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NCP CAR PARK,
64-74 SKELDERGATE,
YORK

REPORT ON AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
DESK-TOP STUDY



1999 FIELD REPORT
NUMBER 33



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ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-TOP STUDY

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NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

An archaeological desktop study of the NCP Car Park, 64-74 Skeldergate, which is proposed for redevelopment, was undertaken by York Archaeological Trust on behalf of DTZ Debenham Thorpe Property Advisors in May 1999. It provides evidence of archaeological deposits being preserved over the whole site; the top of these deposits is an average of 1m below the present ground surface. In the south-west part of the site the overall thickness of the archaeological deposits is 2-3m, but increases in depth to around 6m towards Skeldergate. These include stratified and well-preserved waterlogged organic archaeological deposits of medium and high archaeological value, dating from Roman times to the medieval period.

The site is within the area of the Roman *colonia*, a civilian settlement which was established on the west bank of the River Ouse. The Roman features probably include large Roman masonry structures in the form of public buildings or high-status town houses, and perhaps massive walls that supported artificial terraces on which the buildings stood.

The character of later activity is less clear, but it is likely that the Skeldergate and Fetter Lane street frontages were occupied by the Anglo-Scandinavian period, and that much of the land to the rear was built on during the medieval period. Many of these buildings would have been timber-framed, but some high-status residences and possibly a hospital might have been built in stone.

In the 19th century the area was characterised by workshops, small scale housing and public houses whilst the 20th century has seen the development of large scale warehouses on the site.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

This archaeological desktop study provides a critical assessment of the current level of knowledge on the location, extent, date, character, condition, significance and quality of the surviving under ground archaeological resource within the proposed redevelopment.

The area of the desktop study is situated at the junction of Fetter Lane and Skeldergate (centred on N.G.R. SE 6012 5154) and measures approximately 80m square (Figure 1).

The report presents the results of an archaeological desktop study and a walk-over survey. The records on which the report is based are stored in the Trust archive under the accession code YORAT:1999.6.

1.2 Methodology

The compilation of this report involved a number of stages of collection and collation of information and assessment of its significance in relation to the archaeology and the built heritage within the development area.

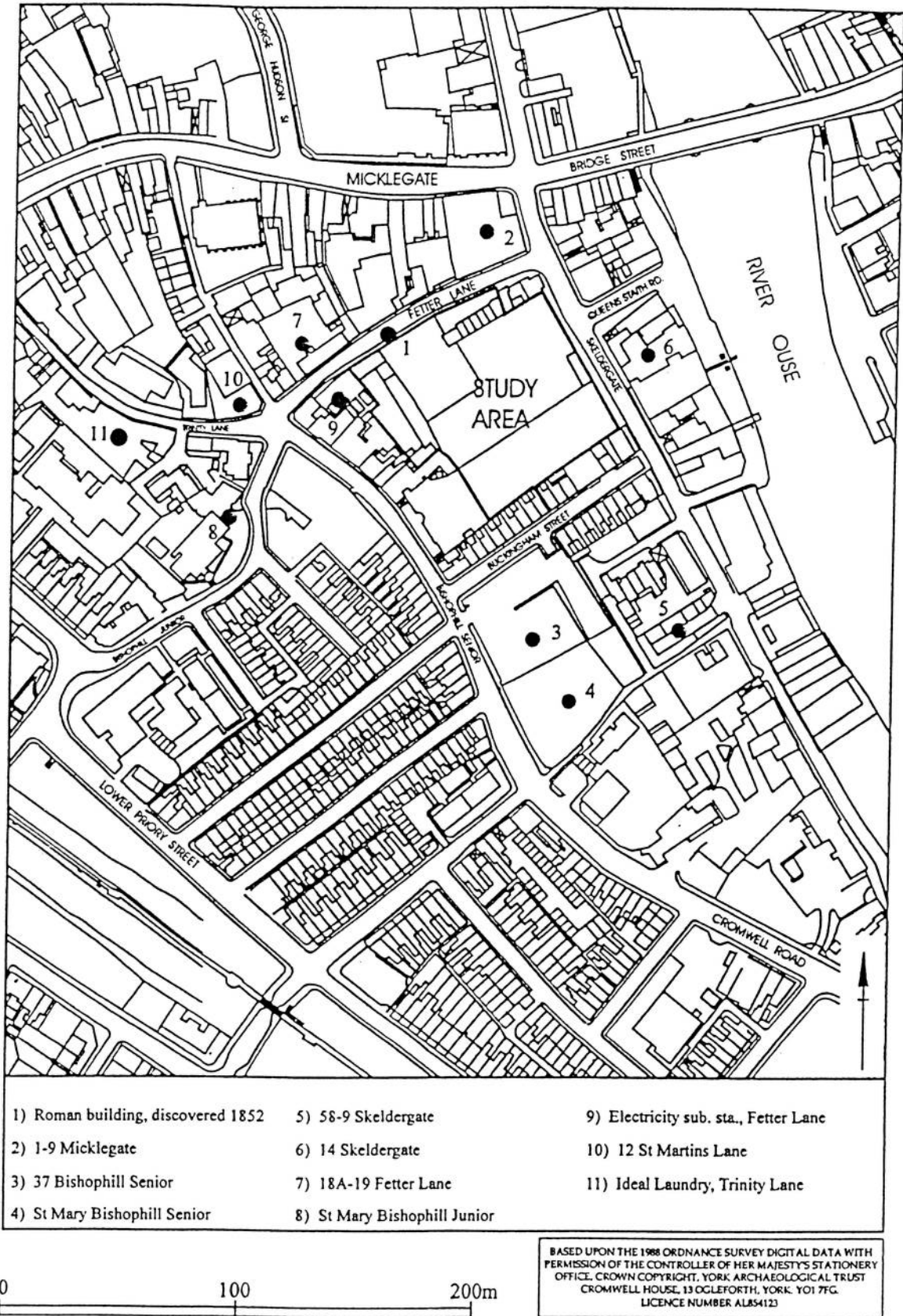


Figure 1, Location of study area and sites mentioned in text

The following sources were accessed and utilised:

- a) Published and archived data sources including the Sites and Monument Register (SMR); the List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest; and the York Archaeological Trust Gazetteer of Sites in York.
- b) Ordnance Survey topographical maps, historic maps and geological maps.
- c) Historic documents, historical accounts and published histories of the city.
- d) Archaeological evaluation, watching brief and excavation reports.

Consultation was also undertaken with relevant local government heritage officers, libraries and academic institutions.

Upon completion of the data collection phase, a walk-over survey was undertaken to look at the current state of the development site and to aid in the prediction of potential areas of modern disturbance and damage to archaeological deposits.

2.0 THE DEVELOPMENT SITE

2.1 General Overview

The development covers an area of approximately 6,500m² and lies some 50m south of Micklegate and 60m to the south-west of the River Ouse. The south-west and south-east boundaries lie to the rear of properties fronting onto Bishophill Senior and Buckingham Street respectively. The north-west and north-east boundaries are formed by Fetter Lane and Skeldergate respectively, excluding 76 Skeldergate in the north corner of the site (Figure 1).

2.2 Site Topography

The site lies on the steep slope down to the River Ouse from the high ground to the south-west. The highest point within the development area, towards the south, is at approximately 16.0m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) and the lowest point, at approximately 9.2m AOD, is in the north-east part of the site.

2.3 Geology

The solid geology incorporates Bunter and Keuper Sandstone, part of the Sherwood Sandstone Group, dating to the Triassic period (Ordnance Survey 1967). Over this lies boulder clay beneath sands and gravels, part of the glacial till and York Moraine that formed as a result of the last glaciation (Institute of Geological Sciences 1980, 124). The York Moraine formed a natural causeway across the marshy Vale of York, between the Yorkshire Wolds to the east and the Pennine foothills and the Yorkshire Dales to the west; hence its importance as a communication

route and a focus of human settlement. The River Ouse cuts through the York Moraine in order to drain southwards and the site lies on the south-west side of this valley.

2.4 Historical Background

2.4.1 Documentary evidence

Although some medieval documents refer to the walled area on the west side of the Ouse as a suburb, it seems that this area was more than merely an extension of the urban nucleus that lay on the opposite bank of the river. There are references to a cathedral church that may have stood west of the Ouse as early as the 7th century. Holy Trinity Micklegate is mentioned in Domesday Book and may have been preceded by a pre-Conquest minster called Christ Church. The use of the west bank of the Ouse as a waterfront is recorded from the later 11th century, and may have been established as a commercial development by the archbishops of York during the 9th century. Micklegate would have been a busy thoroughfare from an early date, as it was on the route into York from the south and west. A great fire, which swept through York in 1137, reached Holy Trinity Micklegate, indicating that the street was solidly built up, allowing the fire to spread along it (Palliser 1984, 104-6). The western part of York was evidently considered of sufficient importance at the time of the Norman Conquest to require the installation of castle (the Old Baile) there, in addition to the castle between the Ouse and the Foss.

The first guildhall in York, belonging to the Gild Merchant and dating to before 1128, was apparently situated west of the Ouse. Only in the 13th century did the focus of civic government shift to the east of the Ouse, followed by the mercantile government. However, the area west of the Ouse remained prosperous and the residences of leading burgesses including the Scropes, Mowbrays and Nevilles were built there (Palliser 1984, 106-7).

Skeldergate is first documented in the 12th century (Palliser 1978, 15). The name could be derived from the Old Norse word *skjalf/skelde* ('shelf') perhaps describing a low stretch of riverbank upon which boats could be beached (RCHM 1972, 101). The Husgable Roll of 1282 records 68 properties in Skeldergate, second only to Micklegate of the streets south-west of the Ouse.

Skeldergate was the main dockside street of York until the late 19th century, running parallel to the west bank of the Ouse downstream of Ouse Bridge. Many merchants resided on either side of Skeldergate, directly behind the wharves. Sir Thomas Widdrington wrote in c.1650 that 'in Skeldergate.... have been and are many ancient built houses, as the fashion of some of them shows, which probably belonged to merchants.' William Bowes (d. 1439), a merchant who was twice Mayor and four times M.P. for York, owned much property in Skeldergate. During the post-medieval period the Pawson family, the 'chief traders' in the city in wine, lived in Skeldergate; their house is described as containing 'noble vaults.' However, during the 19th century Skeldergate became a less prosperous, more industrial area. Several epidemics, notably the cholera outbreak of 1832, started in Beedham's Court, a yard off Skeldergate, otherwise known as the Hagworm's Nest (which lay in the study area). One of the main 19th century coaching inns in York, the Elephant and Castle, was located in the study area at 67 Skeldergate (Parson and White 1830, 419).

Fetter Lane was first referred to as *Felteryayl* (Middle English for 'the lane of the felt-workers'), in the 13th century (Palliser 1978, 9). Ten properties, mostly if not all on the south-east side of the street, paid house tax in 1282 (RCHM 1972, 67). A *maison dieu* (a type of medieval hospital) stood in Fetter Lane, but its location is uncertain (Tillot 1961, 365). 19th century workshops and public houses, followed by a warehouse and an electricity sub-station in the 20th century, were built on the south-east side of Fetter Lane, and now no houses stand on this frontage.

Bishophill first appears as *Bischophill* (and variants) in the 13th century. The name means 'Bishop's hill' and may point to a major archiepiscopal holding in this area (Palliser 1978, 5). The name Bishophill Senior came to be applied to this part of the street connecting the churches of St. Mary Bishophill Senior and St. Mary Bishophill Junior. Thomas Fairfax built a mansion on Bishophill immediately to the south of the site, which was ranked in the 1672 Hearth Tax as the fourth largest house in York. It was inherited by his son-in-law, the Duke of Buckingham, hence its name 'Duke's Palace.' In 1736 Drake described the palace as being in a 'sad ruinous condition', although it had 'large, spacious gardens beyond it'; these gardens extended north-east into the study area. Buckingham Street was built across the former Fairfax property in 1855, connecting Bishophill Senior and Skeldergate. None of the buildings comprising the Fairfax mansion lie within the study area. The part of the Fairfax land north-west of Buckingham Street was occupied by a penitentiary during the latter half of the 19th century, which was subsequently replaced by houses.

2.4.2 Cartographic evidence

The earliest map of York, dating to around 1545, notes *howsis* in the area bounded by Skeldergate, Fetter Lane and Bishophill, but the precise location of these houses is not shown (RCHM 1972, Figure 1). On 17th century maps, such as those of Speed (1610)(Figure 3) and Richards (1685), houses are shown lining Skeldergate and Fetter Lane, with gardens to the rear. Several large buildings are depicted fronting onto Bishophill, at the junction of the wall forming the boundary between the parishes of St. Martin and St. Mary Bishophill Junior; this was evidently the Fairfax mansion, and its site is labelled as such on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 4). Some maps, such as those of Rocque in 1750 and Todd in 1811, show the entire area as built up, but this may have been a convention used on these maps, which are by no means as accurate or detailed as the modern Ordnance Survey maps. For example, the garden behind the Fairfax residence, which extending some 60m to the north-east (into the south-west part of the study area), appears on the 1822 Baines map and the 1852 and 1892 Ordnance Survey maps and Whittock's View of c.1858. This area was still an open space in 1937, according to the Ordnance Survey map compiled that year (Figure 6).

Apart from the Fairfax garden, the 1852 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 4) shows the study area almost entirely built up. Several passageways, between buildings on the street frontages, led from Skeldergate and Fetter Lane to narrow courtyards (such as Beedham's Court) and were lined with a combination of low-status housing and workshops. Several public houses are shown standing on the street frontages. The 1892 Ordnance Survey map shows this layout was still extant, but by the time the 1937 Ordnance Survey map (Figure 6) was drawn it had been replaced with warehouses and workshops.

2.5 Archaeological Background

2.5.1 The character and preservation of archaeological remains

A feature of land use alongside the River Ouse in York is the deposition of thick layers of material, in order to raise the ground level (to reduce the risk of flooding) and reclaim land from the river. As a result, since Roman times the ground level alongside the River Ouse has risen by some 7m, only the top 2m of which is post-medieval and modern in date (YAT 1988, 11; Ove Arup 1991, 17). On the other hand the total depth of deposits on the high ground at the south-west side of the study area is likely to be around 2.5m, of which the top 1m is post-medieval and modern (see Figure 2).

The dumps of material used to raise the ground level were deposited in a short space of time, and normally contain large quantities of artefacts. Furthermore, these deeply stratified deposits are completely waterlogged, so that organic materials such as wood, textiles and biological remains are extremely well preserved. Such deposits are in effect closely dated 'time capsules' of archaeological material and are therefore a prime archaeological resource (Ove Arup 1991, 19-20).

2.5.2 Prehistoric and Roman Periods (to the 5th Century AD).

Although archaeological deposits of prehistoric date have not been found in the vicinity of the site, it seems that the York Moraine was a focus of prehistoric activity. Prehistoric finds, particularly Neolithic stone axes, are widely distributed on the high ground south-west of the River Ouse, and possible burials of Bronze Age and Iron Age date have also been found nearby (RCHM 1972, xxxvii-xxxix).

During the Roman period, York was a legionary base; the fortress stood on the north-east bank of the Ouse. A town grew up across the river from the fortress; its importance is reflected in its status as a *colonia*, and it was also the capital of one of the provinces of Roman Britain (RCHM 1962, xxix-xxxix). This site lies in the middle of the Roman town.

Excavations on the site of the former Queens Hotel at 1-9 Micklegate (Frere 1990, 325-6, Figure 15) and 14 Skeldergate (YAT 1991b) demonstrated that the original south-west bank of the River Ouse lies to the north-east of the site. Consequently, the Roman and later waterfronts almost certainly lie entirely beyond the development. A length of Roman street was found at 58-9 Skeldergate some 6m south-west of Skeldergate; it is thought to have been part of a road that served the waterfront, running parallel to the river and probably connecting further north with the main road to the fortress (AY 4/1, 5f.). This road could cross the north-east side of the site, but it is more likely to run broadly along the line of modern Skeldergate at this point, beyond the limit of the development.

There is evidence that natural terraces on the slope down to the River Ouse were 'improved' during the Roman period by the deposition of dumps up to 2.2m thick (Figure 2) in order to create areas of level ground for building purposes (AY 4/1, 30-2, Fig. 14; YAT 1994, 23; YAT 1996; YAT 1997). This activity appears to date to the latter half of the 2nd century, and could represent a major re-organisation of this part of the town, associated with its elevation to *colonia* status (Ottaway 1984, 30). Excavations at St. Mary Bishophill Junior to the west of the site

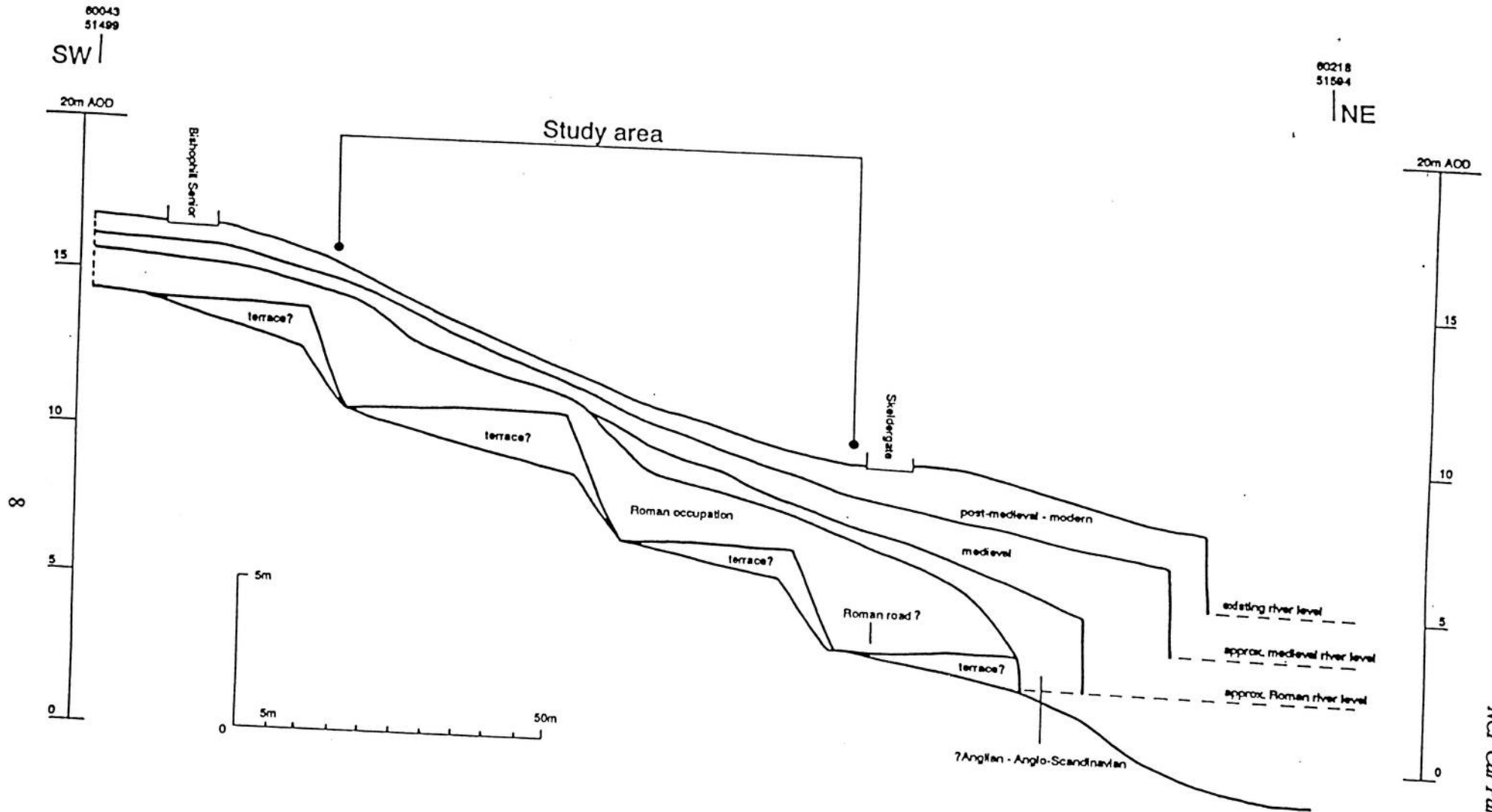


Figure 2, Suggested profile of archaeological deposits

(Ottaway 1984, 32) and 37 Bishophill Senior (Ramm 1976) and St. Mary Bishophill Senior (AY 4/1, 32f.) to the south, revealed substantial masonry buildings with hypocausts, including at least one bath suite, dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries. During excavations at 1-9 Micklegate (former Queen's Hotel) to the north of the site, part of a major masonry building, perhaps a public baths, was found (Frere 1990, 325-6). Smaller excavations to the north-west and west of this site – Ideal Laundry, Trinity Lane (YAT 1991a); 12 St. Martin's Lane (YAT 1994, 23 and YAT 1995, 21); Fetter Lane Electricity Sub-Station (Hopkinson and Pearson 1998); and 18A-19 Fetter Lane (YAT 1997) - have also produced evidence of substantial later Roman buildings. However, the character of the Roman settlement in this part of the *colonia* is still poorly understood; even the basic topography and the street layout remain a mystery.

2.5.3 Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5th to the 11th Centuries AD)

There is no clear evidence for occupation in this part of York during the 5th-7th centuries, although this could be due to a lack of datable artefacts that can be assigned to this period. However, there is some evidence for 8th-9th century settlement south-west of the River Ouse. Finds of Anglian pottery of this date have occurred mainly towards the River Ouse, suggesting that activity was concentrated along the waterfront (AY 16/6, 561), and several 9th century coin hoards have been found in the area (AY 8/1, 7). Direct evidence of occupation is scarce, although a substantial timber building at 1-9 Micklegate is probably Anglian in date. This activity was followed by intense Anglo-Scandinavian occupation in wattle and timber buildings, associated with the establishment of property boundaries that persisted until the modern era (Gaimster et al. 1990, 219-20). Other excavations in the vicinity support the documentary evidence that the existing street pattern was established before the Norman Conquest (AY 8/1, 8; YAT 1997), but this process remains largely obscure.

The presence of sculptured stones at the nearby churches of St. Mary Bishophill Junior and St. Martin's Micklegate indicate that they were in use by the 9th and 10th centuries respectively; a third church, St. Mary Bishophill Senior, was erected by the 11th century (RCHM 1972, xl-xlii). The Anglo-Scandinavian population of this part of York was clearly large enough to require several parish churches.

2.5.4 Medieval (11th to the 16th Centuries AD)

The site lies within the walls of the medieval town. There is evidence from a number of excavations in the vicinity for continued, intensive occupation in timber buildings along the street frontages at Skeldergate and Fetter Lane, with backyards to the rear (Gaimster et al. 1990, 219-20; YAT 1991b; YAT 1997; Hopkinson and Pearson 1998). However, the pattern and character of settlement is not understood in detail.

2.5.5 Post-Medieval and Modern (16th to the 20th Centuries)

Modern disturbance has removed much evidence of post-medieval occupation in this part of York except for cellars along the street frontages (YAT 1991b; YAT 1997), and the same is probably the case at 64-74 Skeldergate. Furthermore, this site has been almost entirely redeveloped as warehouses during the 20th century, leaving little trace of any preceding standing buildings.

2.6 Built Heritage

The standing buildings on the site are all modern in date; none are considered to be of architectural or historic interest (RCHM 1972; DOE 1983). The main structures are a group of early 20th century warehouses built in brick, with two-storey offices along Skeldergate and part of the Fetter Lane frontage, and large warehouses to the rear. The ground floor of the offices on Skeldergate is set back from the street, and the first floor is carried over on stone-faced concrete pillars. The north-east end of the Fetter Lane frontage in the study area is occupied by small, late 19th/early 20th century brick workshops, set back from the street. Immediately north-east of the warehouse entrance is a mid 20th-century brick house, apparently comprising domestic accommodation over a shop, with bay windows at first floor level. The south-west end of the Fetter Lane frontage in the study area is open, with single-storey prefabricated timber workshops behind.

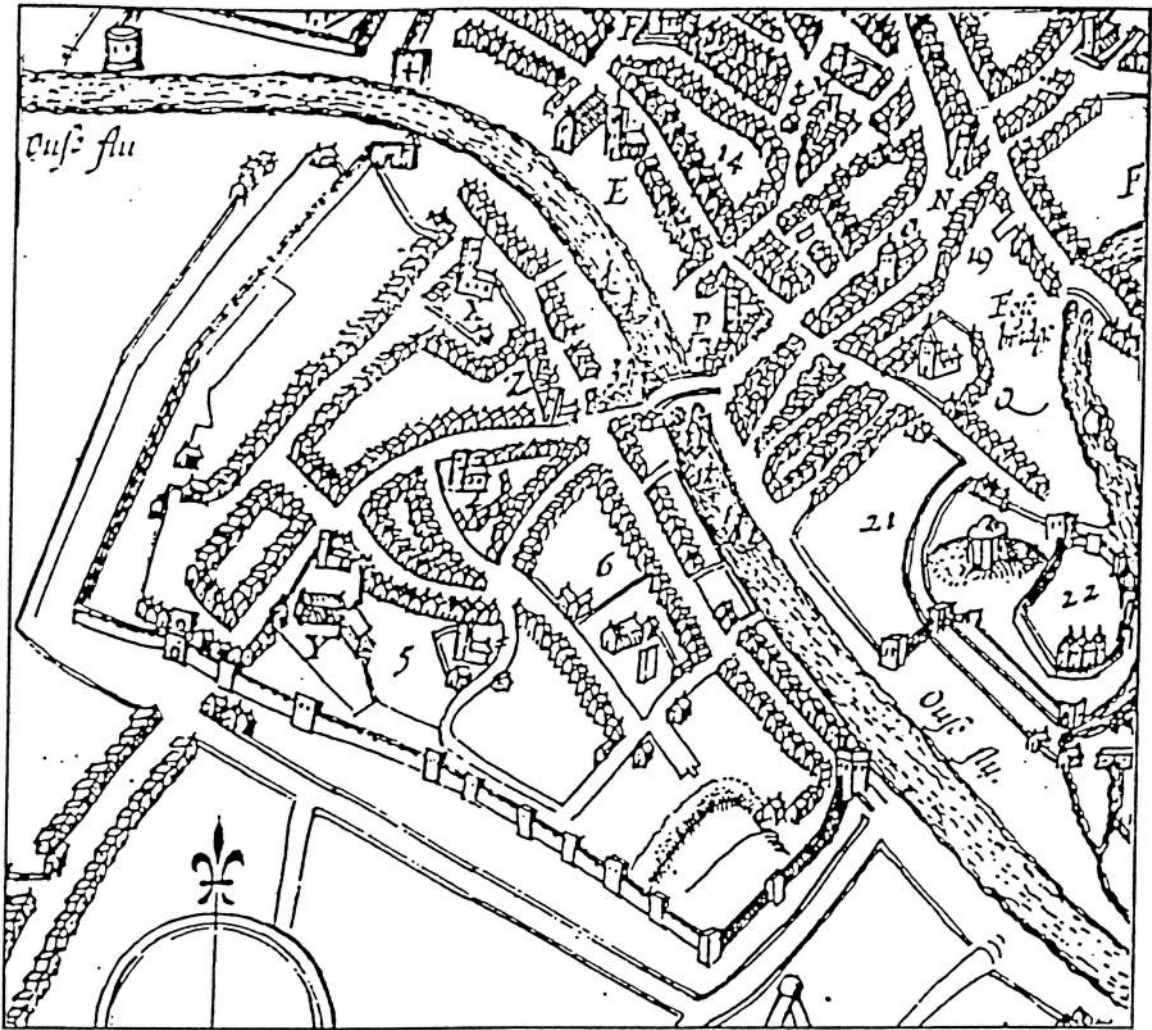


Figure 3 John Speed's map of c.1610



Figure 4 1852 Ordnance Survey map

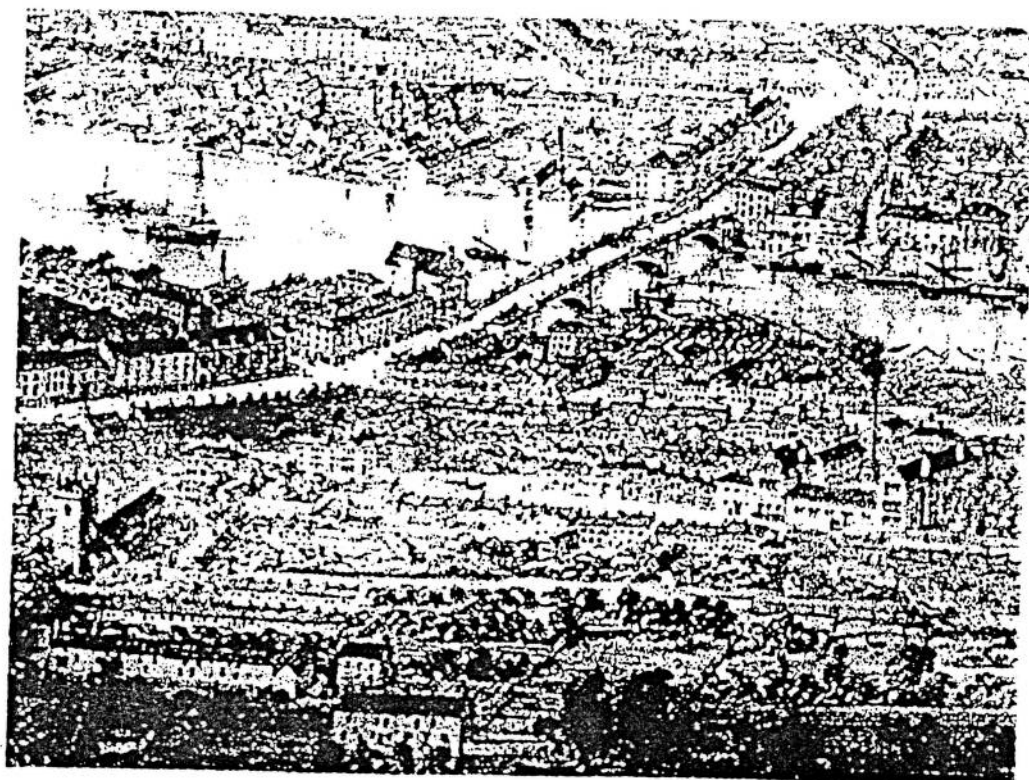


Figure 5. Whittock's Birds Eye View of York c.1858 (extract)



Figure 6 1937 Ordnance Survey map

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

The north-east part of the site lies within Zone 10 of the York Development and Archaeology Study (the west bank of the River Ouse). The archaeological deposits in this zone are deeply stratified and well-preserved, and are classified as Grade 1, the highest value. In addition to the large quantities of artefacts found in the riverside dumps, the waterlogged deposits are probably rich in organic material, including environmental data. The archaeological deposits on the higher ground in the western part of the site (Zone 11) are valued at Grade 2, medium quality, as they are unlikely to be so deeply stratified and well-preserved (Ove Arup 1991, 21-22, Fig. 4.1).

An unusual topographical element is the natural terracing in the slope down to the River Ouse, which was apparently developed during the Roman period. The terracing probably affected the settlement layout into the medieval period. It should also be noted that the Roman terrace dumps are likely to incorporate closely-dated finds assemblages similar to the riverside dumps, save for the probably lower degree of organic preservation. The presence of the terracing probably means that the thickness, and depth below ground level, of the archaeological deposits varies considerably (see Figure 2). This is likely to be particularly true for the deposits of Roman date, for two reasons. Firstly, the dumps used to level up the terraces could be up to 2m thick at the edge of each terrace, but presumably taper out towards the rear of the terrace. Secondly, the infilling of the terracing, culminating in the steady slope visible today, probably commenced in the Roman period, while the terraces were being occupied during the 3rd and 4th centuries. These occupation deposits are likely to be much thicker towards the rear of each terrace than towards the front. The scale and extent of these variations will depend on the local morphology of the terracing.

Most of the Roman buildings observed in this part of York appear to have been either high-status town houses or public buildings of later Roman date, but otherwise relatively little is known about the Roman and Anglian settlements. It is possible that the remains of early Roman (1st-2nd century) occupation lie buried beneath the terrace dumps.

Skeldergate was presumably established in the Anglo-Scandinavian period, indicating that the waterfront was situated well to the north-east of the study area. However, mercantile activity continued along the south-west side of Skeldergate, and Fetter Lane became a focus of craftworking. The street frontages were lined with buildings throughout, and the backyards of these properties also would have been increasingly occupied by buildings as the population of Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval York grew. However, cellars could subsequently have been dug along the street frontages, removing at least some of the Anglo-Scandinavian and earlier medieval deposits. It is possible that a *maison dieu* on Fetter Lane stood within the study area.

The archaeological remains within the development site are thought to be of medium and high quality, but their character and extent are not fully understood. More detailed information on the archaeological remains could be obtained through the excavation of evaluation trenches and the undertaking of a borehole survey.

Although the standing buildings are all modern, the warehouses in particular form one of the few surviving examples of the commercial character of this part of York. A descriptive and photographic record of these buildings should be made by an archaeologist and deposited with the City of York sites and monuments record prior to their demolition.

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