

**THE DAVYGATE CENTRE,
YORK**

**A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
EVALUATION.**

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1. INTRODUCTION.

In March and April 1996 York Archaeological Trust undertook an evaluation excavation at the Davygate Centre, York (NGR SE 6025 5186), to a specification prepared by John Oxley, Principal Archaeologist for York City Council. This work was undertaken in advance of redevelopment of the site and consisted of two trenches at widely spaced locations within the site (Fig 1).

Trench 1 was located within the vacant shop unit number 7 in the Davygate Centre and was nominally 2m by 1m in size. Trench 2 measured 2m by 2m and was located in the New Street entrance to the centre adjacent to the external wall of Ware and Co.

The finds and site records are currently stored with York Archaeological Trust under the Trust and Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM 1996.85.

For the most part the site lies within the area of the Roman legionary fortress, the south-west wall of which was exposed during the construction of British Home Stores in the 1960's. It is also in the heart of the medieval city and significant remains of this, particularly Davy Hall which was finally demolished in the 18th century, and possibly the post-medieval periods would be expected to survive within the area of redevelopment.

2. THE EXCAVATION.

2.1 Trench 1 (Fig. 2)

2.1.1 The earliest deposit recorded, at a depth of c.1.3m below modern ground level (13.60m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD)), was a dark grey silty clay loam (1004) which contained fragments of limestone, pieces of modern brick, and occasional pieces of modern concrete. Within this layer was a linear concrete setting (1003) running north-west to south-east across the trench.

2.1.2 Sealing 1003 and 1004 was a 0.4m thick layer of dark grey clay loam (1002) which contained brick and concrete. This was overlain by a spread of brick rubble (1001) which formed the bedding for the modern concrete floor (1000) of the shop unit.

2.2 Trench 2 (Figs. 3 and 4)

2.2.1 The earliest deposit encountered in this trench, at a depth of c.1.75m below modern ground level (c.13.10 - 13.25m AOD), was a mid grey silty clay loam containing patches of brown clay and occasional flecks of charcoal and mortar (2004). This deposit was present at the base of the entire trench and contained pottery of the 11th or 12th century.

2.2.2 Into the top of this deposit was cut a posthole (2025) half of which lay beyond the south-eastern limit of excavation. The feature was probably circular with a diameter of c.0.18m. It was c.0.2m deep with vertical sides and was filled with a loose mixture of grey clayey loam and brown peaty loam/decayed wood (2024).

2.2.3 Sealing 2004 and 2024/5 was an extensive deposit of mixed grey ash and charcoal (2003) which appeared to be the bedding for an equally extensive layer of brown clay (2002). This in turn was sealed by a thin c.0.01m spread of charcoal (2026) which was encountered over most of clay 2002.

2.2.4 Into part of 2026 was cut a linear feature (2023) much of which had been cut away by later features 2017 and 2021 or lay beyond the north-east limit of excavation. It appeared to be aligned south-east to north-west and was at least 0.15m deep with a steeply sloping south-west edge. Its backfill was a dark grey slightly clayey silty loam (2022).

2.2.5 At a similar stratigraphic horizon, but believed to be slightly later, was a group of three features. Against the south-west section was a pit (2013) of uncertain size and shape but at least 0.35m deep with a moderately sloping north-east edge. The pit contained a single fill of dark greyish-brown loam (2001) which included 11th, 12th and 13th century pottery. In the north corner of the trench was the south-west half of a probably circular pit (2017). It was c.1m across and at least 0.4m deep and had steeply sloping sides. It had cut away the north-west extent of linear feature 2023. Pit 2017 contained at least two fills; a dark grey slightly clayey loam (2018) and below that a greyish-brown ash (2019). Cutting away the south-east extent of 2023 was a feature of unknown shape, size, and function as most of it appeared to lie beyond the north-east section of the trench. It was at least 0.13m deep with steeply sloping sides and a fill of dark grey slightly clayey loam (2020).

2.2.6 Sealing the features described in 2.2.5 and covering the whole trench was a thick, 0.6m, deposit of dark grey slightly clayey silty loam (2000) which was noticeably cleaner and darker than the earlier deposits encountered but contained only 11th century pottery.

2.2.7 All contexts stratigraphically later than 2.2.6 were of 19th or 20th century date and comprised; a right-angle of brick wall bonded with very soft white mortar (2011), a layer of pale brownish-white lumps of mortar in dark grey loam (2010), a mixture of dark grey loam and pale brown mortar (2012), a ceramic drain pipe (2009), a mixture of pale brown mortar and brick rubble (2008), a mixture of orange, brown, and grey clays (2016), a concrete ground beam (2015), a layer of soft pale brown mortar (2014), an irregular concrete surface (2007), a layer of brown sand (2006), and the concrete sett floor (2005) of the Davygate Centre entrance from New Street. The brick wall and mortar deposit are probably remains and backfill of the Wesleyan Methodist Church which was constructed on the site in 1805 and, after conversion to a cinema in 1920, was finally demolished to make way for the Davygate Centre in 1960.

3. FINDS ASSESSMENT

3.1 Pottery

3.1.1 No pottery was recovered from Trench 1.

3.1.2 In Trench 2 three contexts produced medieval pottery. The stratigraphically latest of these (2000), contained four sherds of 11th century gritty ware. Below this, context 2001 produced a further three sherds of 11th century gritty ware together with a sherd of splashed ware, a sherd of an early variant of York glazed ware and a red ware sherd all of which date to the late 12th or early 13th century. The stratigraphically earliest context (2004), contained further 11th or early 12th century splashed wares. Despite the obvious residuality of some of this pottery (particularly that in 2000), most appears fresh and unabraded suggesting that it has not been much disturbed.

Context	spot date	quantity
2000	11th century	4 sherds
2001	12th/13th century	6 sherds
2004	11th/12th century	3 sherds

3.2 Small Finds and Ceramic Building Materials

No small finds or fragments of ceramic building material were recovered from archaeologically significant deposits.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 Introduction and Methods

One standard-sized box (31 x 31 x 22 cm.) of hand-collected animal bone was recovered from deposits dating to the medieval period. All of the bone was examined, identifications made where possible, and records made of preservation and quantity. In the absence of Dr Keith Dobney on leave this report should be treated as an interim statement only.

4.2 Results

The very small collection of animal bone represented material from four separate contexts. A total of only 28 fragments was recovered, most of which were not identifiable, even to genus. Preservation of the material was fair, with most of the material being fawn or brown in colour.

The very small size of the animal bone assemblage precludes any further detailed recording or interpretation.

4.3 Recommendations

If re-development were to involve major excavation of these levels it is likely that significant assemblages of animal bone of the medieval period would be disturbed. This should be preceded by proper archaeological excavation accompanied by a systematic sampling strategy, with appropriate provision for a post-excavation programme of assessment, research and publication.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Deposit Survival

Modern deposits were recorded for the full depth of Trench 1 where it was clear that adjacent to the major concrete beams supporting the Centre considerable disturbance of archaeology took place in the 1960's. The character of this disturbance, apart from the obvious trenching and piling, suggests that quantities of mixed material were moved about on site, perhaps by bulldozer. Trench 2 recovered well preserved deposits at a depth of c.1.75m below modern ground level, c.13.10m AOD, although here much of the disturbance had been the result of earlier construction, namely the 19th century Methodist Chapel. Below the modern contexts the deposits were generally moist but there was little evidence for the preservation of organic matter. There was a slight but noticeable increase, however, in the moisture content of the soil towards the base of the trench suggesting that organic remains may be better preserved at a lower level.

5.2 Period Analysis

5.2.1 Roman and Anglian (1st-9th century)

The excavation did not penetrate to great enough depth to locate deposits of these periods which are surely present at depth in these locations and have been observed in previous work nearby.

5.2.2 Anglo-Scandinavian (9th-11th century)

Nothing attributable to this period was identified from these excavations. Anglo-Scandinavian structures and deposits have been recorded in excavations under 16 Parliament Street, c.75 m to the south-east in 1987, at 11-13 Parliament Street, some 100m to the south-east, in 1971, and in the vicinity of the Roman interval tower SW 5, some 200m to the north-west in 1972. It is therefore reasonable to expect that deposits and features of the period do survive in this area but below the level of 13.10m AOD reached in Trench 2.

5.2.3 Medieval (11th-16th century)

Deposits, features, and pottery of this period were recorded from Trench 2 where they were relatively frequent and well preserved. Structural activity was also noted from this trench, perhaps a reflection of its proximity to New Street, first mentioned in the 14th century.

5.2.4 Post-Medieval (16th-19th century)

Much of the archaeological evidence for this period seemed to have been destroyed by modern activity with the exception of the brick-built structure recorded in Trench 2 which, on the basis of the size of its bricks, was of 19th century date and appears to equate with the New Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel constructed in 1805.

5.2.5 Modern

Modern activity, which was extensive, was recorded throughout the full depth of Trench 1 and the top c.1.4m of Trench 2. The Trench 2 sections suggest at least two phases of modern construction.

6. ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

From the two evaluation trenches reported on above there would appear to be between 1.30m and 1.70m of modern material above intact deposits of archaeological significance. This is consistent with a report submitted on observations of pile cap investigations. However, it is also clear that some of the disturbances noted are particular to the form of construction involved, namely pile cap and ground beam and it is possible therefore that medieval deposits do survive closer to the surface in some places.

The evaluation did not penetrate to great enough depth to identify deposits of earlier periods which are surely present. If development retains the existing piling system there should be no physical damage to archaeological deposits. If it is necessary to insert a small number of extra piles these should be kept away from the known areas of solid archaeology, namely the Roman Legionary Fortress wall and interval tower.

Any large scale excavation should be resisted unless accompanied by appropriately funded archaeological excavation, analysis and publication.

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