

# Before *Eoforwic*: New Light on York in the 6th–7th Centuries

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*ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS by Field Archaeology Specialists in 2002 outside the walls of York have revealed new evidence for the elusive transition between the Roman and Viking city. At Heslington Hill, in the campus of the present University of York, an early-Anglo-Saxon settlement dates from c AD 550 to AD 650. In the 7th century a new settlement began 2 km westwards on the same glacial moraine. This was the site of Eoforwic at Fishergate on the River Ouse, investigated in the 1980s and here revisited with additional evidence from excavations in 2000–01. The ceramic assemblage suggests that the two communities were connected.*

As a major centre in the Roman and early medieval periods, the city of York (North Yorkshire) represents an invaluable barometer of social change in 1st millennium AD England. The city has been subject to intense levels of archaeological intervention over the last 30 years, much undertaken in the context of developer-led evaluation and excavation. The transition between the Roman and Viking cities remains the most elusive period at York as elsewhere, but investigations have, in places, encountered stratified relevant remains, although these have sometimes been ambiguous and poorly dated.<sup>3</sup> This paper offers two new sightings of the transition period: an early-Anglo-Saxon settlement (6th–7th century) from just outside the city, and an extension to the Anglo-Saxon settlement (7th–9th century) already known at Fishergate. Both these settlements occupy the same gravel terrace and are only 2 km apart. Examination of the pottery hints at a direct association between the two.

The city of York has its origins in the Roman fortress of *Eboracum*, established at the confluence of the Rivers Ouse and Foss in the 1st century AD, followed by the development of a *colonia* on the opposite bank of the river (Fig 1).

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<sup>3</sup> Christie and Loseby 1996, especially Roskams on York; Carver 1993; 1995; Collins and Gerrard 2004, especially Faulkner.

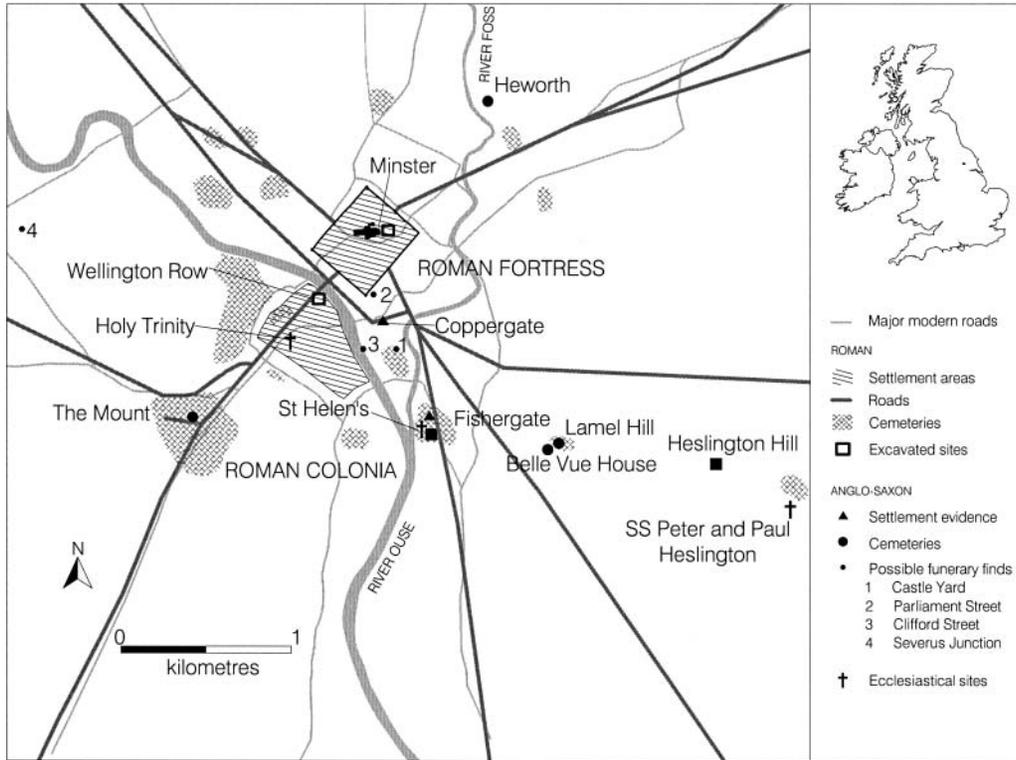


FIG 1

Location of sites mentioned in the text. © *Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

The city hosted a major urban centre of population throughout the Roman period, detected archaeologically widely across the city. After the 5th century, however, the fate of Roman York becomes less than clear. Historically, there are no records of the city between the early 4th century, when Constantine was proclaimed Emperor and a York bishop was recorded as present at the Council of Arles, and the early 7th century, when Pope Gregory expressed an ambition for York to become the second metropolitan see of Britain.<sup>4</sup> By the time Bede wrote his *History* in the early 8th century, York had become a major ecclesiastical centre, and Bishop Egbert received the pallium there in 735, the year that Bede died. By the end of the 8th century, when Alcuin wrote his poem, York was an ‘emporium’ and had a colony of Frisians, as well as being a major Christian centre with several churches.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Anonymous Valesianus* in Rollason 1998, 10, 43–4, 46; Rivet and Smith 1979, 49–50; *HE* I.29; Rollason 1998, 46; 1999, 118.

<sup>5</sup> James in Phillips and Heywood 1995, 10.

Archaeologists have identified at least three, possibly four, centres of 8th-century activity: a cemetery with grave-markers under York Minster;<sup>6</sup> Coppergate where an 8th-century helmet was found; Fishergate on the bank of the River Ouse, where excavations have unearthed a 7th–9th century settlement;<sup>7</sup> and less certainly in the *colonia*, south-west of the Ouse.<sup>8</sup> In general, a revival of York by the 8th century is not in doubt, and the Fishergate evidence best archaeologically documents *Eoforwic*, York's Anglo-Saxon emporium.<sup>9</sup> The role of the city in the previous 300 years is rather more contentious. On the best evidence available, from under the present Minster, *Eboracum* was certainly occupied until the 5th century. Carver has effectively challenged the idea that Roman buildings were used or even stood in the centre of the legionary fortress after that time.<sup>10</sup> Only casual finds, without settlement evidence, have been found in the area of the *principia* before the first burials arrive. This means that it is presently impossible to say if, or how, the centre of York was exploited during the 5th, 6th and arguably the 7th century.

Nevertheless, activity of some kind is expected. Looking back a hundred years, Bede records that Edwin was baptised at York in 627 in a hastily constructed timber church,<sup>11</sup> and his head was buried there in 633 in a church of St Peter that he had started to build, and which his successor, Oswald, completed.<sup>12</sup> Theodore consecrated bishops in York in 678.<sup>13</sup> These events are assumed to refer to the old legionary fortress, where St Peter's Minster now stands, which means there has always been a *prima facie* case for extrapolating the life of the Minster back to the early 7th century. Elsewhere, there are 5th-century Anglo-Saxon cremation burials at The Mount and at Heworth, which may imply an association with Roman York, or at least knowledge of its geography.<sup>14</sup> Otherwise, the place appears to be deserted and we can still say, with Edward James, 'If there is no certain archaeological evidence for a continued Romano-British or British presence in York in the 5th and 6th centuries, there is also no evidence for a takeover by the Anglo-Saxon newcomers'.<sup>15</sup> Even discounting continuity, this leaves the question of York's revival wide open. Was it refounded as an act of historical piety by 7th-century churchmen who knew it had been the seat of a Roman bishop? Or was it a pagan Anglo-Saxon place, already in a state of development before the emergence of Anglo-Saxon *Eoforwic*? The two recent investigations reported here raise the question of early-Anglo-Saxon predecessors for York and have enlarged the evidence for the earliest Anglo-Saxon presence.

<sup>6</sup> Lang 1995, 434–8. Some of the stelae may be earlier, although Lang remarks (p 435) 'To hang the argument on half a marigold with its 7th-century connection is naturally perilous'.

<sup>7</sup> Kemp 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Tweddle et al 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Kemp 1996; Rollason 1998; 1999; Tweddle et al 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Carver 1995, 177–205; Phillips' model for Roman continuity is summarised on p 195.

<sup>11</sup> *HE* II.14.

<sup>12</sup> *HE* II.20.

<sup>13</sup> *HE* IV.12.

<sup>14</sup> Stead 1958; Tweddle et al 1999, 170, 233.

<sup>15</sup> James in Phillips and Heywood 1995, 9.

## HESLINGTON HILL

## LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

Heslington Hill lies to the south of the city of York, in an area now occupied by the University of York. A strip of glacial moraine runs west from the hill to meet the River Ouse just south of the city. On this moraine lie prehistoric remains, the two tumuli of Lamel Hill and Siward's Howe, and the Anglo-Saxon settlements at Fishergate and Heslington reported here. Archaeological investigation in the area has not been intense, but chance finds, archaeological monitoring and antiquarian accounts indicate activity in the area from prehistory to the modern day.<sup>16</sup> Artefactual evidence has suggested Neolithic and Bronze-Age activity focused on the upper slopes of the moraine, believed to be a thoroughfare throughout prehistory.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent Iron-Age and Roman activity shifted to the lower ground around Heslington village. Richly furnished Roman burials and evidence for high-status structures suggests a landscape of élite villa estates.<sup>18</sup>

The place-name of the village, Heslington, is Old English in derivation, interpreted as 'farmstead near the hazel woods', suggesting early-medieval settlement in the vicinity.<sup>19</sup> The 19th-century discovery of the cemetery at Lamel Hill, to the west of the village, provides further evidence: a series of inhumation burials cut into a low mound containing a cremation of possible, though uncertain, Roman date.<sup>20</sup> Artefacts associated with these inhumations, and those discovered in the immediate vicinity in the 1980s, have led to a 7th- to 8th-century date being widely accepted.<sup>21</sup> Situated on Heslington Hill, the enigmatic mound now known as Siward's Howe may also represent an Anglo-Saxon tumulus. Although the *hlaew* name itself is suggestive, this is a misnomer because a cartographic error transferred the name from Lamel Hill.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, the identification of medieval ridge and furrow overlying the mound, and an undated inhumation recovered near its base, support its identification as a possible early-medieval (or prehistoric) monument.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the construction of the campus in the 1960s, this was a rural landscape; the village of Heslington retains a later medieval plan, with tofts fronting onto the main street, surrounded by larger enclosed fields.<sup>24</sup>

## RESULTS OF EXCAVATION

Investigation at Heslington Hill was necessitated by large-scale development of the N campus of the University of York in 2002 (NGR: SE 6235 5085), more specifically the construction of a car park and medical school building.

<sup>16</sup> FAS 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Radley 1974; McNab 2004, 184.

<sup>18</sup> Sheahan and Whellan 1856, 625; Colley 1992, 3; Allason-Jones 1996, 21; McNab 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Smith 1970, 274.

<sup>20</sup> Thurnham 1849; 1855.

<sup>21</sup> Briden 1984a; 1984b; Tweddle et al 1999, 233.

<sup>22</sup> Ramm 1966, 587.

<sup>23</sup> Short 1994; Yorkshire Archaeological Trust online Gazetteer 1980.1029.

<sup>24</sup> Ordnance Survey First Edition, 1853.

Mitigation took the form of a watching brief. The watching brief encountered intact archaeological deposits that had been truncated and then buried during modern landscaping episodes. Two areas of archaeology exposed during the groundworks, allocated Intervention 1 and 2, were investigated (Fig 2). Annette Roe supervised fieldwork and the authors were responsible for post-excavation, analysis and reporting.

### *Intervention 1*

Intervention 1, measuring 5129 sq m, was situated to the north of the J B Morrell Library and to the immediate east of 'Siward's Howe'. Groundworks for the car park required the preparation of a level area resulting in greater truncation of landscaping deposits to the west, and less landscaping to the east. As a result, the development only exposed remains at the western side of the area: a series of small pits and a large depression, which contained a shallow sequence of strata overlying natural glacial subsoil. Most of the sub-oval pits (F1 to F3, F5 and F6) produced animal bone, while two (F1 and F2) produced Roman Greyware and Samian; the latter also produced a sherd of early-Anglo-Saxon pottery.

The large natural depression, formed by undulation in the underlying glacial make-up, had captured deposits representing a small surviving area of stratified archaeology, which had once probably been more extensive. The

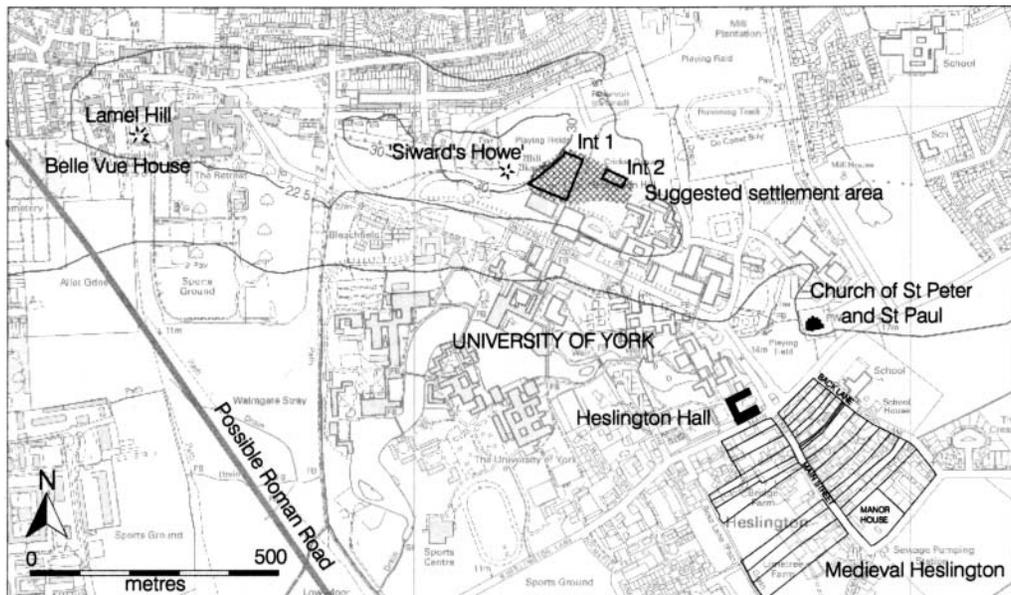


FIG 2

Heslington Hill and surrounding landscape. © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey Rights Reserved (with additions by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd).

earliest identified layer was a buried soil (C1015) that contained abraded Roman ceramic, overlain by C1010, a dark brown clayey sand deposit, levelling the natural hollow. The deposit was poorly defined in plan, disappearing eastwards beneath landscaping layers, but where exposed measured approximately 70 sq m. All of the available deposit was excavated by hand with a proportion subject to fine-mesh (1 mm) sieving and flotation. The material assemblage recovered included early-Anglo-Saxon pottery, animal bone, an iron blade, slag and two fragments of annular loomweight. The soil-sampling regime brought rewards with the recovery of a bichrome glass bead, hammerscale and carbonised grain.

### *Intervention 2*

Positioned 95 m to the east of Intervention 1, the landscaping required for the construction of the new medical building exposed a second area of intact archaeology beneath a substantial build-up of modern ground. The excavated area was more restricted, being a small window of 893 sq m, but revealed the edge of a second deposit trapped within a natural depression on the W side of the intervention. An area of this deposit was available for excavation between two construction piles.

Excavation revealed a primary deposit of dark brown sandy clay (C1020 = C1021) that produced Roman and early-Anglo-Saxon pottery, animal bone, slag and a fragment of sandstone whetstone. The same soil-sampling regime recovered two beads, one opaque white, the other translucent white with turquoise trail decoration, and more charred grain.

### THE MATERIAL ASSEMBLAGE

These midden-like deposits and pits therefore produced a tantalising variety of material, the most notable of which consisted of stamped and bossed, hand-made pottery and glass beads. Subsequent analysis of more mundane artefacts and ecofacts permits an interpretation of the material as domestic in origin and not, as we originally thought, as redeposited funerary remains. The soil sampling recovered no human bone, burnt or otherwise.

### *The pottery*

By Dr Ailsa Mainman, Dr Alan Vince and Diana Briscoe

The analytical programme involved the detailed recording and description of the vessels, comparison with two contemporary assemblages from cemeteries near York (Heworth and The Mount) and thin-section and ICPS analysis to determine clay sources. This reveals that the pottery assemblage contained an estimated ten vessels, two of which were decorated with combinations of incised lines, stamps and applied bosses (Fig 3). The chronology proposed for the group is based on form and decoration, with a small amount of supporting evidence from one or two other sherds and some associated glass beads. A small, fragmentary group such as this is not closely datable, but suggests a date of manufacture in the second half of the 6th century.

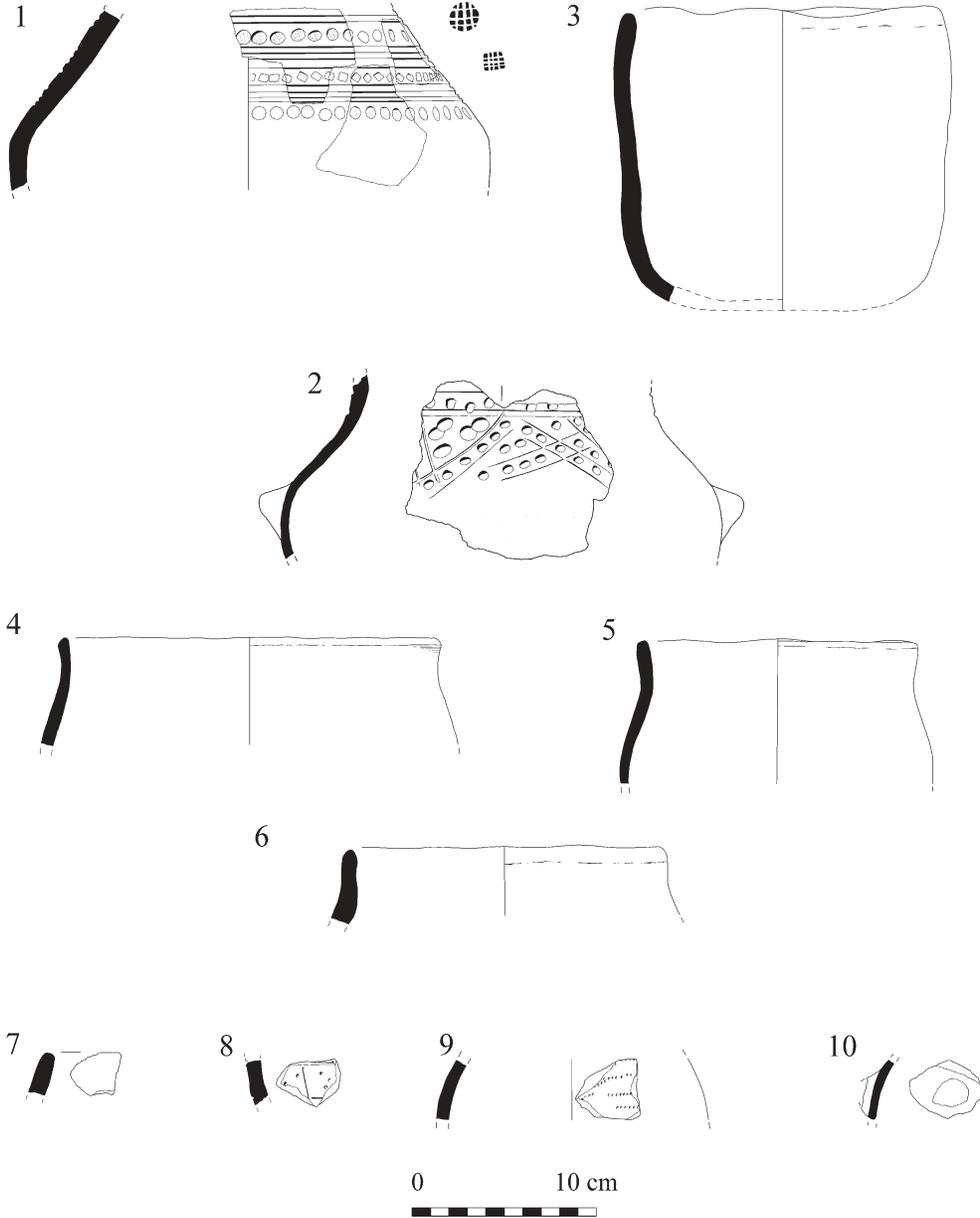


FIG 3

Early-Anglo-Saxon pottery from Heslington Hill. *Drawn by R Jackson. © Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

Of the ten vessels, Vessels 1 and 2 were elaborately decorated biconical pots, while Vessels 8 and 9 showed less formal decoration in the form of random line and stab decoration and comb teeth-impressed line decoration. Vessel 3 represented a small bag-shaped vessel with irregular straight-sided walls. It

belongs with a group of plain vessels thought to have a long chronology, although Myres pointed to examples found with 6th-century metalwork.<sup>25</sup> Vessels 4 to 7 inclusive, and Vessel 10, were represented by two or less sherds and probably derive from undecorated vessels. Two undecorated vessels (Vessel 3 and 4) notably displayed sooting on the exterior and interior surfaces suggesting use in cooking.

Vessel 1 was made very confidently and competently, decorated on the shoulder with what Myres called 'panel-style decoration': a horizontal arrangement of groups of four incised lines separate three zones of stamps (Briscoe Types A3aiv and F2aiv).<sup>26</sup> The decoration of Vessel 2 comprised a neck ring of stamps (Briscoe Type A1bi) within two horizontal incised lines. Below this, on the shoulder, hangs a loose arrangement of swags forming triangles, each delineated by two incised lines that create triangular zones that are in turn filled with simple stamps (Briscoe Type A3bi). The whole scheme is informal and the stamps overlap each other as well as cutting into the incised lines. All the stamps are enclosed either in triangular or linear zones. On the surviving sherds these zones are limited to the shoulder area and do not occur below the group of three bosses that mark the carination. It is unclear whether there is a continuous line of bosses as on, for example, a vessel from Girton (Cambridgeshire), or whether the bosses occur in groups as, for example, Caistor by Norwich (Norfolk).<sup>27</sup> The stamps on Vessels 1 and 2 were compared to known sites within a 20-mile radius; it is of interest that the two nearby cemetery sites at The Mount and Heworth produced relatively few parallels. There is, however, a strong connection with Sancton; all the motifs appear at Sancton (Humberside), except A3bi.

Only a single sherd represents Vessel 9, this time with comb teeth point decoration and, although the sherd is small, a rounded shape is suggested. The use of comb point may represent an attempt to imitate rouletting and there are similar examples from Kent, Essex and the Midlands.<sup>28</sup> This technique of decoration has no parallels in the Heworth or Mount assemblages. The form of the decoration and the unusual fabric suggests that this vessel may have come from outside the area, and the East Midlands is suggested.

Thin section and chemical analysis indicated that six of the nine samples (Vessels 1–6) are likely to have been of local origin, being typical of the early- to middle-Anglo-Saxon sandstone-sand-tempered fabrics from the Vale of York, and similar in character to samples from the middle-Anglo-Saxon settlement at 46–54 Fishergate, York. The remaining three samples consist of a vessel (Vessel 9) that contains polished quartz sand of lower Cretaceous origin for which a source in Lincolnshire is suggested; a chaff-tempered vessel (Vessel 10) whose silty fabric and chemical composition suggests it may have been a Thames-basin

<sup>25</sup> Myres 1977, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, fig 331, no 197; fig 311 1819.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, fig 362.

product and a leached limestone-tempered fabric (Vessel 7) that is certainly not a calcite-tempered ware from the Vale of Pickering and whose chemical composition and sand content suggests is a Vale of York product, but distinct from the main, sandstone-sand tempered group. The source of two of the non-local wares present reflects the trading contacts of the later middle-Anglo-Saxon settlement at 46–54 Fishergate where the two main non-local English wares come from Lincolnshire (Northern Maxey-type ware) and East Anglia (Ipswich ware).

### *The small finds*

Three glass beads, two small fragments of annular loomweight and a complete whittle-tang blade were the most notable other finds recovered from the midden deposits (Fig 4). The beads are the most closely datable component of the material archive, dating broadly to AD 550 to AD 650:<sup>29</sup> a complete small, opaque white glass, barrel-shaped bead and almost half a small bichrome disc-shaped bead of opaque white glass with double crossing trails of translucent turquoise (Koch type 34 white) may have been made in the Netherlands,<sup>30</sup> while the sharply biconical opaque blue with regular rows of opaque red spots (Dot Regular bead B1) was made in England.<sup>31</sup>

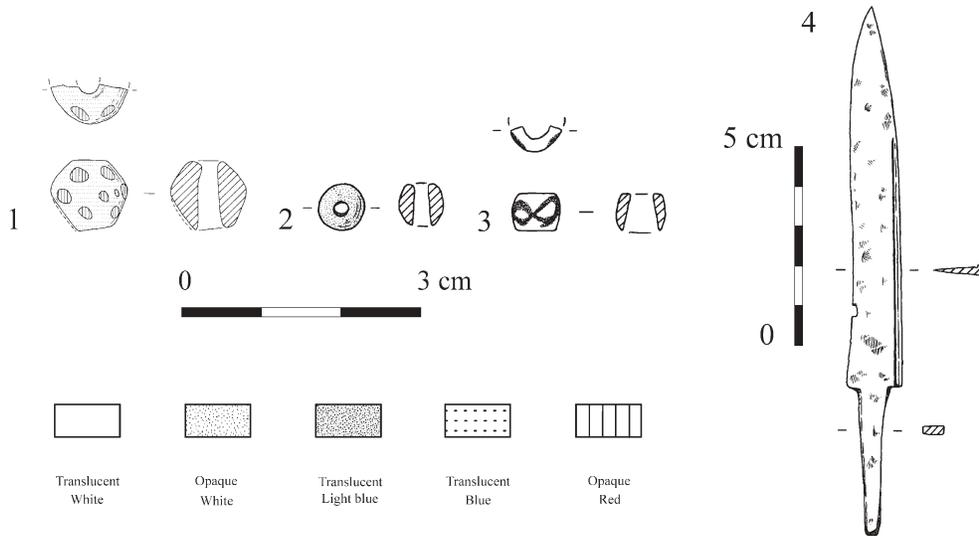


FIG 4

Early-Anglo-Saxon artefacts from Heslington Hill. (1) Bead (Find No 75). (2) Bead (Find No 73). (3) Bead (Find No 74). (4) Knife (Find No. 78). *Drawn by R Jackson. © Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

<sup>29</sup> Brugmann pers comm.

<sup>30</sup> Brugmann 2003, fig 173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

*The animal bone assemblage*

By Stephen Rowland

The investigations recovered approximately 100 litres of animal bone. The Anglo-Saxon midden assemblage appeared slightly bleached in colour with occasions of gnawing on fresh bone giving the impression of exposure for a time before deposition, which would be consistent with redeposited midden material. This factor will have favoured robust cattle bones to the detriment of more delicate juvenile animal bones, and pig and bird bones for instance. With this caveat, the assemblage consisted principally of cattle, caprovid and pig in descending order of quantitative representation, with horse, deer and fox bones also noted. There were no cattle younger than 18 months present in the assemblage: approximately 40% of animals were slaughtered as subadults (18 to 36 months); 22% as young adults (4 to 5 years); 25% (6 years); with a few elderly beasts accounting for the remainder.<sup>32</sup> Data for caprovid and pig was limited but suggested killing of 50% of sheep at prime meat age, while keeping others for breeding and some wool production, and pig exploitation was likely only for meat.

These proportions suggest that subsistence strategy relied heavily on cattle for a variety of products, meat, milk, hides, dung and traction. The assemblage does not have a typical dairying profile (predominant elderly females with high numbers of juveniles), nor that of an economy geared solely to beef production (predominant prime-beef aged animals), but meat production was clearly prominent. Evidence for sheep husbandry is limited, providing hints rather than concrete evidence, but almost half were slaughtered during prime-meat ages and the females could have produced two lambs by then, although it seems more likely that the more elderly individuals represented breeding stock. With limited evidence for proportions of wethers, rams and ewes, the reliance on sheep milk and wool is unclear, although the latter is likely to have been exploited at a self-sufficient level. The small proportion of pigs suggests breeding in small numbers as a convenient means of recycling domestic refuse into edible protein. The presence of horse, some of which were quite old, suggests that these beasts were used for traction on the light soil, although butchery marks demonstrate that the meat was not wasted either.<sup>33</sup> A small contribution may have been made by game, evidenced by the red deer remains, although this must have been on an opportunistic basis.

Overall, while the data are limited, the raising and consumption of large numbers of cattle within a self-propagating herd seems to have been the primary economic concern at Heslington Hill. It is reasonable to suggest that the settlement was self-sufficient, being situated in an area fertile enough to maintain a system of husbandry that was not geared to optimal food production or commodity productivity.

A horse metapodial that displayed evidence for butchery was sent for radiocarbon dating to test whether the domestic component of the middens

<sup>32</sup> Grant 1982; O'Connor 1989, 137–207.

<sup>33</sup> Aged using Levine 1982.

could be ascribed to contemporary deposition rather than being rubbish of a later period occupation mixed with residual funerary remains. The result, AD 430 to AD 640 at the 95% confidence level (GU-14198), helped to establish that the domestic component was contemporary, and supported identification as a domestic assemblage (Tab 1).

Comparative faunal assemblages for Heslington Hill are rare. The poorly preserved animal bone assemblage from Mucking (Essex) and the very large body of material from West Stow (Suffolk), both rural settlements dating from the 5th to 7th centuries, derive from economies based in different geographical, topographic and geological contexts to Heslington Hill.<sup>34</sup> It may therefore be difficult to compare patterns of production and consumption relating to social circumstances, when disparities could arise as much from a response to local environmental conditions as from cultural factors.

### *The carbonised grain*

By Allan Hall

Forty charred grains, recovered during flotation and sieving, were identifiable to genus as *Hordeum* (barley) and *Triticum* (wheat). The barley was identifiable as hulled two-row (not six-row) barley that, while less common during the Anglo-Saxon period, is nonetheless consistent with assemblages elsewhere. The grain was recovered to the exclusion of weed seeds and chaff and may therefore have been prepared for consumption and burnt in a domestic hearth.

### SITE INTERPRETATION

When first recovered, the excavators thought the material assemblages represented the redeposited remains of a small cremation cemetery. This was

TABLE 1  
RADIOCARBON DATES CITED IN TEXT

Lab code	Sample material	Lab age bp	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	Calibrated dates	
				1-sigma	2-sigma
GU-14198	Animal bone: horse metapodial	1505 ± 35	-22.6%	AD 535-610	AD 430-640
GU-12719	Human bone	1220 ± 35	-20.4%	AD 720-40 (6.7%) AD 770-880 (61.5%)	AD 680-890
GU-12722	Human bone	1030 ± 35	-19.1%	AD 980-1030	AD 890-930 (6.6%) AD 940-1050 (85.5%) AD 1090-1120 (3.3%)

<sup>34</sup> Done 1993; Crabtree 1990.

largely because the only Anglo-Saxon remains from the York area were restricted to funerary remains, decorated pottery is most commonly deposited as urns, and the proximity of the remains to the possibly early-medieval burial mound of Siward's Howe. It was in this light that Field Archaeology Specialists (with the approval of John Oxley, Principal Archaeologist, City of York Council) undertook analysis to explore the question of provenance of the midden material.

However, it became clear from the complete absence of human bone that the assemblage related to a settlement. The survival of the remains at Heslington Hill is due to the undulations of the glacial moraine. These hollows may have been used opportunistically as middens; the rubbish had certainly not travelled far considering the multi-herd representation of a few pots and the preservation of the glass beads and iron blade. The hollows lay below the level of 1960s landscaping, which was followed by the importation of a huge quantity of made ground (up to 3 m). Landscaping seems unlikely to have been the only factor favouring survival since aerial photographs of the moraine, and particularly near Siward's Howe, show the later medieval strip-field system extending across the area; a 1994 topographic survey of the monument also records this system.<sup>35</sup> So, it might be more likely that the undulations had preserved the remains below the level of furrows. The blanket of cultivation made the remains undetectable to prospection.

The remains recovered appear to be refuse deposits rather than living areas, but the distance of around 100 m between them implies settlement of substantial size or duration. Settlement evidence encountered on a large scale, such as Mucking and West Stow, is the result of a few homesteads shifting their focus over time.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Heslington, the two excavated areas probably represent two parts of the same settlement. Although the sample was small, the artefactual assemblage captured by this fortunate formation process is unusually rich for a settlement site. Heslington Hill appears to represent a small rural farming community that had settled on the closest upland to the Roman city by at least AD 550 and remained there into the 7th century.

The agricultural regime focussed on beef and grain production, a secondary reliance on sheep, with home-based wool production, and a tertiary contribution from pig; all being typical of early-Anglo-Saxon practice elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> The fragments of annular loomweight and small quantity of smithing slag and hammerscale suggest small-scale, domestic textile-working and maintenance of iron tools. Nonetheless, some opportunity for exchange at a small, local level must have been exploited using some surplus, since the pottery clay source and stylistic influences were all derived from within a limited radius, the Vale of York to the foothills of the Wolds. The glass beads represent the only 'exotica', two of which may have been traded from the Netherlands, although perhaps not directly.

<sup>35</sup> Short 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Hamerow 1991; 1993; 2002; West 1985.

<sup>37</sup> Crabtree 1984; Esmonde-Cleary 1995.

The archaeological assemblages, therefore, point to a rural population, practising a largely subsistence economy; the material assemblages are comparable to excavated examples, as is the site location, being an upland location on a gravel moraine that would have hosted lighter soils than the less well-drained, lower-lying clays.<sup>38</sup> Comparison with contemporary settlements suggests that a settlement of *grubenhäuser* and/or post-built structures occupied the upper slopes of the Heslington moraine.<sup>39</sup> Such sites are hitherto unknown in the immediate vicinity of York; the most obvious comparative site to Heslington Hill is West Heslerton, where archaeologists have studied over 20 ha of early- to middle-Anglo-Saxon occupation situated on higher, lighter soils.<sup>40</sup>

### FISHERGATE REVISITED

The best evidence for subsequent Anglo-Saxon occupation (7th–9th century) has emerged outside the fortress, on the eastern bank of the River Ouse at Fishergate. Excavations undertaken by York Archaeological Trust in the 1980s, in advance of development, encountered the archaeological remains of a settlement of late-7th- to 9th-century date: boundary ditches, postholes, stake-holes and pits, the fills of which were rich in material.<sup>41</sup> The interpretation is of a pre-determined organised settlement, with rectilinear, post-built structures, property divisions and a possible road with evidence for municipal maintenance. The material recovered attested to a range of craft activities, including bone- and antler-working, metal-working, glass-working, textile-working and possibly the processing of skins. The settlement was thought to have declined after the mid- to late-9th century, and a hiatus of activity occurred until the 12th century as Fishergate was ‘increasingly peripheral and suburban’.<sup>42</sup>

In 2000–01, Field Archaeology Specialists investigated middle-Anglo-Saxon remains that probably formed part of the same settlement, prior to development at Blue Bridge Lane, to the south of the earlier excavations (Figs 5 and 6).<sup>43</sup> This found further indications of property demarcation in the form of aligned pits, and evidence for occupation included a number of large pits, initially excavated to receive cess, but subsequently used opportunistically for the deposition of midden waste. The presence of such cesspits would imply constraints on space, adding to the image of an increasingly urbanised settlement. The use of the pits for rubbish disposal provided significant artefactual and craft-working assemblages and faunal assemblages.<sup>44</sup> The range of personal items recovered, including dress pins, bone combs, hooked tags, beads and tweezers, compares well with contemporary sites, not only ‘wic’ sites, but many other middle-Anglo-Saxon

<sup>38</sup> Hamerow 1992, 41–2.

<sup>39</sup> West 1985; Hamerow 1991; 1993; Losco-Bradley 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Powlesland et al 1986; Powlesland 1999; 2000, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Kemp 1996; Mainman 1993; Rogers 1993; O’Connor 1991.

<sup>42</sup> Rees Jones 1987, vol 1, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Spall and Toop 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Andrews 1997, 180, fig 79; 1988; Birbeck 2005, 101–3, figs 56 to 58; Malcolm and Bowsher 2003, 97, fig 86.

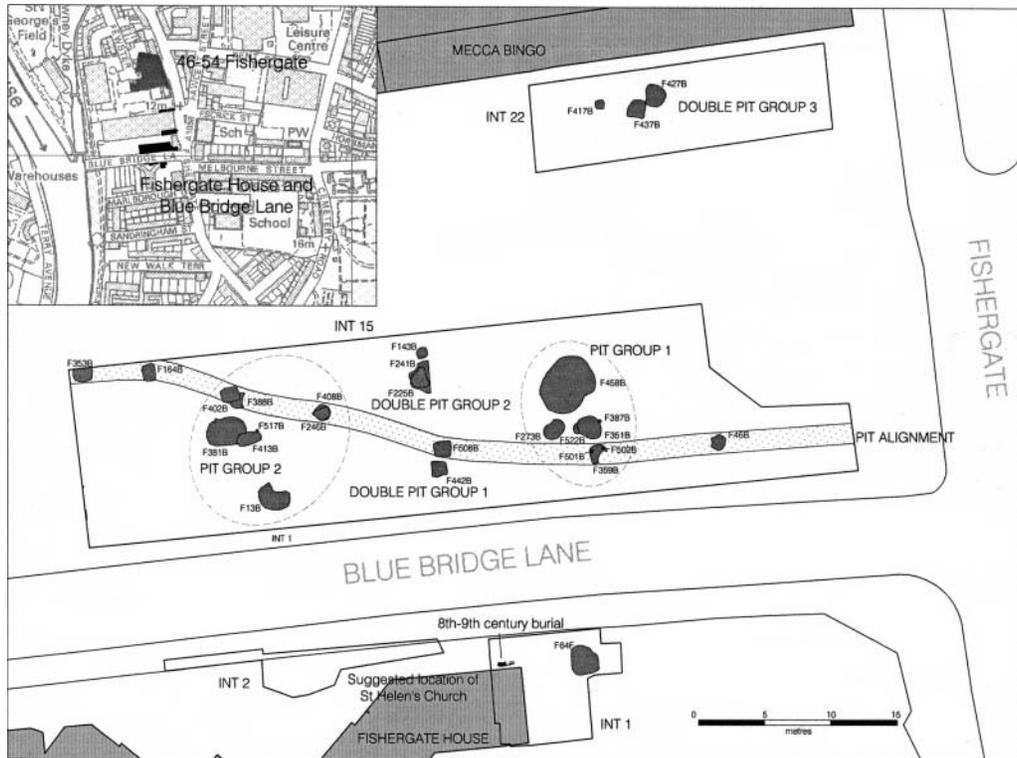


FIG 5

Excavations at Fishergate House and Blue Bridge Lane. © *Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

sites in North Yorkshire and Humberside (Cottam, Cowlam, Wharram Percy, Flixborough) (Figs 7 and 8).

The range of crafts being practised included principally bone-, antler- and horn-working, attested by large numbers of comb billets, blanks and cut horn-cores, and textile production evidenced by annular loomweights, spindlewhorls and a picker-cum-beater (Fig 8). Less substantial evidence for ironworking existed in the form of an assemblage of slag, although this may well have been practised only at a domestic maintenance level, as well as lead-alloy working. Scant evidence for glassworking came in the form of small misshapen blobs of glass, and a fine, Roman, carnelian intaglio prized from its setting and discarded indicated precious metal salvage. A large lump of raw amber might suggest intended conversion into beads or pendants, although it may have simply been for trade or exchange. Other items betrayed contact with Continental sites and took the form of fragmentary Mayen lavastone rotary querns, Rhenish glass, Badorfware cooking pots and Continental-issue sceatta. Pottery from Ipswich and Lincolnshire evidenced exchange with sites closer to home.

Animal bone from 18 of the Anglo-Saxon pits was analysed. Regardless of quantification technique, diet relied almost exclusively upon the main

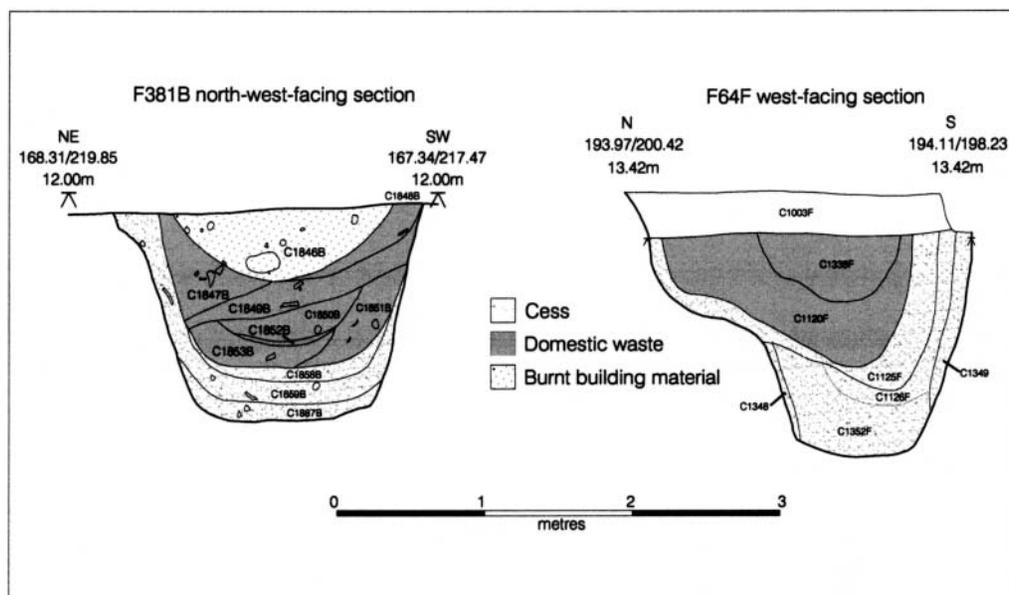


FIG 6

Sample sections of excavated Anglo-Saxon features at Blue Bridge Lane. © *Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

domesticates with only small input from wild mammals, birds and fish, a situation very similar to that noted at other contemporary urban sites including 46–54 Fishergate, and it is therefore probable that almost all of the food was imported, possibly as provisions, from the rural hinterland.<sup>45</sup> Neonatal bones of cattle, pigs and sheep were present, but were too rare to suggest anything more than limited husbandry activity, nonetheless the survival of these delicate remains is noteworthy. The relative importance of the domesticates at Blue Bridge Lane depended upon the quantification technique, but comparison with 46–54 Fishergate showed that sheep were more important in the diet at Blue Bridge Lane. This variation sits well with the more abundant evidence for wool processing and textile manufacture at Blue Bridge Lane.

A medieval cemetery dominated the archaeology of the adjacent development site, separated only by the route of Blue Bridge Lane itself. This belonged to the hitherto ‘lost’ Church of St Helen, Fishergate. Distinct from St Helen-on-the-Walls, this church was listed among the pre-Conquest foundations of the city, as it was granted to Holy Trinity Priory in 1086 as an existing church and toft.<sup>46</sup> A radiocarbon assay of two of the earliest burials laid out in stratigraphic ‘strings’, returned dates of AD 680 to AD 890 (GU-12719) and AD 940 to AD 1050 (GU-12722) (Tab 1). The first was unexpectedly early and suggests the presence of an inhumation cemetery contemporary with, and adjacent to, the Anglo-Saxon settlement remains. The origins of the church, already known to pre-date the

<sup>45</sup> O’Connor 1991.

<sup>46</sup> *ETC* 6, 67–8.

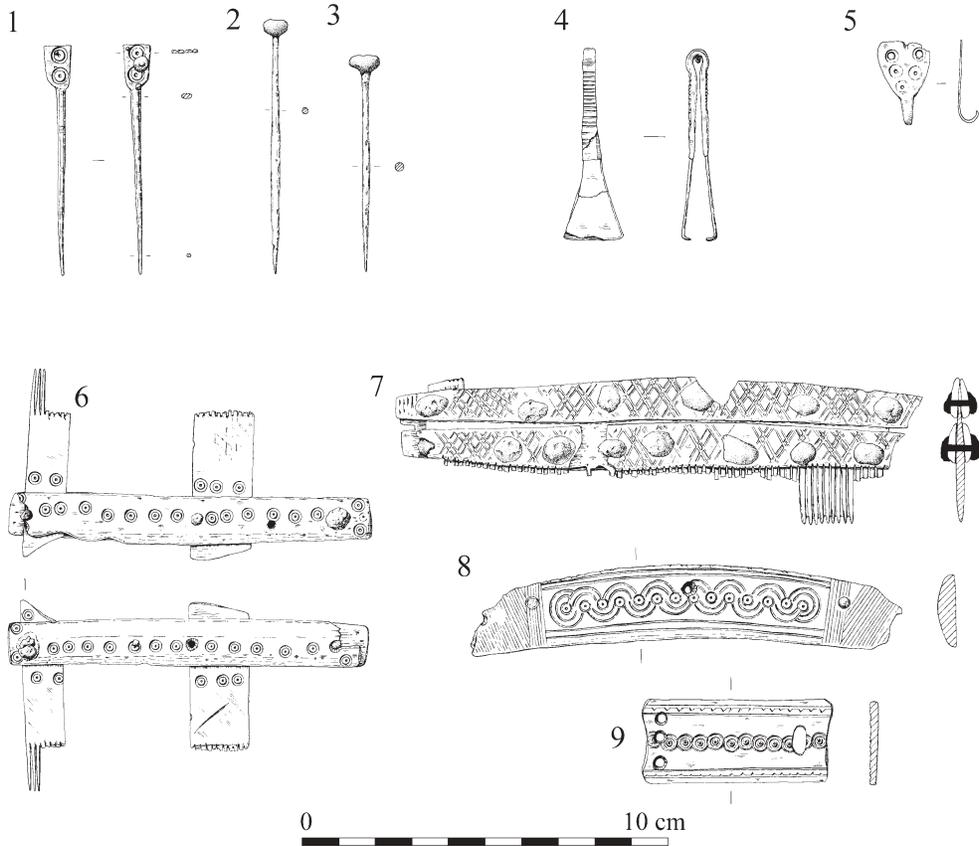


FIG 7

Personal items of Anglo-Saxon date from Fishergate. (1) Copper-alloy dress pin (Find No 2225). (2–3) Iron and lead-alloy dress pins (Finds Nos 3262 and 3472). (4) Copper-alloy tweezers (Find No 2226). (5) Copper-alloy garment hook (Find No 2179). (6–8) Bone combs (Finds Nos 2779, 2772, 2777). (9) Possible bone buckle plate (Find No 2785). *Drawn by R Jackson. © Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd.*

Conquest, may actually belong to the middle Anglo-Saxon period. Identification with the church of St Helen, Fishergate draws the site into the wider cult traditions of this saint, the mother of Constantine, which gained particular currency in the region from the middle to late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>47</sup>

The evidence from Fishergate is widely discussed in the context of *Eoforwic*, the name contemporaries used to describe settlement in York in the 9th and 10th centuries.<sup>48</sup> Along with similar sites at Southampton, Ipswich and London, the view is that is a classic example of a *wic* or *emporium*, established under royal control as a means of controlling trade and production.<sup>49</sup> This

<sup>47</sup> Harbus 2002, 33; Blair 2005, 380; Hawkes 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Fellows-Jensen 1998, 230; Kemp 1996, 64–5; Hopley 1988, 69–82; Rumble 1980.

<sup>49</sup> Hill and Cowie 2001; Morton 1992; Andrews 1988; 1997; Hinton 1996; Hunter and Heyworth 1998; Birbeck 2005; Wade 1988; Vince 1988; 1990; Malcolm and Bowsler 2003; Cowie 2001, 15; Kemp 1996, 64; Anderton 1999.

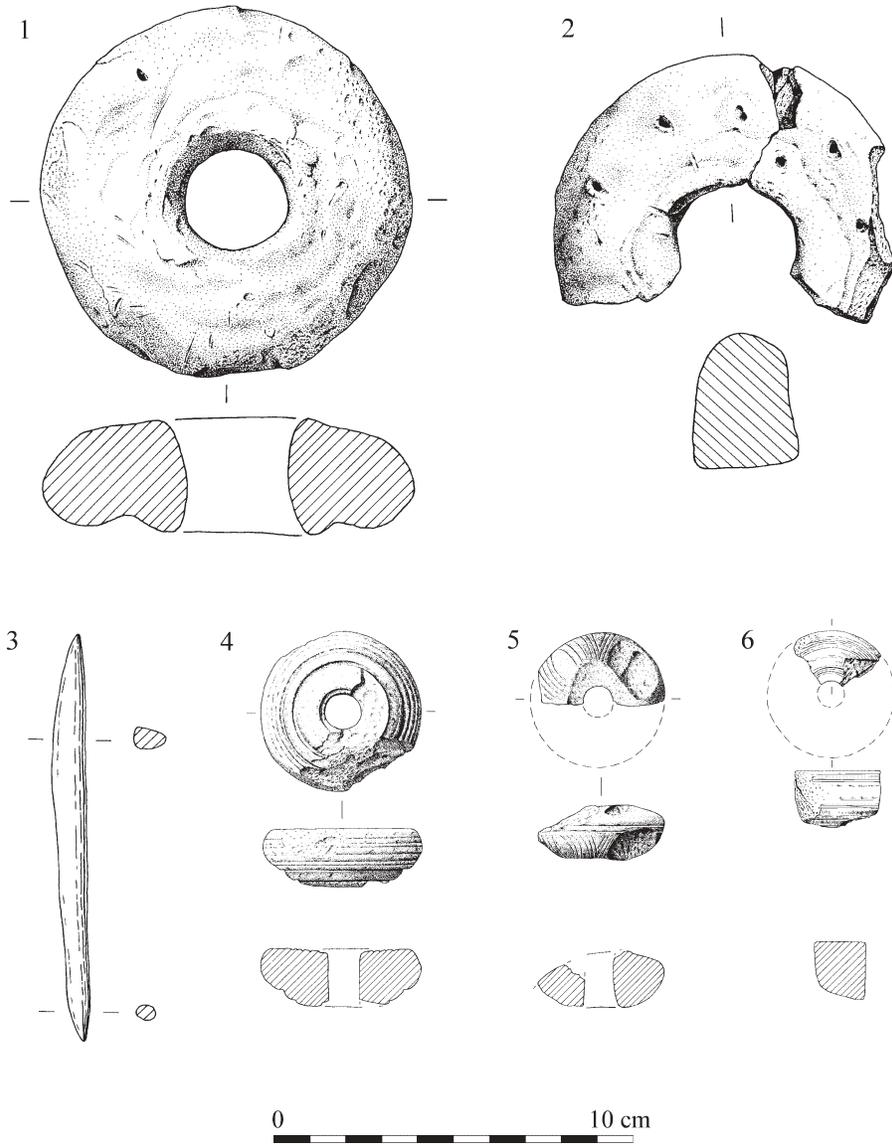


FIG 8

Artefacts relating to textile production at Fishergate. (1) Clay loomweight (Find no 2818). (2) Clay loomweight (Find No 3812). (3) Bone picker-cum-beater (Find No 3830). (4) Clay spindle whorl (Find No 6291). (5) Clay Spindle whorl (Find No 2888). (6) Antler spindle whorl. *Drawn by R Jackson.*  
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interpretation emphasises the planned nature of the settlement and sees it as a royal centre established *de novo* on the banks of the Ouse, thriving as part of a polyfocal network of power, with political and ecclesiastical *nuclei* postulated in the legionary fortress (in the form of Edwin's church near the Minster, and

possibly the church of the *Alma Sophia*, documented by Alcuin in the late 8th century, and suggested by Morris to have been a predecessor of the church of Holy Trinity Micklegate).<sup>50</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The evidence from Heslington Hill represents the only known early-Anglo-Saxon settlement in the immediate vicinity of York. As such, the newly discovered site provides a potential insight into the way that the Roman landscape was reinterpreted by its 5th- to 7th-century occupants, and also the character of the predecessor to the major ecclesiastical and economic centre of the 7th century. The available archaeological evidence from the city suggests that, once the *raison d'être* of the fortress had been removed, and the economic and physical infrastructure supporting urban settlement had declined, the Roman fortress and *colonia* held no further attraction as a place to live. Some limited 5th-century activity is surmisable but does not support the idea of urban continuity, and there is no indication that those who inhabited sites such as the current site of York Minster or Wellington Row had sufficient power to exact sustained levels of surplus from the hinterland.<sup>51</sup> Instead, the population occupied the land previously appropriated by villa estates, and it is in this landscape that the site at Heslington Hill was located. Powlesland has stressed the importance of the late Roman landscape context in the interpretation of early-Anglo-Saxon settlement, and it is in this light that Heslington Hill should be considered.<sup>52</sup> Evidence for high-status Roman burials was encountered at Heslington through antiquarian activity, and the recent and ongoing investigations at Heslington East have revealed the presence of high-status Roman settlements;<sup>53</sup> this is likely to have been a cultivated landscape that provided an attractive location for continued settlement and agricultural activity. The 6th- to 7th-century population chose to occupy the more elevated land, on the glacial moraine that represents the dominant topographic feature of the area.

The evidence from Heslington indicates a dislocation in the 7th century, when people appear to abandon the settlement on the moraine. This adheres to broader trends of early-medieval settlement, first proposed by Arnold and Wardle, and comprehensively discussed by scholars such as Helena Hamerow.<sup>54</sup> During this 'Middle Saxon shift', many upland settlements appear to have been abandoned in favour of lower-lying land that could be more intensively farmed. The shifting of settlements, and the newly emerging *wic* sites, can be seen as inextricably linked to wider process of social change that saw intensified agricultural production, a breaking up of traditional patterns of burial, and the development of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with the concomitant increase in

<sup>50</sup> Palliser 1984; Morris 1986; Kemp 1996.

<sup>51</sup> Ward-Perkins 1988; Carver 1995; Whyman 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Powlesland 2000, 22.

<sup>53</sup> McNab 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold and Wardle 1981; Arnold 1988, 48; Hamerow 1991; 1992; Moreland 2000.

social stratification.<sup>55</sup> The increasing identification of sites of 7th-century and later date, across the region as a whole, is providing a more comprehensive view of the middle-Anglo-Saxon and later landscape.<sup>56</sup> Richards has suggested that we must also see rural sites such as Cottam and Wharram Percy in the context of the evolution of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, representing modest settlements engaging in farming and local trade, administered by royal or aristocratic centres, in this case by Driffield.<sup>57</sup>

It is particularly significant for the settlement sequence at York that Heslington was abandoned at the same time as the establishment of a new settlement on the bank of the Ouse, less than 2 km to the west. The 7th century was clearly a time of major change, both within the fortress and in the surrounding landscape. Finds from the city, including ceramic and high status items, such as hanging bowls from Clifford Street and the stelae from the Minster, indicate a general increase in activity at this time, and the profile of numismatic evidence from York shows a marked increase in economic activity from the late 7th century onwards.<sup>58</sup> This correlates with the historical evidence for a renewed interest in the fortress, as it became an appropriate location for ecclesiastical investment. Bishops would soon have gathered communities about themselves, and the need for craftsmen to construct the buildings, and traders to import the paraphernalia of an episcopal centre, would have resulted in an increase in economic activity.<sup>59</sup> The numismatic evidence from York may reflect a link between economic intensification and the new royally patronised ecclesiastical power. There was an expansion of minting at York, which began with the reign of Aldfrith (AD 685–704). Metcalf has argued that the Type 37 *sceattas* were minted jointly by the king and the bishop at the *wic*; some 20 years later, King Eadberht and Archbishop Ecgberht, brothers, jointly minted a coin, an example of which was encountered during the recent excavation at Fishergate. Metcalf suggests that the king ‘may have laid secular tasks on the bishop in York, to oversee the king’s peace and justice in his *wic*, and rewarded him with the right of coinage’.<sup>60</sup>

The establishment of the settlement at Fishergate, to the south of the fortress and *colonia*, evidently formed part of this new level of investment. The site demonstrates a marked shift from the rural economy evidenced at Heslington, representing a specialised settlement commanding sufficient archaeological resources to engage in a range of crafts and to participate in long-distance and local exchange. However, the evidence does not necessarily indicate that

<sup>55</sup> Basset 1989; Carver 1989; Hamerow 2002, 121f; Marshall and Marshall 1993, 400 for building change; Bullough 1983, 186–8; Lucy 1999, 20; Geake 1997; Samson 1999; Moreland 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Richards 1999; 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Richards 1999, 79; 2001, 166; Moreland 2000, 93–4. The royal centre at Driffield was suggested by Loveluck 1996.

<sup>58</sup> Cramp 1967; Tweddle et al 1999, 205.

<sup>59</sup> Holdsworth 1995, 33.

<sup>60</sup> Metcalf 2006; Metcalf 1994, 344 quoted in Moreland 2000, 102–3. Naylor (2006) has suggested that Type 37 was minted in Lindsey, rather than York, but Mark Blackburn (pers comm) regards his analysis of the find distribution as inconclusive, since it does not take into account the finds from a number of significant sites in Yorkshire, including Fishergate, nor does it distinguish adequately the official coins from their imitations.

Fishergate was established *de novo* as a royally controlled centre. Rollason has observed that, although scholars assume York to have been the capital of Northumbria, there is no clear historical evidence to suggest the presence of kings on any great scale; instead, he describes York as an ecclesiastical city ruled by its archbishop, ‘wielding massive political influence and substantial military power’.<sup>61</sup>

Instead of being a brand new, royally controlled centre, the establishment of a settlement at Fishergate is the result of longer-lived, more integrated social and economic processes at work in the wider landscape, with a predecessor represented at Heslington. Alan Vince’s analysis of the ceramic evidence from Heslington has demonstrated that the trading contacts of the middle-Anglo-Saxon settlement were pre-empted in the early-Anglo-Saxon settlement. Long-distance communications would already have existed, to become more visible as economic production and trade intensified. The shift closer to the fortress reflects the general increase in investment and economic activity concomitant with the establishment of the major ecclesiastical centre.

Such a rise in investment would have facilitated, even necessitated, new types of specialist activities, including trade, craftwork and the production of surplus to support a non-producing population. In turn, increased pressure on the hinterland, and changing settlements of land, will have affected the surrounding settlements, leading to the abandonment of existing settlements, and the establishment of new ones, the shifting of burial practices. This is the context for the establishment of a new settlement on the banks of Ouse — conveniently located for communication networks — which soon gained its own cemetery and eventually a church.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of urban archaeology, being piecemeal and frequently small-scale, means that the results of developer-led investigations are not always integrated into the wider corpus of published material providing the basis of research by those in academia.<sup>62</sup> This is far from ideal; research agendas proposed for urban archaeology have stressed the need for a discursive approach, while in practice constraints of time and funding mean that the production of the requisite archive report often represents the end product of a small-scale urban investigation.

This paper attempts to place the results of a relatively small-scale, developer-led investigation in its wider research context, and the authors are grateful to the Estates Services of University of York for their support of this publication. Rather than representing just another ‘dot on a map’, these results can be construed as beginning to fill an important gap in the sequence of a major 1st-millennium AD city and its hinterland. The discoveries at Heslington have provided an adjacent Anglo-Saxon agricultural settlement contemporary with

<sup>61</sup> Rollason 2003, 178.

<sup>62</sup> Carver 1993, 78–96.

early-Anglo-Saxon burial sites. It was abandoned in the 7th century, at the same time as a new settlement was established at Fishergate. This settlement by the Ouse developed rapidly, participating in long-distance trade, served from the 8th century by its own church.

While the shift to the Ouse represents a settlement of a new kind, it has been shown here to represent not a brand new community, but the heir of a longer development in the nearby hinterland. The industries and some long-distance contacts already existed — things to build on when economic intensification, associated with the ecclesiastical and political centre developing in the fortress, and changing attitudes towards ‘Romanitas’, together attracted the rural population back to the old city.

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Estates Services, University of York funded the archaeological investigations and publication. We are also grateful to Martin Carver for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper. The specialist analyses summarised here will be contained in the site archive at Yorkshire Museum. Some of the pottery fabric analyses were conducted under the umbrella of the Northumbrian Kingdom Anglo-Saxon Pottery Project (NASP).

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## FRENCH, GERMAN AND ITALIAN ABSTRACTS

### Résumé

**Avant Eofofwic: nouvel éclairage sur York aux VI<sup>e</sup> et VII<sup>e</sup> siècles** par Cecily A Spall et Nicola J Toop

En 2002, des fouilles archéologiques réalisées à l'extérieur de l'enceinte de York par des spécialistes de l'archéologie de terrain ont mis au jour de nouveaux éléments relatifs à la transition difficile à cerner entre la ville romaine et celle de l'époque viking. À Heslington Hill, sur le campus de l'actuelle université de York, se trouve un peuplement anglo-saxon précoce remontant à environ 550–650. Au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, un nouveau peuplement s'est établi à 2 km vers l'ouest, sur la même moraine glaciaire. C'était le site d'Eofofwic à Fishergate, sur la rivière Ouse. Ce site qui a fait l'objet de fouilles dans les années 1980 est réexaminé ici en tenant compte de nouveaux éléments provenant de fouilles réalisées en 2000–01. L'assemblage céramique suggère que les deux communautés étaient liées.

*Zusammenfassung*

**Vor *Eoforwic*: Neues Licht auf York im 6.–7. Jahrhundert** von Cecily A Spall und Nicola J Toop

Archäologische Ausgrabungen der Field Archaeology Specialists außerhalb der Stadtmauern Yorks in 2002 haben neue Beweise für einen schnellen Übergang von einer römischen zu einer wikingschen Stadt zu Tage gebracht. Auf dem Heslington Hügel, dem Campus der heutigen Universität von York, stand eine frühe angelsächsische Siedlung aus der Zeit 550 n. Chr. und 650 n. Chr. Im 7. Jahrhundert erstand eine neue Siedlung 2 km westlich auf derselben Gletschermoräne. Dies war die Niederlassung von Eoforwic bei Fishergate an der Ouse, die in den 80er Jahren erforscht und jetzt mit zusätzlichen, von den Ausgrabungen 2000–01 stammenden Beweisen, neu untersucht wurde. Die Keramikfunde weisen darauf hin, dass die beiden Orte in Verbindung standen.

*Riassunto*

**Prima di *Eoforwic*: Nuova luce sulla York del VI–VII secolo** di Cecily A Spall e Nicola J Toop

Nel 2002, gli scavi di alcuni specialisti di archeologia topografica fuori le mura di York hanno portato alla luce nuove prove della sua elusiva transizione da città romana a vichinga. Presso Heslington Hill, nel ‘campus’ dell’attuale Università di York, si trova un primo insediamento anglosassone risalente all’incirca al periodo dal 550 d.C. al 650 d.C. Nel VII secolo fu avviato un nuovo insediamento, 2 km a ovest della stessa morena glaciale. Si trattava del sito di Eoforwic nella zona di Fishergate sul fiume Ouse, studiato negli anni Ottanta e qui riesaminato avvalendosi di ulteriori prove provenienti dagli scavi nel 2000–01. In base all’insieme di ceramiche raccolte si pensa che le due comunità fossero collegate.