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Report on an Archaeological Excavation

at

Barbican Cycle Path
Kent Street
York

York Archaeological Trust

Barbican Cycle Path
Kent Street, York.
A Concise Archaeological Report

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1. Introduction.

The construction of a new cycle path and an access road to a car park at the junction of Kent Street and Fawcett Street (NGR SE 60815117) was preceded by archaeological excavation by York Archaeological Trust. Previous work in the area (YAT site code 1987/8.27) had located inhumations close to the surface which were presumed to be within the former burial ground of the church of All Saint's, Fishergate (closed c.1540).

The current excavations were carried out to a specification prepared by John Oxley, Principal Archaeologist to York City Council, and involved the removal of material to various pre-determined levels across the site. A maximum of 0.80m of material was removed.

Initially a JCB was used to break up the surface of the car park over an area of c. 20m by 9m. To the west this initial work was all that was required but greater depths were required to the east. It was soon established that over c.75% of the area being investigated modern deposits representing successive car park surfaces were all that required removal. In the south-east corner, however, archaeological deposits were uncovered and excavated in two 5m by 5m squares adjacent to the Barbican (Phase 1) footpath. (Fig. 1, Areas I and II).

Subsequently a watching brief was undertaken as the previously excavated area was extended by machine through the pavement to connect with Kent Street. This area, some 7m by 1.4m, was designated Area III and involved lowering of the existing ground surface by c.0.45m.

2. The Excavation.

Area I.

Excavation in this area commenced at a level of c.13.00m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). At this height no features could be seen and after recording the area was taken down by mattock in one large spit of c.0.20m thickness. The new surface was cleaned but again no features were visible. It was again excavated by mattock in a spit of variable thickness to conform with the specification. This left the area at heights of between 12.75m AOD and 12.42m AOD at which point evidence for two burials became apparent. These were uncovered, recorded, and then removed after which excavation ceased. Apart from the two articulated skeletons finds included scattered human bone fragments and a few pieces of pottery. No features were noted and the only structural remains encountered were modern.

Area II.

This area was situated immediately north of Area I and was again a 5m by 5m square. After the removal of concrete and tarmac archaeological deposits were encountered in the south-west corner of this area at c.12.85m AOD. After recording the exposed deposit one spit was removed which varied in thickness from c.0.10m to c.0.15m. This brought the area down to the required level so after recording the exposed deposits no further work was undertaken. No features or burials were found in this area. Scattered human bones were retrieved as was a modest quantity of pottery.

Area III.

Much of this area had been destroyed by the foundations of a modern brick wall and an adjacent conduit for electricity. However, a strip c.1.00m wide adjacent to Kent Street was available for examination. This area was cleaned by trowel and found to have no complete or semi-complete skeletons within it. A single isolated femur was found as well as much scattered human bone from the deposits removed by machine. Scattered disarticulated human bone was also recovered from the exposed deposits which were dark brown loams seemingly identical to those encountered in Area I (1001/2/3).

3. The Finds.

The site produced a small amount of material which has been viewed and assessed. Identifications are based only on initial viewings, not on the result of research.

A. The Pottery.

Very little pottery was recovered from the two trenches and none at all from the watching brief. The upper two contexts which yielded pottery, 1001 and 1002, both contained sherds which date to the 13th and earlier 14th century. The single fragment from 1005 is a Roman rim sherd of third or fourth century date.

The small group of some 12 sherds from Trench II is indicative of the first half of the 13th century.

Spot Dates.

Trench 1.

u/s 18th century plus.

1001 mid 11th to 14th century; mid 13th/earlier 14th century.

1002 mid 11th to mid 13th century.

1005 225-350 AD.

Trench 2.

2004 mid 11th to 13th century; 1st half 13th century.

B. Bone.

Contexts 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 2004, all produced human bone; there was also some unstratified human bone. This will be the subject of a separate report.

C. Other Finds.

Copper Alloy. A single complete copper alloy dress pin with a sub-globular head and shank with swelling towards the tip was recovered from context 1002. It may be compared to similar dress pins found at 46-54 Fishergate and other sites in the city, and may derive from the Anglian period, c.8th-9th centuries AD.

Fired clay. A single fragment of a post-medieval tobacco pipe stem was found.

Tile. One fragment of medieval peg tile, dating from the 13th century onwards, was recovered.

4. Summary.

Machine stripping of the site revealed only a small area of surviving archaeological deposits towards the Kent Street frontage. These were excavated as required revealing two burials and scattered human bone and some pottery. The deposits encountered were devoid of features and contained well scattered finds of bone and pottery possibly as a result of ploughing or other agricultural activity. Pottery from deposits above the two in-situ skeletons suggested that they were of 13th or 14th century date. Residual finds may indicate earlier activity (Roman/Anglian) in the immediate vicinity.

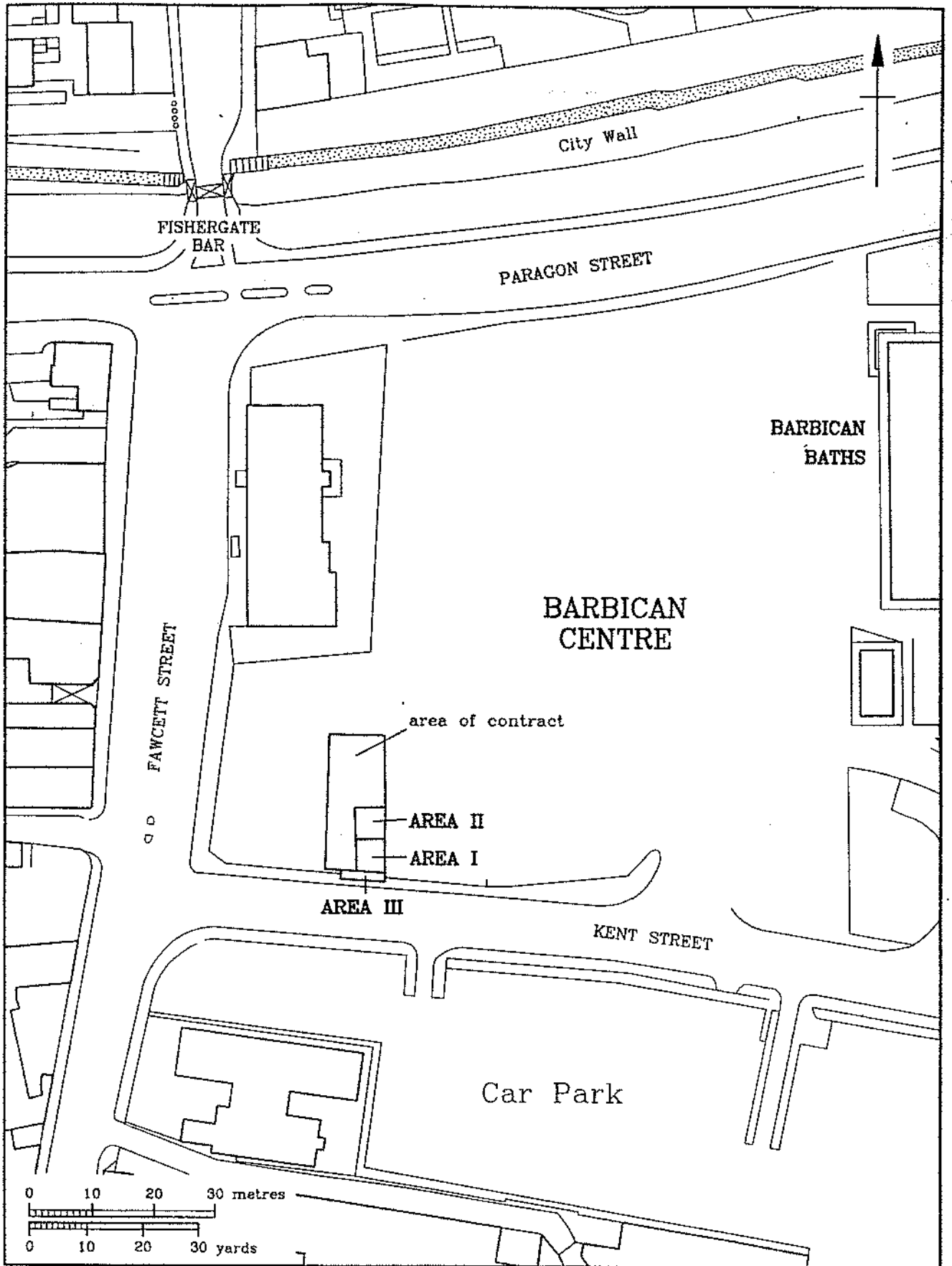


Fig.1 Location of excavation

AREA I

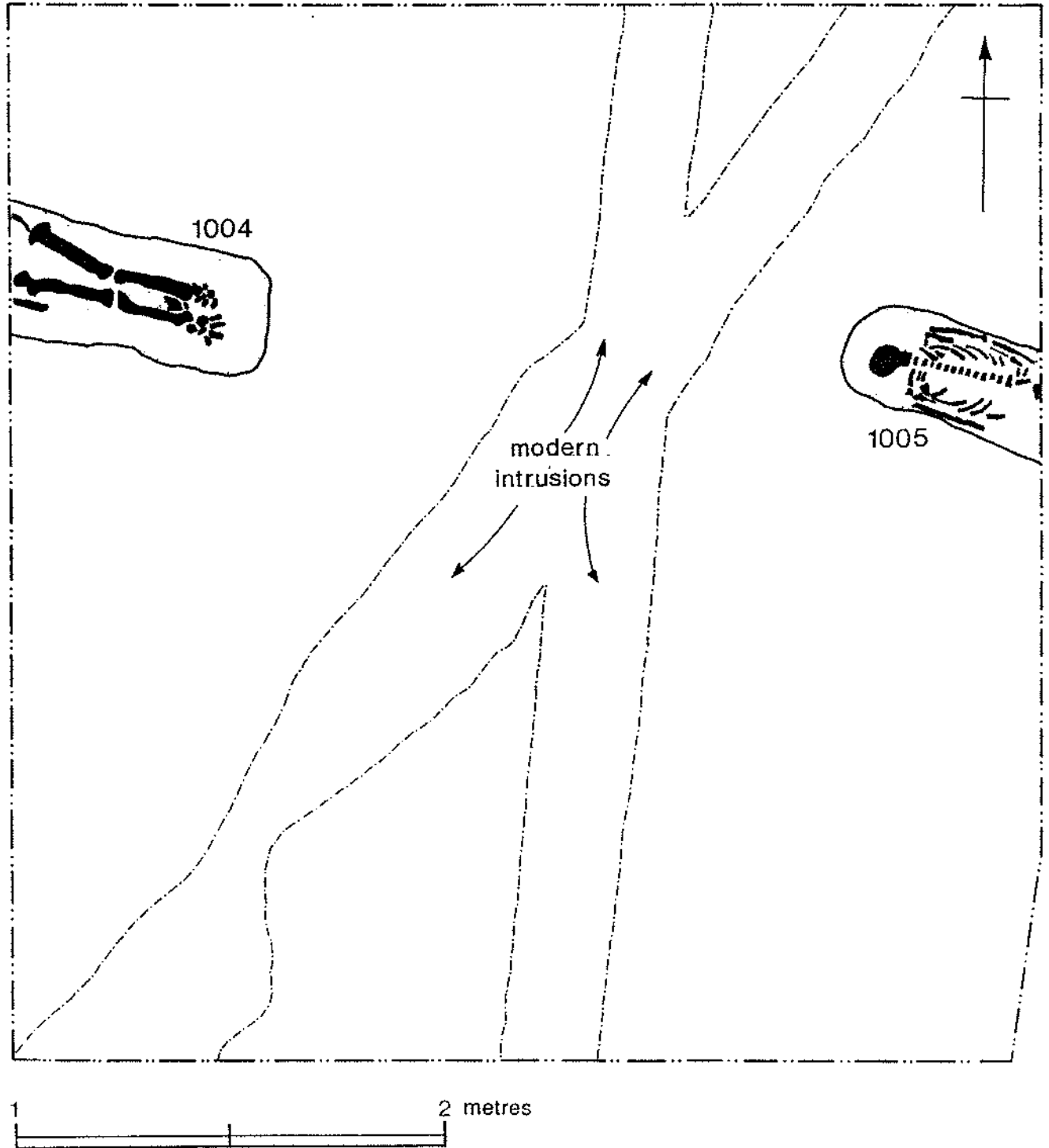


Fig.2 Location of skeletons 1004/5