

Fishergate

40 years of excavations

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York Archaeology

Credits and content advice

- Images: York Archaeology, Field Archaeology Specialists, York Press, City of York Archives, Historic Towns Atlas, Northstar Ltd, Portable Antiquities Scheme
- Research: York Archaeology, Field Archaeology Specialists, Fishergate, Fulford and Heslington Local History Society, Van Wilson, York Press
- **This presentation includes images of excavated human remains**

Running Order

- Digging Fishergate: 1985 – 2004: Ian Milsted (*45 mins*)
- Q&A (*15 mins*)

- Break (*15 mins*)

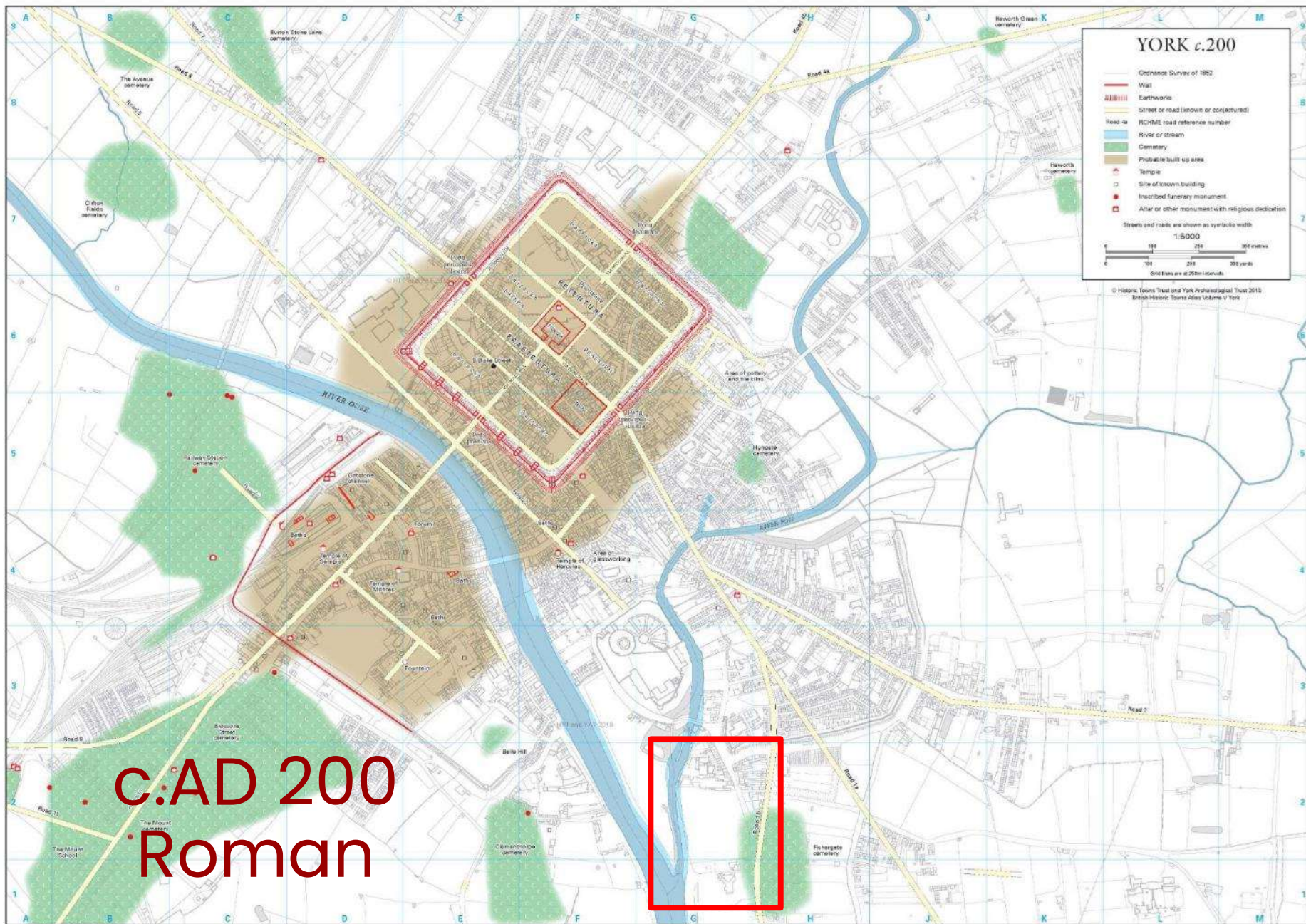
- Finds from Fishergate: Ian M (*15 mins*)
- Lucy Johnson: finds from the recent excavations; Ian: older excavation plans and the church model. (*30 mins*)

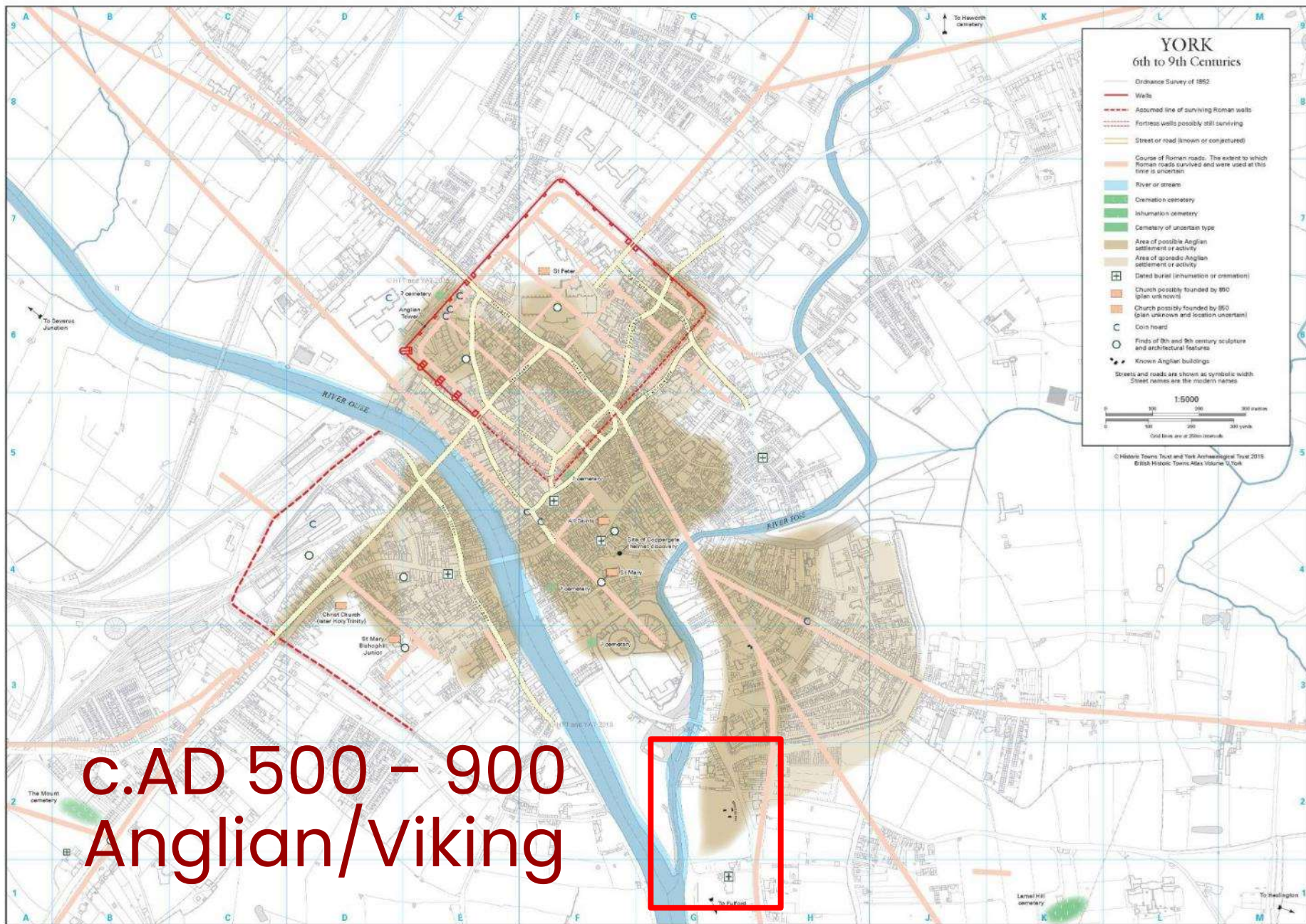
- Digging Fishergate: 2021–2023: Lucy Johnson (*45 mins*)
- Q&A (*15 mins*)

Digging Fishergate:

(nearly) 40 years of archaeological investigation

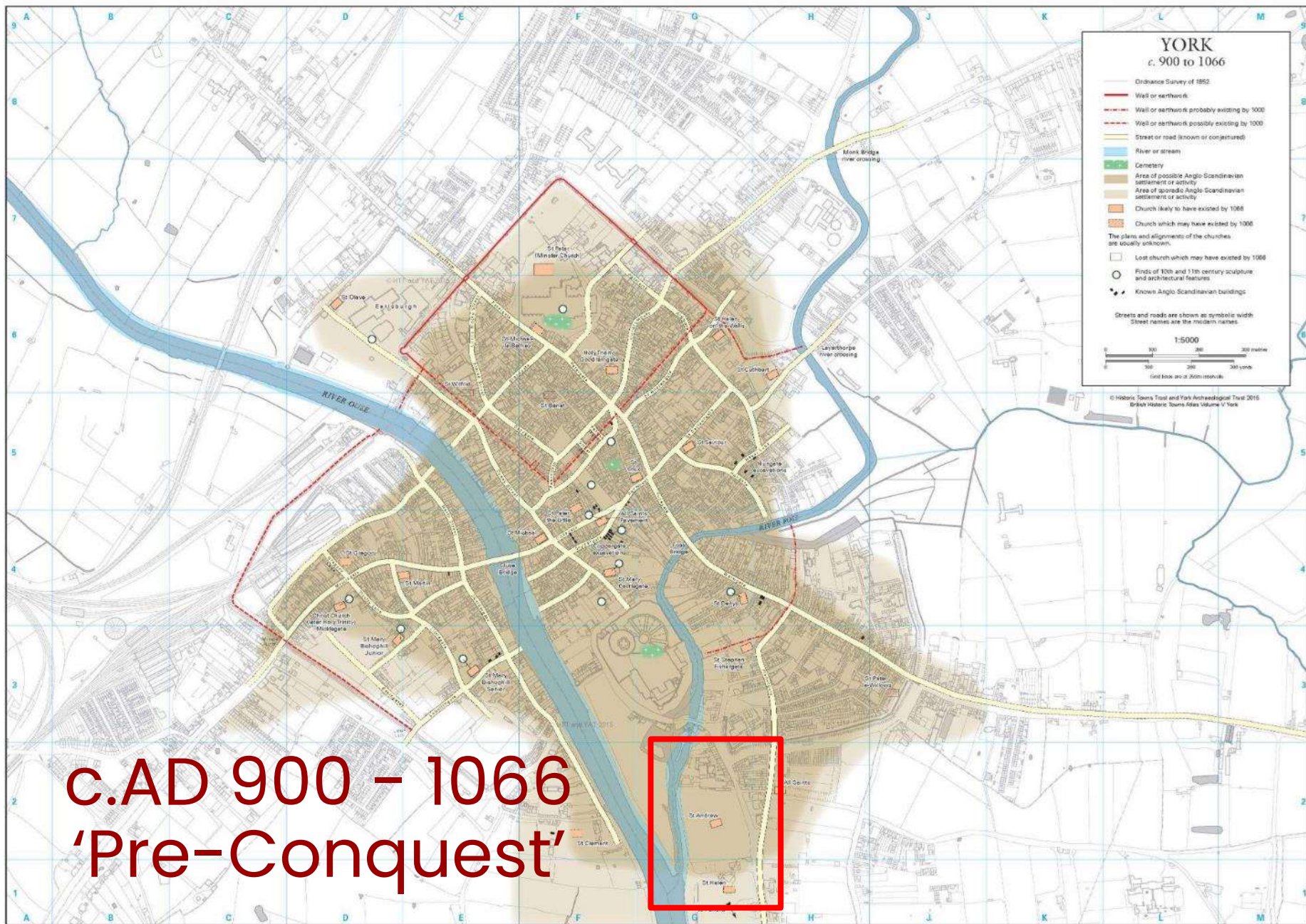
- York Archaeological Trust: 1985/6
Redfearn's National Glass site
- Field Archaeology Specialists: 2001-4
Blue Bridge Lane/Fishergate House
- York Archaeology: 2021-2023
Former Mecca Bingo, Fishergate
- But first: The History of York in 10 minutes ...





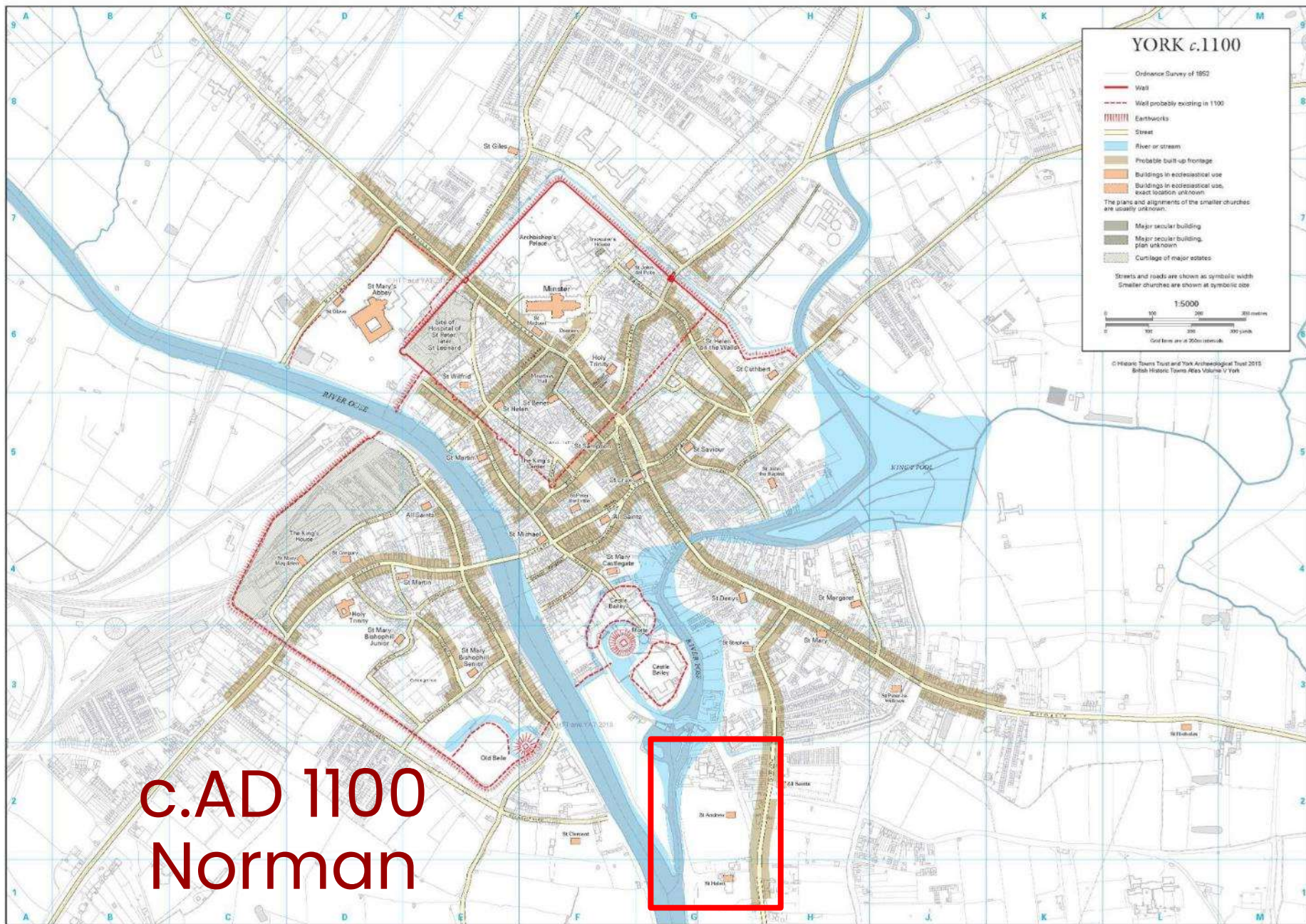
C.AD 500 - 900
Anglian/Viking





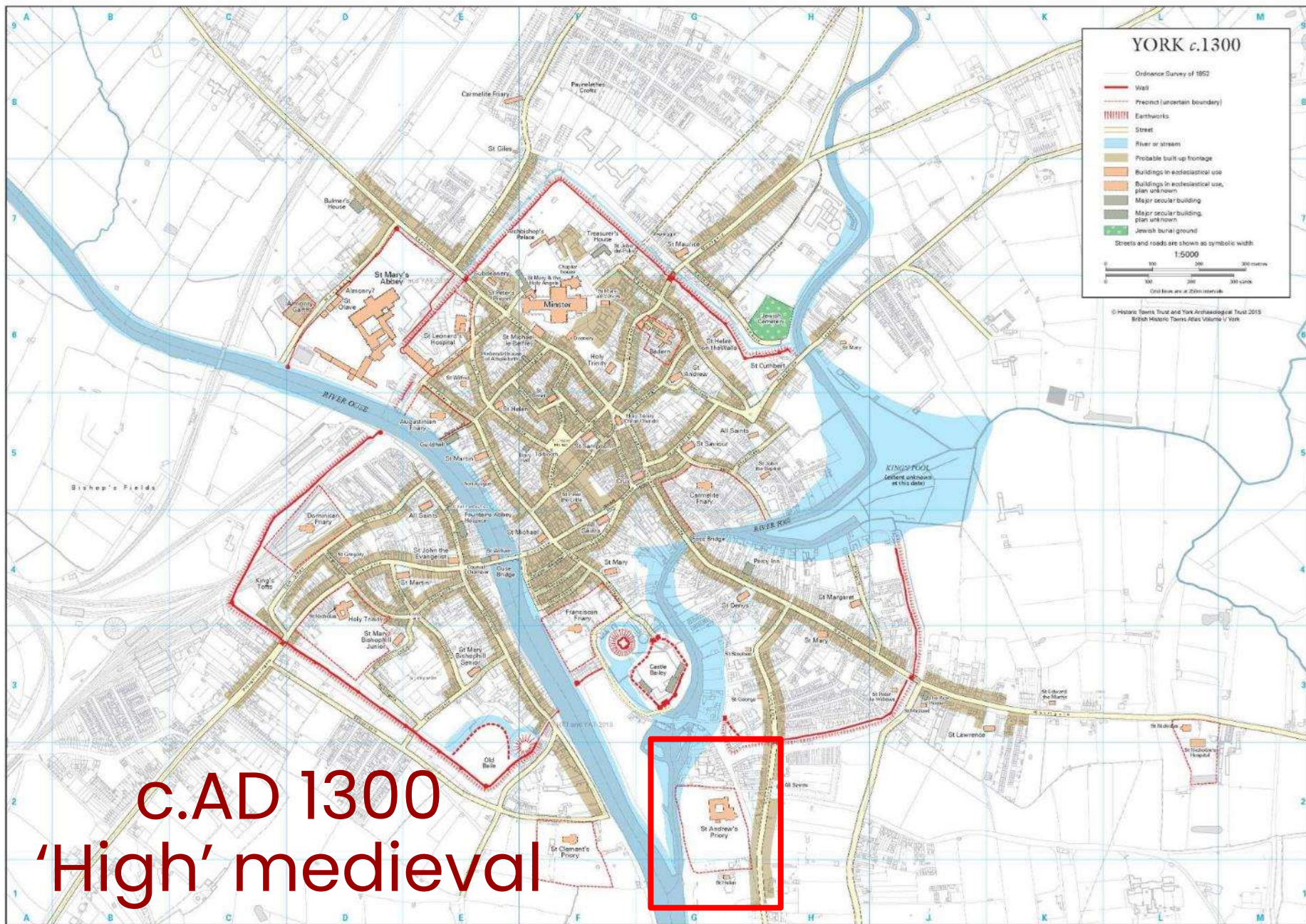
c.AD 900 – 1066
'Pre-Conquest'

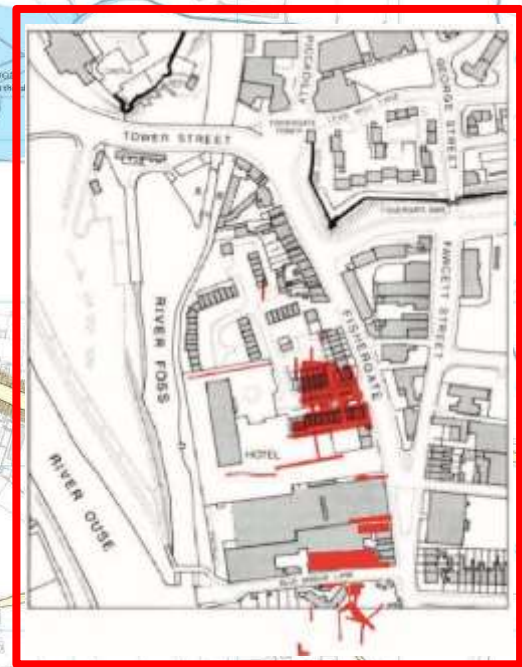
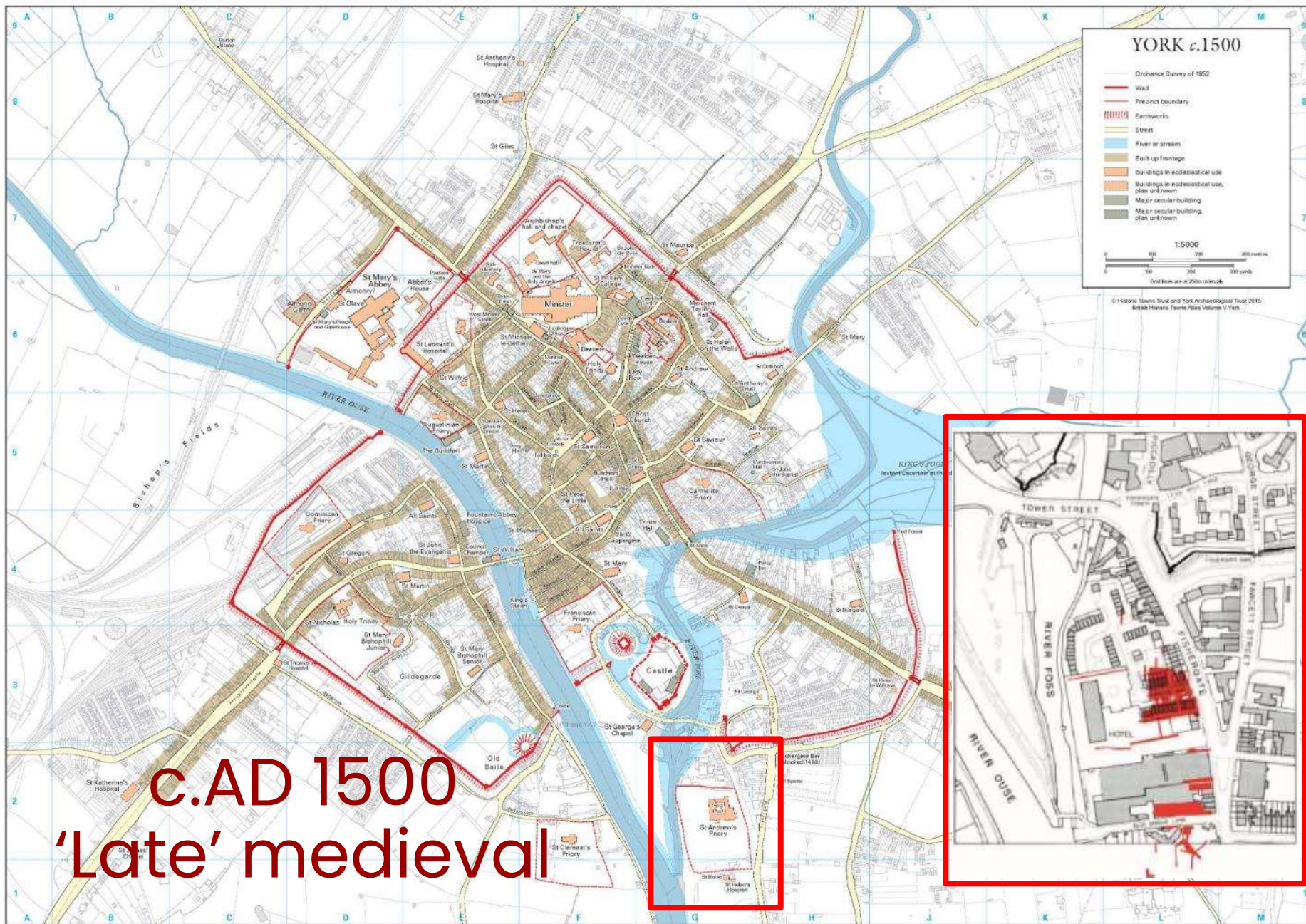




**C.AD 1100
Norman**





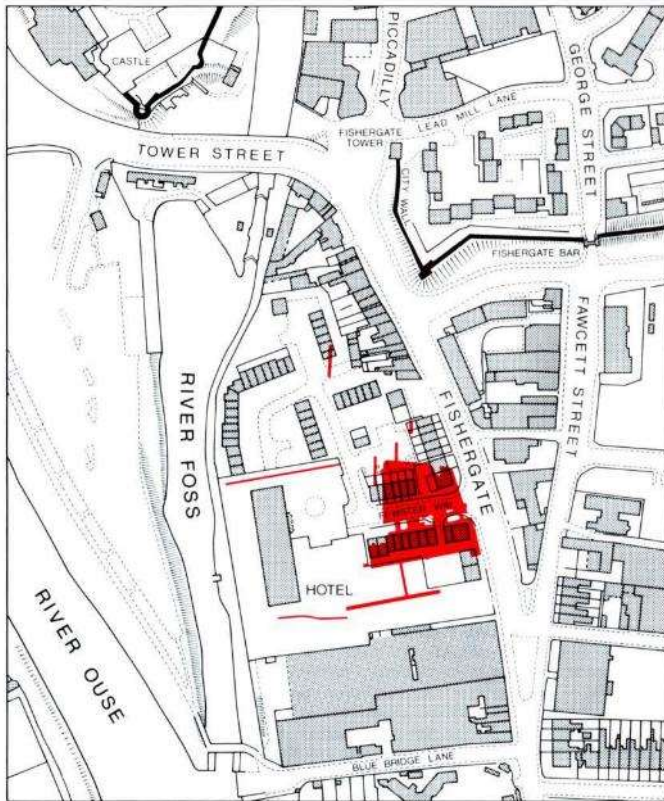


Redfearns National Glass



- First plant established 1794 as Hampston & Prince
- By 1880 was known as York Glass Company
- Merged with Redfearn's National Glass in 1977
- At one time the 3rd largest employer in York, making 16% of the UK's glass bottles
- Company closed in 1983 and demolition commenced the following year

YAT at Fishergate 1985/6



The Rialto/Cat's Whiskers/Mecca Bingo

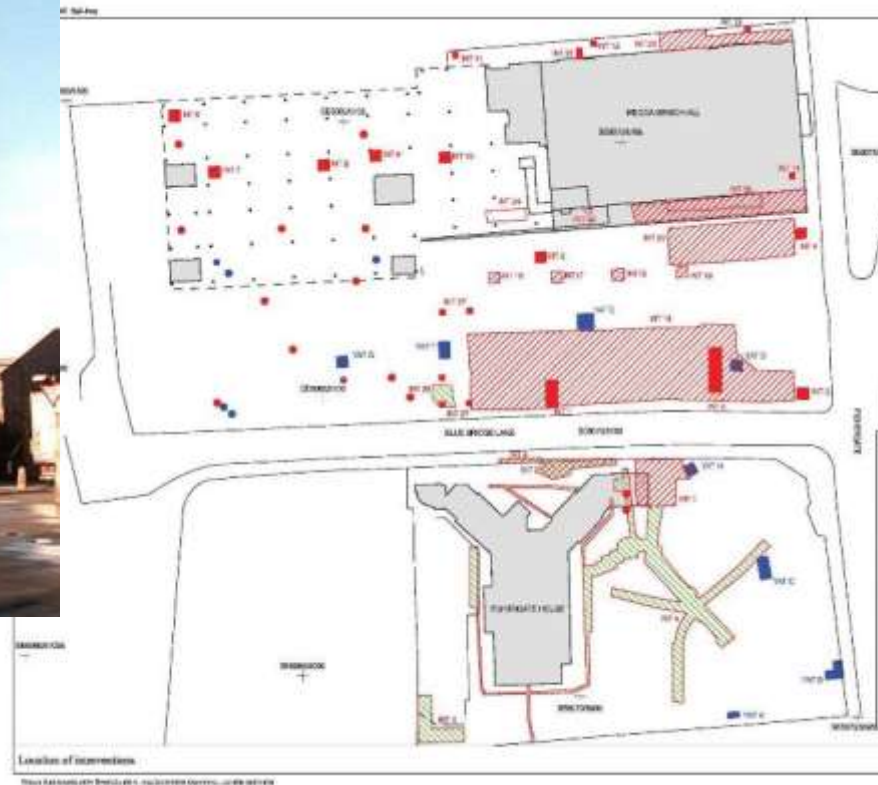


- 1909: Roller Skating Palace
- 1913: Rialto Cinema and Dance Hall
- 1935: destroyed by fire and rebuilt
- 1930s: Jack Prendergast years: performers include Stan Kenton, Gracie Fields and Louis Armstrong

- 1961: Bought by Mecca: cinema closes but acts appearing include The Beatles
- Late 60s: became the (in)famous Cat's Whiskers nightclub
- 80s: leisure and bingo club
- 2001: Demolished and replaced with a new bingo club: Mecca Bingo



FAS at Blue Bridge Lane/Fishergate House: 2001-2004



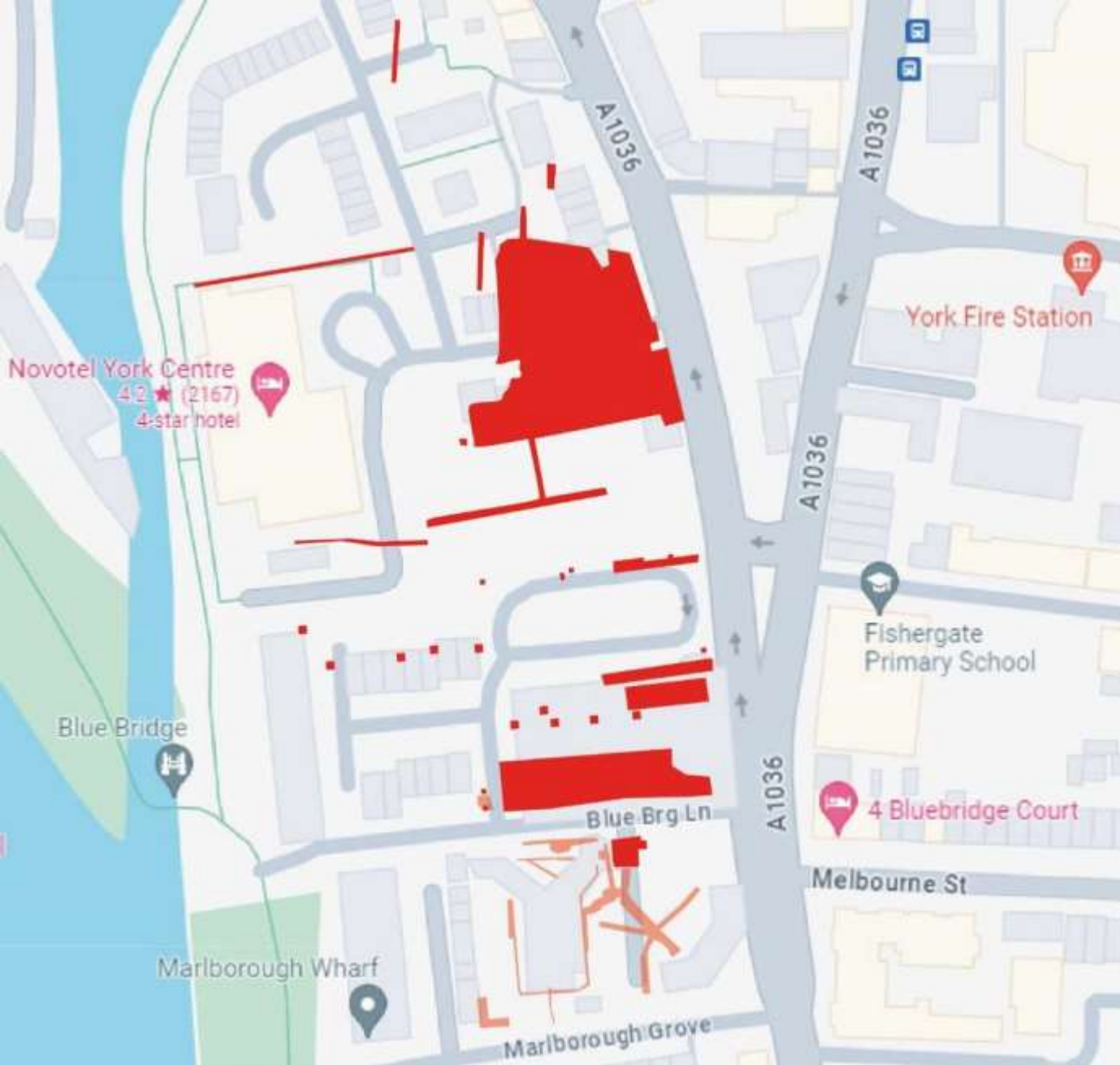
Mecca Bingo, Fishergate



York Archaeology at Mecca Bingo: 2021-2023



Excavations 1985–2004



- Large area with significant archaeological remains
- **Local:** Roman, Viking Norman and post-medieval
- **National:** Medieval
- **International:** Anglian
- Significant gaps in the record

Excavations 1985-2023



- 2021-3 excavations: a major opportunity:
- Last large-scale investigation for at least a generation
- Potential to provide a lot of critical missing information
- New cohort of York archaeologists

Roman: AD 71-c.410

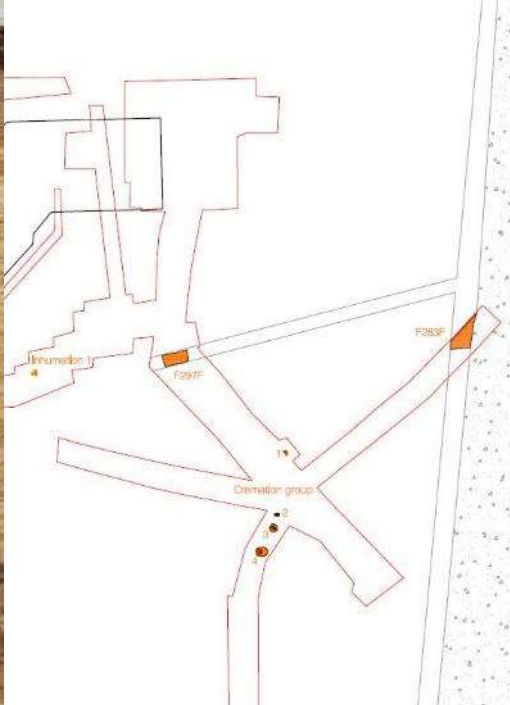
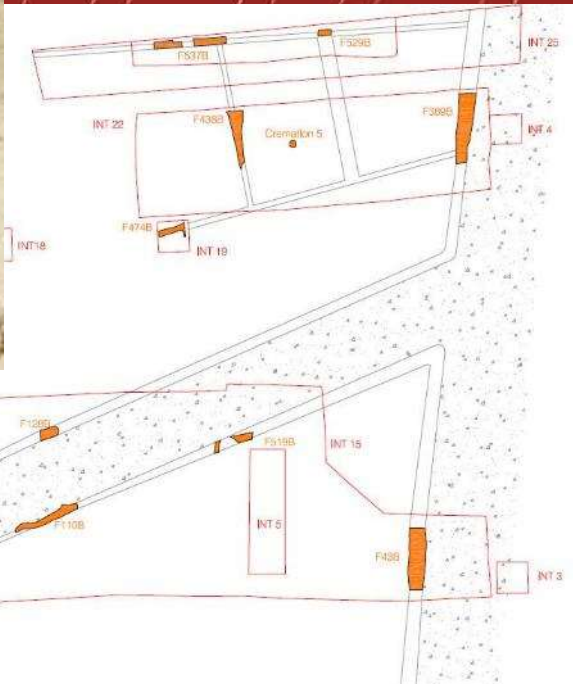


- Natural sandy clays
- Roman ploughing
- Ditches
- Roman road surfaces
- Possible occupation surfaces
- 5 cremation burials
- Inhumation burial
- Significant quantity of disturbed human bone



FAS 2001-4: Roman features

- Roadside ditch and cobbled surfaces
- Cremation burials: juveniles, 1st-2nd century

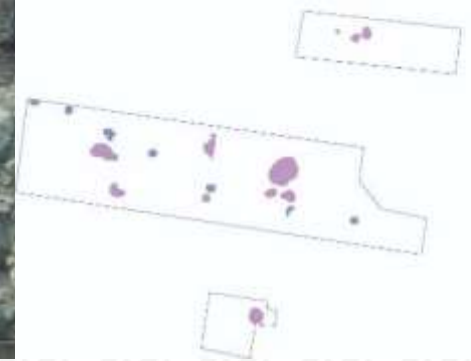


YAT 1985/6 Anglian: c.AD 650 – 850

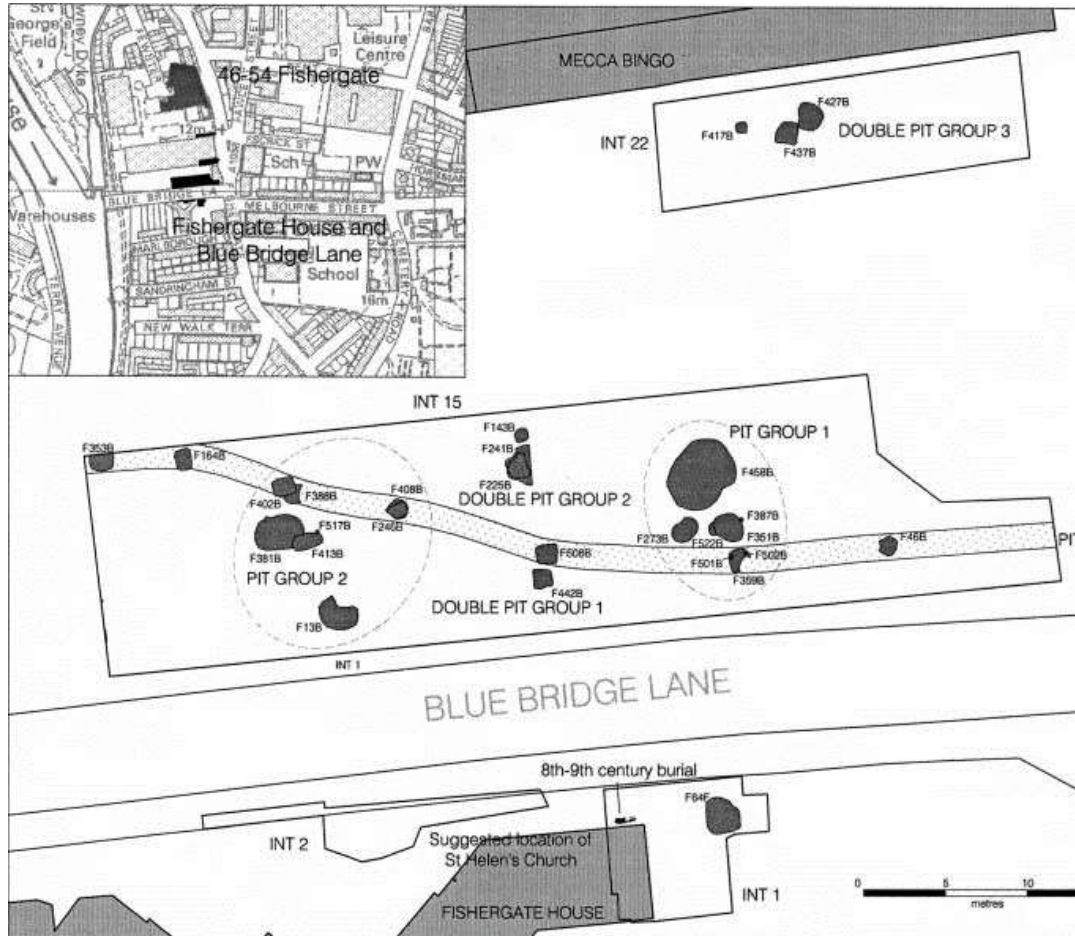


- Boundary ditch and fences/palisades
- Clusters of rubbish pits and latrines
- Finds include extensive evidence for craft working
- Animal bone: controlled food supply
- Food production: grain
- 3 post-built 'structures'
- Re-organized early 9th century and goes out of use by Viking period

That looks ... complicated



FAS 2001-4: Anglian c.650 – 850



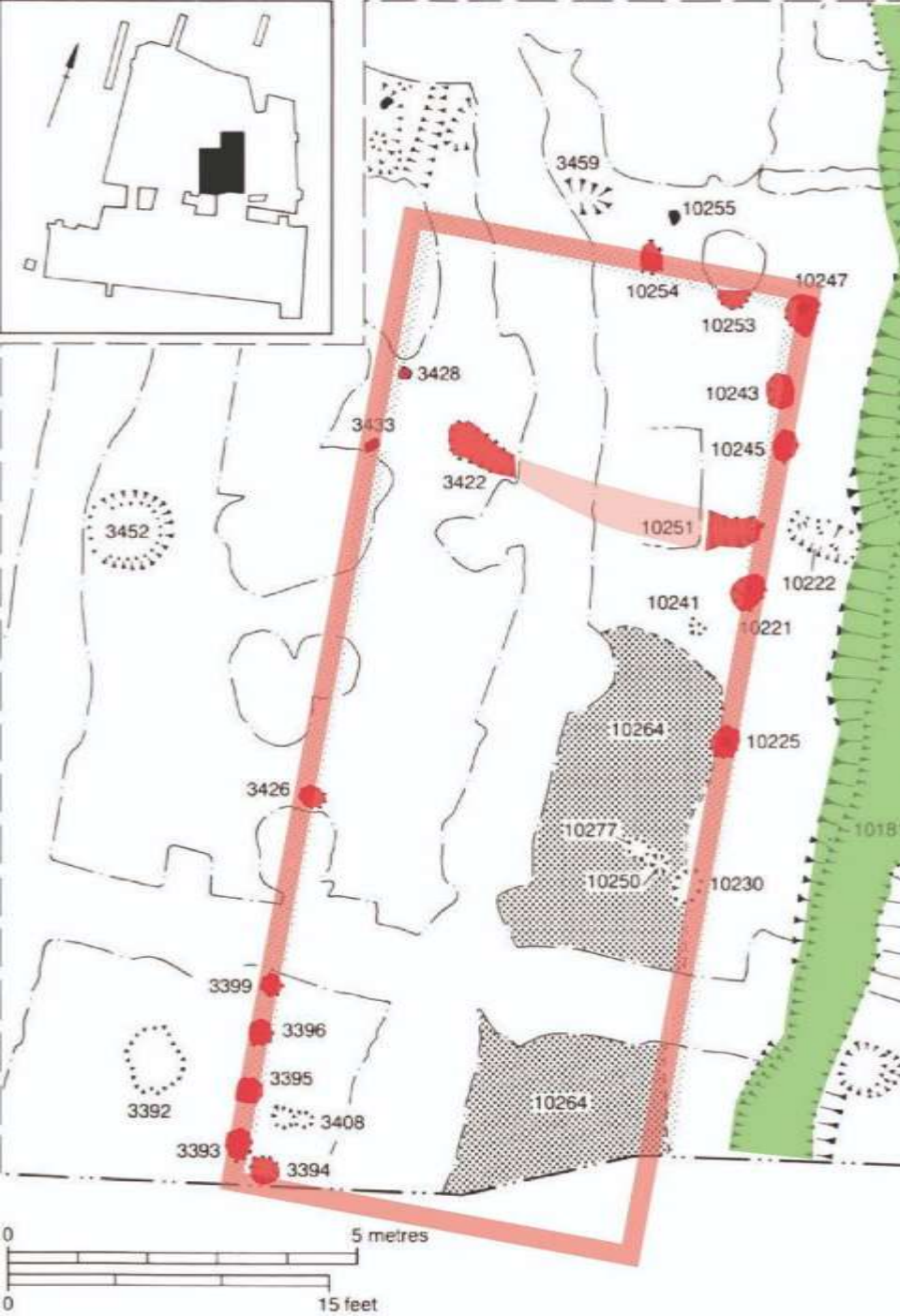
- Continuation of the Anglian activity, with a clear, if unseen, southern boundary
- Pit alignment/boundary feature
- Pit groups with extensive waste material from crafting, manufacture and occupation
- Activity continues into Viking period: limited settlement evidence



A planned settlement?

- The ditch demarcates most of the activity
- Open for ?a year prior to activity commencing
- Site reorganized in the early 9th century and the ditch was re-cut in this location (Periods 3b and 3c)
- Suggests a specific purpose

'Structures'



- Up to 20m long
- Very shallow post-holes
- Internal divisions
- Respect site boundaries
- Workshops? Halls?
- Deliberately dismantled c.800 prior to site re-organisation



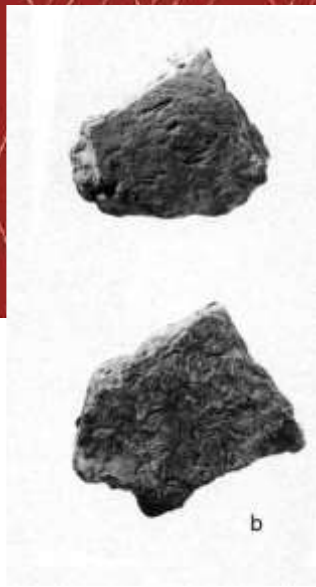
Pits and their contents



- Latrine pits, rubbish pits, former post-holes: refuse shows evidence for:
- Bone and antler working (combs, knives)
- Metal (ferrous and precious)
- Leather and other textiles (tools)
- Beads, keys, buckles, tools, etc
- Jewellery and dress items



Pottery



- Local wares: very important assemblage of hand-made fabrics
- East Anglian imports: Ipswich Ware
- Continental imports: Grey and Black burnished wares

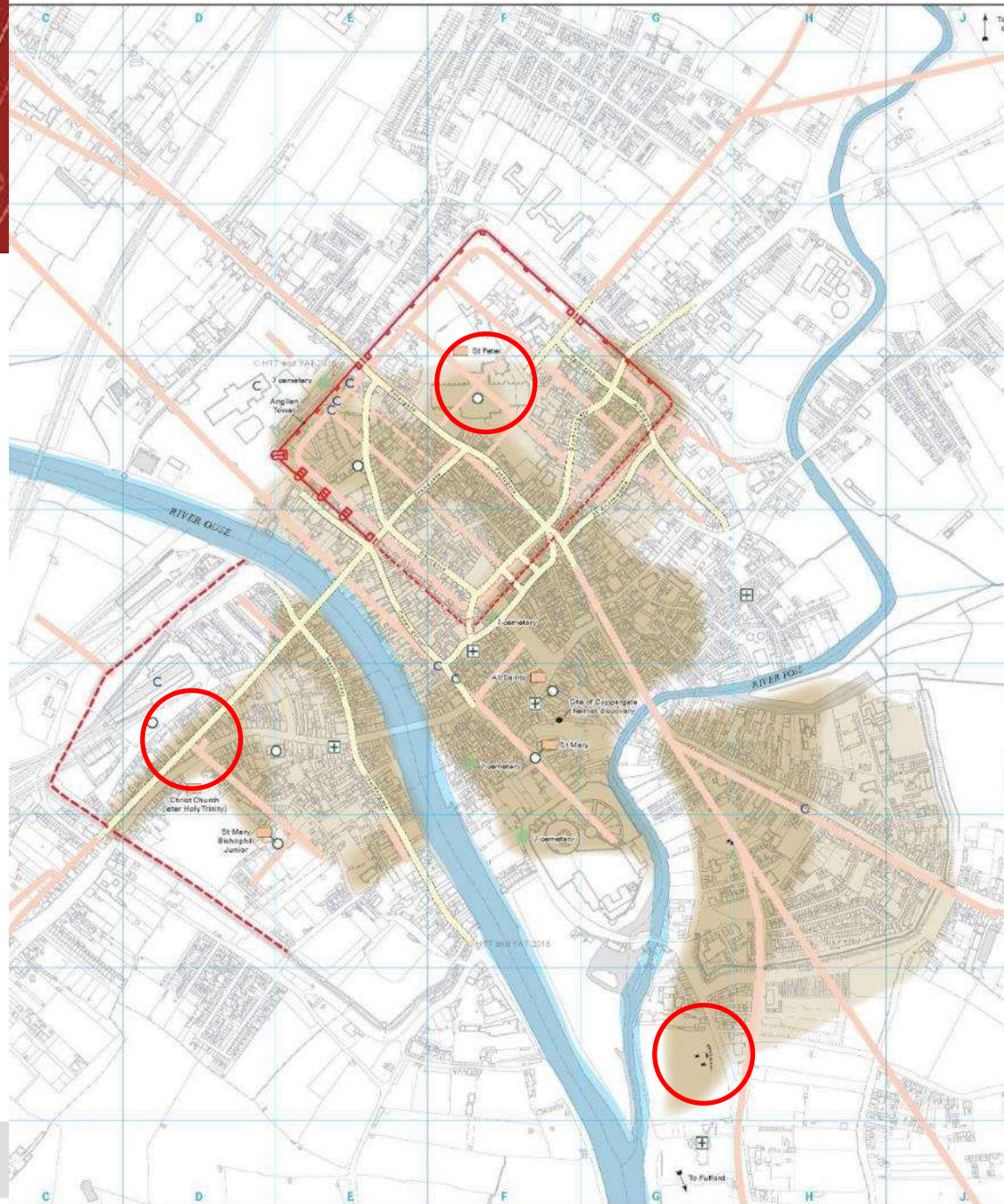
What is this?

- Riverside location: trade
- Planned settlement
- Extensive crafting
- Controlled food supply?
- Documentary references to merchants
- Imported goods (lava querns, pottery)
- 'Eoforwic' as a Royal centre?
- Is this a 'Wic'?

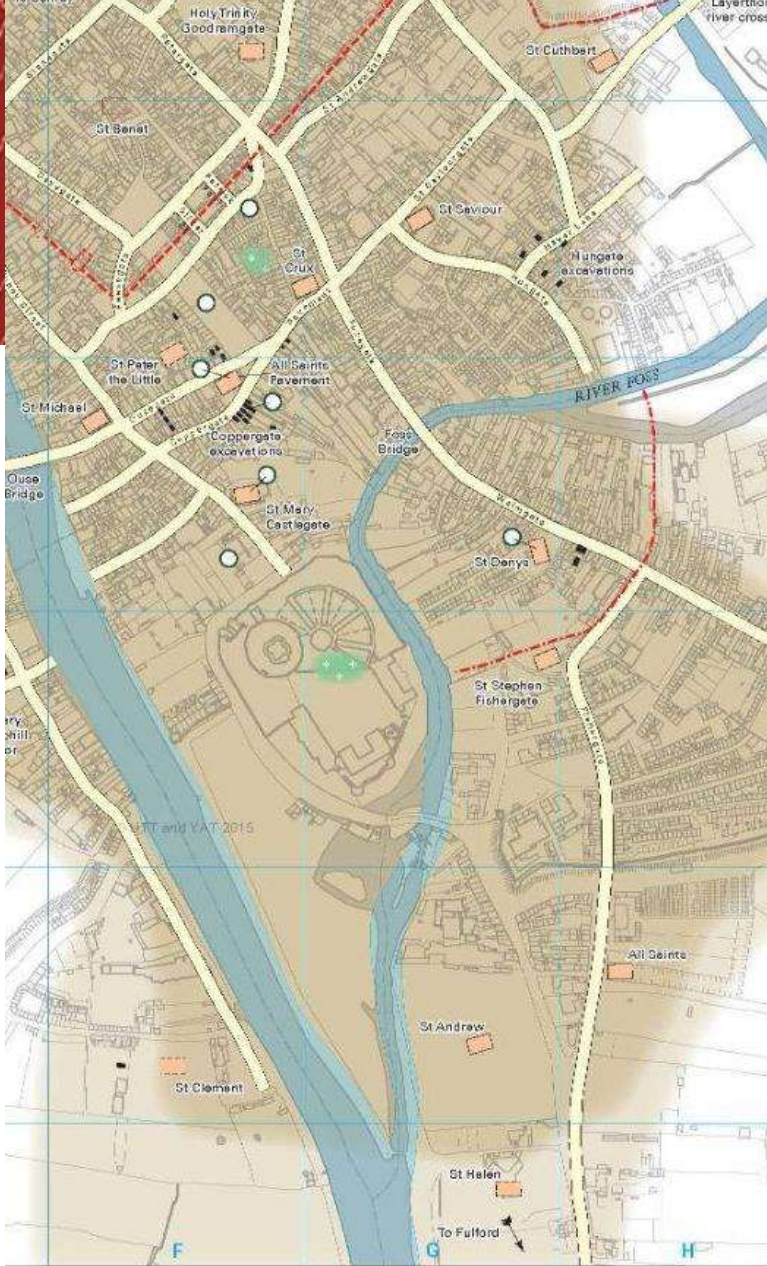


For and Against

- 'Polyfocal' settlement
 - 'Eoforwiceastre'/'Eoforwic'
 - Evidence for trade and production
 - Similar to known 'Wics', especially the animal bone data
 - Convincing landscape story?
-
- Too small? (4ha/40ha)
 - Nothing like as planned as Hamwic, for example
 - Finds are similar to other regional Anglian sites: not unique?
 - More subtle ideas of trade and economy since 1980s



Pre-conquest churches



- This is a bit of archaeological 'cheating'
- Documentary evidence for two pre-1066 churches within the 1985/6 and 2001/4 excavation areas:
- St Andrew's and St Helen's
- Inferred from deposits and finds of later date
- Burials and dated artefacts
- Building remains
- Landscape analysis

St Andrew's: ???? – c. AD 1195



- Referred to in Domesday
- Ownership passed through a number of Norman families before ending up with a Hugh Murdac by c.1195
- YAT found fragmentary building traces and several phases of burial covering the 11th and 12th centuries
- The name survived in the later Priory

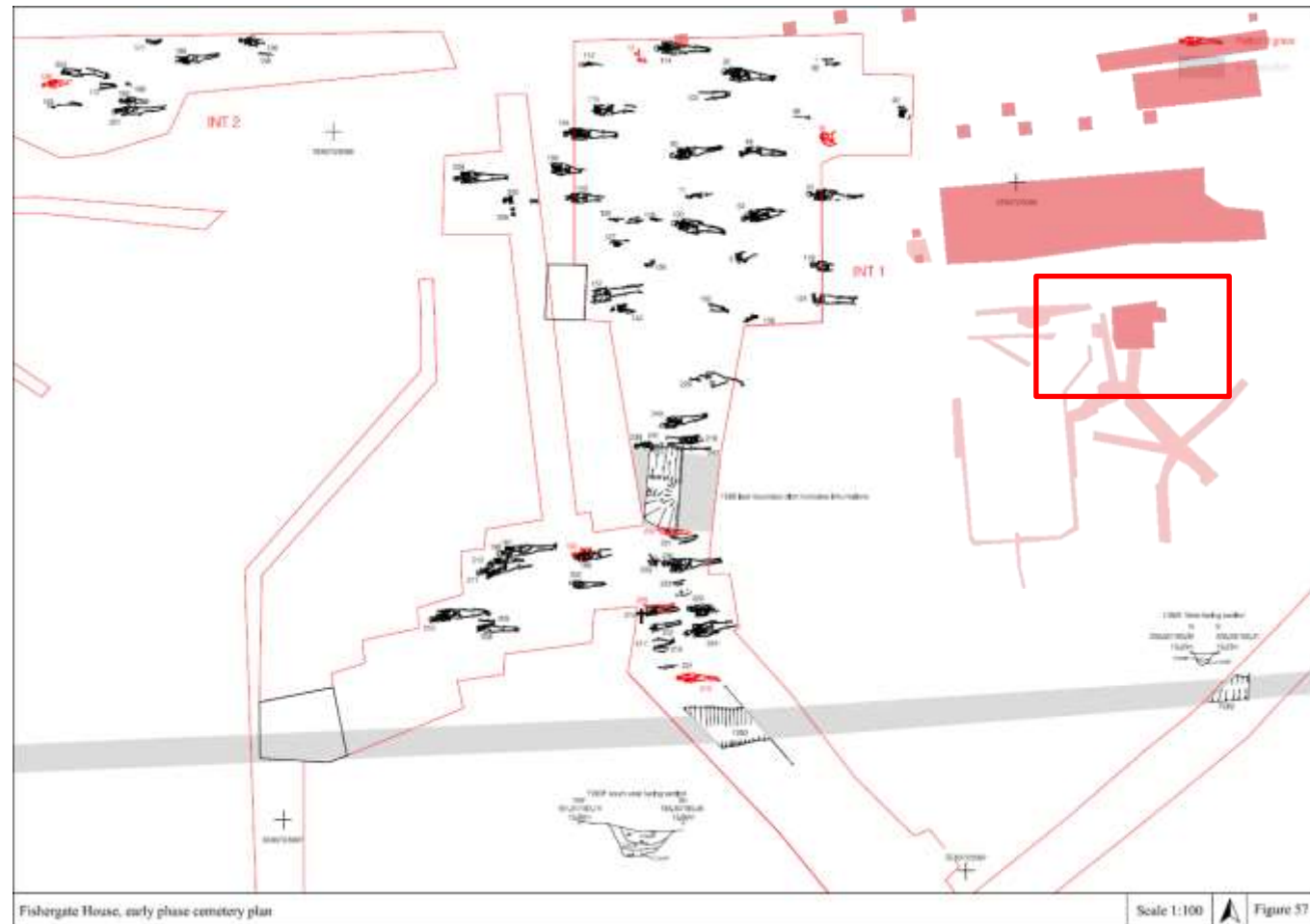
St Andrew's: timber church and burials



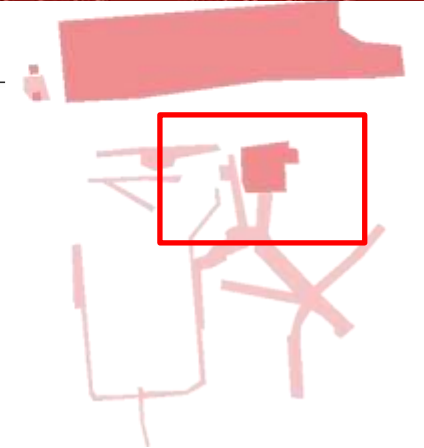
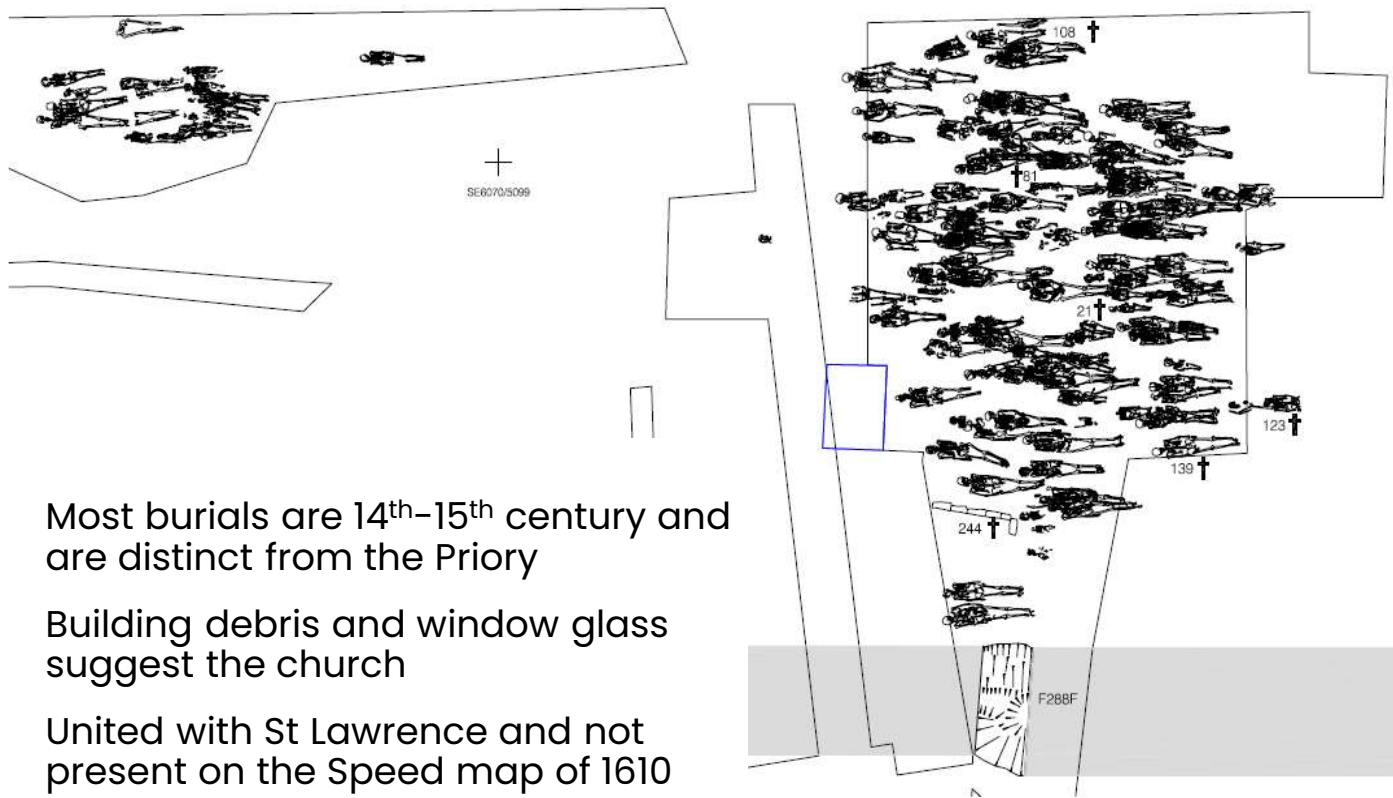
- Two groups of burials had suffered blade injuries
- Dating was largely through typical Norman pottery types
- Clustering and landscape features suggest cemetery limits

St Helen's, Fishergate: ????? – c.1536

- Identity and location inferred from documentary references and landscape
- Granted to Whitby Abbey in 11th century
- No direct evidence for the church itself

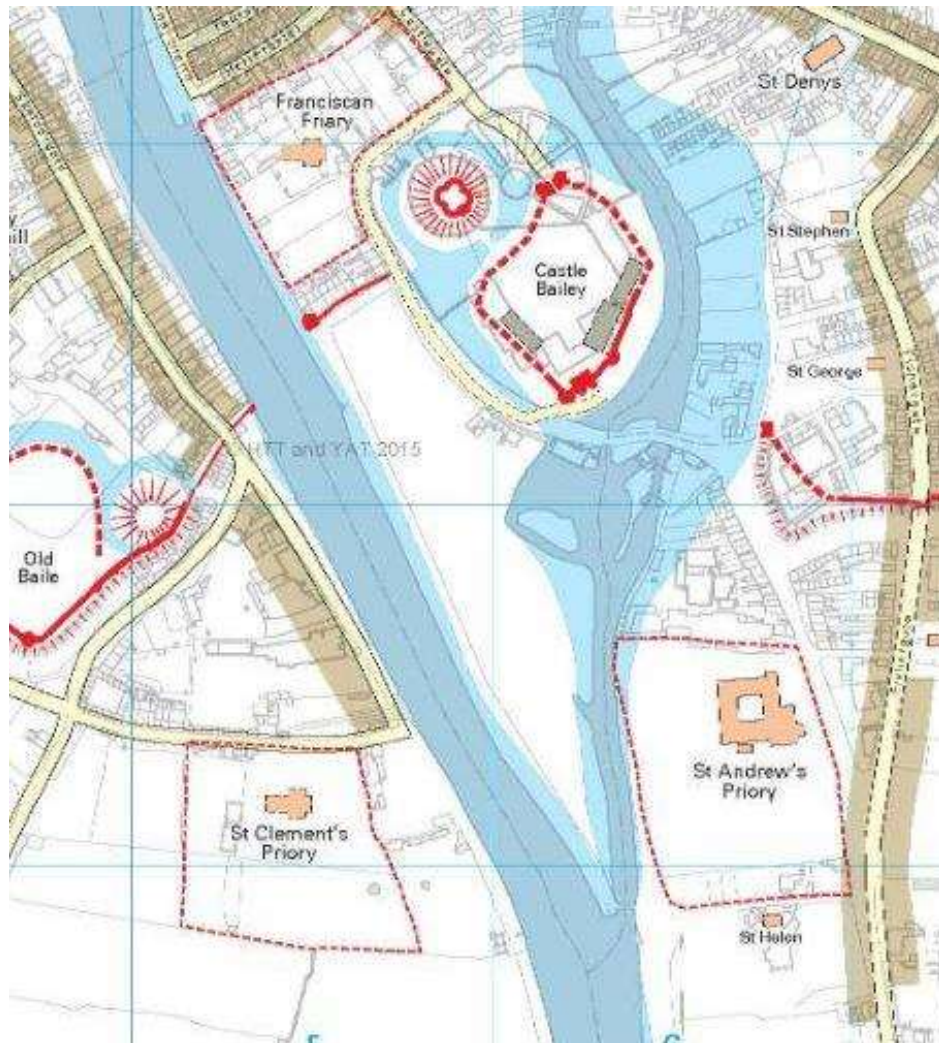


St Helen's, Fishergate: ????? – c.1536



- Most burials are 14th-15th century and are distinct from the Priory
- Building debris and window glass suggest the church
- United with St Lawrence and not present on the Speed map of 1610

Gilbertine Priory: c.1195 – 1538



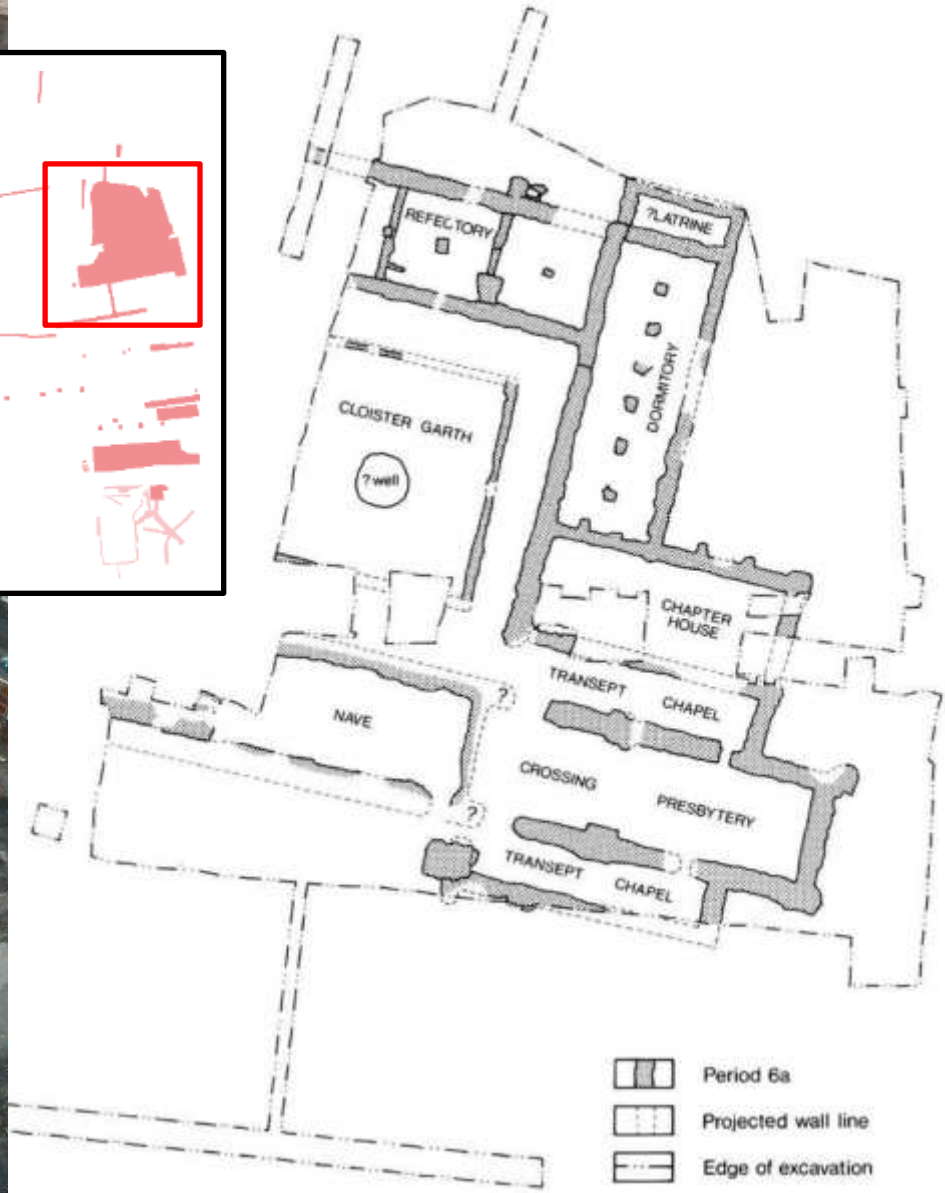
- Extensive evidence for St Andrew's Church and Gilbertine Priory
- 1985/6 excavation: located several phases of the claustral remains
- 85/6 also found several phases of monastic burials
- 2001/4 excavation investigated the wider precinct, identifying industrial activity undertaken by the Priory

The Gilbertine Priory



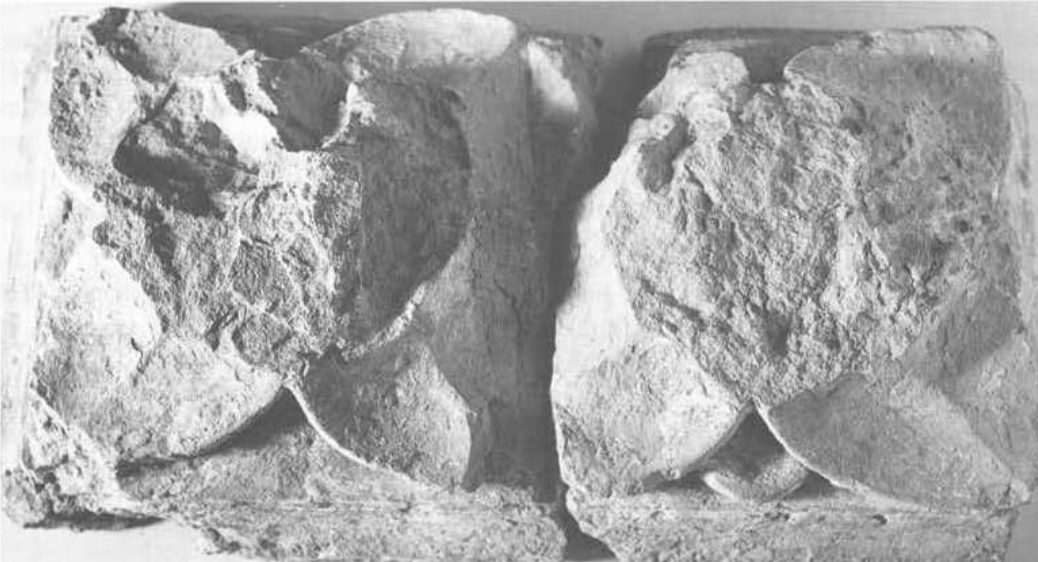
- The Order was founded in 1131 by St Gilbert of Sempringham
- Only wholly-English monastic order
- The Priory of St Andrew's was founded by Hugh Murdac c.1195-1202
- The original buildings were heavily modified in the 14th century
- Extensive evidence for the buildings and occupants but very little refuse or everyday items due to survival

c.1202–c.1335

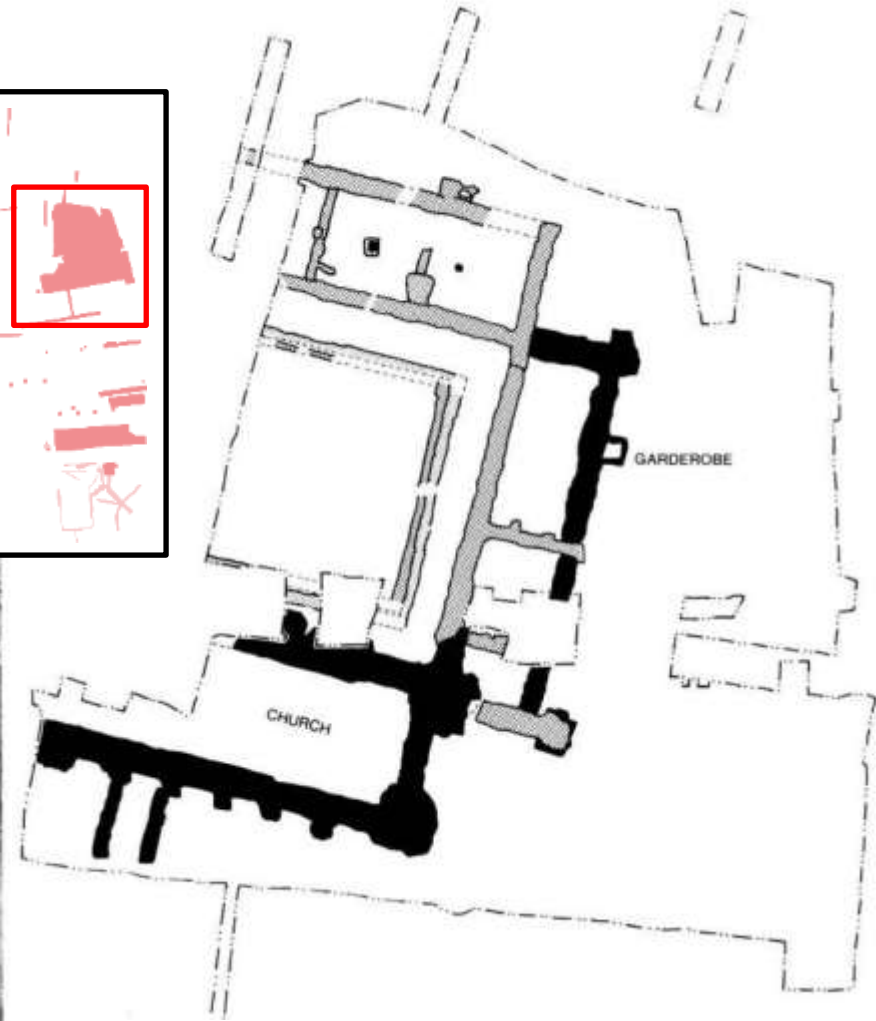


Fabric of the Priory

- Stonework of original Priory was largely fresh-cut limestone
- Surviving fragments are typically late 12th–early 13th century



c.1335 – c.1538



Cemetery c.1202 – c.1335

- Separation of burials identified
- Monastic burials within the church and to the south
- Male, some buried with chalices and patens, most in coffins
- Lay burials to the east
- Mixed genders

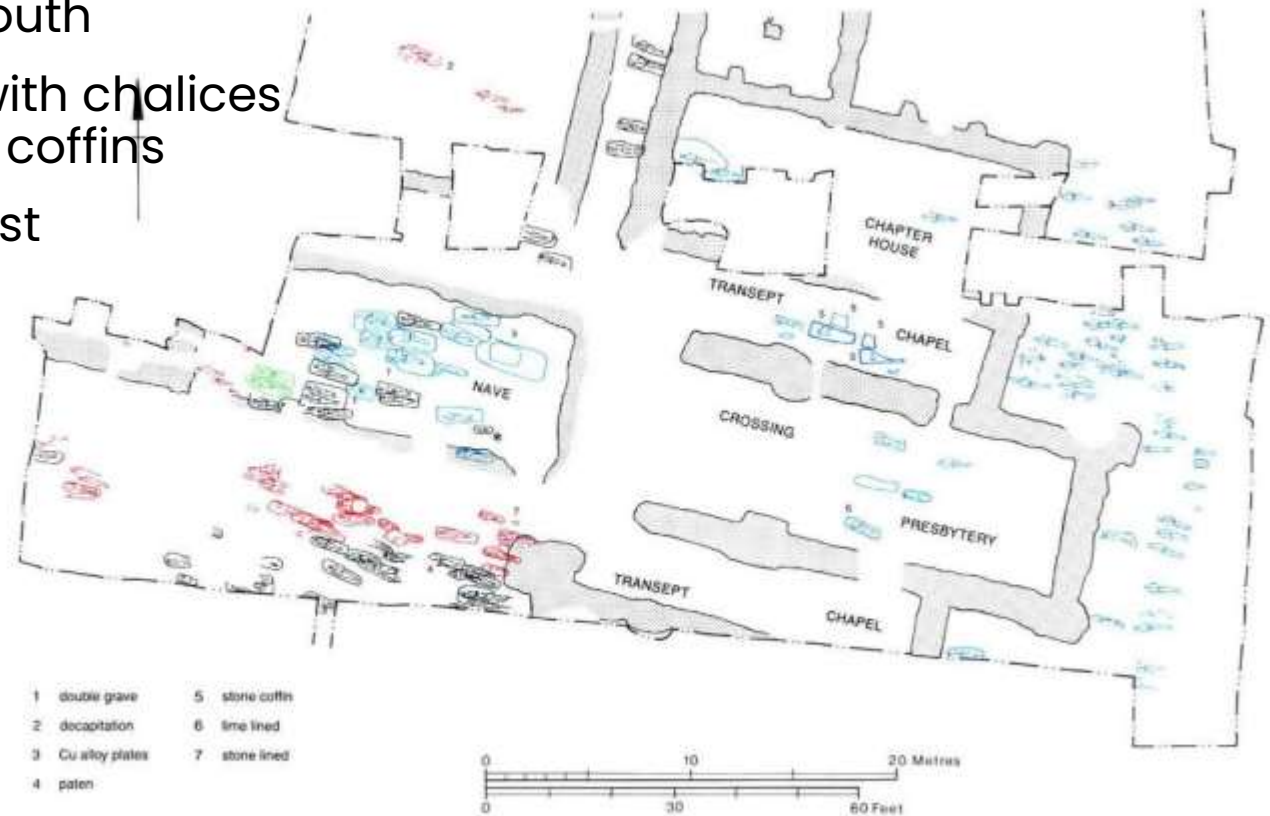


Fig. 17 The location and distribution of Period 6b burials and all other burials which may also be from this period. Burial #490 located in the north cloister alley is not shown on plan. Scale 1:200

Cemetery c.1335 – c.1538

- Burials resume within the re-built church
- No clear separation of monastic or lay burial
- Some individuals have severe blade injuries

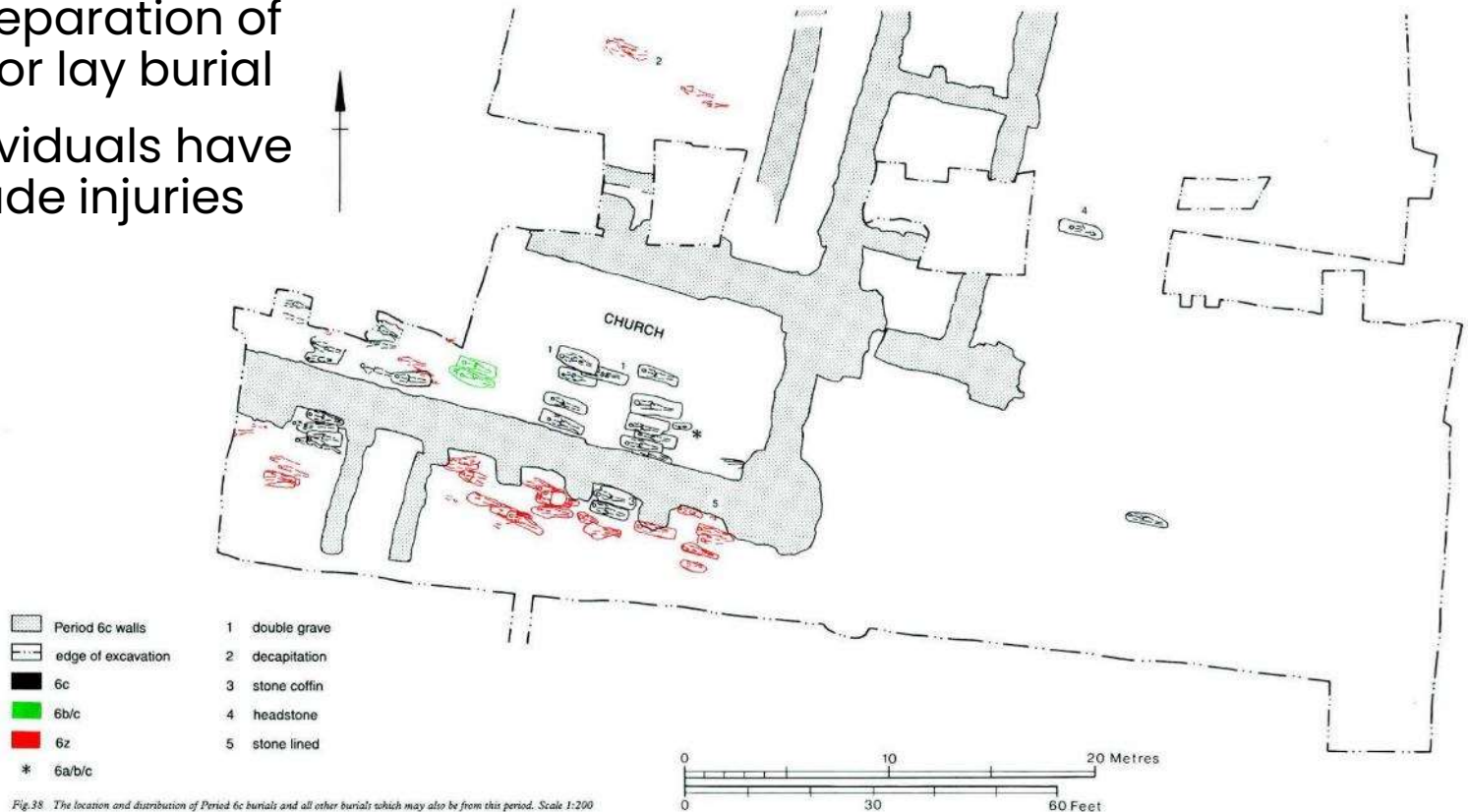


Fig.38 The location and distribution of Period 6c burials and all other burials which may also be from this period. Scale 1:200

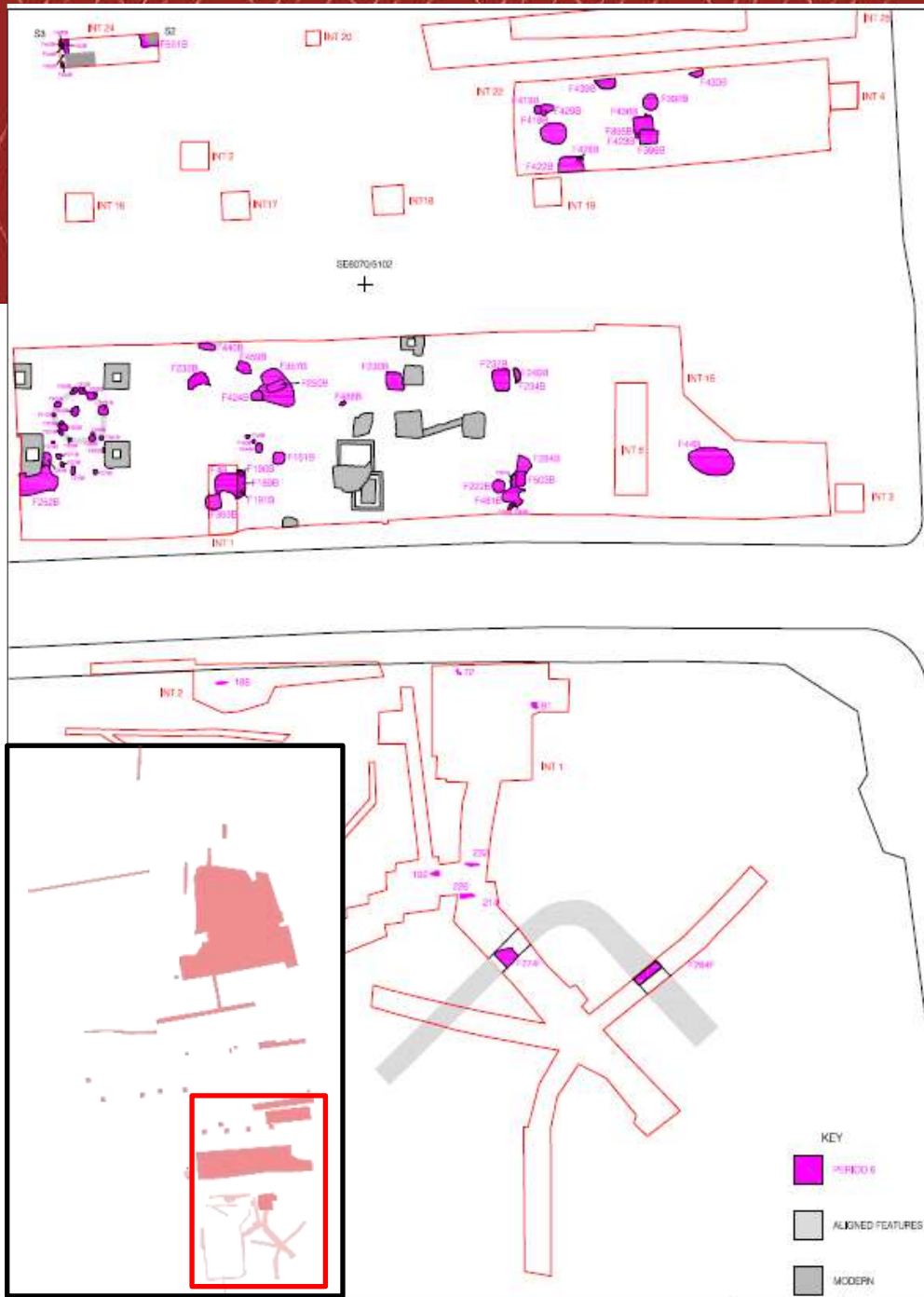
Monastic health and lifestyle

- The burials are the only evidence of lifestyle
- Over 50% of the 190 burials were aged 40+
- Health issues mostly degenerative joint diseases and dental loss
- 'Famous' examples:
 - DISH (fat monks?)
 - Schmorl's nodes
 - 'Gazza' knee



Life in the Priory: c.1202–c.1335

- 1985/6 work didn't locate kitchens or waste disposal
- 2001/4 work investigated the Priory precinct: found precinct wall
- Extensive rubbish pits and unidentified structures
- Rich, high-status diet
- Clean, unscavenged environment



Life in the Priory: c.1335–c.1538



- The 2001/4 works identified a phase of 14th century industrial activity
- Clay quarrying, metal working, and a probable pottery kiln for Humber type wares
- At the time, the first medieval kiln found in York
- Backfilled with refuse into the 16th century

The end of the Priory

- Gilbertine Order voluntarily surrendered their holdings to the crown in 1538
- Pensions were awarded to the Prior and remaining canons
- The church rapidly went out of use and its precinct reverted to orchards
- Glass factory 1790s; gradual development through the 19th and 20th centuries
- Glass production ended in 1983



Part 2: FINDS FROM FISHERGATE

- A fairly brief slideshow of artefacts from Fishergate
- Lucy will talk through some of the artefacts from the 2021-23 excavations
- Ian will talk about the archaeology in more detail using the published plans and the Gilbertine Priory model

Roman: AD 71 – c.410



Fragments of a Roman sarcophagus, re-used in a 13th century burial at the Priory

The inscription commemorates the burial of a decurion (cavalry officer) by two men called [...]*cus* and M(arcus) Aurel(ius) Ir[..*us*

At least 3rd century in date

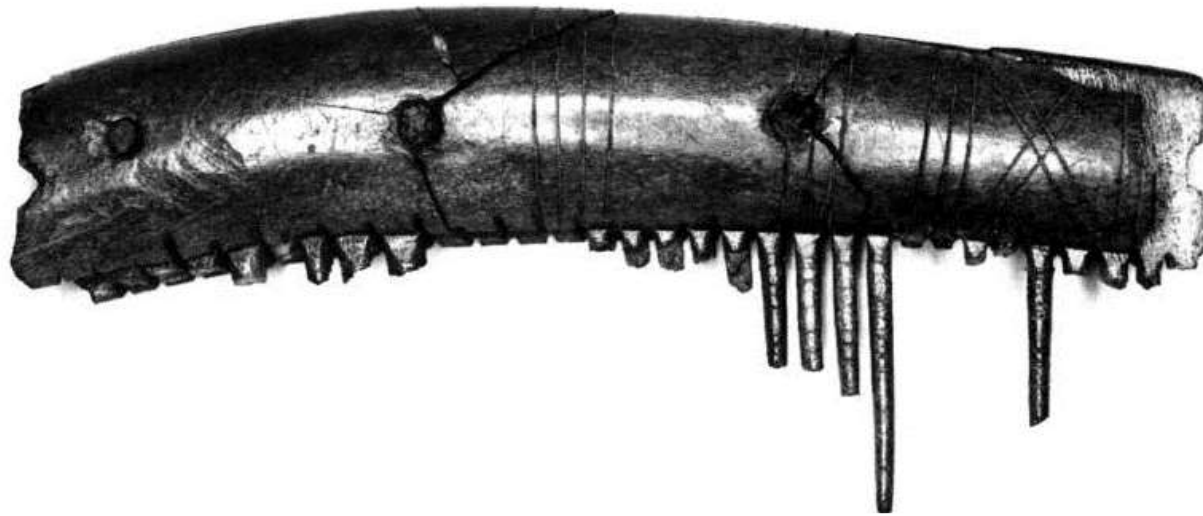
Roman:
AD 71 – c.410



Cremation burials excavated by FAS in 2001/4

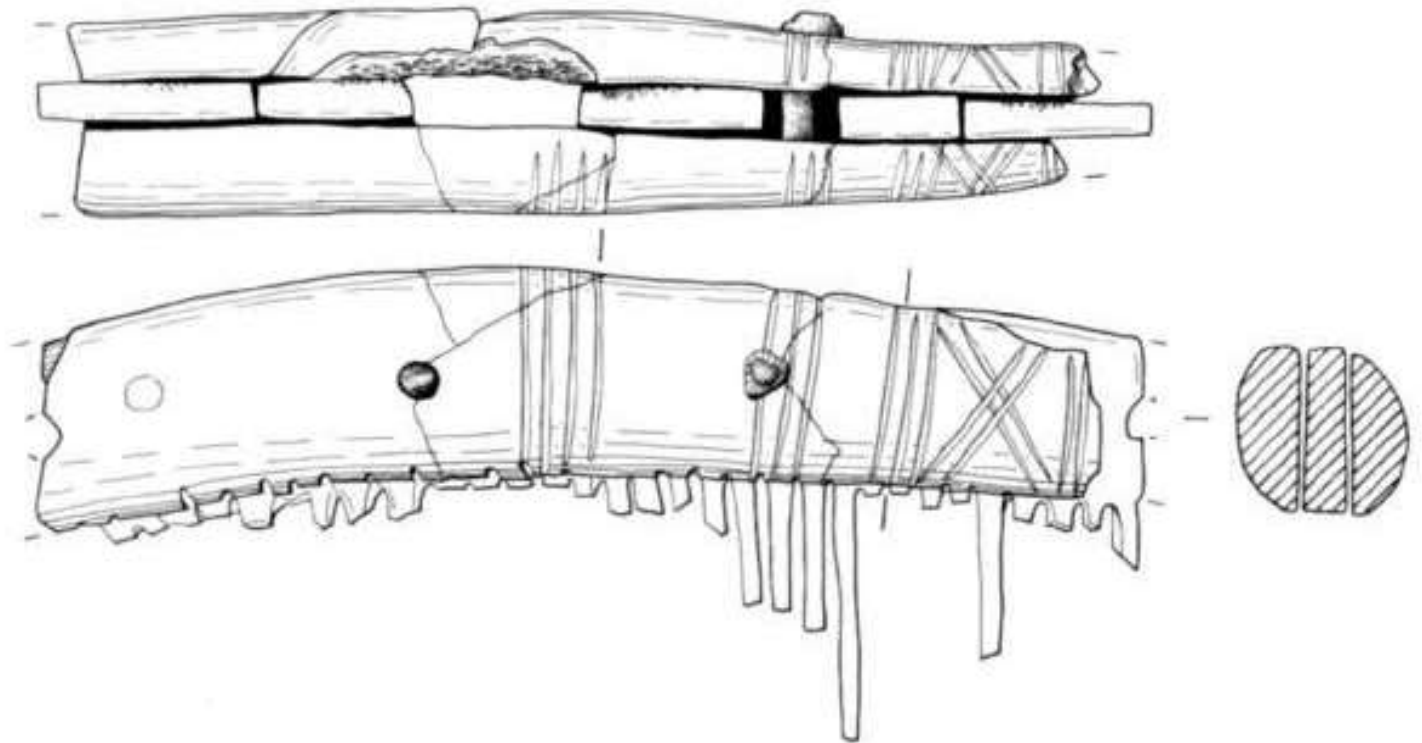
Juvenile burials in Grey Ware jars, some with Ebor Ware flagons: may represent a family group or a burial club



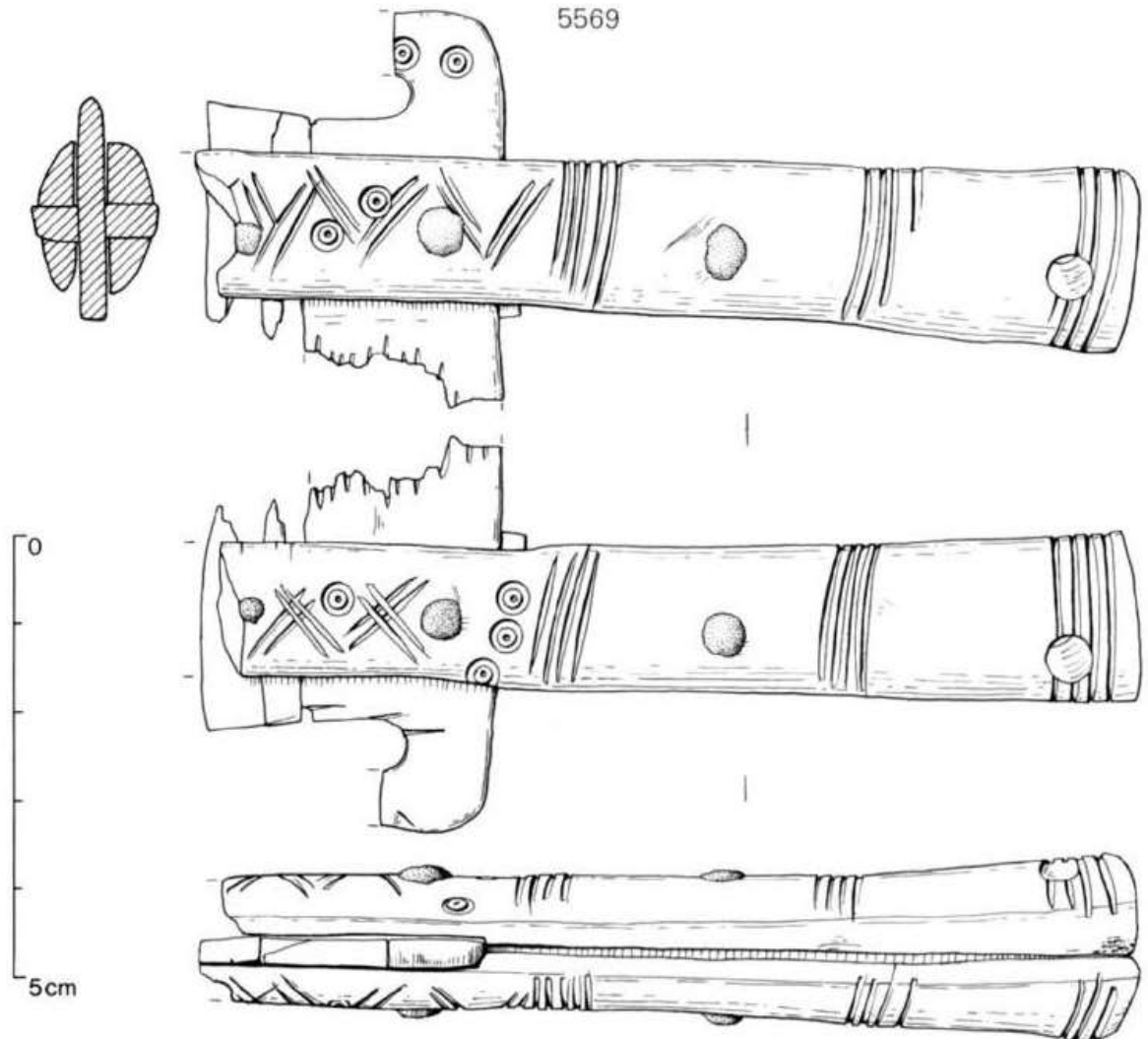


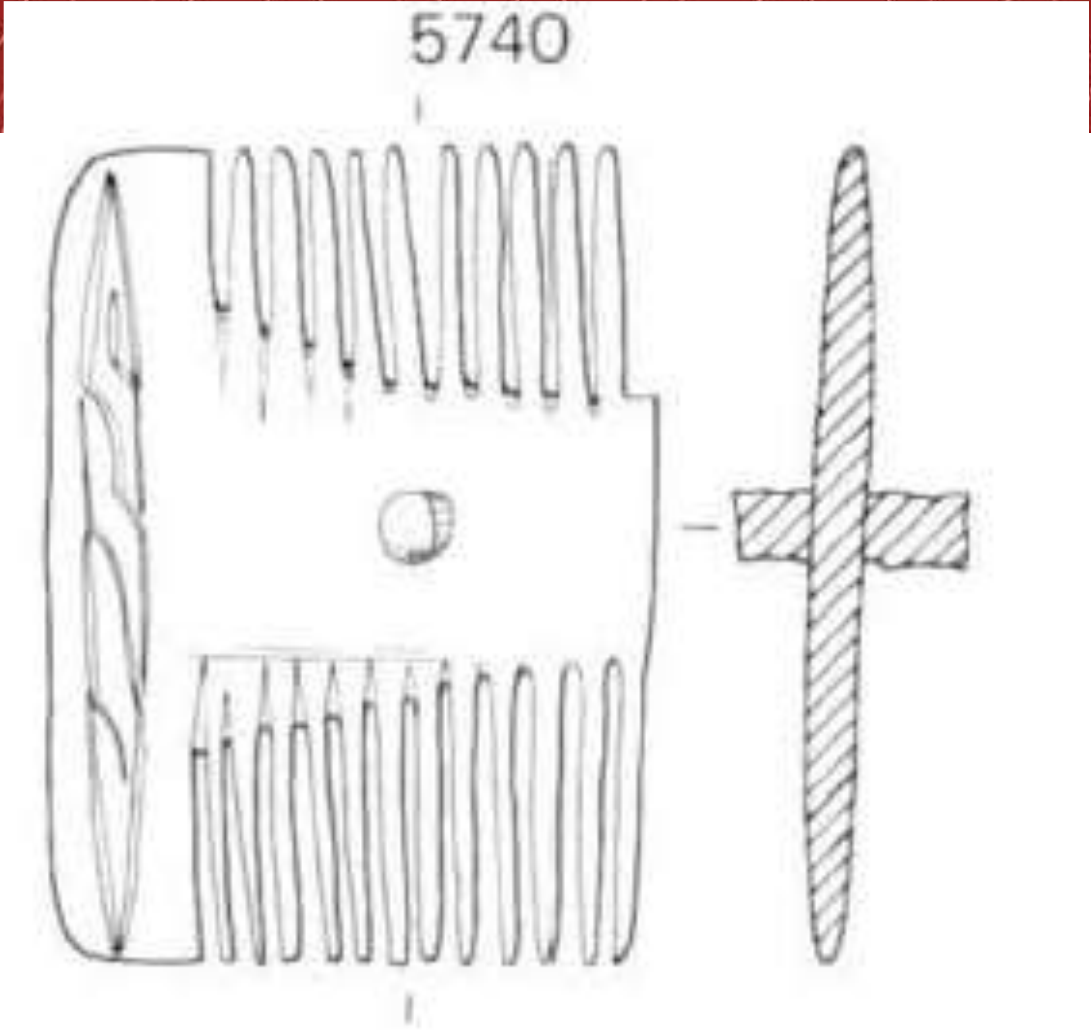
Anglian: worked
antler and bone

5698



Anglian: worked antler and bone



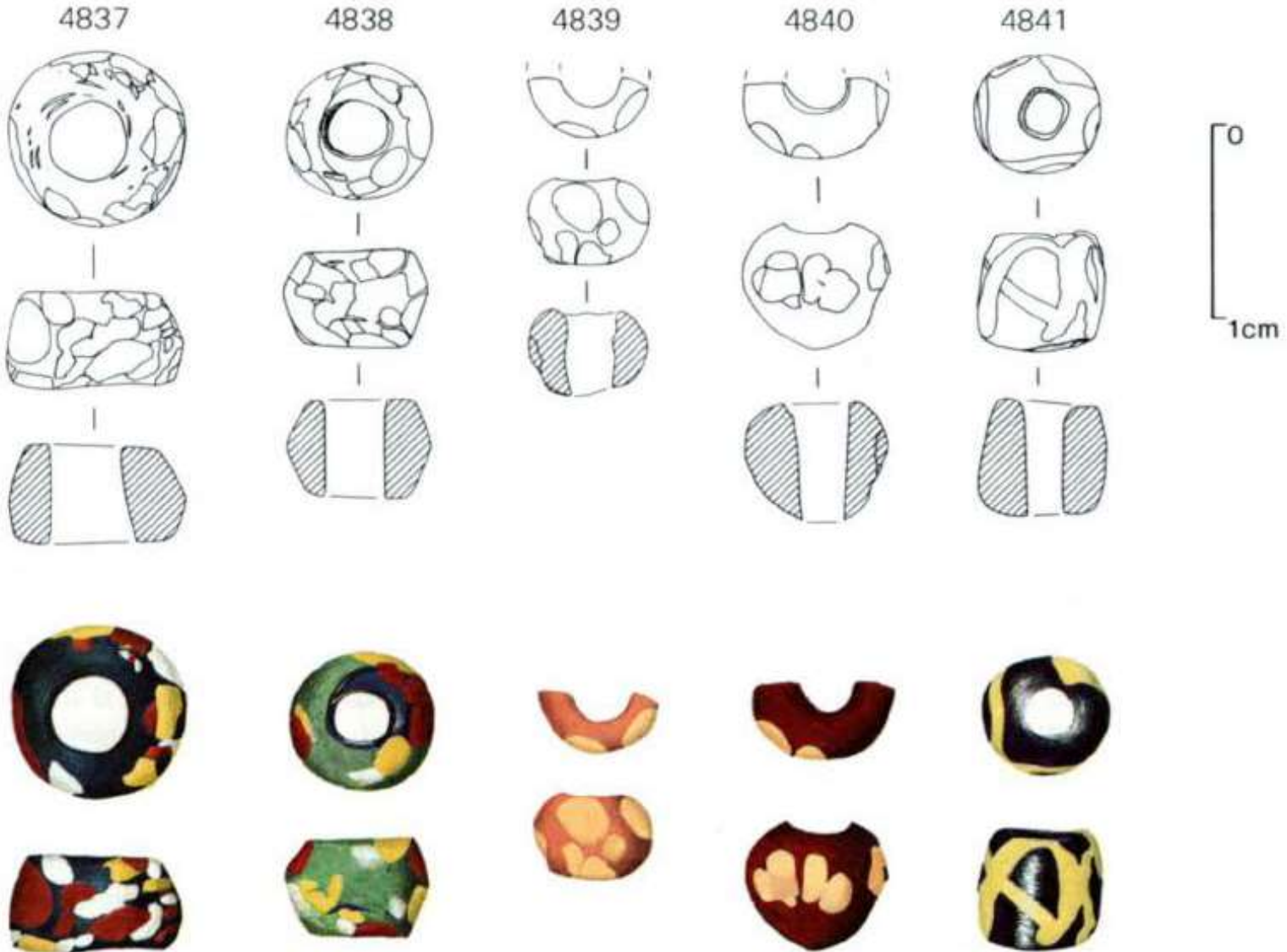




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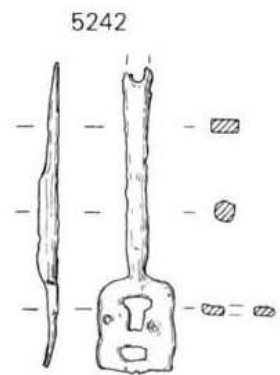
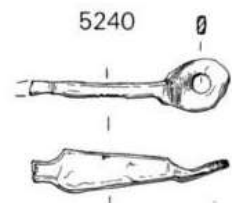
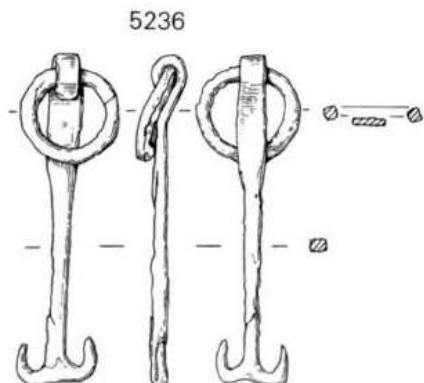
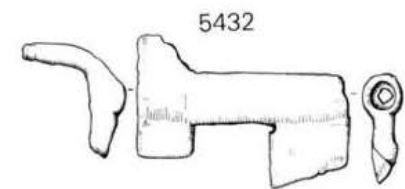
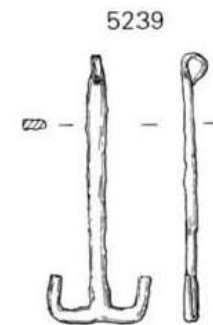
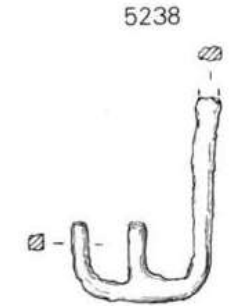
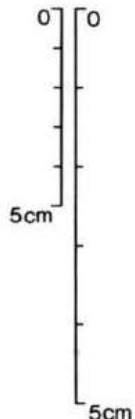
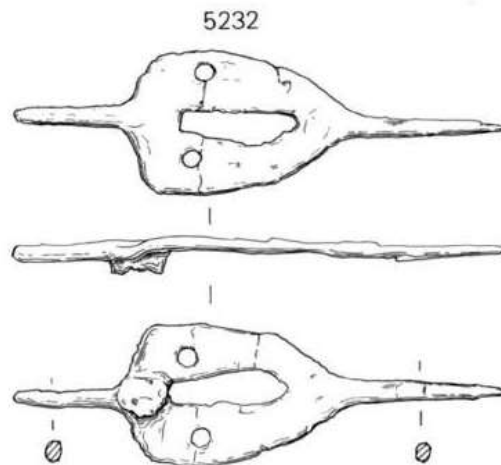
Anglian: glass beads

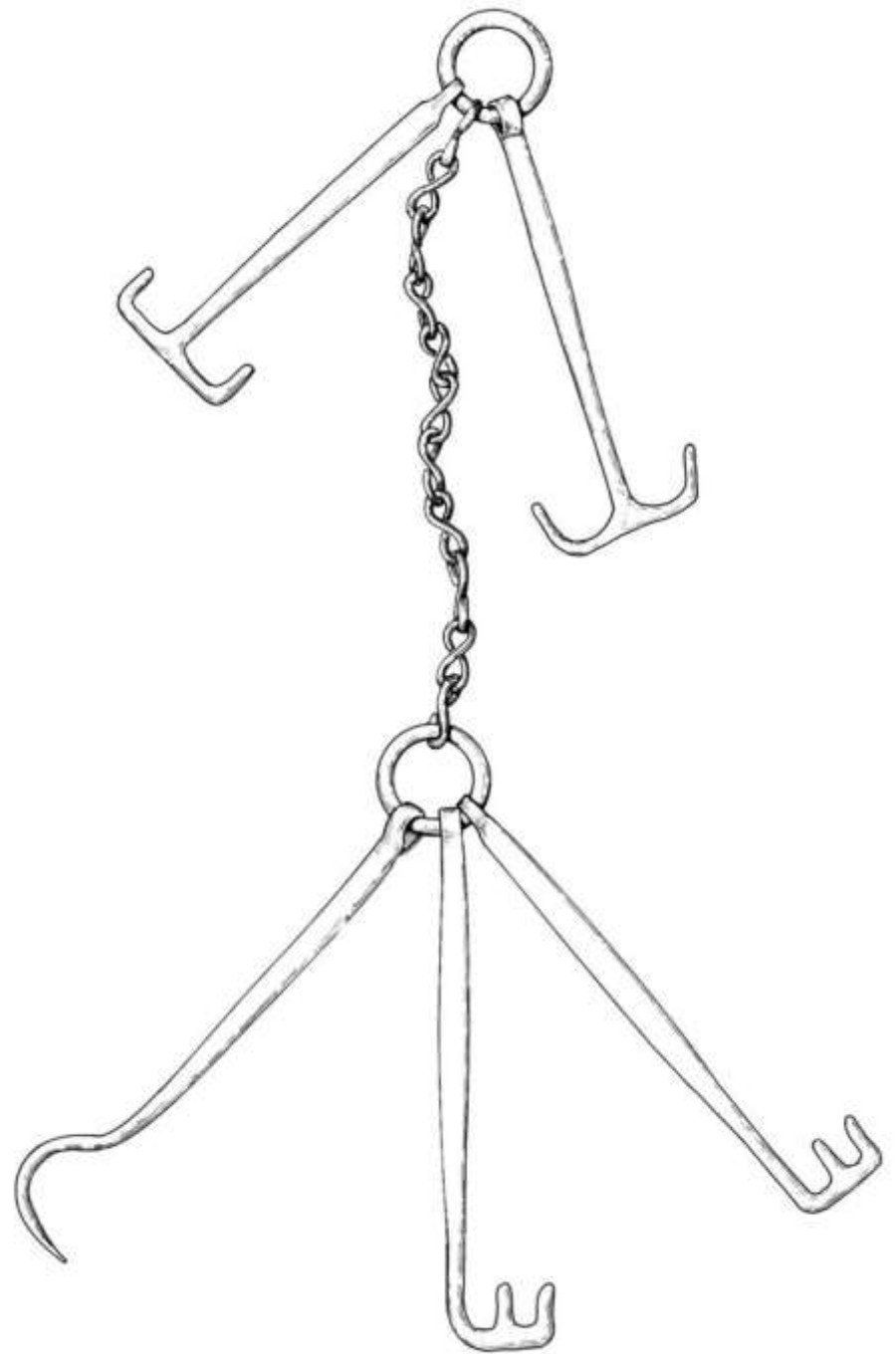


Anglian metal work

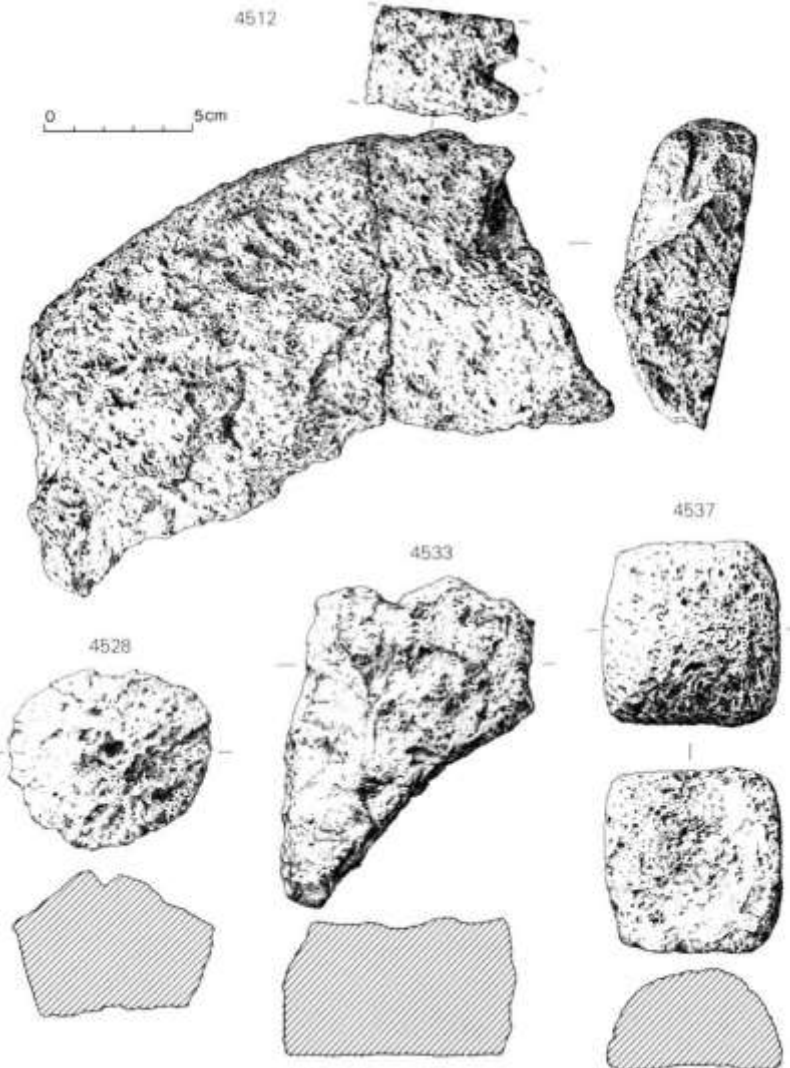
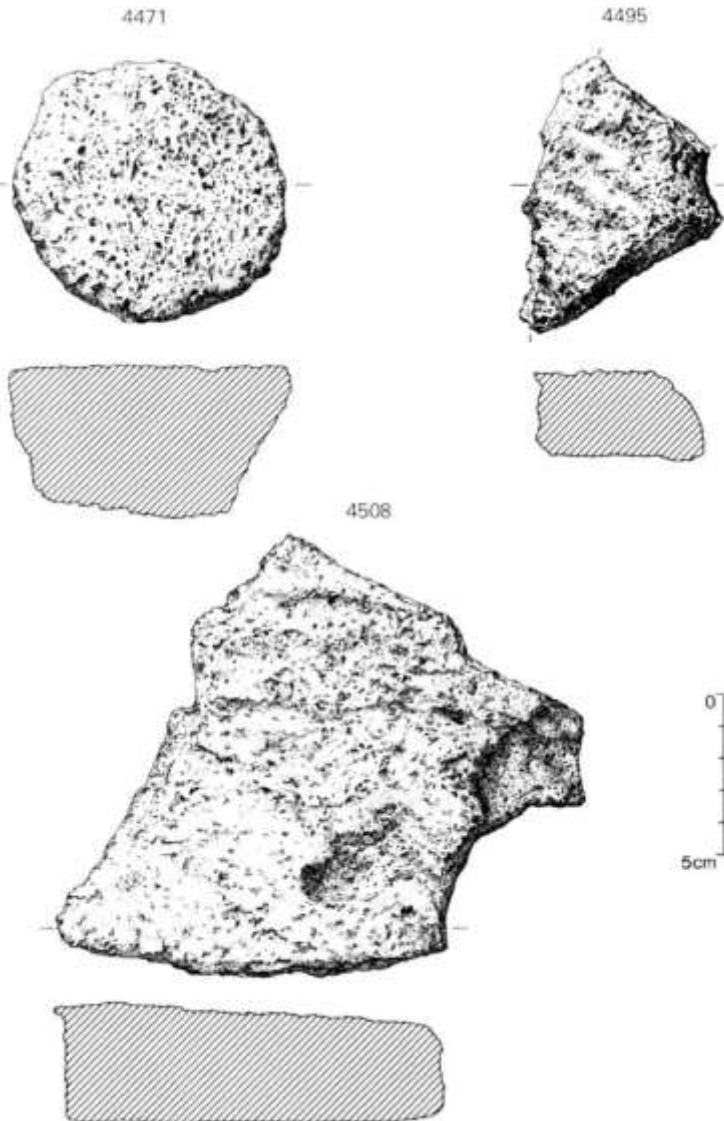


Anglian metal work





Anglian: imported lava querns



Medieval grave goods: 13th – 16th centuries



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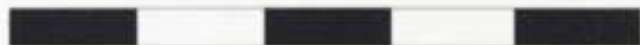


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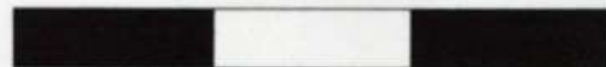


- All from FAS 2001/4 investigation of the Priory precinct

Medieval artefacts from refuse pits



centimetres



- All from FAS 2001/4 investigation of the Priory precinct

Community Project: an idea



- I heard so many stories from Fishergate people during the Open Day
- Many have been gathered before
- Can we find more and bring them together with the archaeology of the Rialto?

