



22 ST SAVIOURGATE YORK

A Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

by David Evans
and
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Cover illustration:

View looking south-east into site on completion of observed works

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List of Abbreviations

BGL	Below Ground Level
CBM	Ceramic Building Material
NGR	National Grid Reference
YAT	York Archaeological Trust
YORYM	Yorkshire Museum

ABSTRACT

This watching brief, carried out in the south-eastern end of the garden of 22 St Saviourgate on October 23rd 2004, recorded a well-stratified sequence of deposits, structures and features from the late medieval period to the present day. It has indicated that substantial and significant stone structures and related occupation deposits may survive relatively intact in area possibly bounded by the medieval streets of St Saviour's Place, St Saviourgate, Hungate and the modern road, The Stonebow. It would appear that the area has much archaeological potential, particularly in the gardens of the buildings fronting onto St Saviourgate.

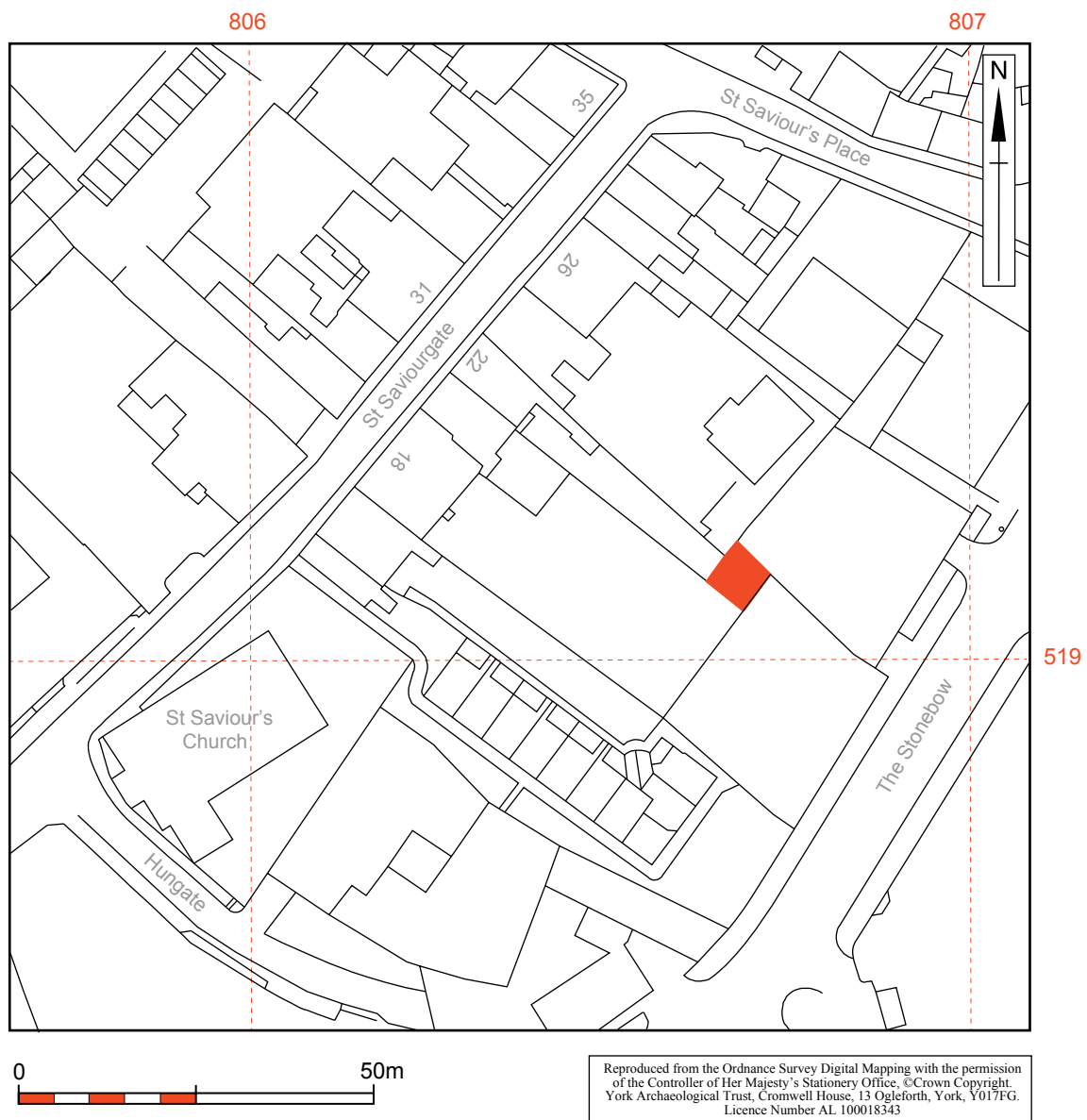


Fig. 1 Location of works

1. INTRODUCTION

On October 23rd York Archaeological Trust (YAT) undertook an archaeological watching brief on land at the rear of 22 St Saviourgate, York (NGR SE60665191, Figure 1). The watching brief was a condition of planning consent imposed by City of York Council and was to observe the groundworks during the construction of a new parking bay. To ensure a surface level with the current vehicular access this involved the lowering of the ground, in places, by up to 1.6m. The watching brief was commissioned by Jane Hindley of 22 St Saviourgate and the groundworks were undertaken by the building contractors.

2. METHOD STATEMENT

An archaeologist was present at all times during the ground clearance work. Measured sketches and scale section drawings were made on site of any deposits, features or structures encountered during the works. These field notes were formally drawn up during May 2005 as part of the preparation for this report. Most of the digging was by a mini-tracked excavator with the corners, sides and base finished by hand. All the scheduled groundworks were observed as they were carried out.

All site records are currently stored at the York Archaeological Trust where they have the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM:2004.505.

3. LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site lies c.210m south-east of the south-east wall of the Roman Fortress but within the medieval walled city north-east of the River Ouse and within an area bounded by The Stonebow, St Saviourgate, and St Saviour's Place. The area of groundworks was c.6m square and lay at the south-east end of the garden behind 22 St Saviourgate. Access to the site was effected by knocking down part of a boundary wall in the eastern corner of a small private car immediately south-west of the Jorvik Medical Practice, previously Woolpack House. The land in this part of York slopes gently down from c.14.3m OD on St Saviourgate to c.11.3m OD. In the vicinity of the groundworks the ground was fairly level and lay at c.13m OD.

4. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Note : other sites in York are normally referred to in the form 1990.000 or YORYM:1999.000. Further details of these sites are available from the YAT online archive gazetteer (www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/gaz/index.htm)

The reason for undertaking the watching brief was because the site lay within the York Area of Archaeological Importance as defined by City of York Council. Work in the past has encountered archaeological remains all around the current site. A summary of the archaeology and historical background of the area is presented below.

The site lies at the rear of a property fronting on to St Saviourgate, meaning 'street with the church of the Holy Saviour'. This was first attested in 1361 (Palliser, 1978). Prior to this, in the 13th and 14th centuries, the street was almost certainly known as Ketmongergate, 'street of the flesh-sellers'. The name Ketmongergate, derived from Old Norse, suggests that St Saviourgate as a street was in existence prior to the late 11th century.

South-east of the property lies Stonebow which is a modern street, but during the medieval period the Wool Market lay c .40m to the south-east and beyond it lay the King's Fishpool, a stretch of water created by damming the River Foss in the late 11th century.

There have been a number of archaeological investigations and discoveries close to the present site. Roman remains in the immediate area are not frequent but a watching brief at Lady Hewley's Almshouses (1985.1001) located a possible Roman drain.

No Anglian material is known to have come from close to the present site but there is some evidence for Anglo-Scandinavian activity. An excavation at 5 St Saviourgate (1983.43) located Anglo-Scandinavian deposits and a watching brief on sewer repairs in St Saviourgate (1985.21) located a timber building, a pit and a cobble surface which may be of 11th century or earlier date but could be medieval. Work by MAP at 9 St Saviourgate (1995.434) produced evidence for the Anglo-Scandinavian period including a hoard of ironwork.

Work in the area of St Saviourgate (1995.89 and 1995.0313), located well-preserved late-medieval buildings at 14m OD, 0.8m below present ground level. More recently significant deposits, features, structures and burials of the period have been recorded at a site (YORYM: 2004.355) adjacent and immediately south-east of St Saviour's Church (Evans, 2004). Further recent evidence for this period has come from an excavation at the former Henly's Garage site (YORYM:2004.148), c.70m south-south-west of the present site.

Extensive remains of the post-medieval period have been found close by, at Woolpack House, including the remains of buildings that fronted on to St Saviour's Place (YORYM:1995.4670). They consisted of the remains of foundations and part of a cellar with a brick floor. Further evidence for post-medieval structures, features and deposits (YORYM:2003.287) was recovered during building work in 2003.

Examination of the old maps of York clearly shows the arrangement of post-medieval buildings in this area. On the John Speed map of 1610 buildings are shown fronting onto St Saviour's Place and the edges of what became known as the wool and hay markets with open land behind. This is a pattern reflected on other maps from the 17th and 18th centuries (Archer 1685, Richards 1685, Chassereau 1750). By the early 19th century there is evidence of buildings starting to infill behind those on the street frontages (Baines 1822, Ordnance Survey, 1852).

5. THE WATCHING BRIEF

The earliest deposits identified in the watching brief were a spread of mid orange burnt clay (1005), a friable, very dark grey silt with moderate numbers of cobbles and occasional tile (1003) and another spread of mid orange burnt clay (1000). Above 1005 there was a layer of light to mid orange-brown clayey silt with moderate amounts of tile (1006). Overlying 1000 was a firm, mid greyish-brown silt with occasional tile (1001). Probably contemporary with 1001 was a spread of mid brown silt with moderate tile and charcoal (1004). These all lay at c.1.1 – 1.4m BGL and may have been occupation deposits within a now vanished structure.

Cut into 1001 was a linear feature (1009) aligned approximately north-west / south-east. It was c.1.4m wide and at least 0.45m deep, but not dug out, with very steeply sloping sides. The base was not seen. The only backfill noted was a mixture of loose tile and mid brown silt (1002). At the same stratigraphic level was another linear feature (1024) which was aligned roughly south-west / north-east and met 1009 at 90° close to the centre of the trench. It had the same type of backfill as 1009, a mixture of loose tile and mid brown silt (1008). Towards the north-east limit of the trench was a roughly oval spread of loose, black silt with moderate charcoal and tile (1007). It was felt that this was the backfill in a large pit, perhaps c.4m across but it was not possible to confirm this. Its stratigraphic relationship with 1009 and 1024 is not certain but it is likely to be at least roughly contemporary. Although none of the deposits described above was formally excavated, a small amount of brick, tile and pottery was taken from the tile rich deposits described above. These finds were broadly dated to the 12th century – 16th century and included fragments of 'curved flange' tile indicative of a high status building.

Overlying backfill 1002 was a possible levelling deposit of firm, dark greyish-brown clayey silt with occasional white mortar (1025) and a similar possible levelling deposit of firm, mid greyish-brown silt (1032). Possibly contemporary with 1025 and 1032, observed in the north-west facing section of the trench, was a firm, friable, light creamy-brown sandy silt with moderate quantities of white mortar (1011), possibly an accumulation deposit.

Cut into 1011 was a feature (1013) of uncertain shape, size and function. It was at least 1.6m across and 0.6m deep with a gently sloping north-east edge and probably a flattish base. It had a backfill of loose, mid creamy-brown sandy silt with occasional white mortar (1012). Sealing the backfill was a loose mixture of brick rubble, tile, mortar and mid brown silt (1014) which may have been a demolition or levelling deposit. Possibly contemporary with 1014 was a possible accumulation deposit of mid greyish-brown silt with occasional white mortar (1010). Cutting 1014, in the north-west facing section, was feature of uncertain function (1016). It was c.0.85m across and 0.5m deep with steeply sloping sides leading to a gently concave base. It had a backfill of mid brown silt with moderate brick rubble and occasional white mortar (1015).

Later root disturbance has confused the picture in the south-east facing section, but it is at this point that the first evidence for the construction of the boundary wall on at the northern

corner was apparent. Cutting into 1032 was 1034, the poorly defined construction cut for the wall. The cut was at least 0.50 m deep and as much as 0.35m wide beyond the lower courses of the structure. In the base of 1034 was a single course of re-used limestone blocks (1035) up to 0.22m deep and including at least one sculptured block. The blocks had been bonded, or packed, with lumps of very pale brown mortar. Set over 1035 were three courses of horizontal bricks, c. 0.2m deep in total, bonded with a hard white mortar (1036). They were stepped in, to the north-west, some 0.15m from the south-east edge of 1035. These bricks measured c.245mm x 120mm x 50mm. It was felt that contexts 1035 and 1036 were both within construction cut 1034 which had been backfilled with a firm, mid brown silt (1033).

This construction backfill appeared to be sealed by a deposit of firm, mid grey silt (1031), which was probably contemporary with a deposit of firm, friable, mid greyish-brown clayey sandy silt (1017), to the south-west of 1028. Both 1031 and 1017 may have been accumulation deposits.

Cut into 1017 and 1031 was a brick culvert (1028) aligned approximately north-west / south-east. It had an external width of c.0.65m and an internal channel c.0.2m wide. It had a floor of horizontally laid bricks and the walls were two courses thick. It survived to a height of c.0.6m. Any roof to this culvert appeared to have been destroyed but it may have been of brick and arched. The brickwork was bonded with a soft pale grey mortar. Two backfills were observed the lower being a clean, mid brown silt (1030) and the upper was composed of small brick fragments in a mid greyish-brown silt with occasional white mortar (1029).

Also cutting into 1031 was a wall construction cut (1041) which was at least 0.2m wide and 0.45m deep with a nearly vertical south-west edge and a flat base. In the base of 1041, and overlying 1036, were six courses, a depth of c.0.45m, of brickwork bonded with a hard white mortar (1037). They were stepped in c.0.1m to the north-west of the south-east edge of 1036. The bricks in these courses were approximately 245mm x 120mm x 52mm. Above 1037 was a similar band of six courses of brickwork (1038), c.0.45m deep. They were, however, far rougher and more weathered than 1037. Construction trench 1041 had been backfilled with a dark grey silt containing occasional stone and tile (1040). This wall had been placed directly on top of the earlier structure (1035/1036) and could in fact be part of the same construction process that has been disturbed by root activity (see above). The most likely explanation is that the wall was taken down and rebuilt after its original reconstruction.

Sealing 1040 was a possible levelling deposit composed of dark greyish-brown sandy silt with occasional brick and tile (1018). Probably later than 1018, and above 1038, was the brick wall of a modern standing structure (1039). In the north-west facing section 1018 had been cut by a wall construction trench (1021) which was up to 0.4m wide and at least 1.4m deep with a vertical south-west edge. The base was not seen. Within 1021 were mortared foundations (1022) bonded with a hard white mortar. Above 1022 was a brick wall (1023) aligned north-west / south-east and bonded with a hard white mortar.

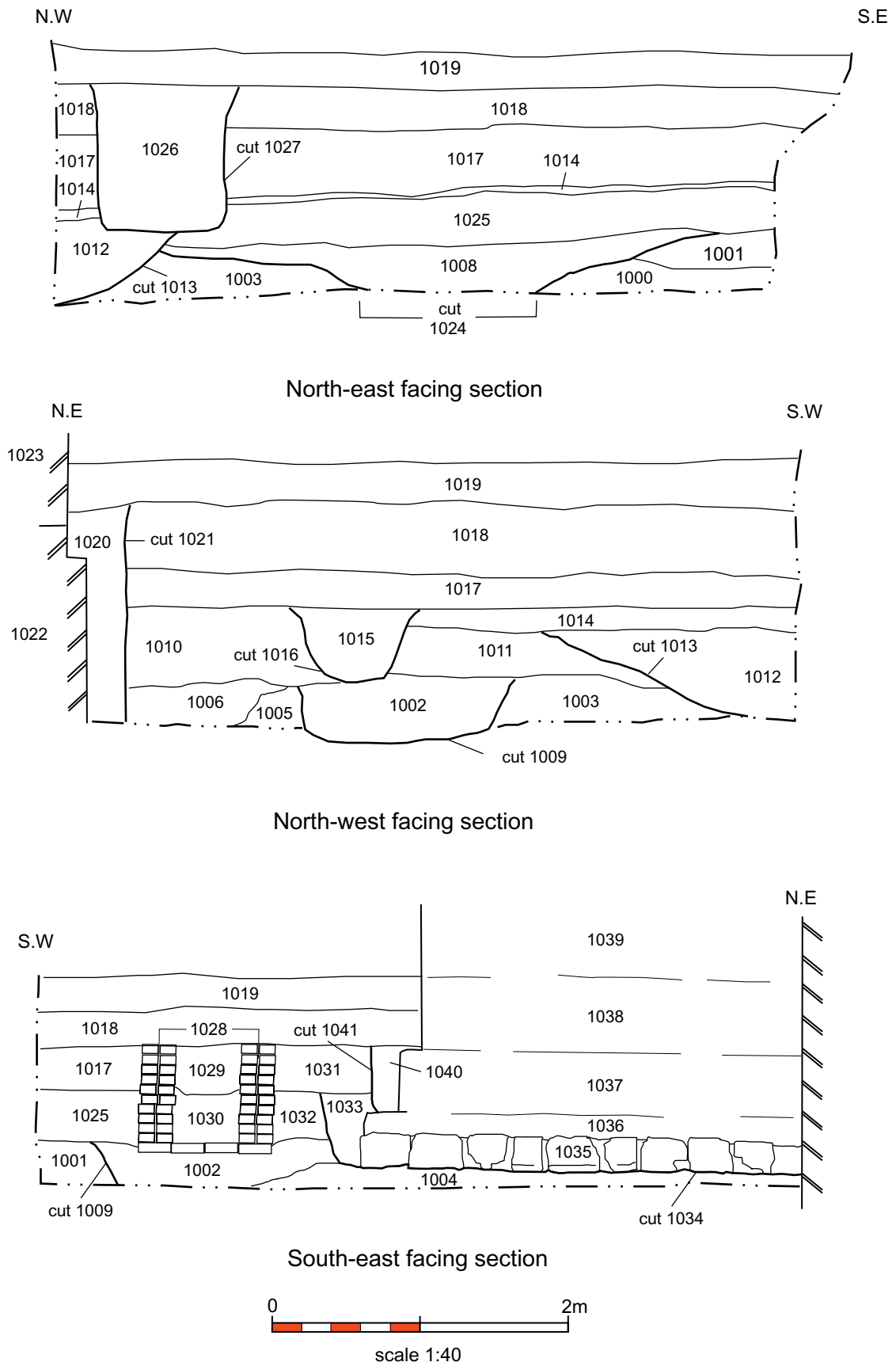


Fig. 2 Recorded sections

Construction trench 1021 had been backfilled with a mixture of brick rubble and dark grey silt with occasional white mortar (1020). Wall 1023 seemed to be a distinctly different build to 1022 which may be an old retaining wall re-used as foundations for a new wall (1022). Also cut into 1018, but seen in the north-east facing section, was a possible linear feature (1027). The function of this cut was uncertain, it may have been a modern pit or a disused service trench aligned north-east / south-west. It was c.0.9m across and 1m deep with vertical sides and a flat base. It had been backfilled with a firm, friable, dark greyish-brown sandy silt with moderate brick rubble (1026). The uppermost deposit throughout the trench was a very dark grey sandy silt capped by plants and other vegetation (1019) which was the existing modern ground surface.



Plate 1 Exposed wall foundations, south-east facing section

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The lowest, and chronologically earliest, deposits disturbed during the groundworks undertaken related to a series of possible surfaces, dumping and backfills. These backfill and dumping deposits were made up of tile, brick and to a lesser extent mortar. The tile and brick from the lowest deposits dated from the 12th century and onwards through the medieval period. A particularly noteworthy example was the fragments of 'curved flange' tile which is attributed to high status buildings from the 12th century. This date range was also seen in the occasional fragments of pottery noted within these contexts. The volume of CBM (Ceramic Building Materials) and mortar observed suggests the wholesale demolition of medieval structures on, or in the nearby vicinity of, the site.

The brick culvert, 1028, is of a type commonly datable to the post-medieval period although it could be as late as the later 19th century. The size of some of the bricks seen in the walls and

foundations, 1035 and 1036, in the south-east facing section also strongly suggest a post-medieval date.

Many of the upper deposits, features and structures could be confidently attributed to the modern period, 19th – 21st centuries on the basis of their form and stratigraphic position although the attribution of walls 1037 and 1038 are far from certain.

This watching brief has recorded a well stratified sequence from the late medieval period to the present day, not at all unusual in York. What may be of significance is that there appear to be substantial stone structures, possibly of high status, of the medieval period in an area now occupied largely by gardens. The work immediately south-east of St Saviour's Church in 2004, however, produced a very similar situation with intensive activity during the medieval period followed by relative inactivity during the subsequent post-medieval period. The reason for this remains obscure but may be of considerable significance for understanding the history of this area of York which until recently has seen little archaeological investigation.

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