

Life, Death and Rubbish Disposal in Roman Norton, North Yorkshire

Excavations at Brooklyn House 2015-16

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Cover Illustration: The *bustum* burial under excavation.

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John Buglass, Janet Phillips, Sophie Tibbles and Pete Wilson

Chapter 1

Introduction

Pete Wilson

The site consisted of the access road and external areas of the former Brooklyn House Youth Centre located on Langton Road, Norton-on-Derwent (hereafter Norton), including the associated playing fields (NGR SE 7930 7086). Redevelopment as a primary school necessitated a programme of non-invasive work, followed by excavations undertaken between 2015 and 2017. Norton is located on the south bank of the River Derwent opposite Malton and its Roman fort. Roman Malton was, or more probably, Roman Malton and Norton together were known as *Delgovicia* (Drake 1736: map following p. 36; Creighton 1988: 403; Wilson 2017; 2019), rather than *Derventio* which was the accepted identification for much of the 19th and 20th centuries (see for example: Rivet and Smith 1979: 333-334).

The programme of archaeological works included trial trenching and excavation and was undertaken by JB Archaeological Services on behalf of the construction contractors, variously Jacobs and Simpsons of York, working on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council.

Previous work at Brooklyn House had included an evaluation in 2002 on the line of a new access off Langton Road (MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd 2002) and an extensive geophysical survey of the playing fields occupying the southern part of the site (Lyll 2014).

BACKGROUND

Geology and Soils

The underlying geology of the site and the surrounding area are the Ampthill and Corallian clays of the Upper Jurassic (British Geological Survey 2001). Overlying this, the quaternary geology is one of lacustrine clays, silts and sands (British Geological Survey 1977). The soils which have developed from these deposits have been classified as the Landbeach association which is a permeable, calcareous loamy soil (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983). While, within the areas investigated, the geology does not seem to have influenced the development of the archaeology as recorded, it did provide reasonably favourable conditions for geophysical survey (Figure 5).

Topography and Land-use

The site is generally level and is generally at a height of around c. 25 m AOD, although to the west it slopes down towards the course of the Mill Beck. Prior to the excavations the areas investigated were in use as a playing field, car-parking area and access road associated with the former Youth Club.

Archaeological Context of Project

The location of occupation in Malton/Norton in all periods is, in large part, dictated by the need to utilise one of the relatively few potential crossing points on this part of the River Derwent (Figure 1). The Derwent originates on Fylingdales Moor some 6 km from the coast, but flows south and then south-westwards away from the coast to join the River Ouse at Barmby on the Marsh. The eastern part of the Vale of Pickering offers few north-south routes east of Malton/Norton, which is located west of the confluence of the Derwent with its major tributary the River Rye and above Kirkham Gorge which obstructs crossings to the west. Although the exact location of the Roman period river crossing is not known it is assumed to lie close to the present river bridge linking the two towns. That said Robinson identifies two possible locations for fords upstream of the island (1978: fig 6c, 34 no. 231, 40 no. 386; see Figure 2), although the latter location, no. 386, is based on an analysis of the medieval and later street pattern, rather than any Roman-period associations. Despite the lack of physical evidence, and even allowing for changes to the river as a result of post-Roman management of the River Derwent and its catchment, the existence of a Roman-period bridge at *Delgovicia* would be a reasonable expectation.

In the Roman period the river crossing(s), whatever their form, would have been dominated by the fort located in Orchard Field and extending to the west under what became the site of Malton Castle and a (now demolished) Jacobean mansion that replaced it (Hudleston 1962: 117).

To the south of the river a number of Roman roads are known, or suggested to extend to the south and east

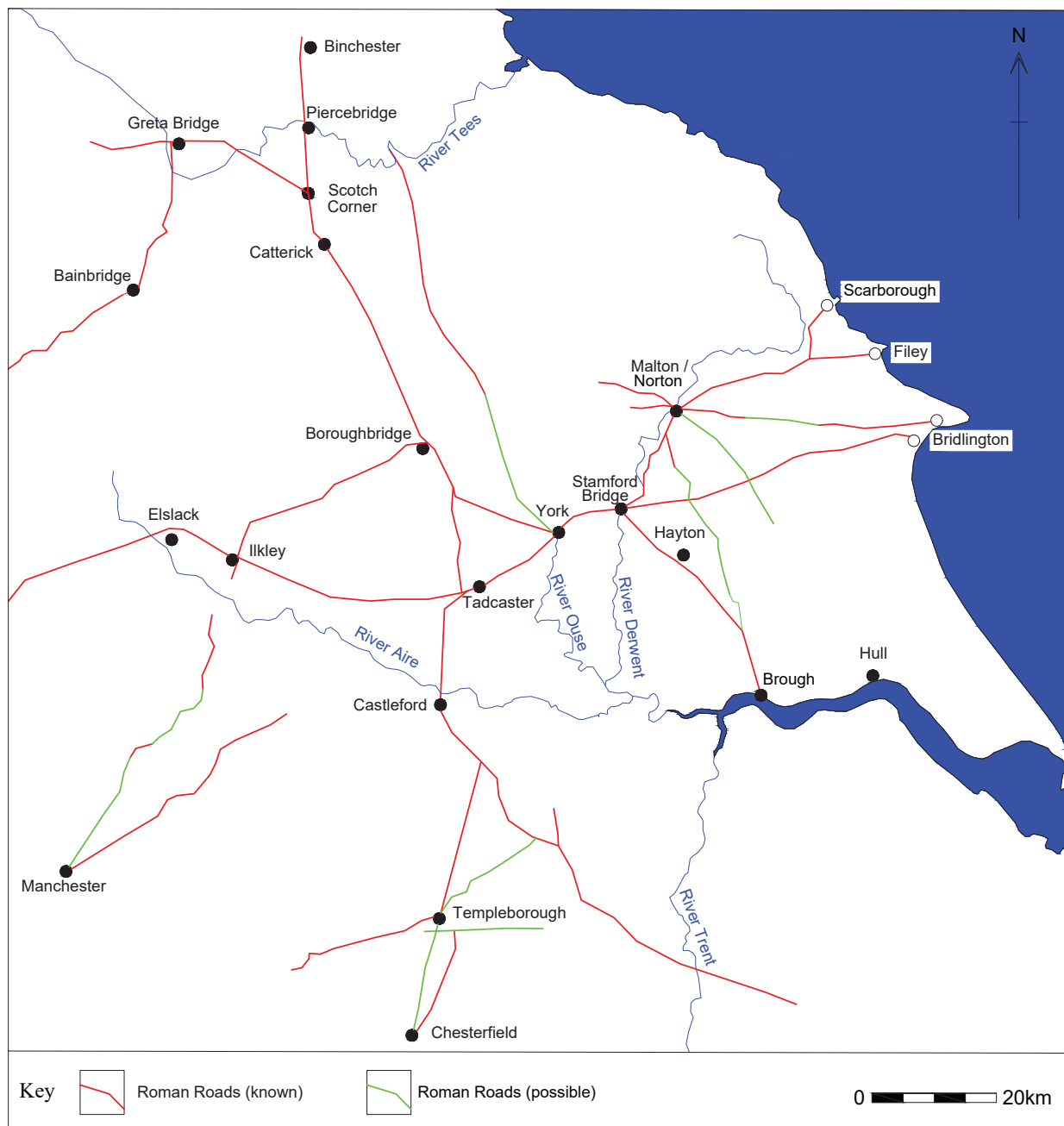


Figure 1: The Location of Malton and Norton

(Margary 1973: roads 29, 81a, 812, 813, 816 – reassessed in RRA *Gazetteer of Roman Roads*). Langton Road, approximates to the course of Margary’s Road 81a, which originates at York. About 3.5 km south of Malton/Norton, Road 81a is joined by Margary’s Road 29 which originates at Brough-on-Humber (Roman *Petuaria*), the crossing point of the Humber for traffic from Lincoln (*Lindum*). Thus Langton Road was the major approach to Roman Malton/Norton from the south.

Until the advent of developer-funded archaeology the bulk of major archaeological effort was concentrated on the Malton side of the river (Figure 2) starting with

substantial excavations in and around the Roman fort from 1927-1930 (Corder 1930). As part of the 1920s campaign Dr J.L. Kirk excavated trial pits in the civilian settlement in Orchard Field and the grounds of The Lodge west of the fort (Corder 1930: fig. 52), although the report as published was focussed on the fort and its defences.

In 1949-1952 Rev. Derek Smith undertook excavations in advance of development within the civilian settlement outside the south-east gate of the fort (Mitchelson 1964). It was these excavations that revealed the building known as the ‘Town House’ (Mitchelson 1964: fig. 3, plates VI-VIII), with its mosaic floor (Mitchelson

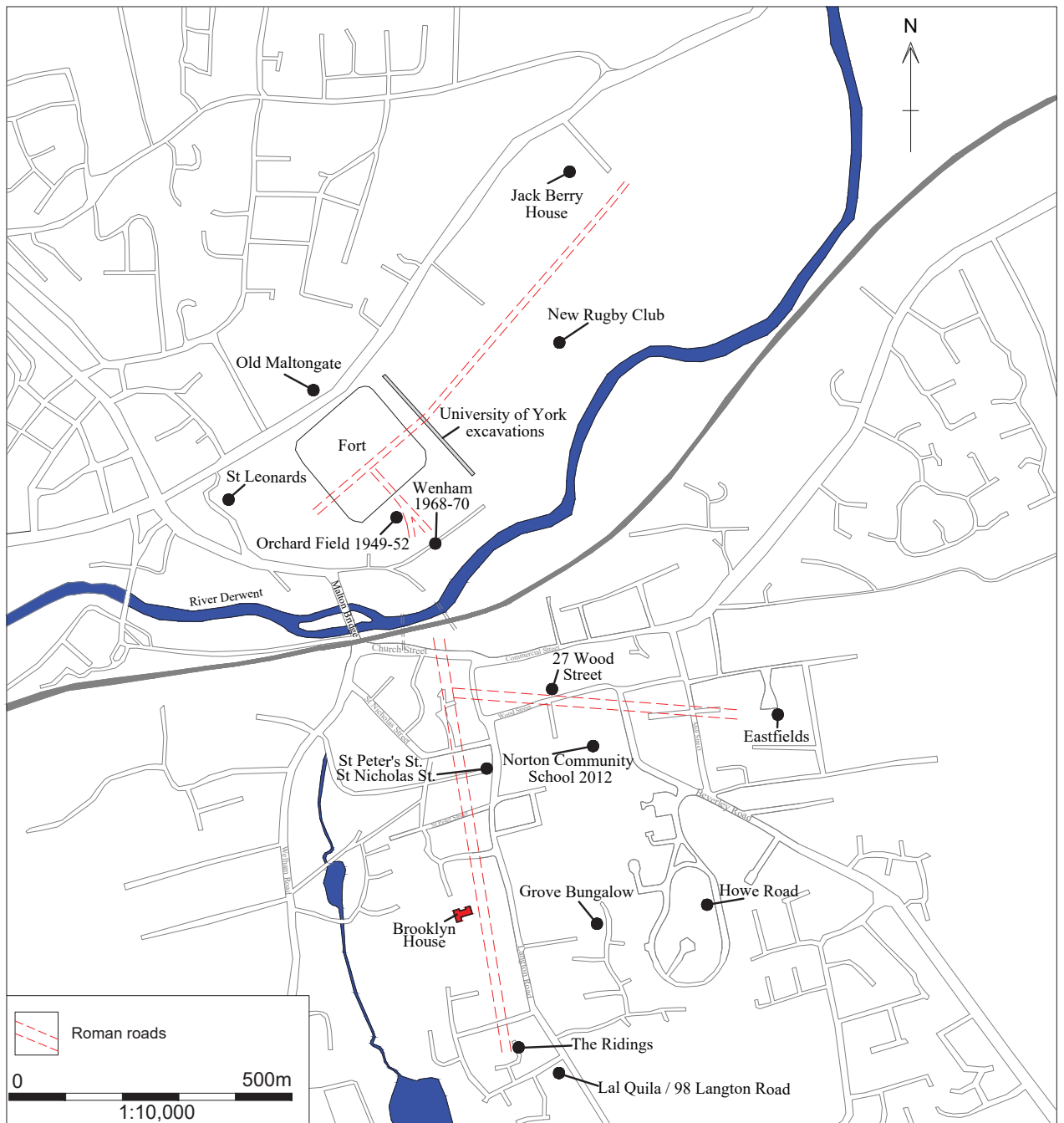


Figure 2: Roman sites in Malton and Norton

1964: plate IX; Neal and Cosh 2002, 344-346), as well as other buildings. From 1968-1970 further excavations in Orchard Field investigated a number of other buildings within the civilian settlement which it is suggested may have been furnished with defences and, possibly included a *mansio* in the 4th century (Wenham and Heywood 1997: 36-38). Dr Tim Horsley undertook earth resistance and magnetometer surveys on the eastern part of the fort and northernmost part of the civilian settlement within Orchard Field and within the adjacent walled garden. This work revealed considerable evidence relating to the stone buildings belonging to the latest phases of the fort's occupation,

including part of the *principia* and other buildings in the central range, as well as barracks and other structures in both the *praetentura* (front) and *retentura* (rear) of the fort (Horsley unpublished). The barracks, as plotted (Horsley unpublished, figures 5. 13, 13, 28) appeared to include conventional cavalry barracks similar to those at Wallsend (Hodgson 2003, 37-121) in, at least, the *praetentura*, along with possible 'chalet style' barrack in both parts of the fort. See Daniels (1980) and Rushworth (2009, 114-133, 149-71; 2016, 468-520) for discussions of 'chalet' barracks on Hadrian's Wall, which at Wallsend Rushworth (2016, 516-520) unequivocally interprets as cavalry barracks.

Earlier discoveries in Malton, and also Norton, have been brought together in a number of publications. These include: *A Gazetteer of Roman Remains in East Yorkshire* (Kitson Clark 1932: 99-108 – Malton, 113-118 – Norton) and *The Archaeology of Malton and Norton* (Robinson 1978: 5-12, 24-29 – Malton, 34-40 – Norton), referred to above. More recent small-scale developer-funded projects have examined a number of sites including within the civilian settlement in Orchard Field where 1st-century post-holes and stone buildings of 2nd- to 4th-century date have been found (MAP 1993: 32-34). South-west of Orchard Field test-pits on Sheepfoot Hill, close to the location of the 1949-52 excavations, revealed evidence of 3rd-century timber buildings and 4th-century stone structures (Finney 1990-91). However, the major fact that emerged from a review of the data available in 2006 is that there is an intensity of occupation apparent in areas other than those recognised at the time of Robinson's survey (Wilson 2006). By that time there was evidence of occupation in Old Maltongate outside the north-west gate (or *porta decumana*) of the fort (MAP 1998a); St Leonard's Churchyard west of the fort (YAT 1992); Sheepfoot Hill/King's Mill (Finney 1990-91; MAP undated) and the area of Castle Howard Road where Roman period boundary features have been noted (Stephens 1992a; 1992b; MAP 1996). What is not clear from most of these small-scale interventions is the character and extent of the deposits encountered, although St Leonard's Churchyard has produced Roman-period stone-built structures of 3rd- and 4th-century date with evidence of painted plaster amongst the demolition debris (YAT 1992). This site extends the known area of reasonably well-appointed civilian occupation into what was previously a 'blank area'.

Other development-led projects to the north-east of the fort have added evidence of substantial 2nd- to 3rd-century buildings, apparently lining the road towards Old Malton at Malton New Rugby Club (Stephens and Ware 1995: 12-14), as well as early military occupation and later agricultural use at Jack Berry House (Burn *et al.* 2017). While outside the north-east gate of the fort excavations by the University of York have demonstrated the presence of major civilian stone buildings and occupation extending, probably, into the 5th century, as well as craft or industrial activity (Collins 2019: 424).

Roman Norton (Figure 3), prior to the advent of developer funded archaeology, received much less formally organised archaeological attention than Malton. Despite that Robinson was able to list 147 discoveries and find spots (Robinson 1978: 34-40, nos 231-377). As was the case in Malton, many of the early discoveries were only recorded in the pages of the *Malton Messenger*, a source used by both Kitson Clark (1932) and Robinson. Of particular note is the cumulative evidence relating to both industrial/craft

processes and burial activity (Wilson 2006: 43-45, fig. 3). Most unusual is the evidence for a goldsmith's shop in the form of an inscription referring to its operation by a slave (RIB 712).

The most substantial body of evidence relating to Roman-period industry in Norton is that for pottery production, with evidence for up to at least 25 kilns known along with additional material such as kiln fire bars (Swan 1984: 109-11, Bidwell and Croom 1997: 101-103; Wilson 2006: 43-44; Stephens and Ware 2012: fig. 2). Many of the discoveries are the result of 'casual observations' but rescue excavations in 1948-1949 focussed on Howe Road on the Model Farm Estate, some 500 m east of Brooklyn House, revealed a group of 8 kilns, including two that intercut (nos 5 and 5a) and a T-shaped structure, similar to a 'corn-drier' or malting oven, which was suggested as a possible 'drying floor' for unfired pots (Hayes and Whitley 1950). Subsequent to the main excavations a further well-preserved kiln was located at Grove Bungalow, Langton Road (Hayes 1988: 72-76), some 250 m east of Brooklyn House. Citing information from Philip Corder, Kitson Clark (1932: 115) records a kiln 'discovered in Wall Street, in 1862, in the foundations of Mr Jackson's House on the road to Langton'. Wall Street, may have been a mistake for Wold Street, although Robinson (1978: 37) notes that most construction activity in 1862 was in Langton Road, not Wold Street, and places his gazetteer number (311) close to Brooklyn House, but there is no evidence to support that location as the find spot.

Although the possibility of late 2nd-century (Swan 1984: 109), or even 1st- to 2nd-century (Bidwell and Croom 1997: 10-101, 110), pottery production at Norton had been suggested, no kilns pre-dating the 3rd century were known prior to 2012. The discovery of a kiln at Norton Community Primary School, c. 400 m north-east of Brooklyn House in 2012 pushed the evidence for pottery production back into the late 2nd to early 3rd century (Stephens and Ware 2012). In 1953 Hayes' Grove Bungalow kiln was reopened and archaeomagnetic dating demonstrated that it was used in late 3rd to early 4th century (Cook and Belshé 1958; Hayes 1988: 77). The Norton Community Primary School and Grove Bungalow kilns demonstrate that the Norton Industry was active for in excess of a century, and possibly for at least 150 years, given that Evans (1988: 324) proposes the cessation of production at the Norton kilns 'by the mid-4th century'.

Other industries also existed in Norton, including iron-working evidenced by a furnace, possibly for iron-smelting/smelting, found inserted into the mortar floor of a stone-built building (Robinson 1978: 35, no. 264; Hayes 1988: 86-88 – for the building see below). Other crafts industries were no doubt present in Norton (and Malton), with the discovery of 'several fragments

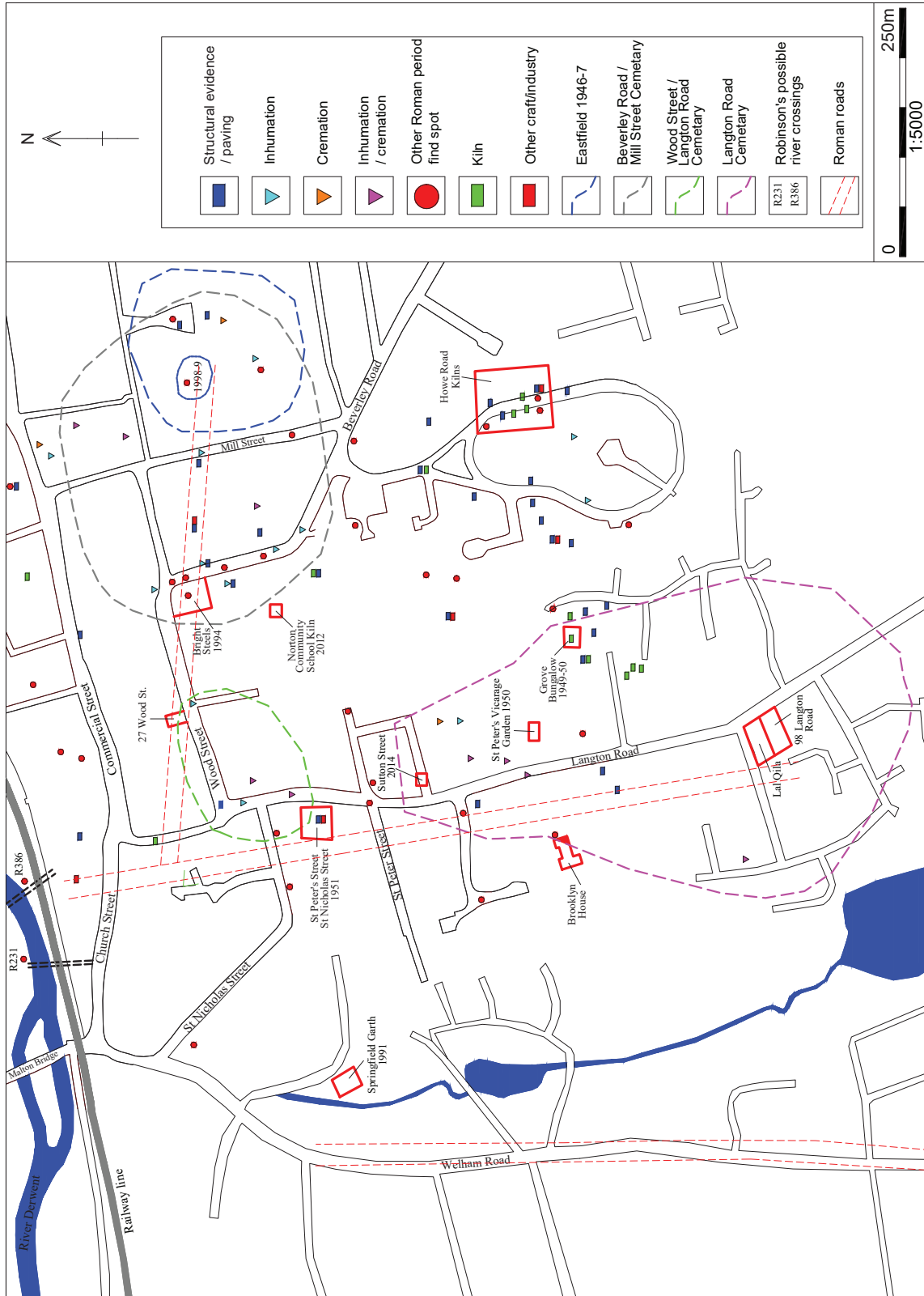


Figure 3: The Brooklyn House area – sites and find spots

of *tesserae* 'near the Wesleyan Chapel, Commercial Street' (Robinson 1978: 35, no. 247) providing further evidence of mosaic or tessellated pavements in *Delgovicia* and, perhaps, the existence of a locally-based mosaic workshop.

Burials are the second category of data well-represented in Norton, but poorly understood due to many of the discoveries being Antiquarian finds or records, or more recent observations during building works and service trench excavations (Wilson 2006: 44-45). Again we are indebted to Kitson Clark (1932: 113-118) and Robinson (1978: 34-40) for their collation of antiquarian and other finds. In Howe Road, 500 m east of Brooklyn House, two inhumations were cut into the area of the kilns excavated by Hayes and Whitley (Hayes and Whitley 1950: 11), with a further inhumation recorded some 75 m south-west of the excavated area (Robinson 1978: 39, no. 353) and a skull reported from The Grove (Robinson 1978: 39, no. 352), some 50 m further west towards Brooklyn House.

In the broader Wold Street/Langton Road area a number of finds of inhumations, cremations, a tombstone naming one Aurelius (RIB 715) and a lidless stone sarcophagus, indicate the existence of an extensive cemetery extending for over 500 m (Robinson 1978: 35-37, nos. 270, 271, 306-10, 316). Similarly, in the Wood Street/Beverley Road area various finds of inhumations and cremations suggest another extensive cemetery (Robinson 1978: 36-39, nos 275, 276, 278, 279, 285-88). More recently sewer works in Sutton Street revealed a late 1st- to 2nd-century female cremation burial (NAA 2014: 7). To the north, inhumation and cremation burials have been found either side of Commercial Street over a distance of some 200 m (Robinson 1978: 35, nos 245, 248-251).

Immediately south of the Brooklyn House playing field some 60 inhumation burials and an unknown number of cremations of 2nd- to mid-4th-century date are known from a cemetery west of Langton Road. The evidence for this cemetery largely derives from three discoveries:

1. an excavation at Leefe's Bungalow (now known as 'Sancroft', 98 Langton Road), located to the south of The Ridings (*contra* Stephens and Ware 2012: fig. 2) in 1953 which produced 26 inhumations and four or five cremations (Robinson 1978: 39, no. 354; Hayes 1988: 77-80);
2. two inhumations were discovered in the garden of Lal Qila adjacent to 98 Langton Road (Malton *Gazette and Herald* 29th April 1960; Hayes 1988: 77-80). 'Lal Qila' no longer exists, but was probably located to the north of 98 Langton Road as for many years 98 No. 98 was the last house on the

west side of Langton Road (David Snowden, Malton Museum, *pers. comm.*).

3. an apparently enclosed cemetery partially excavated in 1966-67 at The Ridings, which produced some 33 burials, including at least seven cremations (Robinson 1978: 39, no. 355).

Further cremation and inhumation burials are known from the Malton side of the river including discoveries resulting from the construction of, or located close to, the former Malton to Thirsk railway close to the fort (Robinson 1978: 26, nos 67, 69-75), including a gypsum burial and a stone sarcophagus. In addition there are various reports of the discovery of 'urns' and inhumation from various locations across Malton (Robinson 1978: 24-29), including at least 29 infant burials within the fort (Corder 1930: 32, 67). Although the sample is small, the gypsum burial and sarcophagus, along with the discovery of the tombstone of a former trooper of the Imperial Household Cavalry (RIB 714) at Pye Pits outside the north-west gate of the fort, could indicate a bias towards more prestigious burials being located on the Malton side of the river.

The third element of the known archaeology of Norton, the form of the settlement itself, is perhaps the most difficult to draw together as much of the evidence is derived from antiquarian records, casual observations and 'watching briefs' (Figure 3). Within Norton Robinson (1978: 354-40) records at least 22 discoveries of structures or floors and 19 where paving is recorded, but in many cases the information is limited.

In 1946-47 housing development in the Eastfields area of Norton impacted on extensive areas of Roman-period occupation. By working around the builders' activities, Hayes (1988: 66-72) was able to record late 4th-century paving and at least two walls were found in Areas A and B, with further areas of paving, quantities pottery and other finds from a further 11 areas. The paving in Area A and the western part of Area B was well-laid and suggestive of an interior surface, with a less well-laid area to the east representing a possible yard. Nowhere were the excavators able to examine underlying stratigraphy. Further recording during construction works at Eastfields in 1998-99 revealed further worn stone surfaces indicative of occupation and dated to the late Roman period by a coin of Valentinian I (A.D. 364-375) sealed by the earlier of two surfaces. Underlying the earliest surface was a flue and other deposits that produced pottery dating probably dating to the later 3rd century suggesting that occupation in that part of Roman Norton originated around that time (Anon 1999; Halliday and Sweeny 1999a; 1999b).

Similar paving to that seen at Eastfields was observed near the junction of Wood Street and Wold Street

(Robinson 1978: 35, no. 269; Hayes 1988: 83) and close to the kilns in Howe Road (Hayes 1988: 85). In 1950 a late 4th- to possibly 5th-century paved surface was excavated in St Peter's Vicarage garden, c. 150 m east of Brooklyn House (Robinson 1978: no. 320). The paving was shown to seal a stone-lined flue, which in combination with the discovery of Hayes and Whitley (1950) type 3 firebars could indicate pottery production on the site (Hayes 1988: 87-88)

Between St Peter's Street and St Nicholas Street well-built masonry walls, consisting of dressed blocks of limestone forming the south-west corner of a building, were found in 1951 c. 200 m north of Brooklyn House. At least two phases of floor were recorded and 'three or four periods of occupation ... from c. 150 A.D. or earlier to c. A.D. 370', with evidence for iron-working in the form of a heavily burnt flue, associated with iron slag, that had been cut through the buildings' mortar floor. The building sealed further structures, the earliest incorporated a semi-circular apsidal element which was itself sealed by an 'fine hard mortar (Robinson suggests *opus signinum*) floor', which underlay 'two feet of ash, refuse and burnt matter' on which was laid the latest mortar floor (*Malton Gazette and Herald* - 2nd March 1951). In 1954 a further building was excavated on the site which contained a flue and, close to Langton Road, a kiln (Robinson 1978: 35, no. 264; Hayes 1988: 88, pl. 24).

Two developer-funded sites in Norton have provided evidence of structures. Work at Bright Steels in 1994 produced evidence for surfaces, probably representing floors, similar to those recorded at Eastfields in 1946-47, but associated with 1st- to 3rd-century pottery, rather than late Roman material (Stephens and Ware

1995: 14). More recently a site was excavated at 27 Wood Street, located c. 150 m south-east of the Roman-period river crossing, which produced a sequence of timber and stone buildings dating from the late 1st to early 4th centuries (Burn *et al.* 2018).

Turning to the Brooklyn House site specifically the earliest known reference to archaeological material is on the 25" Ordnance Survey Map (1911). The map records the discovery of 'Roman coins found previous to A.D. 1851' in land parcel 301 - the eventual location of Brooklyn House. In 1967 excavations for the foundations of the Youth Club produced:

'scattered Romano-British and mediaeval potsherds. A sewer trench across the site of the car park on the eastern side of the building cut through a pitched floor covered with stone roofing slates at a depth of 3 ft (c. 0.9 m). An infant burial beneath the floor. Finds: - fragment of the lower stone of a quern, a bone pin, fragments of a knife handle, a grey ware counter, oyster, mussel and limpet shells, sherds of Norton, Crambeck and calcite gritted ware.' (Radley 1968: 115; Robinson 1978: 37, no. 312).

In 2002, in advance of an extension to the car park and the creation of a new access to the Youth Club an archaeological evaluation was undertaken (MAP 2002). The excavation tentatively identified a Roman road, elements of at least two Roman-period structures, two infant burials and noted the presence of large quantities of demolition material, including ceramic roof and box-flue tiles. The latter being taken to suggest the possibility of a high status building with a hypocaust in the area.