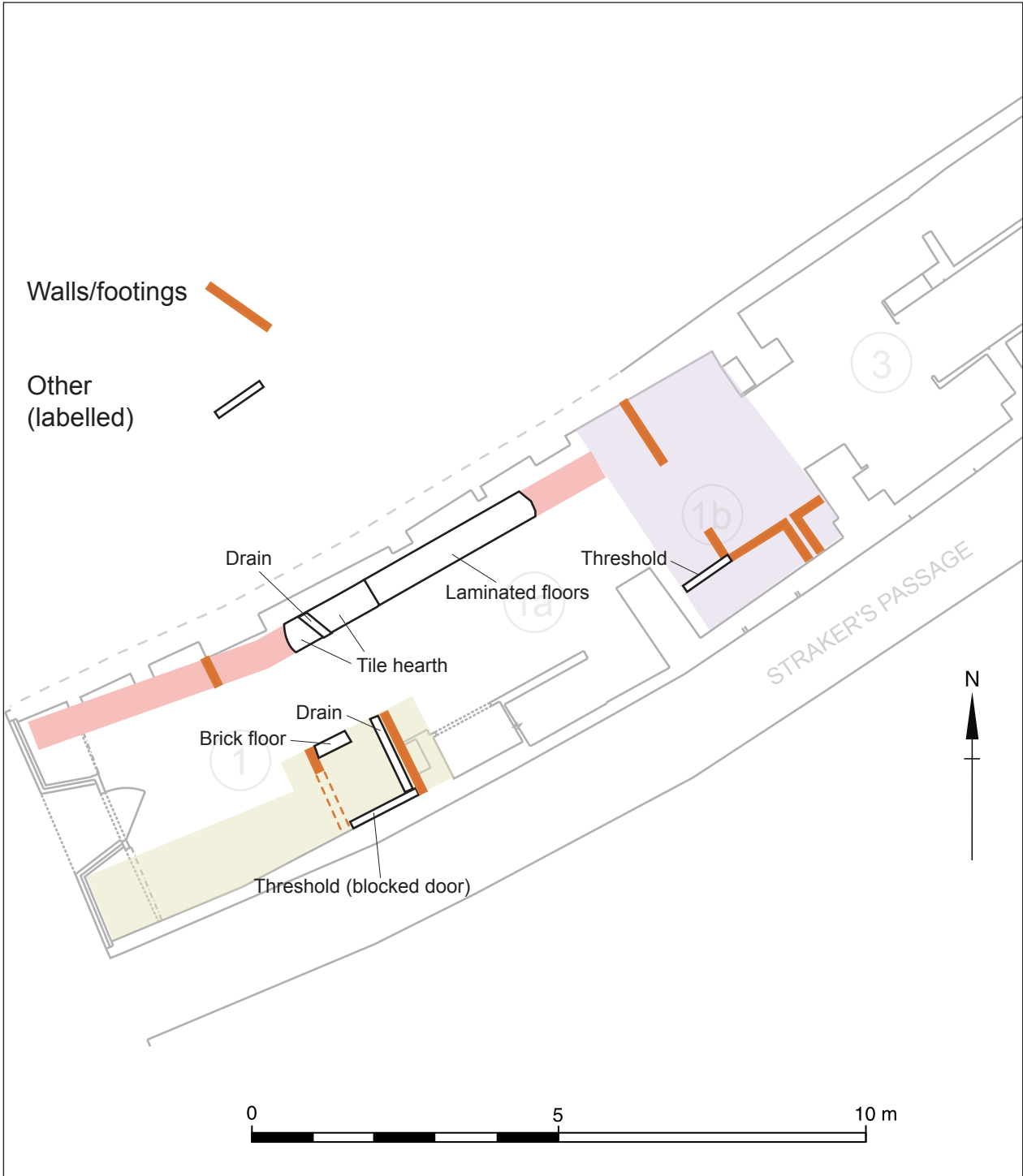


Figure 3 Front range results

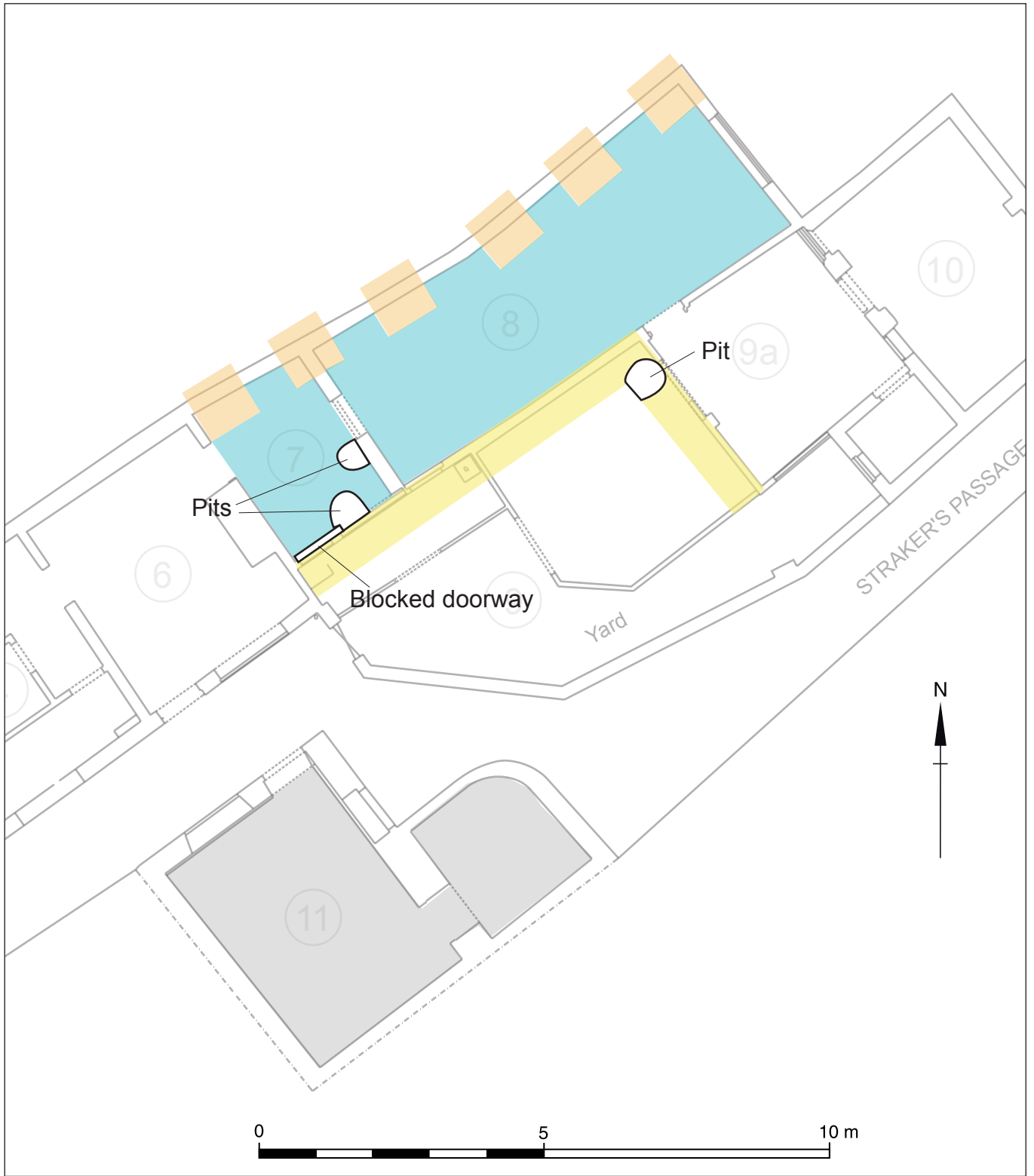


Figure 4 Rear tenement & outbuildings