

YORK



ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
TRUST

LAND ADJACENT TO  
37 MAIN STREET,  
WHELDRAKE,  
YORK

REPORT ON AN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF



1999 FIELD REPORT  
NUMBER 43

**LAND ADJACENT TO 37 MAIN STREET,  
WHELDRAKE, YORK**

**REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF**

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## ABSTRACT

*On 17<sup>th</sup> June 1999 York Archaeological Trust carried out a watching brief on development land adjacent to 37 Main Street, Wheldrake. Two features were seen to cut into natural glacial deposits. One of these was a probable pet grave, the other possibly a large garden feature. A possible surface between the backfilled garden feature and the extant topsoil was also noted. All of these features are believed to be of early modern – recent date.*

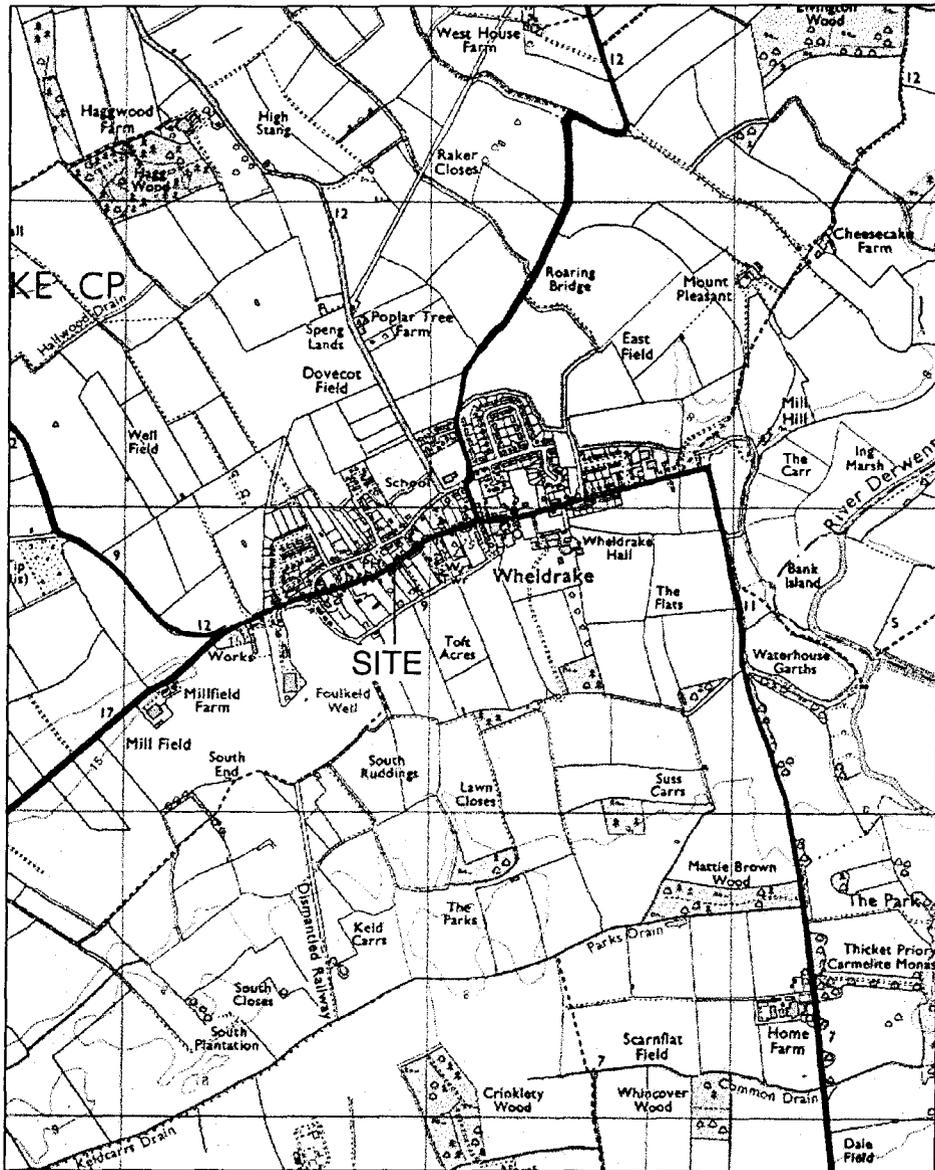
## 1. INTRODUCTION

On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June 1999 York Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief on a plot of land on Main Street, Wheldrake York (NGR SE 6790 4482) (Figure 1, Site location plan). Until recently the land had formed part of the garden of 37 Main Street. The monitoring and recording works were prompted by development of the site with the erection of a single residential dwelling. The village of Wheldrake sits on a low but distinct moraine ridge, the "Escrick Moraine", close to the east bank of the River Derwent. The uppermost part of the drift geology at the site is of glacial sand and gravel below which lie the mixed morainic deposits. The underlying solid geology is of Bunter sandstone, (Geol. Surv. 1973).

The aims of the archaeological work were to establish the presence or absence of any archaeological remains within the area of the development and to determine the location, date, extent, character and quality of any such deposits that may be found. The watching brief was carried out on behalf of Mr Chris Cook of Nether Poppleton in accordance with a specification of works formulated by John Oxley, City of York Council Principal Archaeologist and placed as a planning condition on the development.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The meaning of the place-name Wheldrake is uncertain, though the village is historically known to be of pre-Norman conquest origin, (Smith. 1970). Nearly all of the older properties in the village lay along Main Street and its continuation Church Street. One of these has exposed timber framing and several others apparently contain fragments of timber framing. These buildings are generally held to be of 17<sup>th</sup> century origin. There are also several brick buildings again thought to be of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the other buildings on Main Street are of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century construction, the remainder being of this century. It has been suggested that the historic core of the village owes its arrangement to a re-planning of the settlement in the later 11<sup>th</sup> century, (VCH, 1976). This re-planning is supposed to have involved the laying out of eight tofts on either side of Main Street. The growth of the village up to around 1850 is said to have been achieved almost solely by sub-division of the original tofts. Post later 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of the village has tended to occur on the north-western side of the village. Today Wheldrake serves largely as a dormitory village for York. Two attempts at the building and maintaining of a castle are recorded in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Each of these is said to have been destroyed or prevented at the insistence of York. There has been very little archaeological work carried out in the vicinity, though two stray finds of flint axes from the village are recorded.



BASED UPON ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:25000 MAP DATA WITH PERMISSION OF THE CONTROLLER OF HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE, CROWN COPYRIGHT, YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST CROMWELL HOUSE, 13 OGLEFORTH, YORK. YO17FG. LICENCE NUMBER AL854123

Scale 1:25,000

Figure 1, Site location plan

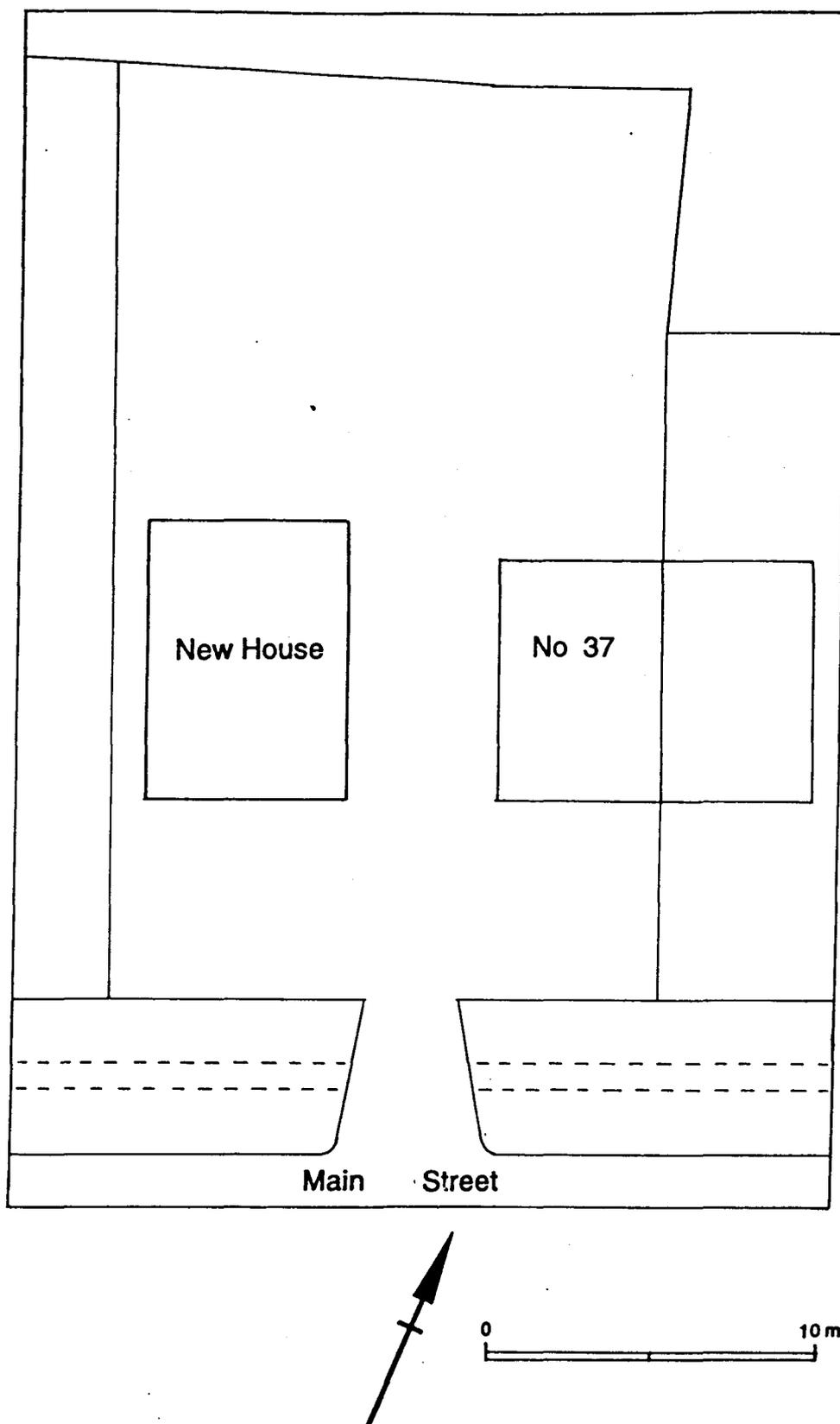


Figure 2, Works location plan

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The watching brief consisted of the observation and recording of deposits revealed during the excavation of the wall foundation trenches for the new house (Figure 3, Foundation trench plan). Prior to the cutting of the foundation trenches some ground levelling had taken place, though this was of a very limited scale and involved no more than a reduction in the level of topsoil across parts of the site. All of the trenches for external walls were 0.65m wide and those for internal walls 0.45m wide. Both sets of trenches were 1.0m deep below cleared ground level and were excavated by means of a small mechanical excavator. At the completion of trench excavation the revealed sections were selectively cleaned, examined for additional finds and certain parts of them were then drawn. All section drawings were at a scale of 1:10. Drawn sections were located on a 1:50 scale foundation trench plan. All contexts encountered were recorded on separate pro-forma sheets. A series of colour print photographs were taken of various parts of the trenches and their sections at the completion of excavation.

All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the YAT accession code YORAT: 1999.14.

### **4. WATCHING BRIEF**

Natural deposits of post-glacial origin, contexts 1005 and 1004, were encountered at depths below the existing ground level of 0.12m – 0.39m. The lowest of these, context 1005, was a reddish brown, stiff, clay that in places contained small quantities of sand, and was seen only in the south-eastern two thirds of the site. The absence of this material in the remainder of the site was caused by the slope down to the north-west. Sealing the clay was context 1004, a deposit of gravelly sand up to 0.80m thick.

Two features were seen to cut into the natural deposits. The smaller of these in the southern corner of the site, context 1003, appeared to be sub-rectangular in shape, measured some 0.80m across by 0.29m deep, was fairly steep sided and had a flattish base. The fill, context 1002, was a dark greyish brown, friable, sandy silt. The only finds retrieved consisted of two small animal bones. Information provided by the builder indicates that the previous occupier of 37 Main Street, a cat loving elderly lady, buried many a deceased pet in her former garden. It is probable that 1003 represents the not so final resting place of one of her feline companions.

The second cut feature, context 1007, occupied the north-west part of the site. The size of 1007, in excess of 6.5m x 4.5m (though nowhere more than 0.74m deep), was such that its limits lay beyond the area investigated. In several of the trench sections the south-eastern edge of the feature could be seen. Each of these sections showed a fairly gently sloping side, nowhere in excess of 30 degrees, and a base that was either flat or undulated very gently. A single fill, context 1006, was seen to occupy this cut. Although slight colour and textural variations were apparent within the fill, 1006 was essentially a light – mid greyish brown, moist, slightly silty sand. Small quantities of brick were present close to the base of the fill whilst very occasional flecks of coal, stone and charcoal were evenly distributed throughout it. Readily datable finds from 1006 consisted of one sherd of blue and white transfer ware, one sherd of white glazed pot and several small fragments of probable roofing slate. The finds evidence clearly indicates an early modern – recent date for the backfilling, at least, of this feature. It is not entirely certain

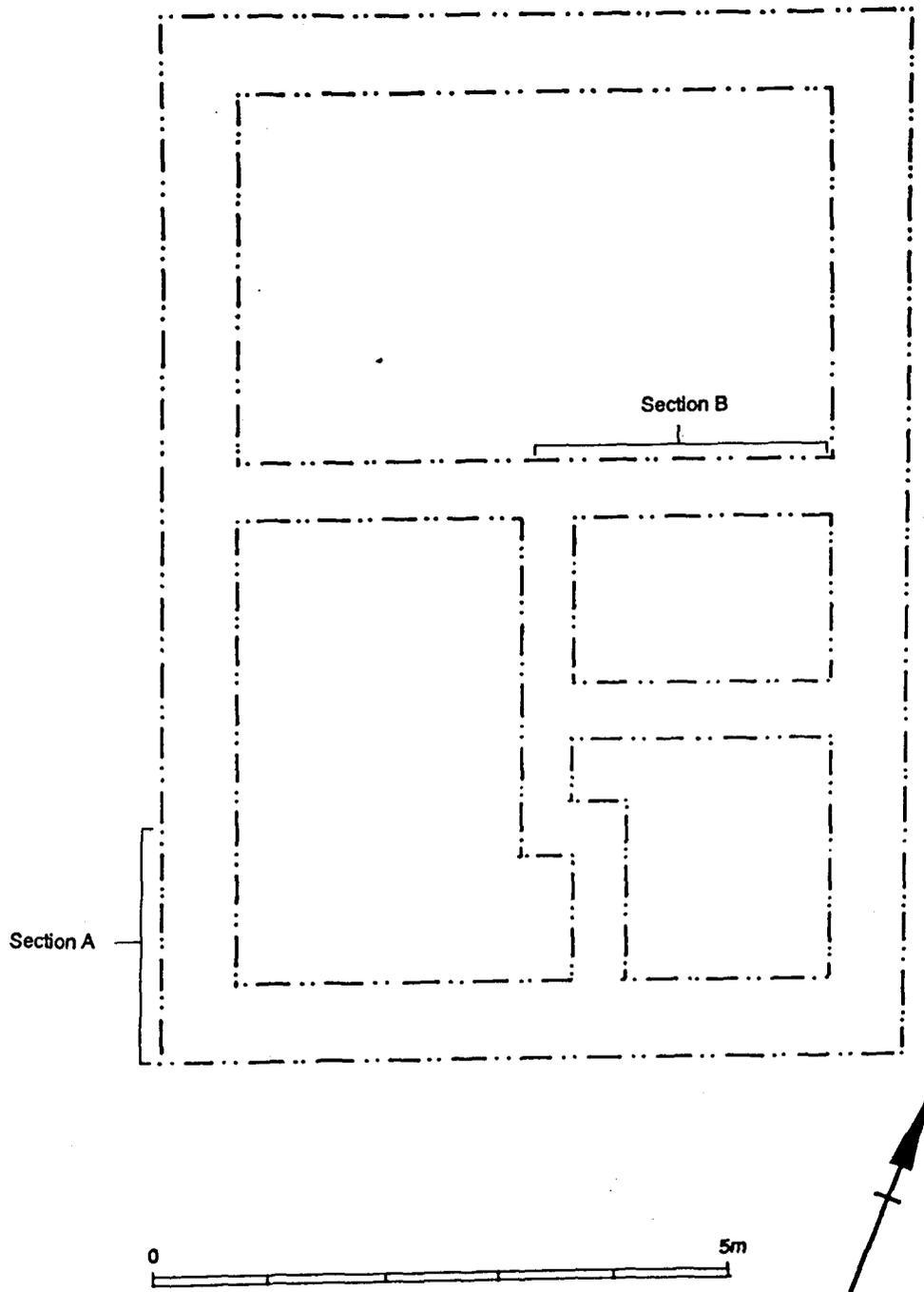
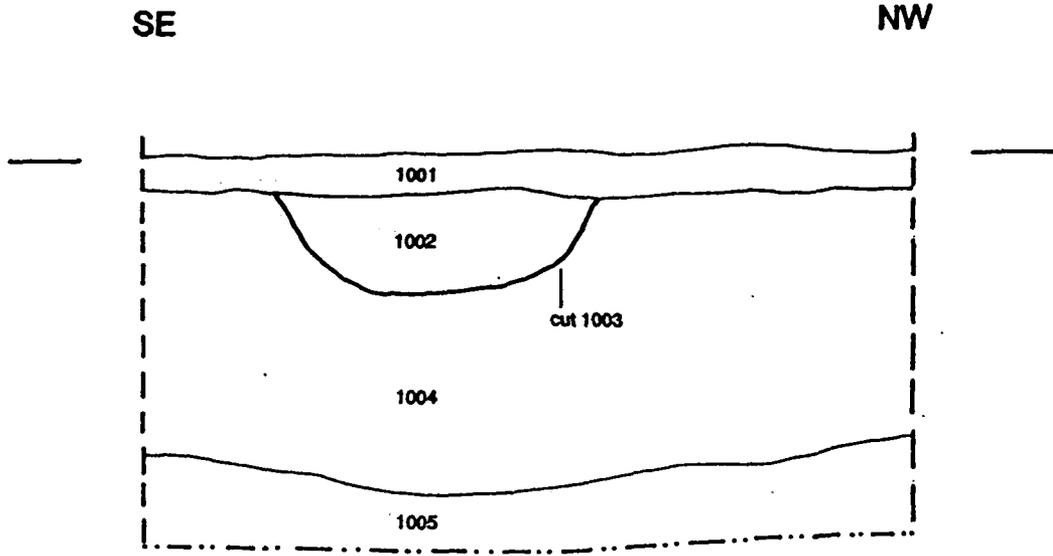
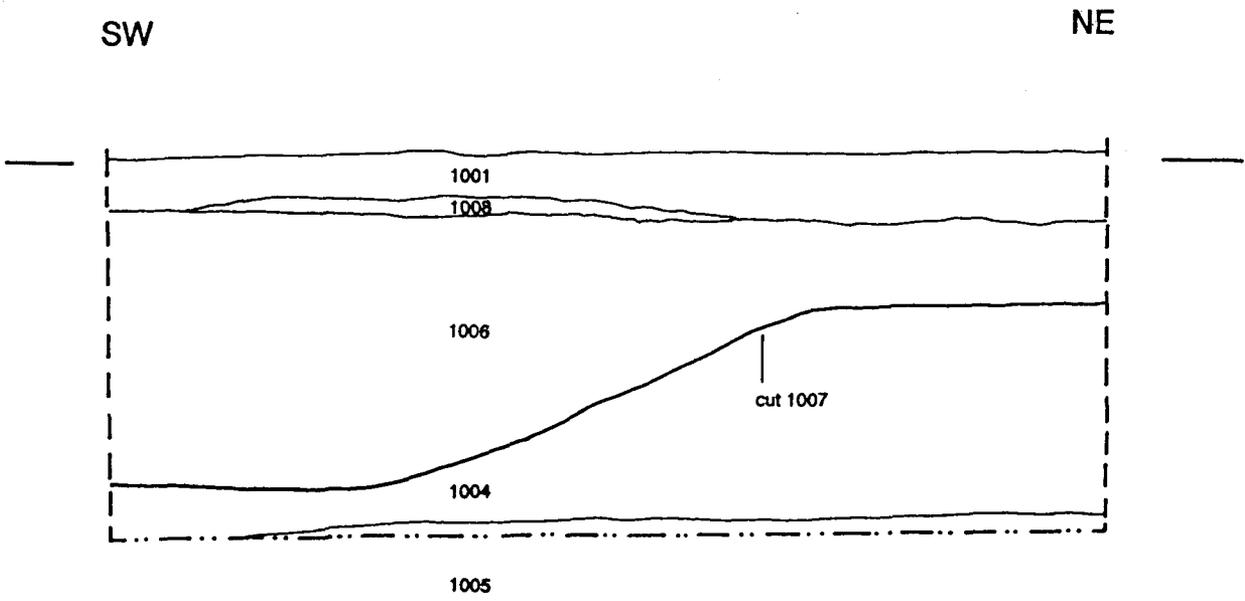


Figure 3, Foundation trench plan showing location of sections A & B



Section A



Section B

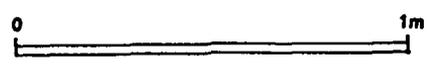


Figure 4, Sections A & B

what this cut represents. The fact that most of the feature has sides and a base cut into sand, together with the total absence of any water-lain or organic material in even the lowest parts of the fill, suggest that it is unlikely that it ever functioned as a pond. Given that only a single late fill was discernable, it is perhaps more likely that 1007 represents some sort of garden feature, perhaps a Victorian sunken garden.

Occurring only within that north-western part of the site occupied by cut 1007, at the interface between fill 1006 and the extant topsoil, was context 1008. This was a thin, somewhat discontinuous, compact, horizontal band of mixed material including brick, tile, cinder and coal fragments. A number of blue and white transfer ware and white glazed pot sherds were present within the deposit. It is probable that this material represents the final sealing of the backfilled feature 1007. Its compact, even nature may even suggest that for some time at least it formed a roughly surfaced area within the garden.

Sealing all of the deposits cited above were the remnants of the extant topsoil, context 1001, a mid greyish brown, friable, sandy silt.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief located two features cut into natural deposits, a probable pet grave and a possible large garden feature. Both are believed to be of early modern – recent date. A thin compact deposit lying between the backfilled garden feature and the topsoil may represent a former surface within the garden. None of these features was of significant archaeological interest. The absence of archaeological remains at the site suggests that this particular part of the village had always been open, albeit possibly cultivated, ground.

## 6. LIST OF SOURCES

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Geol. Surv. (1973)  | Geological Survey of Great Britain (England & Wales), Sheet 71, Solid & drift.                    |
| Smith, A. H. (1970) | The place-names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York. <i>English Place-name Soc. Vol xiv.</i> |
| VCH (1976)          | Victoria County History. A History of Yorkshire, East Riding, Vol. 3.                             |

## 7. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

- |  |                |
|--|----------------|
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# YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological - consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. It can manage projects, provide professional advice and monitor archaeological works to ensure high quality, cost effective archaeology. Its staff have a considerable depth and variety of professional experience and an international reputation for research, development and maximising the public, educational and commercial benefits of archaeology. Based in York its services are available throughout Britain and beyond.



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