Archaeological Investigations at
24-25 Portland Street, York

By A. Johnson

YAT Assessment Report 2019/175        November 2019
York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. We manage projects, provide professional advice and fieldwork to ensure a high quality, cost effective archaeological and heritage service. Our 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, Sheffield, Nottingham and Glasgow the Trust’s services are available throughout Britain and beyond.

York Archaeological Trust, Cuthbert Morrell House, 47 Aldwark, York YO1 7BX
Phone: +44 (0)1904 663000    Fax: +44 (0)1904 663024
Email: archaeology@yorkat.co.uk          Website: http://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk

© 2019 York Archaeological Trust for Excavation and Research Limited
Registered Office: 47 Aldwark, York YO1 7BX
A Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England No. 1430801
A registered Charity in England & Wales (No. 509060) and Scotland (No. SCO42846)
CONTENTS

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY .................................................................................................. III
KEY PROJECT INFORMATION ................................................................................................. III
1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 4
2 METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 4
3 LOCATION, GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY ........................................................................... 4
4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ..................................................... 4
5 RESULTS ............................................................................................................................. 5
6 POTTERY ASSESSMENT ....................................................................................................... 6
   6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 6
   6.2 Discussion .................................................................................................................... 6
   6.3 Recommendations for further work .............................................................................. 6
7 DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................................ 7
8 LIST OF SOURCES .............................................................................................................. 7
9 REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................... 8
10 PLATES .............................................................................................................................. 9
11 FIGURES ........................................................................................................................... 11
APPENDIX 1 – INDEX TO ARCHIVE .................................................................................. 14
APPENDIX 2 – CONTEXT LIST ............................................................................................. 15

Plates
Cover: View of site
Plate 1 West facing view of archaeological sequence exposed in foundation trench section 9
Plate 2 General site shot of the works, view south-west ......................................................... 10

Tables
Table 1. Pottery quantification ............................................................................................... 7
Table 2 Index to archive ......................................................................................................... 14
Table 3 Context list .................................................................................................................. 15

Figures
Figure 1. Site location .......................................................................................................... 11
Figure 2. Works location ....................................................................................................... 12
Figure 3. Representative section .......................................................................................... 13
Abbreviations

BGL – Below Ground Level

YAT – York Archaeological Trust
NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Between October 18th and November 18th 2019 York Archaeological Trust conducted an intermittent archaeological watching brief at 24-25 Portland Street, York (SE 60161 52498) (Figure 1). The work was undertaken for Merster Ltd. in response to the submission of an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice (Operations Notice 19020) and involved the monitoring of foundation trenches for a single storey extension to the rear of the building and underpinning trenches below the existing external walls.

The groundworks revealed layers of modern-overburden overlying a mixture of historic ploughsoils and up-cast material relating to the construction of the building’s cellar in the late 19th century. A concentration of residual Roman and medieval ceramics was noted, suggesting that settlement activity of this date may survive at greater depth.

KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>24-25 Portland Street, York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YAT Project No.</td>
<td>6182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Number</td>
<td>2019/175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Project</td>
<td>Watching Brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Merster Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Application No.</td>
<td>Operations Notice 19020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGR</td>
<td>SE 60161 52498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Accession No.</td>
<td>Pending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OASIS Identifier</td>
<td>yorkarch1-374798</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REPORT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Produced by</th>
<th></th>
<th>Edited by</th>
<th></th>
<th>Approved by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initials</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Initials</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Initials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>20/11/19</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>14/01/20</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copyright Declaration:
York Archaeological Trust give permission for the material presented within this report to be used by the archives/repository with which it is deposited, in perpetuity, although York Archaeological Trust retains the right to be identified as the author of all project documentation and reports, as specified in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (chapter IV, section 79). The permission will allow the repository to reproduce material, including for use by third parties, with the copyright owner suitably acknowledged.

Disclaimer:
This document has been prepared for the commissioning body and titled project (or named part thereof) and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of the author being obtained. York Archaeological Trust accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than that for which it was commissioned.
INTRODUCTION
Between October 18th and November 18th 2019 York Archaeological Trust conducted an intermittent archaeological watching brief at 24-25 Portland Street, York (SE 60161 52498) (Figure 1).

The work was undertaken for Merster Ltd. in response to the submission of an Area of Archaeological Importance Operations Notice to mitigate the loss of any archaeological remains that may be affected by the development (Operations Notice 19020).

Intrusive works were observed under watching brief conditions to allow for the recording of any affected archaeological deposits.

METHODOLOGY
The groundworks involved the excavation of foundation and underpinning trenches measuring 0.80m in width and up to 1.70m in depth for a single storey extension measuring 8m x 2m (Figure 2). Excavations were mainly carried out by a Kubota KX016-4 tracked excavator equipped with a 0.80m wide toothless bucket, although much of the underpinning trenching had to be carried out by hand.

Following the excavation of a small test pit, the remaining works were monitored by regular site visits. The archaeological sequence exposed was recorded by annotated sketch plans/sections and digital photography. Where distinct deposits were observed, the standard YAT single context recording system was applied. Trenches were located on a base map provided by the client.

LOCATION, GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY
The works were located in the rear yard of 24-25 Portland Street adjacent to the south-east wall of an existing extension (Figure 2). The footprint of the extension covers a 16m² area bounded by the 24-25 Portland Street property and yard to the north-west, south-west and south-east and by the rear alley separating Portland Street and Claremont Terrace to the north-east. The site sits within the Central Historic Core Conservation Area and City of York Character Area 5: Gillygate (MacRae 2013).

The superficial geology of the site is the clays, sands and gravels of the Vale of York Formation overlying Sherwood Sandstone Group bedrock (British Geological Survey).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
Gillygate has its origins in the medieval period, with building plots laid out on the south-west side of the street from the mid-12th century. The land to the north-west was historically an open space known as the Horsefair. The medieval church of St. Giles from which Gillygate derived its name was located a short distance to the east of the site, close to the junction of Lord Mayor’s Walk and Gillygate (MacRae 2013; 166).

The church is first referred to in documentary sources in 1145-61 and may have been a chapel owned by St. Mary’s Abbey. Like many York churches, it was deconsecrated in 1586 and was
united with the parish of St. Olave. While in private ownership, the churchyard received the burials of plague victims in 1605 and executed criminals reportedly continued to be interred on-site as late as 1693 (Wilson and Mee 1998; 83). The precise date of the church’s demolition is not known, although its absence from 18th century mapping would suggest it did not survive into the 1700s.

A period of rapid expansion in the mid-19th century led to the construction of the first buildings on the north-west side of Gillygate, although Portland Street was not laid out until later in the 19th century (MacRae 2013; 166). Portland Street presently survives with little alteration to its late 19th century appearance; the street is broad and lined by uniform three storey townhouses with basements.

Alongside recording the date and nature of the site’s archaeological sequence, a principal aim of the watching brief was to investigate whether the churchyard of the St. Giles extended beneath Portland Street.

5 RESULTS

A uniform archaeological sequence was observed in all interventions on the site. The earliest deposit observed during the works was a layer of soft, mid-brownish yellow slightly sandy clay between 1.50m and 1.70m BGL (Context 105; Figure 3; Plate 1). The ceramics recovered from this deposit were exclusively Roman in date, including sherds of mortaria, Grey wares and colour coated wares. As only a small amount of this deposit was removed, its date remains uncertain; although the absence of any modern material may suggest that this deposit represents the upper extent of undisturbed archaeology. Whether this layer does represent Roman activity or medieval deposition with re-deposited Roman ceramics is uncertain.

A layer of soft, dark grey to black silty clay was present across the site between 0.75m and 1.50m BGL (Contexts 103; 104; Figure 3; Plate 1). This deposit was interpreted as a horticultural layer relating to the site’s use as farmland prior to the late-19th century. The deposit was noteworthy in that it contained a high level of residual material dating from the Roman period to the 19th century. The Roman assemblage included samian, Grey ware, colour coated ware and Calcite Gritted ware; medieval Brandsby ware and 18th-19th century transfer and white wares were also present. This broad date range may be a result of repeated ploughing bringing buried material to the surface, although some of the material may also have been up-cast during the construction of 24-25 Portland Street’s cellar. In either case, the frequency of Roman and medieval ceramics from a small area is suggestive of deposits relating to settlement activity surviving in situ at greater depth.

The remainder of the sequence comprised 0.63m of mixed make-up deposits of soft, light-yellowish brown sandy clay and mid-greyish brown sandy silt; both contained inclusions of gravel, brick and tile rubble, coal fragments and mortar flecks (Contexts 101; 102; Figure 3; Plate 1). All deposits were sealed below a 100mm thick surface of concrete (Context 100).
6 POTTERY ASSESSMENT

By Anne Jenner

6.1 Introduction
Twenty-one sherds were retrieved from five contexts during archaeological intervention at Portland Street. They are all from vessels that were probably used in a domestic context. They range in size from small to large (<5cms to >10cms). The earliest sherds are Roman. The latest sherd is a 19th century transfer printed ware. Medieval wares are also present.

6.2 Discussion
The Roman wares include a small piece of Samian which may be a 2nd century type, though Samian wares are also found in 1st century contexts and this cannot be ruled out. The latest Roman ware is probably the Colour Coated pentice moulded beaker sherds. These may be late 2nd/3rd century or later types. They may have been made in the Nene Valley or in Northern Gaul. The Grey ware jar sherds may also be from late 2nd/3rd century vessels. The white ware mortaria sherd may be of a similar date. It could have been made at a number of production centres, such as Mancetter-Hartshill.

There are a few medieval jug sherds which would have been produced in Yorkshire. These include Brandsby and Humber wares which would have been in currency in the late 13th and 14th centuries. A small sherd of Ryedale ware follows in the green glazed medieval tradition but would have been current in York in the late 16th to early 18th centuries.

Notable by their absence are the Cistercian wares. These wares are typical amongst late 15th and 16th century assemblages. It is not possible to determine whether this reflects a lack of activity in this area at that time, or whether their absence merely a reflection of the small sample size.

6.3 Recommendations for further work
A mortaria specialist may be able to shed further light on this sherd. Further analysis of the Colour Coated wares may also determine their origin and date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Number</th>
<th>Find No.</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Dating</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>103 BF2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ROMAN AND LATE 13TH CENTURY</td>
<td>1 Bransby jug handle with rod shape and three vertical grooves with applied pellets and dull green glaze, large sherd. 1 Samian, small sherd. 4 Roman Greyware jar, small to large sherds including rim and base. 1 Roman Colour Coated beaker, lightly oxidised fabric and horizontal band.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104 BF3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ROMAN AND 19TH CENTURY</td>
<td>1 Transfer Printed Willow Pattern, open form, small sherd. 1 fine White ware, abraded, small sherd. 3 Roman Grey ware, small sherds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 DISCUSSION

The archaeological sequence observed during the watching brief corresponds well with the known historic development of the Gillygate area, with the majority of the deposition relating to post-medieval agricultural soils. The residual assemblage of Roman and medieval material recovered from the horticultural horizon was notable in its quantity and, along with the less disturbed material at the base of the trench (Context 105), may suggest the presence of intact medieval and earlier archaeology below the present 1.70m limit of excavation.

The absence of any human bone suggests that the churchyard of the former church of St. Giles did not extend into this area.

8 LIST OF SOURCES

British Geological Survey

http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain3d/index.html?

MacRae, C., 2013. City of York Character Areas.

https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/5898/5gillygate
9 REFERENCES

Plate 1 West facing view of archaeological sequence exposed in foundation trench section.
Plate 2 General site shot of the works, view south-west.
York Archaeological Trust

Figure 1  Site location
Figure 2 Location of 2019 excavations overlaid on LHL Group topographic survey.
Figure 3 Representative section
APPENDIX 1 – INDEX TO ARCHIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context sheets</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels register</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographic register</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample register</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing register</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original drawings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/W photographs (films/contact sheets)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour slides (films)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital photographs</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Scheme of Investigation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 Index to archive**
## APPENDIX 2 – CONTEXT LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Concrete surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Make-up deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Make-up deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Horticultural/garden soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Horticultural/garden soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Layer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 Context list**
York Archaeological Trust undertakes a wide range of urban and rural archaeological consultancies, surveys, evaluations, assessments and excavations for commercial, academic and charitable clients. We manage projects, provide professional advice and fieldwork to ensure a high quality, cost effective archaeological and heritage service. Our 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, Sheffield, Nottingham and Glasgow the Trust’s services are available throughout Britain and beyond.