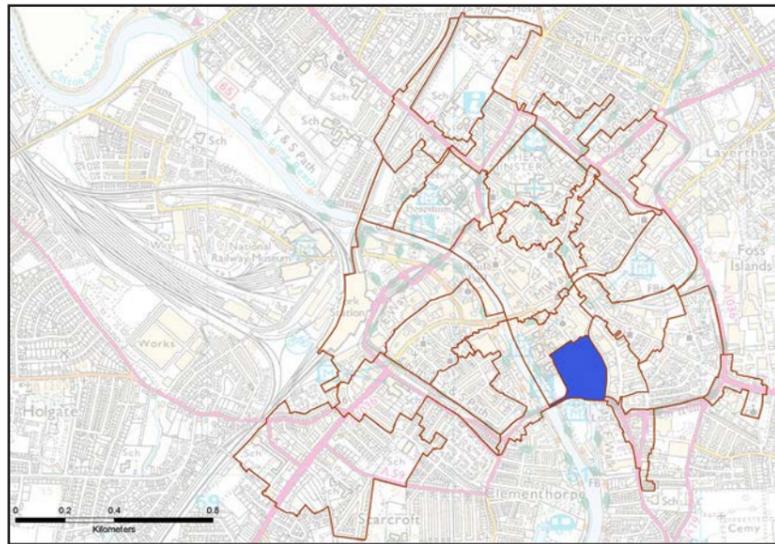


Character area 13: The Castle



The location of the character area within the historic core.

Description

York Castle is strategically situated at the confluence of two rivers, the Ouse and Foss. Founded in the 11th century, it was a seat of power and administration throughout the Middle Ages. From the 17th century, a series of court and prison buildings were built at the Castle to deploy justice and punishment for the county. Since the early 20th century when its prison function ended, the site has been attracting tourists who come to see the iconic Clifford's Tower and Castle Museum, housed in former prison buildings.

Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

Archaeological background

Roman

Construction of the castle and latterly, York Prison has impacted significantly on buried archaeology to the extent that very little is known about earlier periods. Within the Castle Yard itself, part of a Roman inhumation cemetery was located in 1835 and again in 1956. In the modern car park area, the site of former prison buildings, Roman deposits indicative of occupation were noted at relatively shallow depths c.2.5m below ground level (EYO57). The extent of the cemetery is unknown and the extent of any settlement activity is also unknown. The road, identified through investigations on Spurriergate and High Ousegate is presumed to continue through the area leading from the present Castlegate.

Angian - Anglo-Scandinavian

The evidence from the Coppergate excavations and contemporary accounts of the building of York Castle in the 11th century strongly suggest that settlement continued throughout this area although later development (castle and prison) has significantly impacted on sub-surface survival. Anglo-Scandinavian activity in the area is also attested by chance finds, the excavation of pits and craft working evidence at the Castle Car Park (EYO57 and EYO29) and intriguingly, inhumation burials close to the former Female Prison, Castle Yard (EYO132). The top of these burials survived at shallow depths of c.0.7m. Although not fully investigated, they may suggest the site of a pre-Conquest church destroyed during the construction of the castle. Evidence of bone and antler working as well as textile manufacturing was uncovered during the excavation of six trenches in 1992 at the Castle car park (EYO29).

Medieval

The castle was founded in 1086 and by 1070 probably consisted of a simple timber and earth motte with two baileys. The castle was comprehensively re-built in the 1240's and was certainly mostly a masonry construction at this time. There are indications that Clifford's Tower (MYO1748) was built of stone by the 12th century but many buildings were timber. The castle was substantially destroyed by fire in a siege resulting from an anti-Jewish riot in 1190.

The Jewish community took refuge in the castle with the majority committing suicide rather than be killed by rioters. It is the most infamous episode in the castle's history, resulting in the continuing significance of Clifford's Tower to the Jewish community (Castle Piccadilly Conservation Area Appraisal 2006).

The Foss was dammed in the 11th century to create a moat for the castle and the King's Fishpool. A medieval ground surface adjacent to the drawbridge out for the South Gate and floor level of the south angle tower were encountered during an excavation at the southern tip of this area (EYO2864-5).

Other medieval deposits found south of Clifford's Tower include a pit and 1.3m thick rubble and clay dumps containing pottery (EYO3068 & 2887). The possible remains of the gatehouse were uncovered in the castle car park during investigations in the mid 1990s (EYO57). These remains and the earlier deposits located during the same excavation, were truncated by the foundations of council offices dug in the 1930s but abandoned at the outbreak of the Second World War.

Medieval burials and a linear feature containing postholes (possibly part of the timber defences) were recorded at the site of the former Female Prison, Castle Yard (EYO132).

Post-medieval – Early modern

During the 18th and 19th centuries large scale changes were made to the castle's buildings, landscape and function including the construction of the court buildings (MYO1749) and prisons. The construction of the female, debtors and felons prison buildings have partially removed the majority of medieval and post-medieval deposits in this area. Further burials dating to the 19th century were recovered associated with the prison itself. The Tyburn (gallows) originally sited on the knavesmire off Tadcaster Road was moved to the Castle after 1801. Until 1896, murderers and others were executed from a specially constructed platform, known as The Drop, at the end of the Female Prison. The Prison is associated historically with many of the significant social and political events of the 18th and 19th century. Chartist and Luddites were all incarcerated here and some, executed.

The Eye of York, sometimes known as the Eye of the Ridings is located at the exact merge of the three Yorkshire ridings and was a significant place. Parliamentary election results were always announced from here.

Since the 1930s the majority of the area has been municipal car parking.

Visible character

Iconic York buildings

Tourist attractions

Several Grade I listed buildings

Views from Clifford's Tower

Views of the River Foss

Medieval and post-medieval structures

Sub surface character

Ove Arup Development & Archaeology Study Research Zones: 3 and 6

Deposit Depth (where known): Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggest archaeological deposits of a high quality exist in this area between depths of c.3.0m and 5.0m. Made up ground at York Castle Car Park is between 2.0m and 8.0m deep.

Waterlogged, deep deposits on Piccadilly and in some castle ditch areas

Dry deposits with little organic preservation across the car park area

Roman and Anglo-Scandinavian inhumation burials

Dry, re-deposited material to create the motte which supports Clifford's Tower

Modern levels were noted in the Castle Car Park between 1.5m-3.0m in depth and on Tower Street at 4.6m thick.

Period Survival: Roman and Anglo-Scandinavian deposits and burials are known in this area but largely are un-investigated. Medieval and later deposits predominantly relating to the castle and fishpool are have often been disturbed by 18th and 20th century development.

Interventions (recorded on HER April 2013): There are approximately 17 interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record (HER). Few of the interventions are recorded in any detail and a brief examination of some grey literature suggests several interventions are yet to be recorded in the HER. See Appendix I for a brief summary.

Significance

Overview: This area is situated on generally low lying land within the Foss Waterfront (West Bank, south) and the Confluence zone as identified by Ove Arup. The Confluence is the area containing the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement of York. Average depths range between 3.0m and 5.0m. The Study suggests that on the waterfront, deposits of a high quality dating to all periods are known to exist at an average depth of c.6.0m with likely Roman-medieval deposits preserved anaerobically. Other areas of deep, organic deposits have been identified on Piccadilly and in some castle ditch area. The Study also suggests natural ground levels at anywhere between 2.0m and 8.0m below ground level in the Castle Car Park area. However, in this area dry, generally disturbed deposits are usually located.

The site has been a strong national and regional symbol of political power for over 500 years and continues to reflect this use through the survival of the County Court. It is a site strongly associated with key national and regional political events from 11th century rebellions against Norman overlordship through the 12th century Jewish massacre to the incarceration, trial and sentence of key political figures of the 18th and 19th centuries. The first meeting of the York Suffragette Movement took place below Clifford's Tower and the site was used as a temporary army camp during the First World War.

With the limited information available on the HER it can be assumed that wet and dry, disturbed and stratified deposits, relating to all periods, survive within this area at varying depths between 2.0m and as much as 8.0m in some places.

Designations: The site falls within the Central Area of Archaeological Importance and the Historic Core Conservation Area.

All the structures within the Castle area are Grade I listed. The site is also largely a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 13275).

Streetscape components: Paving is a mixture of riven English Pennine Sandstone and pre-cast concrete flags (Marshall's Saxon paving principally).

Natural stone flags can be found within the castle area and around the Eye of York and to part of Tower Street.

Pre-cast concrete flags are predominantly used on Tower Street. Carriageways are asphalt as are footpaths over Skeldergate Bridge and parts of Tower Street.

Surrounding this area (e.g. Tower Street), modern street lighting units, Broxap and Edinburgh waste bins, green iron wayfinding as well as more modern signage posts, late 20th century bus stops and traffic signage are in use. Within the centre of the castle area, replica period style lighting is in use alongside late 20th century English Heritage signage at the foot of Clifford's Tower and concrete bollards separating the large car park area from the Eye of York. The majority of the area is car park.

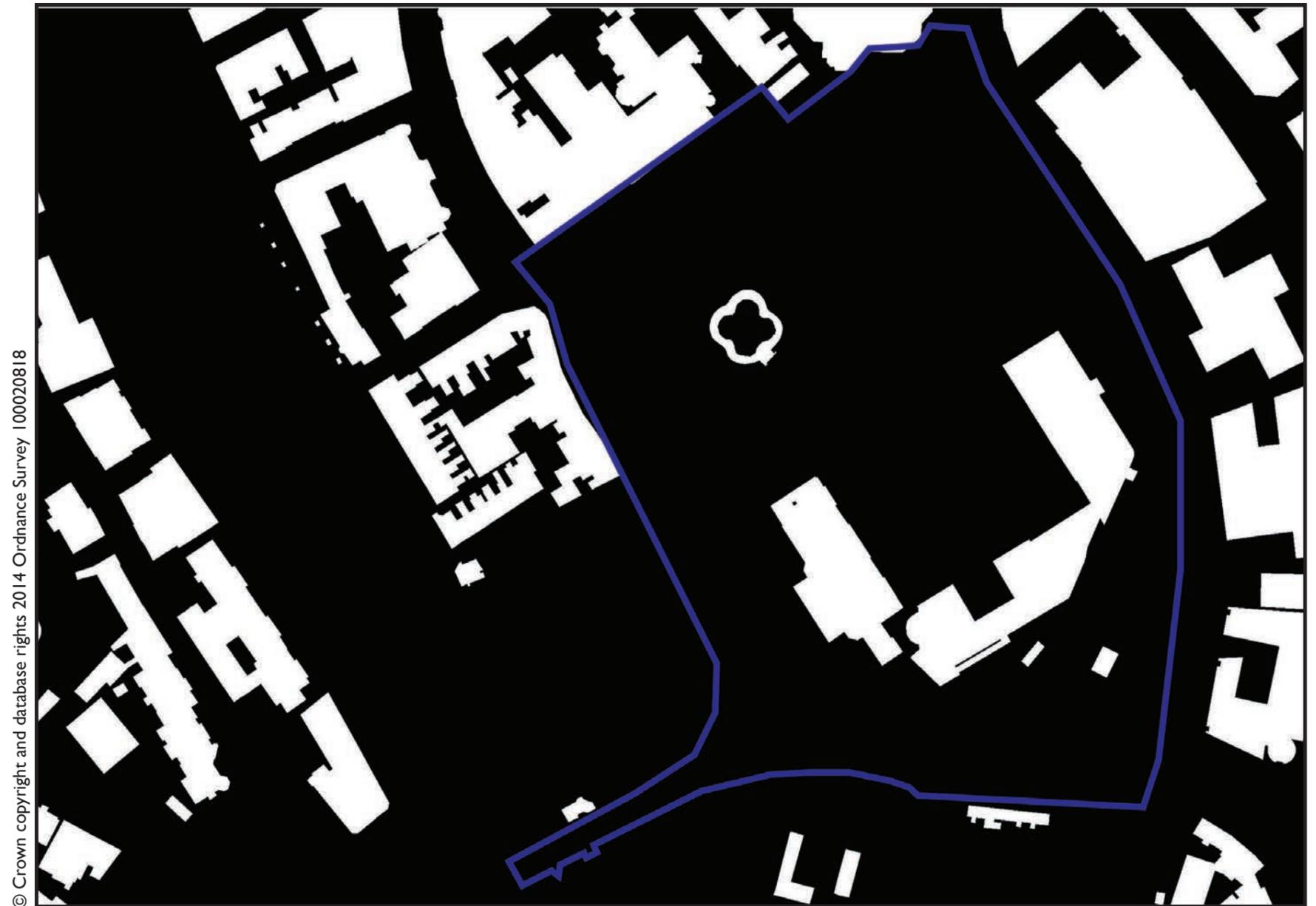
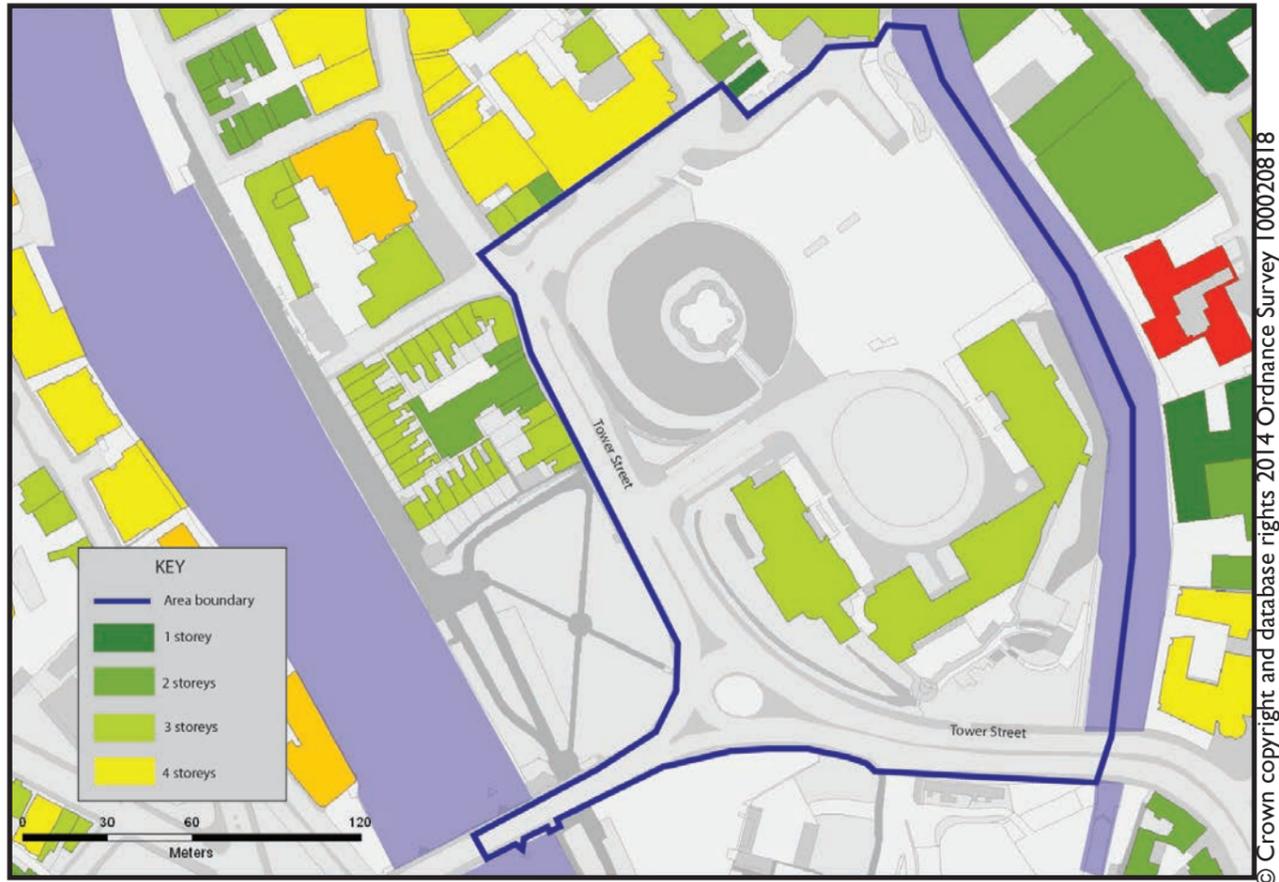
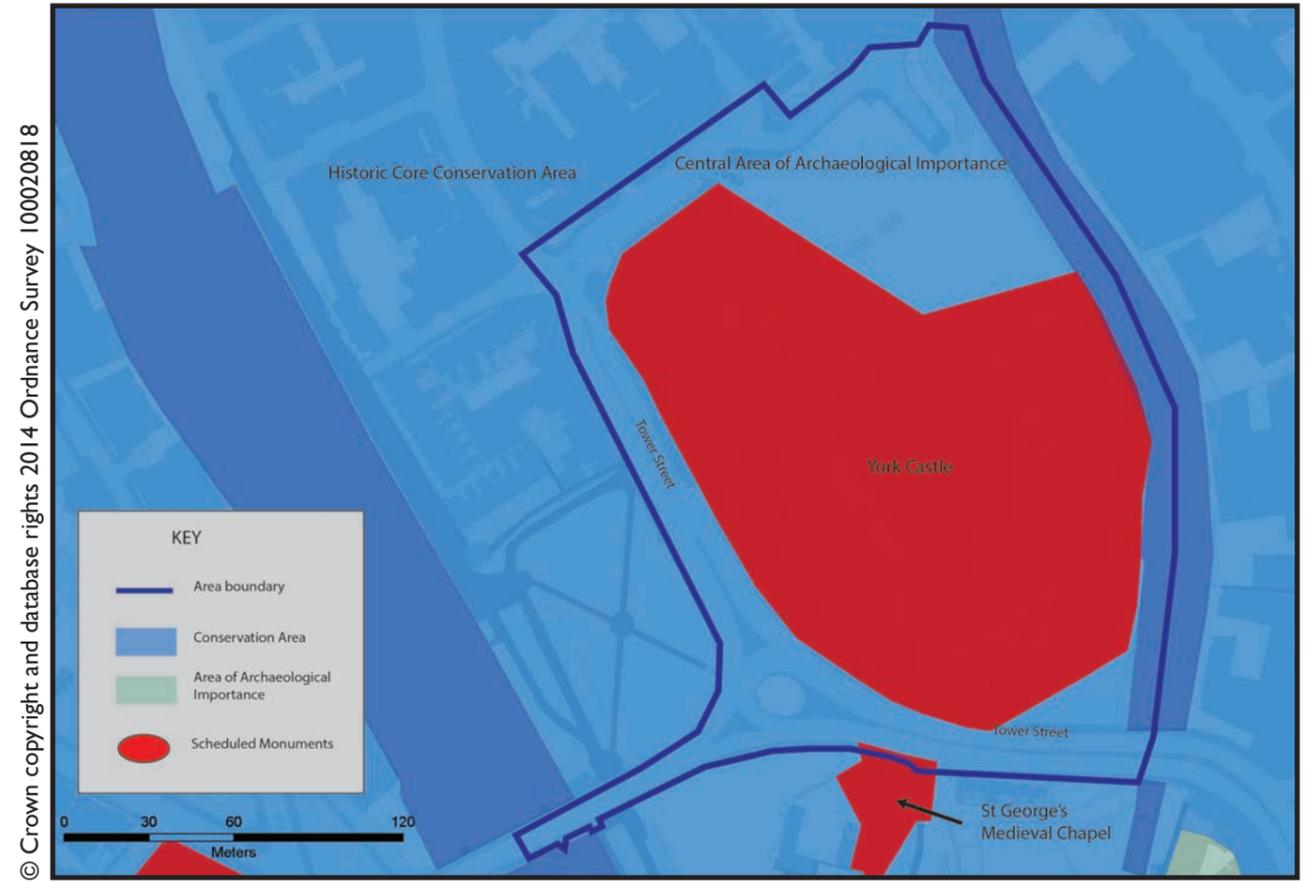
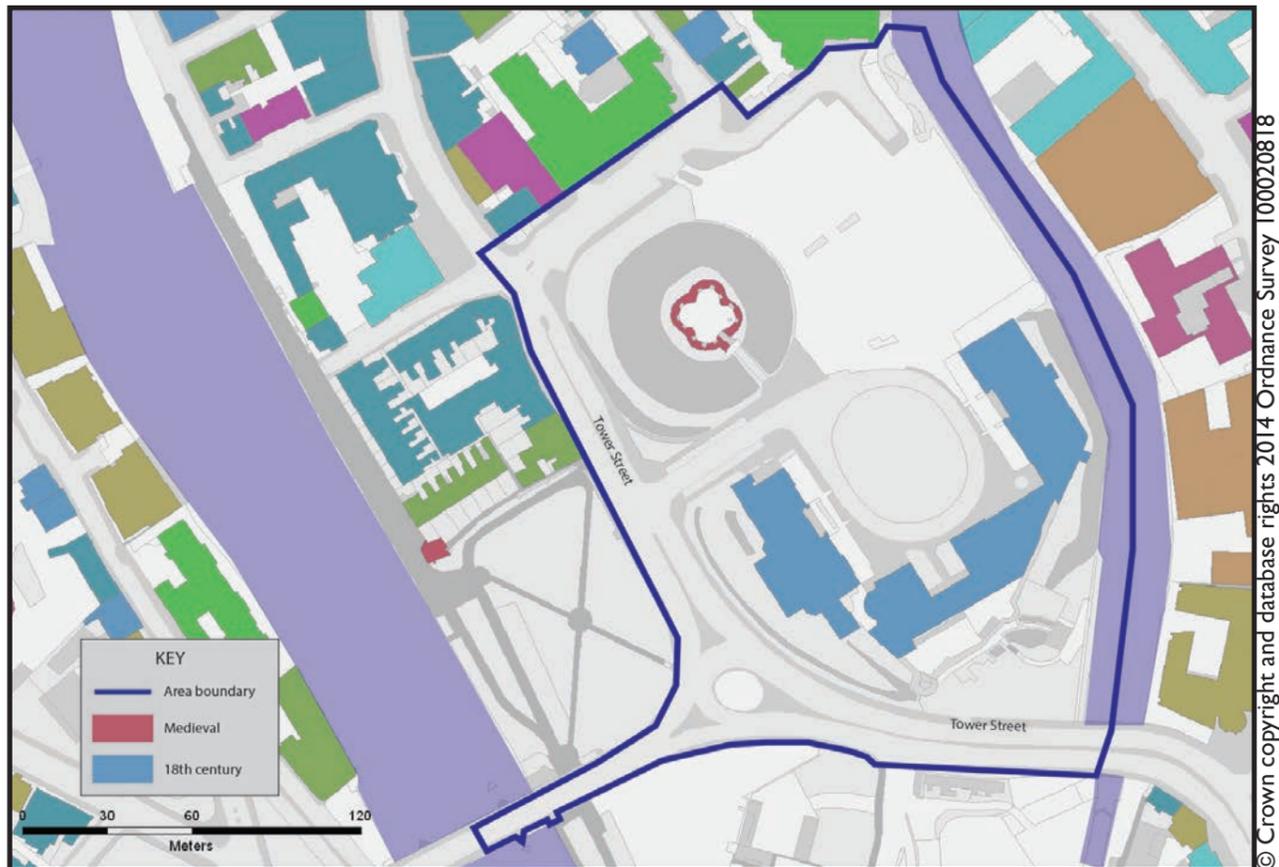


Figure ground map with built environment shown as white on black.



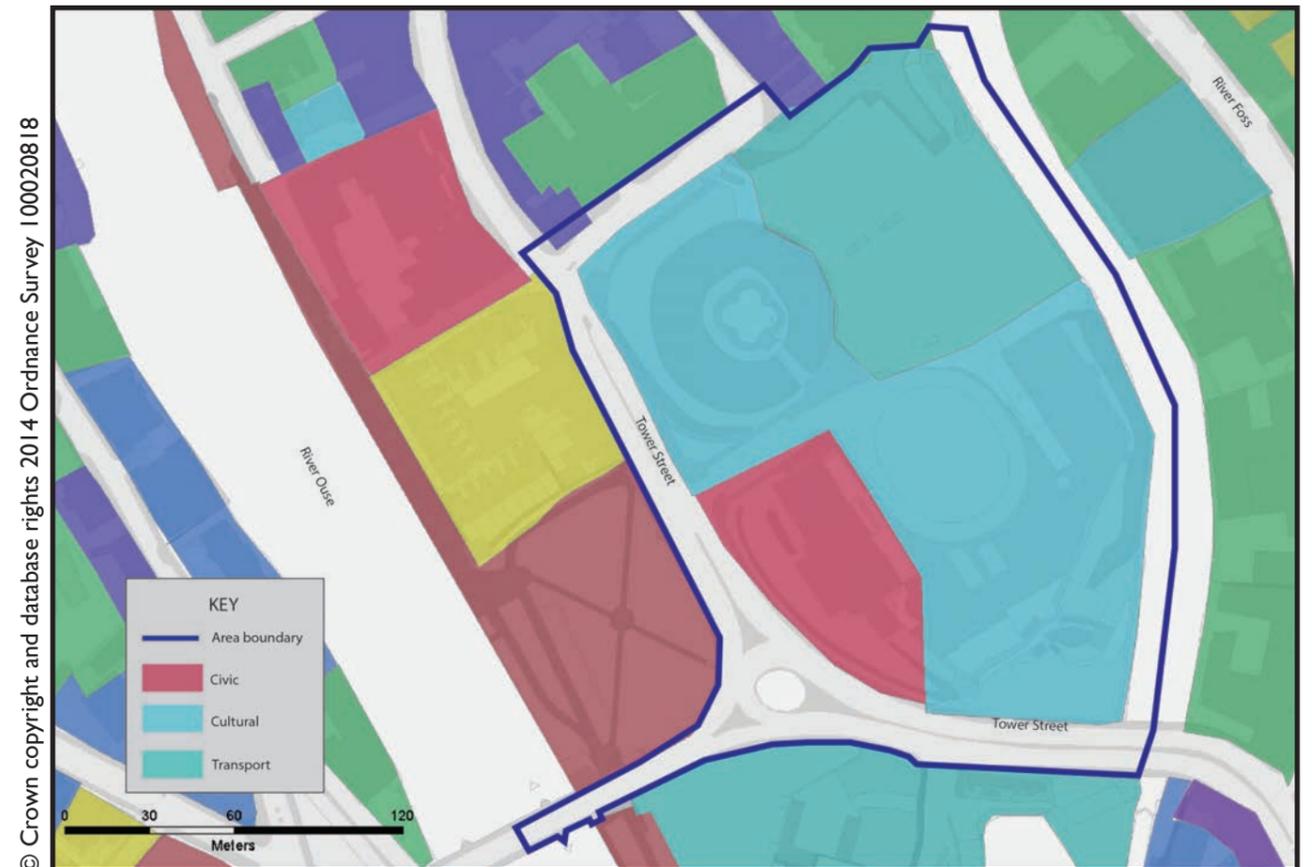
Above: Plan showing the heights of the buildings within this character area.

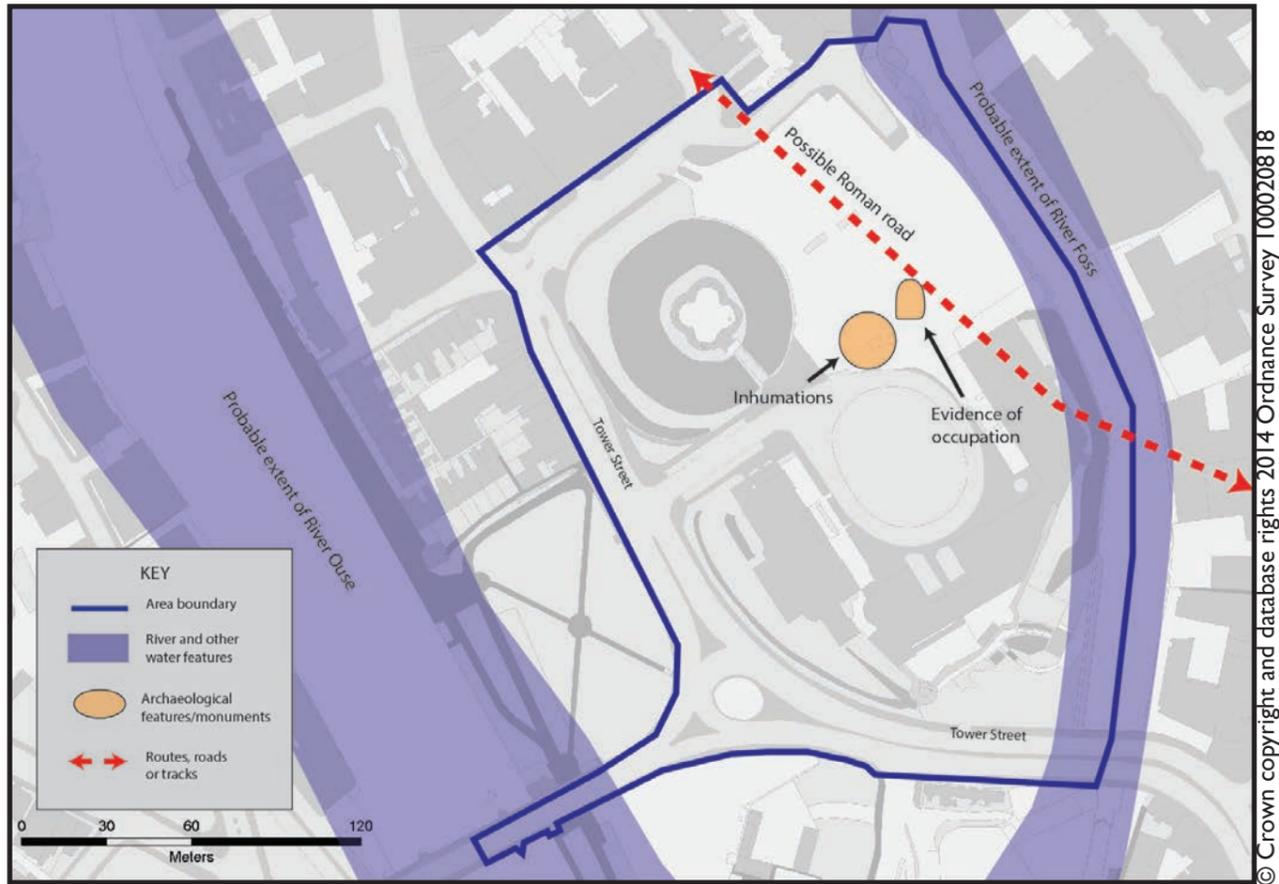
Below: Plan showing the construction dates of the buildings within the area.



Above: Plan showing designated heritage assets within this character area.

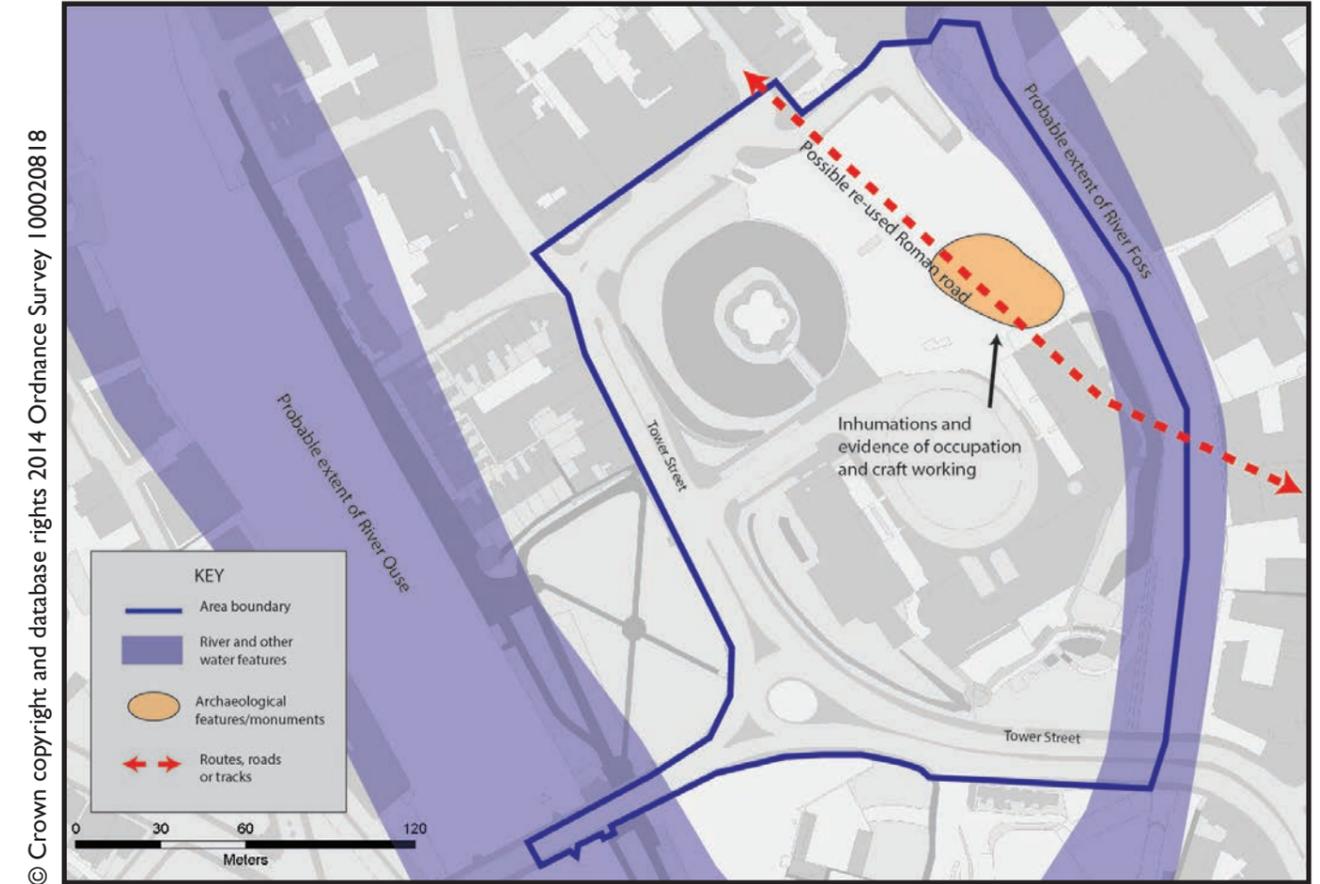
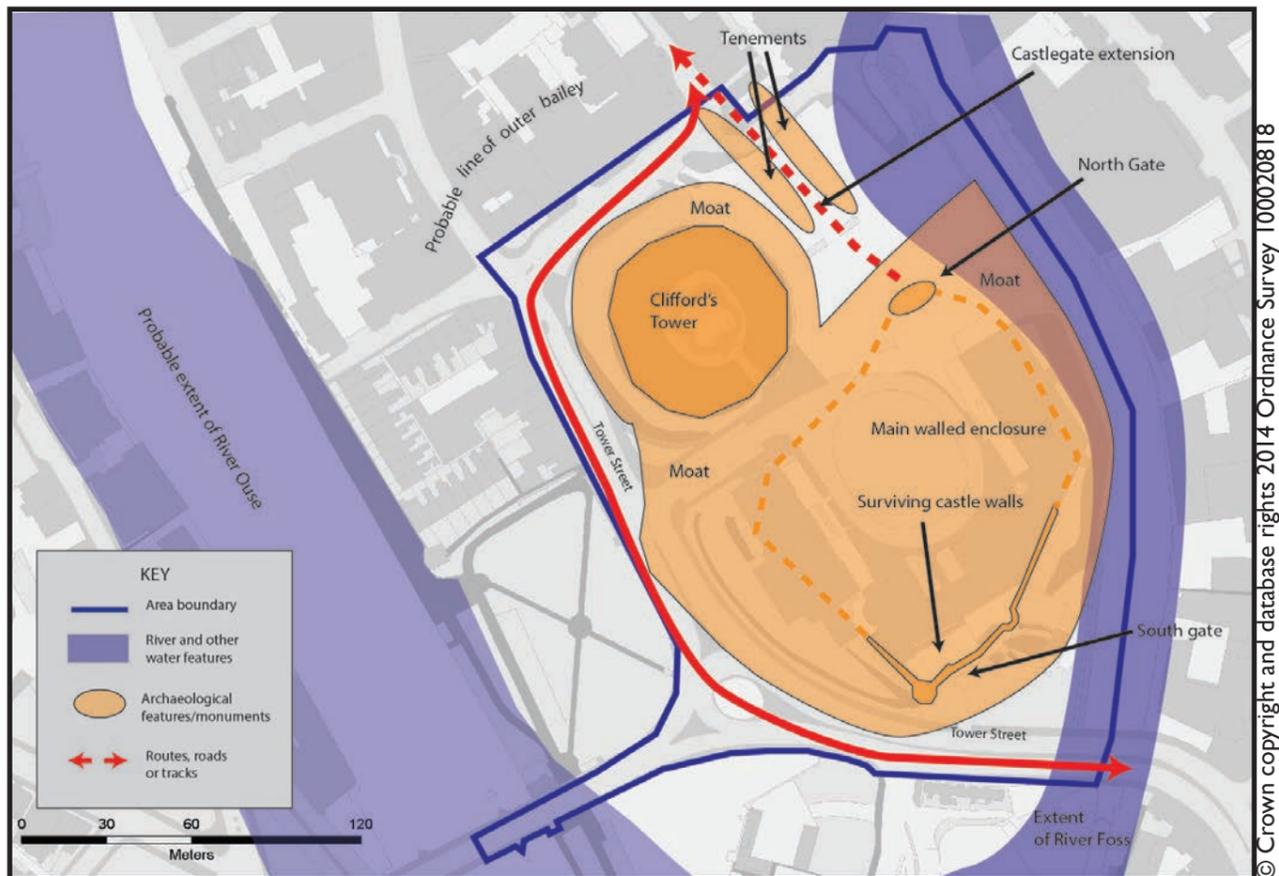
Below: Plan showing the Broad Type characterisation of the area. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan.





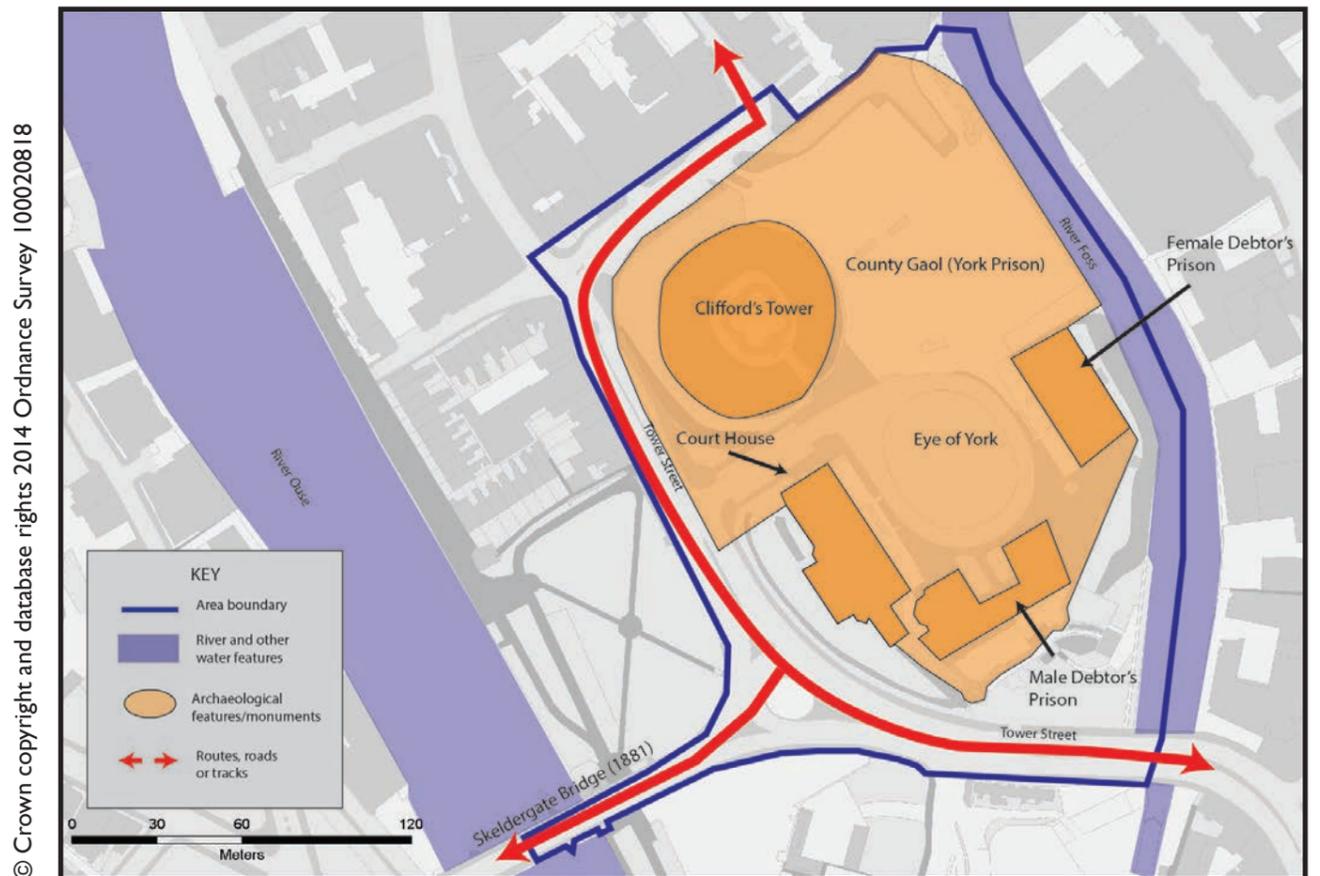
Above: The Roman landscape.

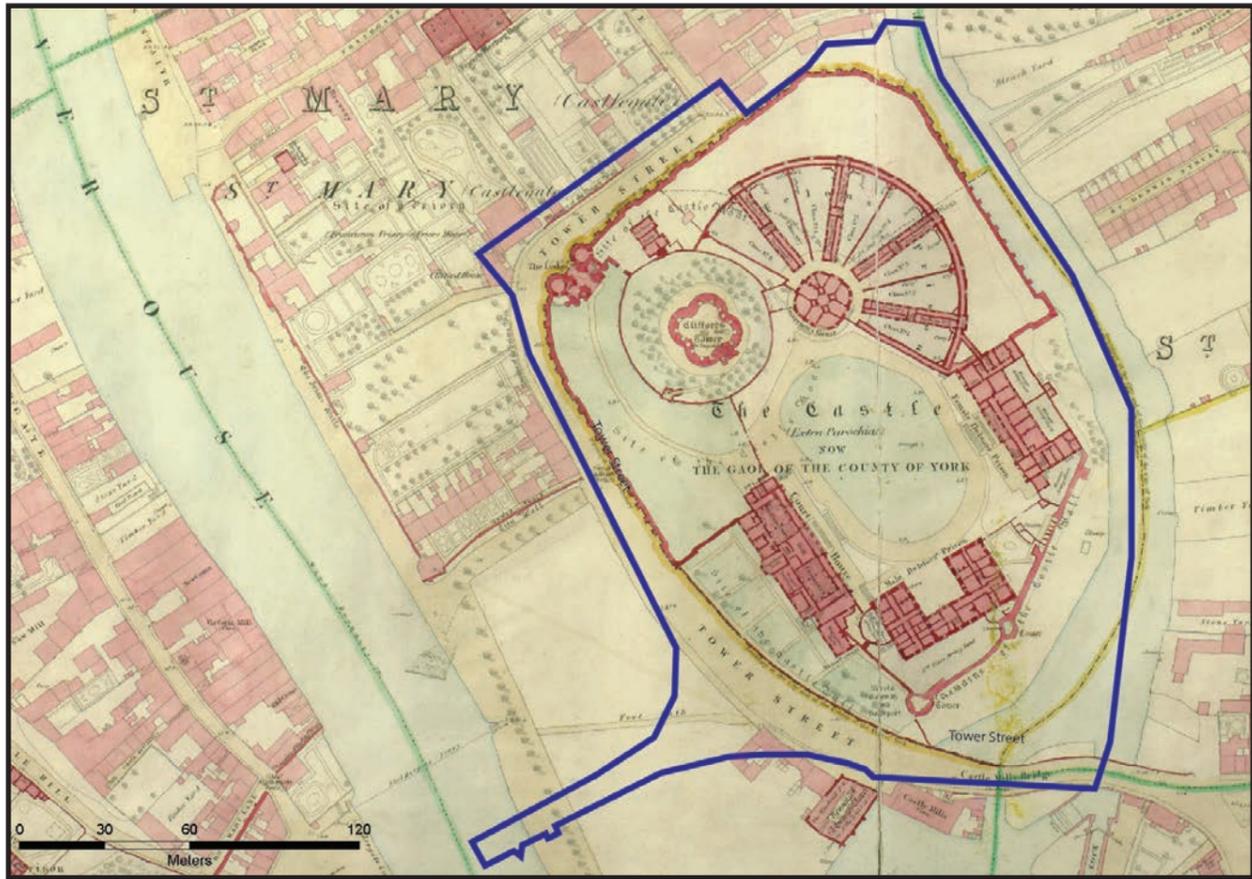
Below: The medieval landscape.



Above: The Anglo-Scandinavian landscape.

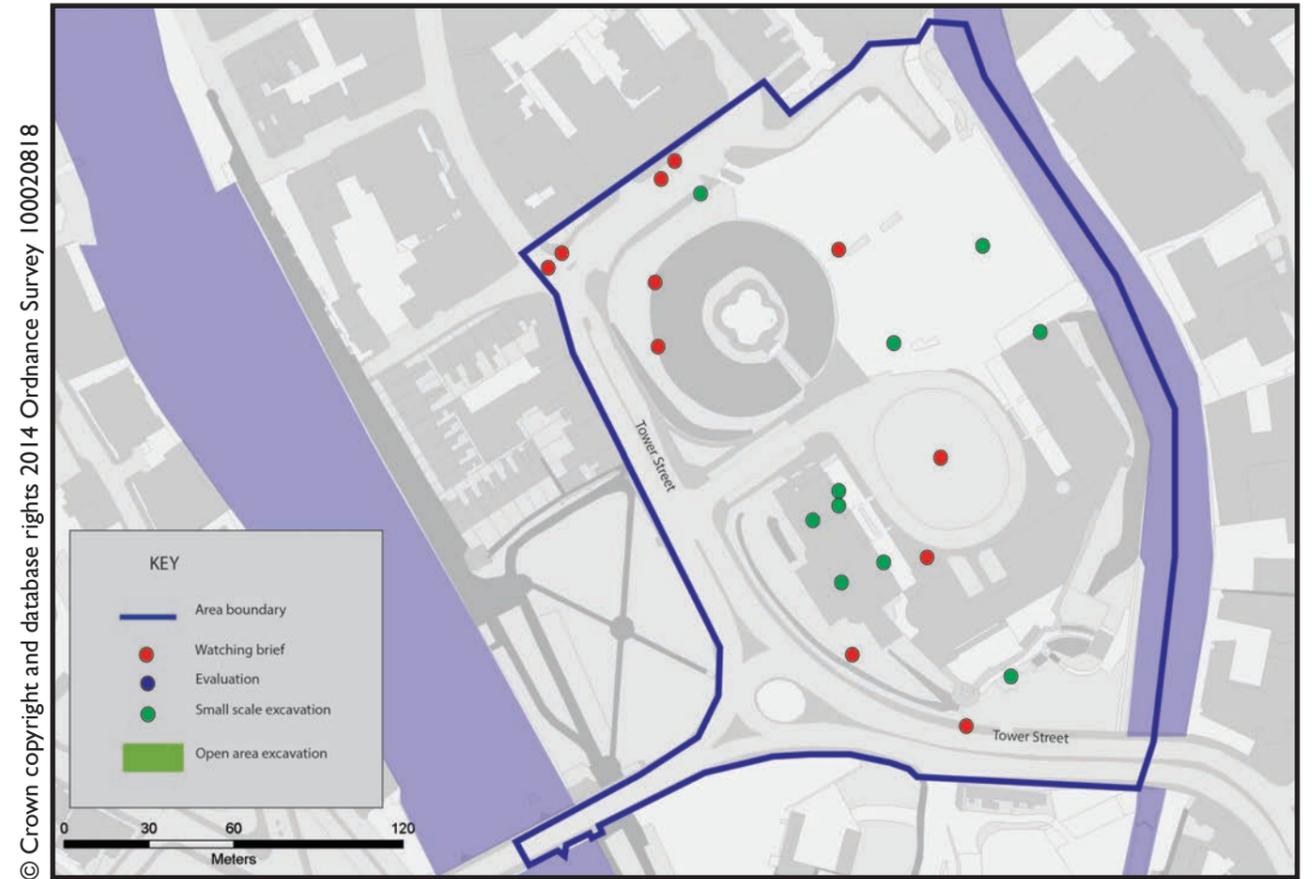
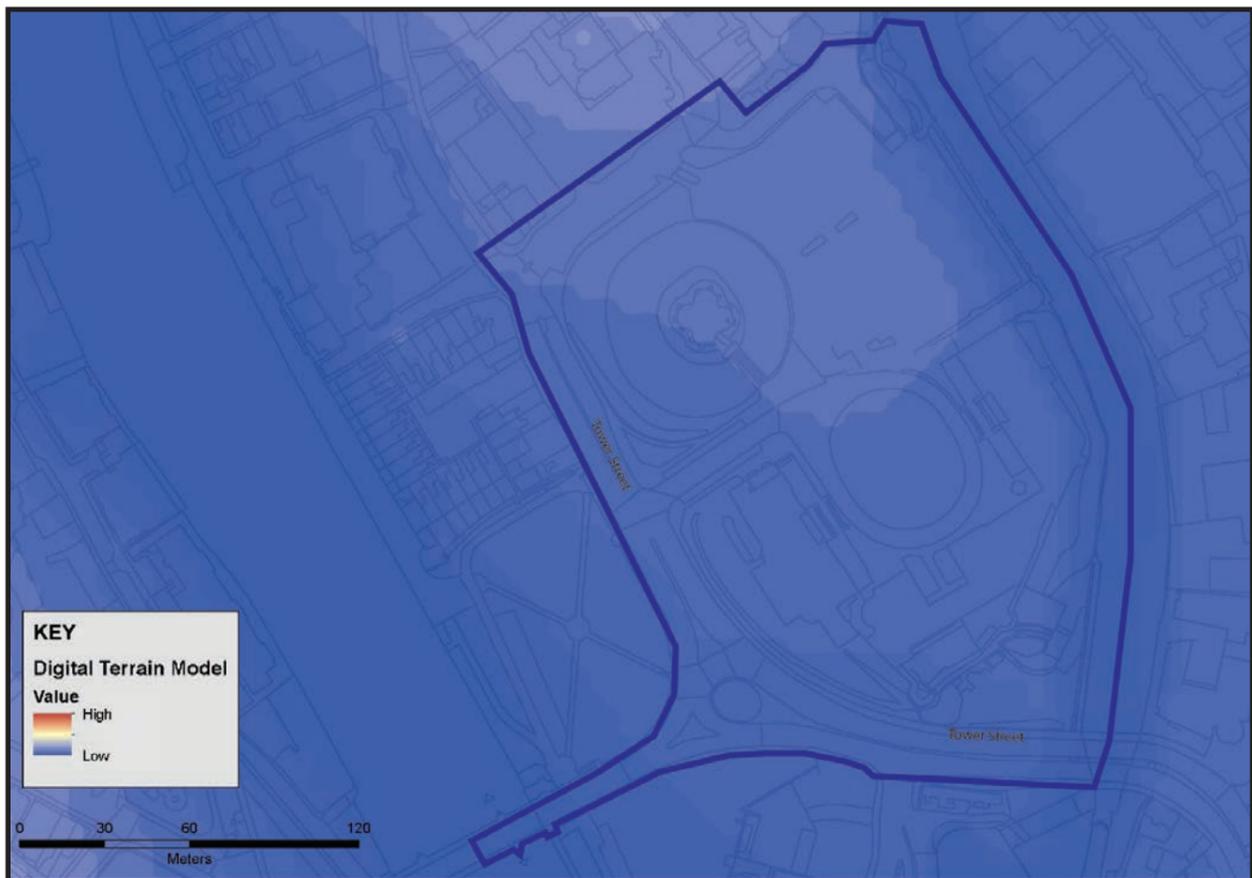
Below: The post-medieval landscape.





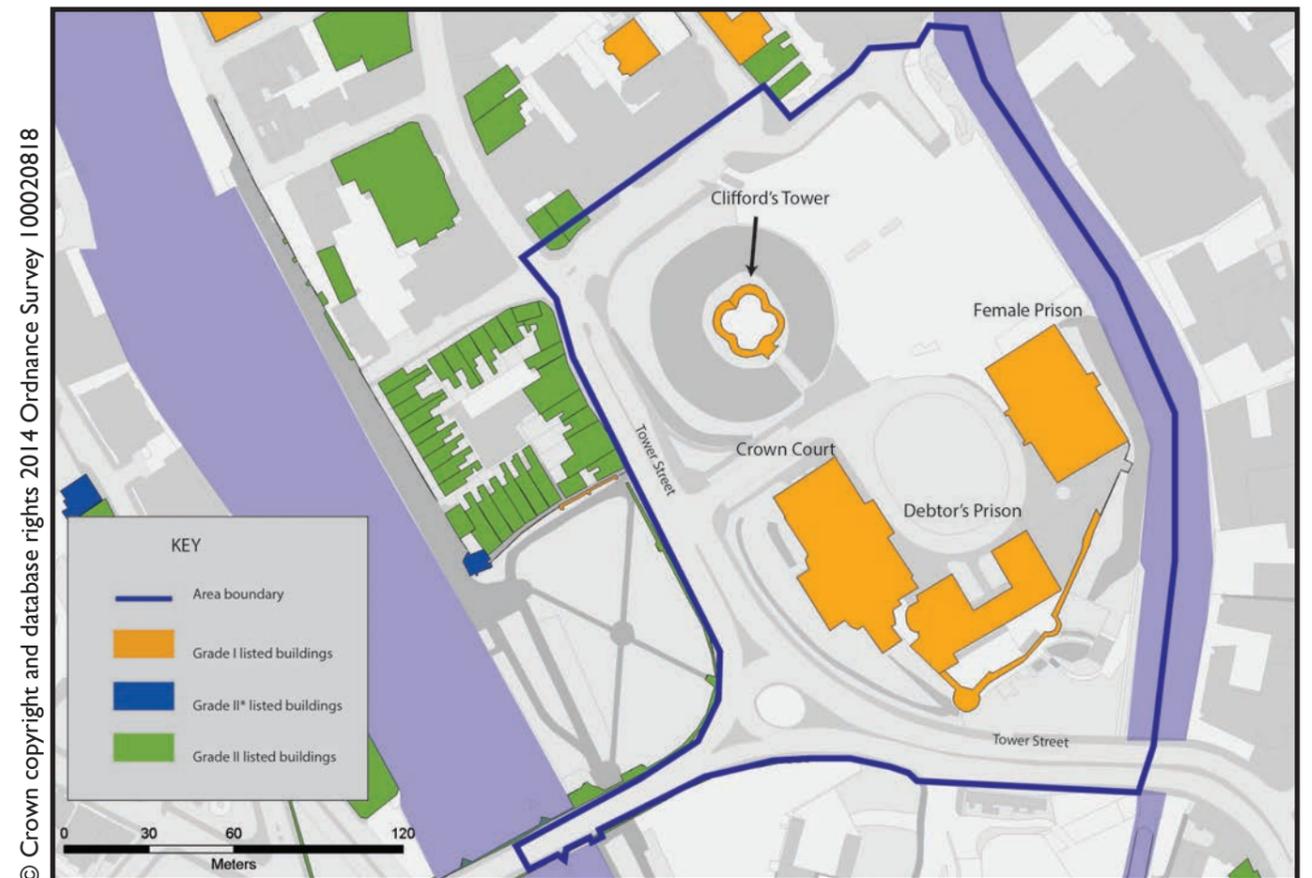
Above: The 1852 landscape.

Below: The general topography showing the low lying nature of the castle site.



Above: The location of archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record.

Below: Location of listed buildings.



Main Sources

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York City Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal- 13: The Castle

Castle Piccadilly Conservation Area Appraisal 2006.

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