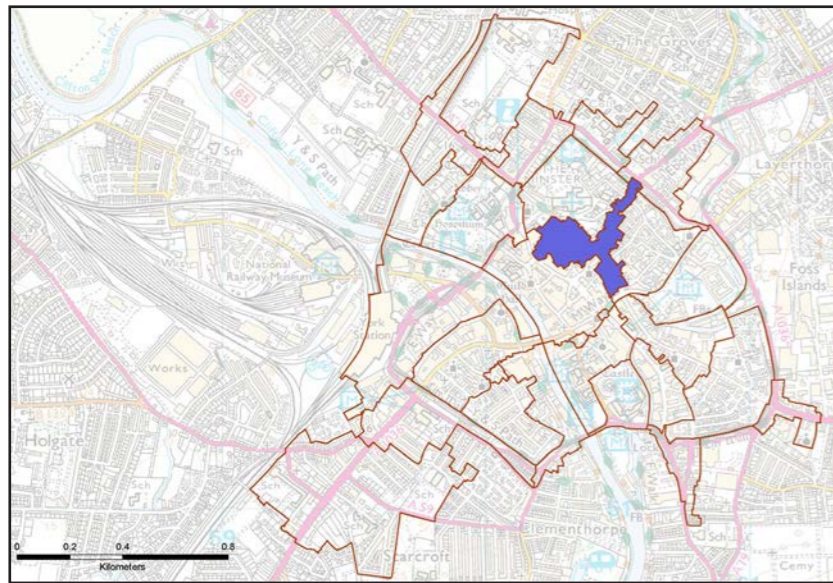


Character area 10: The medieval streets



The location of the character area within the historic core.

Description

The survival of these streets is both by luck and design. They escaped the fires that consumed other parts of the city but also the extensive 'civic improvement' and street widening which took place from the 18th and 19th centuries in the commercial heart of the city nearer the river. This area has not always been so attractive; several streets contained slums until the early 20th century and those that escaped clearance have undergone extensive restoration.

Today the area is hugely significant for the city as it contains the largest numbers of surviving timber-framed houses and is the principal magnet for tourists. Streets such as Stonegate and Shambles have made York known internationally as a picturesque historic city worth visiting. The footstreet network and wide range of independent retailers offer a unique shopping experience

Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

Archaeological background

Roman

This area falls predominantly within the Roman legionary fortress Eboracum (MYO2015) and part of the Canabae or informal civilian settlement. Roman period deposits of a high quality are known from several investigations and exist at average depths of between 3.0m and 5.0m below ground level. The Shambles and Colliergate fall within the area of the Canabae, containing one of three principal industrial and residential areas of Roman York. Prehistoric evidence is scarce; however a pre-Roman soil horizon was noted at 7-9 Aldwark (EYO2253-60) immediately outside this character area. The Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggest natural ground levels outside of the fortress on the east side at between 1.4-14.8m below ground level closer to the fortress (recorded at 3.0m below ground level on Aldwark).

Evidence relating to the Roman fortress was observed during sewerage replacement works on Low Petergate in 1997 (EYO137-38). Further discoveries were made in the area of Grape Lane and Little Stonegate throughout the 1990s. Intact stratified Roman deposits were located at Norman Court, Grape Lane at 1.5m below ground level (EYO58). A stone barrack block building and evidence of an earlier timber building was located at 3 Little Stonegate in 1999 (EYO185) as well as a metalled road surface (possibly a parade ground) and a late Roman building at 12-18 Swinegate (EYO4583). Investigations at 3 Little Stonegate (EYO4152) in 1998 also revealed a sequence of timber to stone Roman buildings. Streets such as Stonegate and Petergate roughly follow earlier thoroughfares through the fortress (Via Principalis and Via Praetoria). Evidence of the South-East gate, the Porta Principalis Sinistra, has been found in the 19th century and more recently in the early 1990s.

Anglian-Anglo-Scandinavian

Evidence for Anglian activity is limited. It may be that much of the former legionary fortress was more or less deserted apart from activity in the Minster area. The majority of the Jorvik Anglo-Scandinavian settlement appears to be located mainly outside the walls.

Recent excavations at the Minster revealed thick deposits of dark soil containing Roman building material within the Principia courtyard area. This deposit is typical of 5th century York and associated with post-Roman abandonment. Two postholes were noted which were sealed by further dark soil (YAT 2011-12). Anglo-Scandinavian timbers were found on Little Stonegate, which may have been used for the construction of a medieval house (EYO185). Evidence of amber and leather working was located in King's Square during excavations in the late 1980s (EYO3109-26) and on Little Stonegate in 1990 strongly suggesting at least some commercial and domestic activity took place. The streets, alleys and back lanes all have Anglo-Scandinavian origins in name and evidence from Hungate illustrates that areas of land were being apportioned in a planned manner and later medieval burgage plot boundaries in the centre may well have their origins in a similar process.

Many of the street-names in this area are derived from Old Norse such as King's Square/Coney Garth (Kuningesgard), Goodramgate (Gutherungate) and Stonegate (Steingate). King's Square was the site of the residential palace of the Scandinavian rulers of York.

Medieval

During the Middle Ages, York was a very successful trading city. Stone houses on Goodramgate and Stonegate indicated wealthy inhabitants. Only fragments survive such as the late 12th century Norman House (MYO786) behind No. 48 Stonegate. The medieval churches of Holy Trinity (MYO1447) and St. Helen's (MYO958) also exist within this character area. Evidence for residential medieval activity is abundant. Tenement layouts can be traced in plan form in many places but in particular on Low Petergate, where research has been conducted on several plots (MYO2070-71, MYO2061-65, MYO2075). Medieval floor surfaces and walls were located at 2 Grape Lane in 1995 (EYO61) at depths of up to 0.5m. In some areas post-medieval deposits were encountered as shallow as 0.15m below ground level. Excavations at 9 Little Stonegate revealed well-preserved evidence of multiple phases of occupation dating from the 13th to 18th centuries all within 0.5m below ground level (EYO133).

Investigations on the medieval frontages of Grape Lane, Little Stonegate and Back Swinegate in the late 1980s revealed parts of the medieval cemetery of St. Benet's (MYO3470) overlying Roman levels (EYO4583). More recent excavations at 62-68 Petergate (EYO730) have provided invaluable information towards the understanding of medieval industry and urban life. Medieval and post-medieval buildings and industrial structures were found in the four tenements excavated at the rear of 62-68 Petergate. Within workshop structures, hearths; furnaces, and other features related to the metal working industry were recovered as well as evidence of leather and horn working. These deposits were overlain by post-medieval building foundations and associated culverts, yards and paths. Part of the city wall including Monk Bar, the North-East gate into the city form a boundary of the character area.

The Shambles is first recorded in the Domesday Book c.1086. Its alternative names, in use in the medieval period, were Haymongergate and Nedlergate derived from Old Norse and referring to needle makers and haymongers. The English name Shambles refers to flesh butchers. The name Colliergate derives from Middle English (early 14th century) and relates to charcoal makers and dealers. The street was considered as part of the shambles prior to its naming (Pallister 1978).

Post-medieval to early modern

Maps from the mid-17th century show a lot of open space behind timber-framed houses. By the end of the century these gardens and yards were increasingly built over so that by the mid-19th century, maps show a more blocky urban structure forming between streets.

In 1937, Holy Trinity Church (Also known as Christ Church - extensively rebuilt in the 19th century) was demolished resulting in the creation of King's Square. Extensive resurfacing with granite setts and runners and riven English Pennine Sandstone took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The first recording of Petergate being split into High and Low Petergate is noted as being 1736 (Pallister 1978).

Visible character

- Large numbers of surviving timber-framed houses
- Houses generally two to three storeys in height
- Picturesque streets such as Stonegate and Shambles
- Key views of Minster
- Monk Bar gateway into the city
- High number of listed buildings
- Medieval churches
- Largely pedestrian area
- Several Roman thoroughfares relating to Eboracum preserved in streetscape
- Medieval streets and back lanes preserved
- Some late 18th to early 19th century shop fronts survive
- Burgage plot and tenement plot survival is very high throughout the area

Sub surface character

Ove Arup Development & Archaeology Study Research Zone: 1 and 2

Deposit Depth (where known): Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggest Roman deposits of a high quality exist in this area at depths of 3.0m to 5.0m. Made up ground (archaeological deposits) are known to be between 2.0m and 3.5m thick at Back Swinegate.

On Little Stonegate and Grape Lane late-medieval and post-medieval deposits have been recorded between 0.15m and 0.5m below ground level. Roman levels have been recorded at c.1.5m below ground level on Grape Lane.

Period Survival: Roman fortress related deposits have been found throughout the area. Evidence for Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian activity is sparse while medieval deposits are very common as in other parts of the city. Burgage plot boundaries survive very well into the present and many existing buildings are either late-medieval in date or reflect earlier structures. Post-medieval and early-modern evidence is also present, possibly truncating earlier deposits.

Interventions (recorded on HER April 2013): There are approximately 79 interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record (HER). Few of the interventions are recorded in any detail and a brief examination of some grey literature suggests several interventions are yet to be recorded in the HER. See Appendix I for brief summary.

Significance

Overview: This area occupies an area of higher ground which originally formed part of the legionary Roman fortress Eboracum, civilian settlement and one the principal industrial and residential areas of Roman York. Stratified Roman deposits are known throughout the area including evidence for parts of the fortress at Little Stonegate and Swinegate. Several thoroughfares of the fortress survive as modern streets such as Stonegate and Petergate. Archaeological evidence dating from the Medieval period has provided information on small scale industrial practices as well as further detail on tenements and urban life. The combination of excellent documentary evidence relating to the history of tenements, the almost unique survival of an Anglo-Scandinavian road system and exceptional conservation of late medieval buildings combine to make this an area of high significance. Research potential is very high for all periods.

With the information available on the HER it can be assumed that substantial stratified deposits survive within this area, and in some places at relatively shallow depths, despite later development taking place. The excavations at 62-68 Petergate and in the Grape Lane/Little Stonegate area have provided significant archaeological evidence dating from the Roman through to post-medieval periods.

Designations: The site falls within the Central Area of Archaeological Importance and the Historic Core Conservation Area.

This character area contains a high number of architecturally or historically significant buildings, in addition to several Buildings of Merit. 14 Grade I listed buildings including the City Walls, 66 Grade II* and 180 Grade II buildings. There are also 2 Scheduled Ancient Monuments within or partly within this area; The Norman House Stonegate (356), the City Walls Jewbury to Monk Bar (30). The walls, Monk Bar and Minster are sizeable extant medieval remains, which form recognisable landmarks, surrounding the largest, most recognisable landmark in the city.

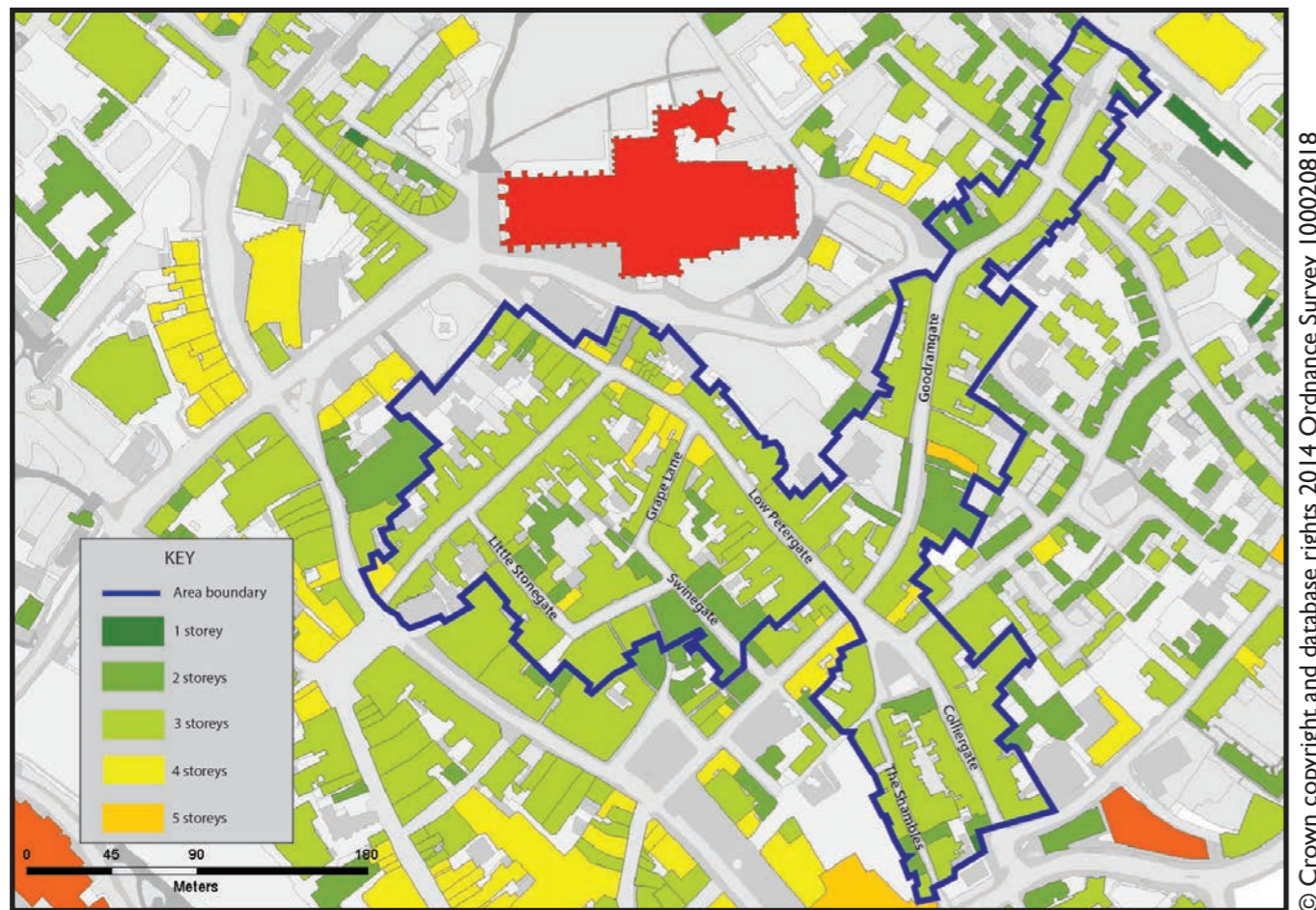
They are part of the medieval fabric of York and make a substantial contribution to York's collection of significant landmark monuments, one of the city's key significances.

Streetscape Components: Paving within this character area is predominantly riven English Pennine Sandstone flags: found on Stonegate; Little Stonegate; Back Swinegate; and, the Shambles. Pre-cast concrete flags are also used on High Petergate; Grape Lane; Swinegate; Goodramgate; and, on part of Colliergate. Carriageways are a mixture of English Pennine Sandstone flags (Stonegate), sandstone and granite setts (e.g. part of Back Swinegate), and asphalt. Colliergate pavements are exclusively surfaced with pre-cast concrete (Marshall's Saxon paving) and Goodramgate is an untidy mix.

This area of the city centre contains a variety of streetscape components, street lighting is generally based on several late 20th century heritage replica styles and attached buildings due to the nature of the narrow streets they illuminate. At the time of writing the city council is in the process of replacing many of these styles with a single replica carriage lantern style with LED luminaires. Another common feature are black, ornate cast iron sign hangers protruding from buildings. Several differing styles of bollards are evident in the area but only to stop delivery vehicles entering certain areas and/or to protect the overhanging buildings from damage. On Goodramgate, which feels more modern than some of the other medieval streets, a telephone box can be found. Green cast iron fingerposts exist in several locations. Several standard City of York waste bins are located on College Street.



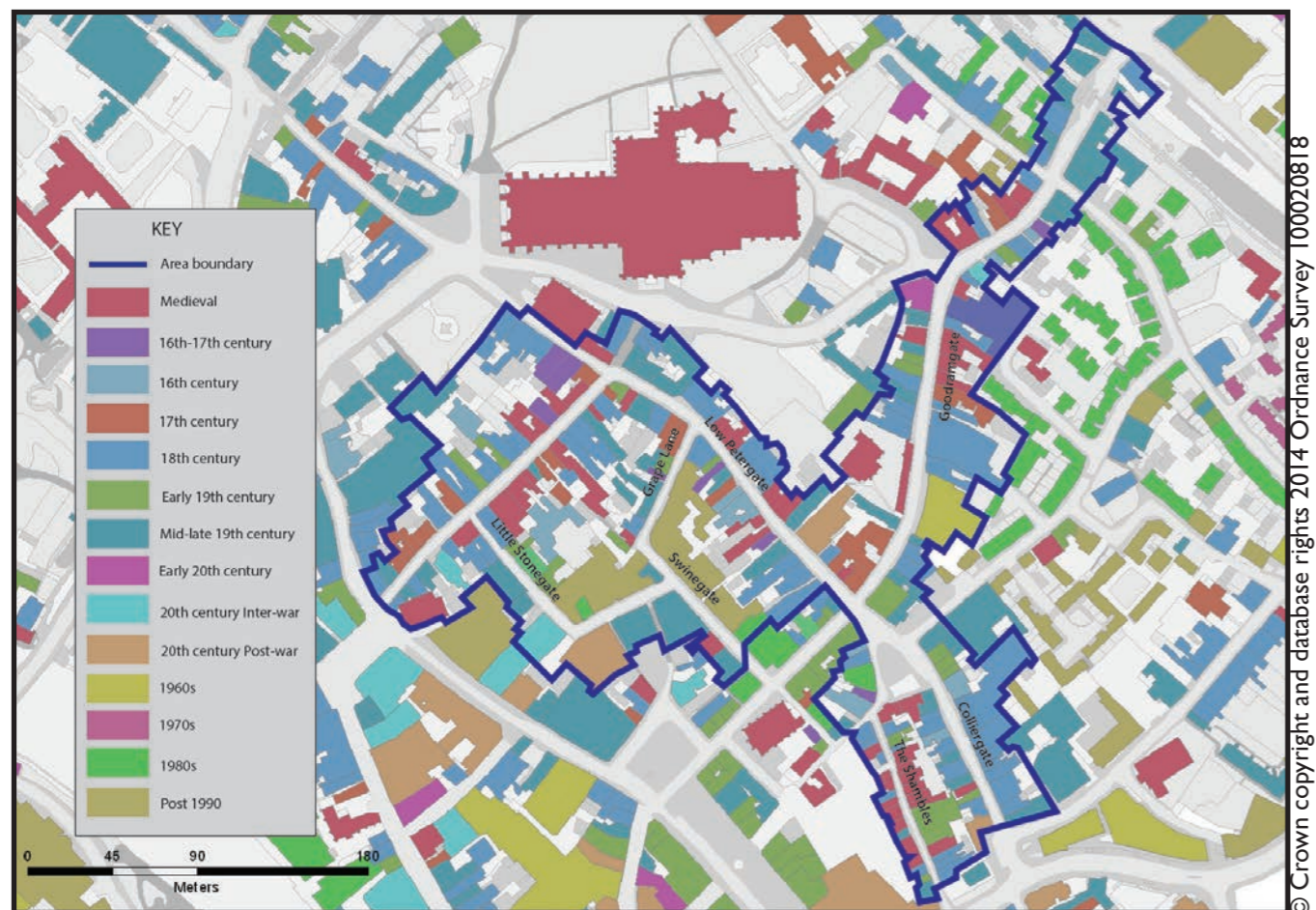
Figure ground map with built environment shown as white on black.



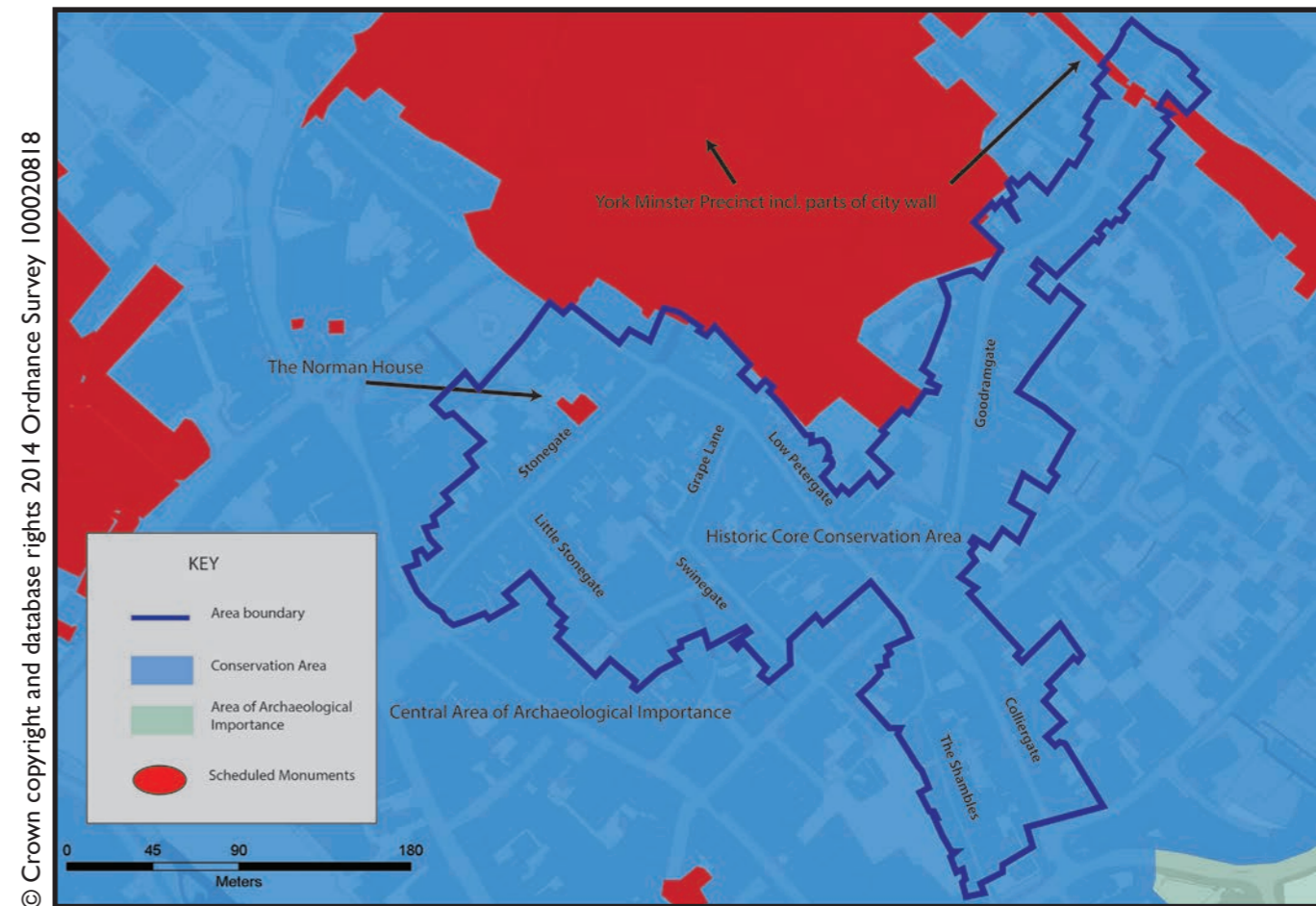
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Above: Plan showing the heights of the buildings within this character area.

Below: Plan showing the construction dates of the buildings within the area.



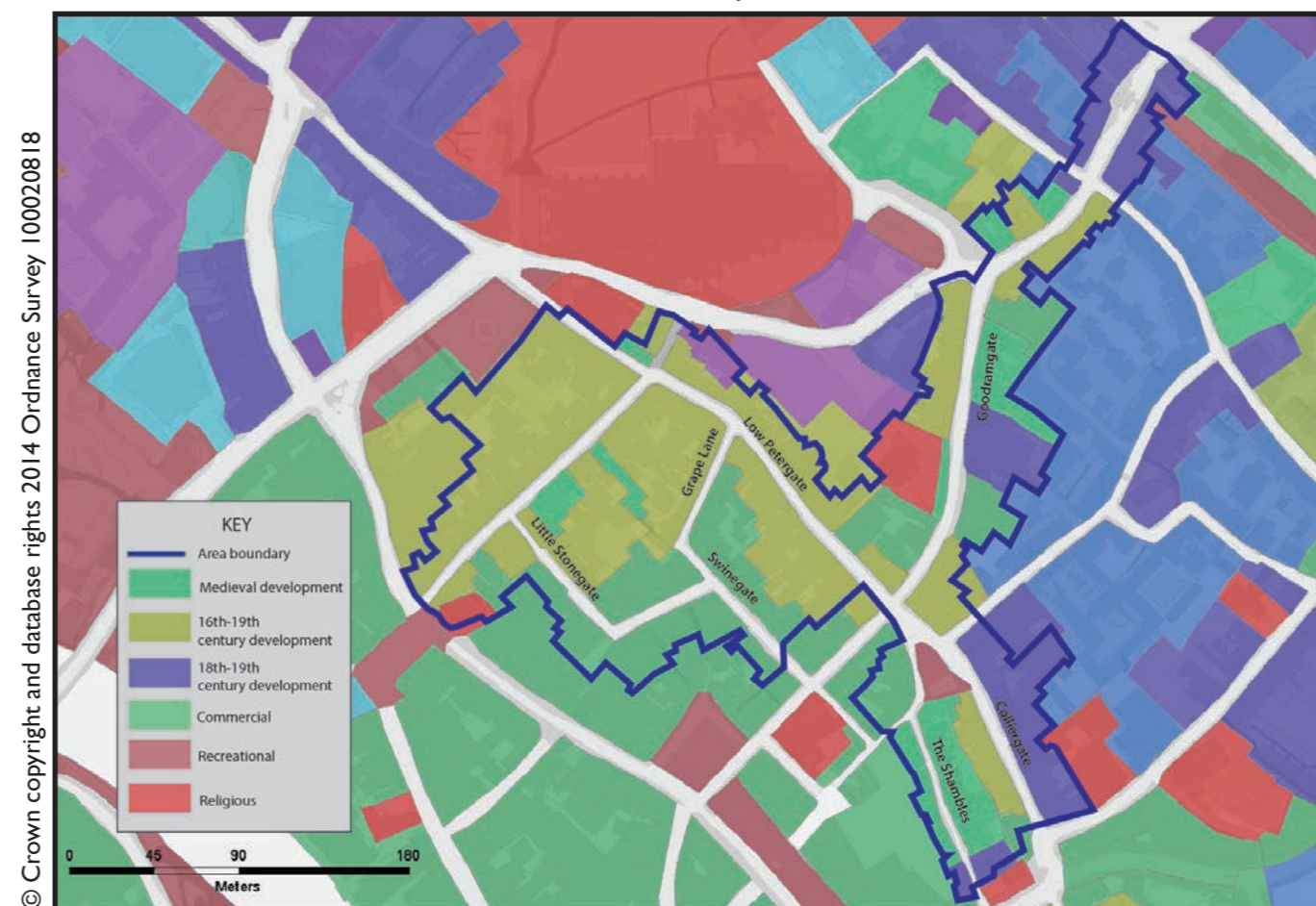
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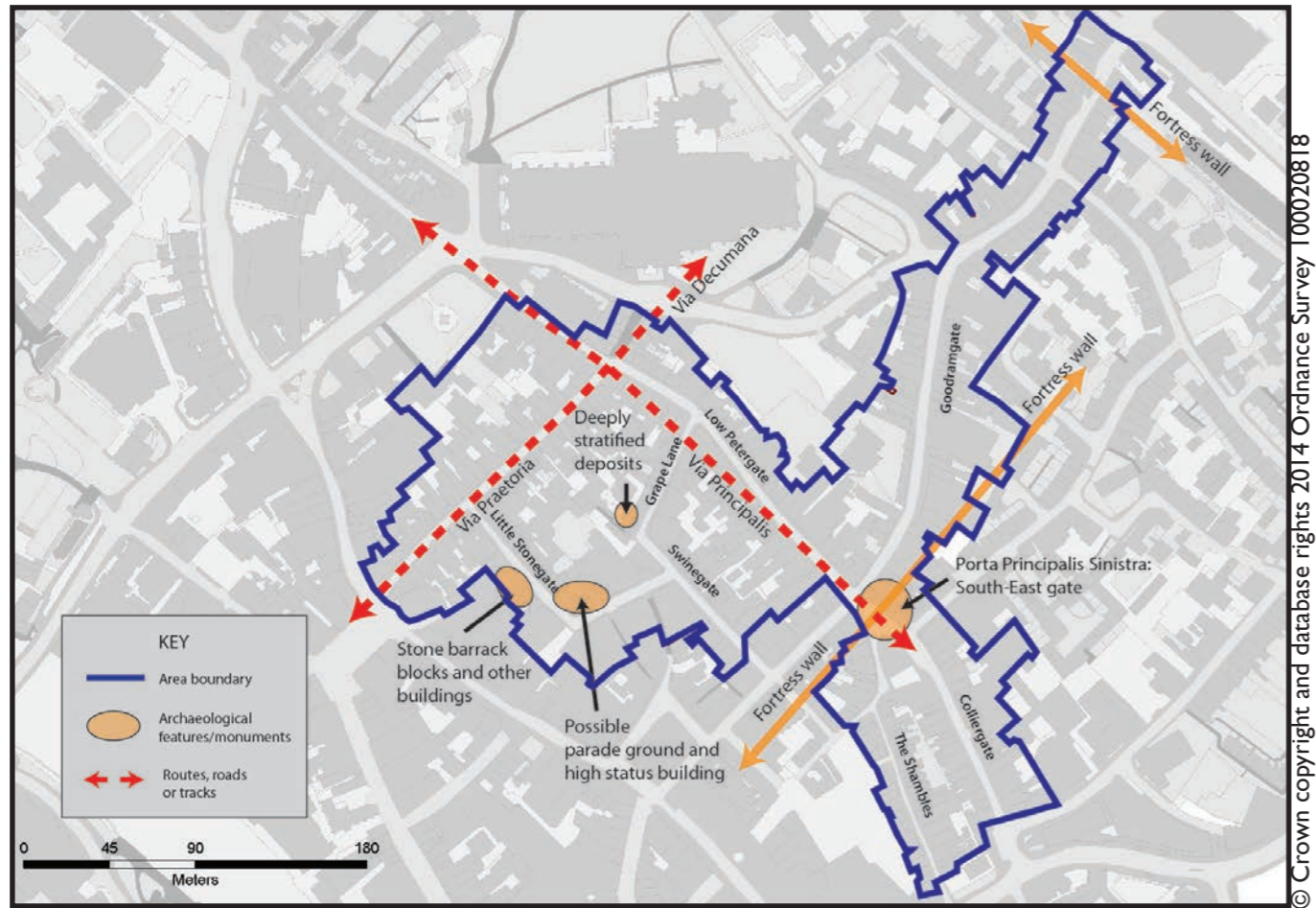
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Above: Plan showing designated heritage assets within this character area.

Below: Plan showing the Broad Type characterisation of the area. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan.



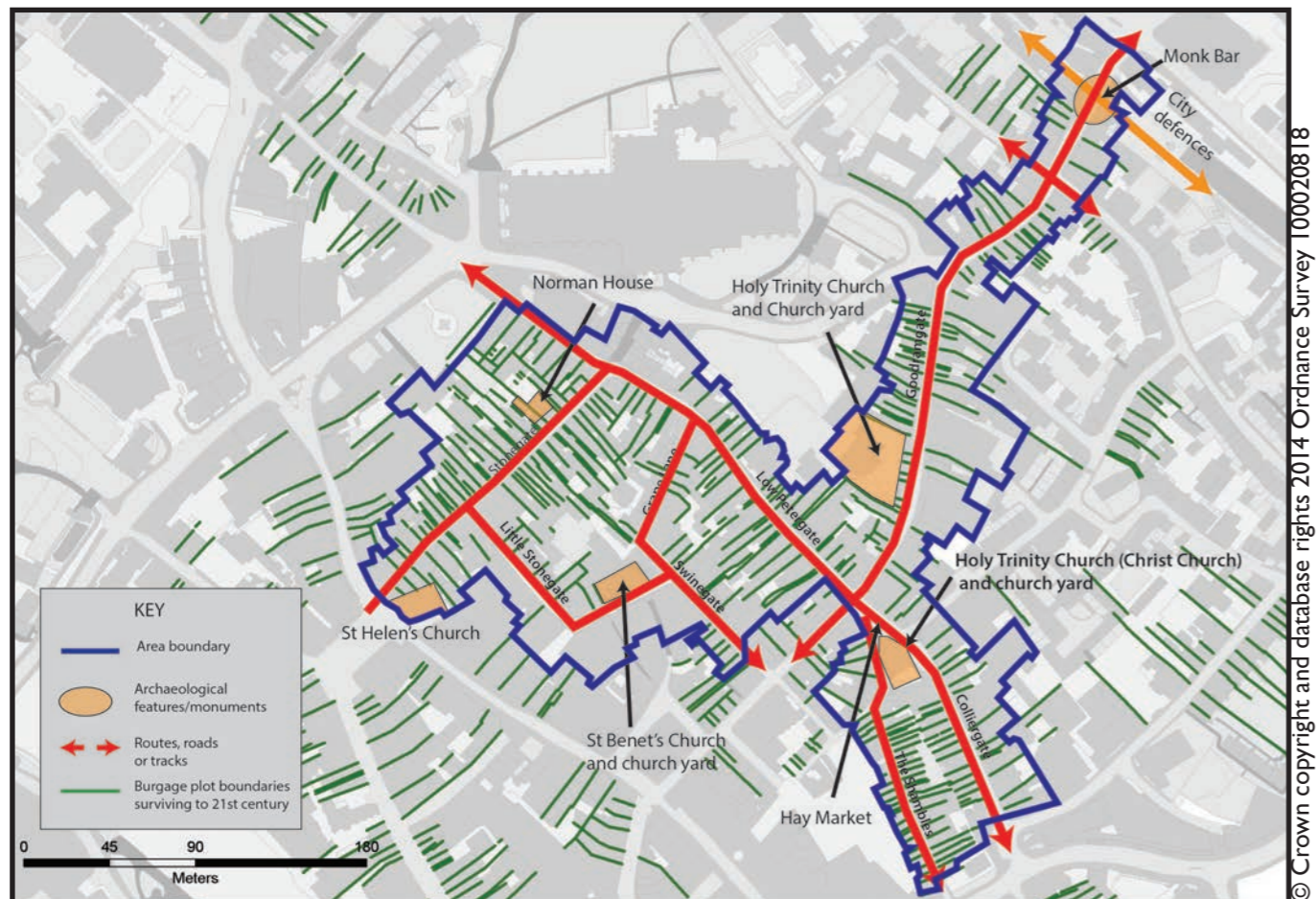
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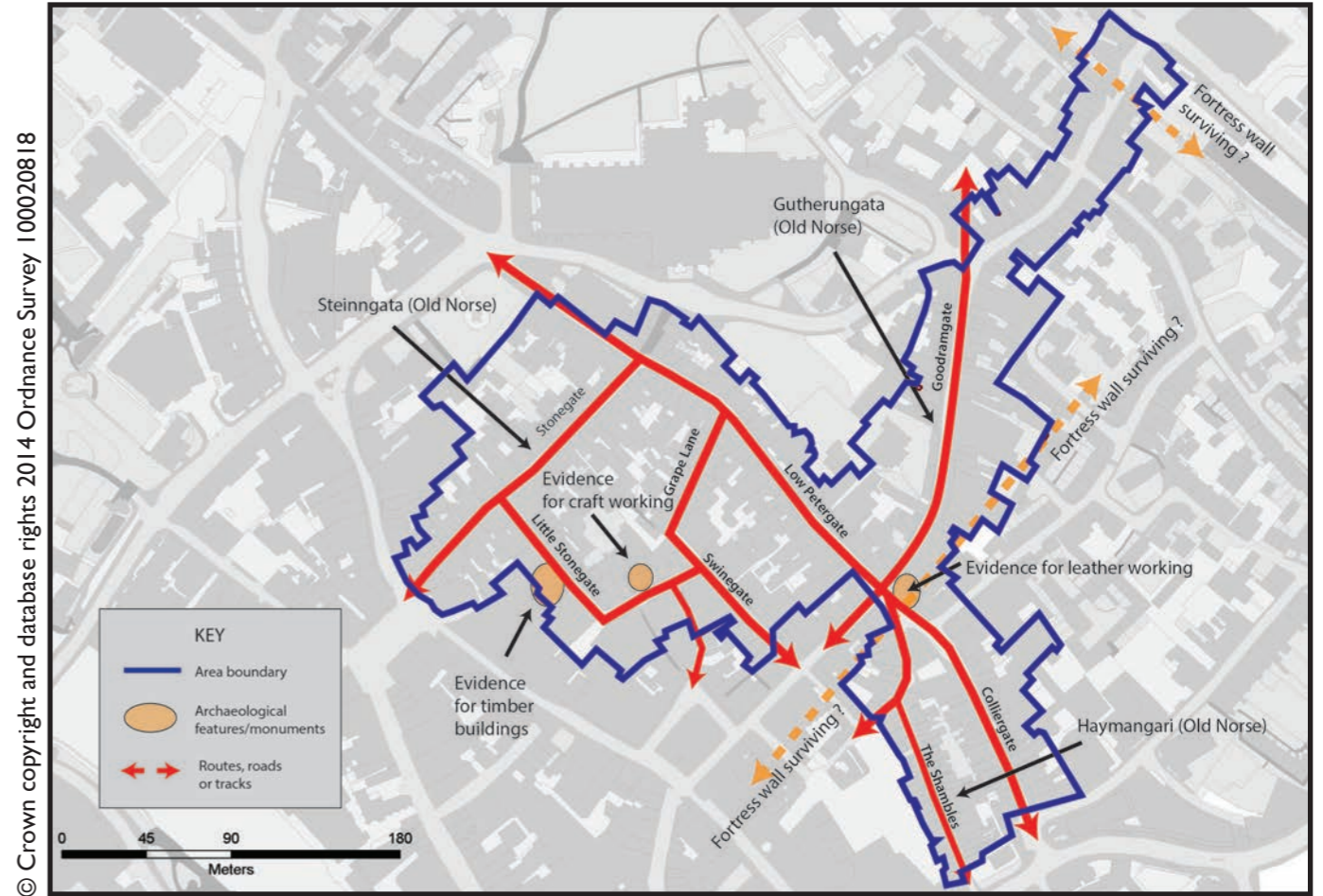
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Above: The Roman landscape.

Below: The medieval landscape.



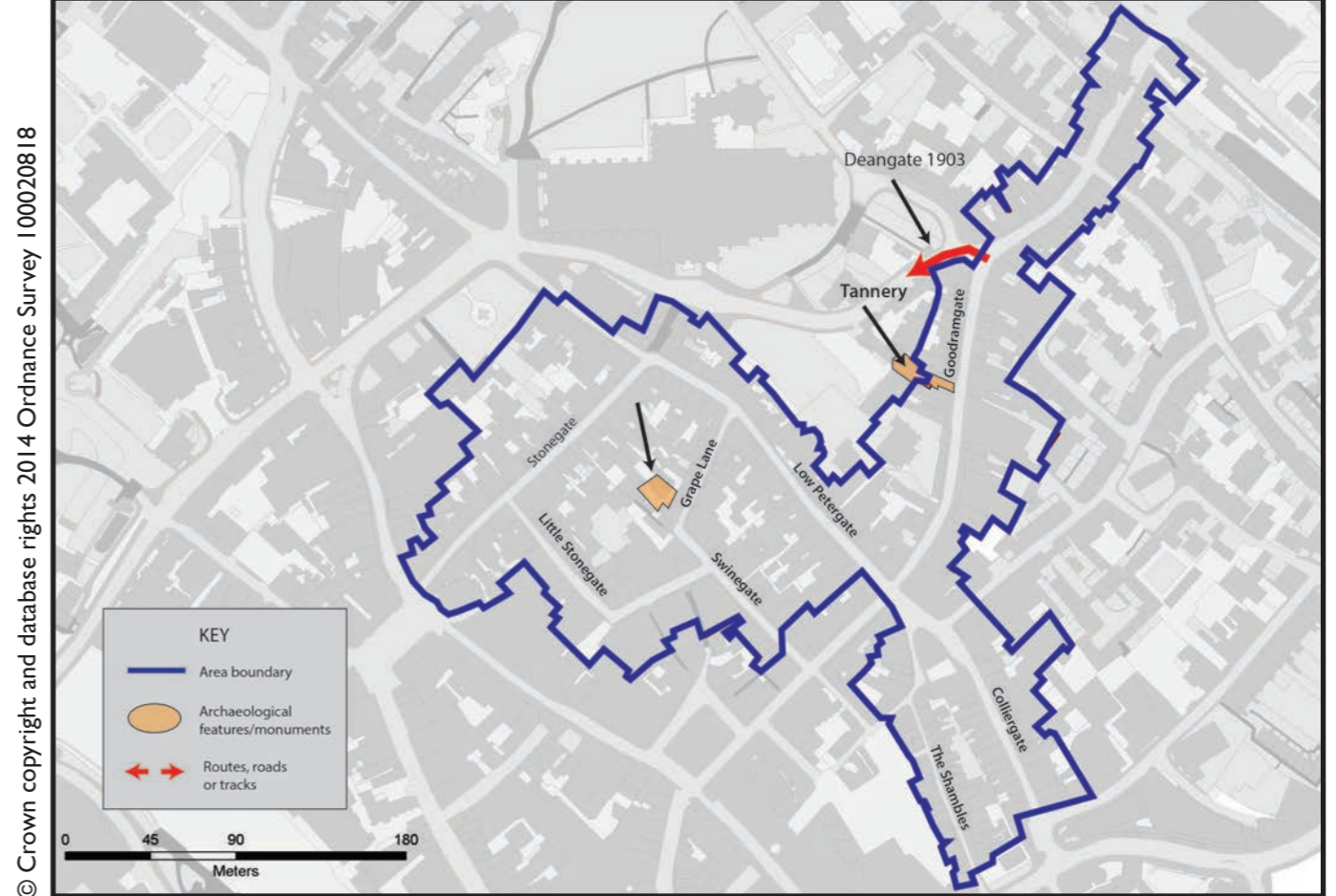
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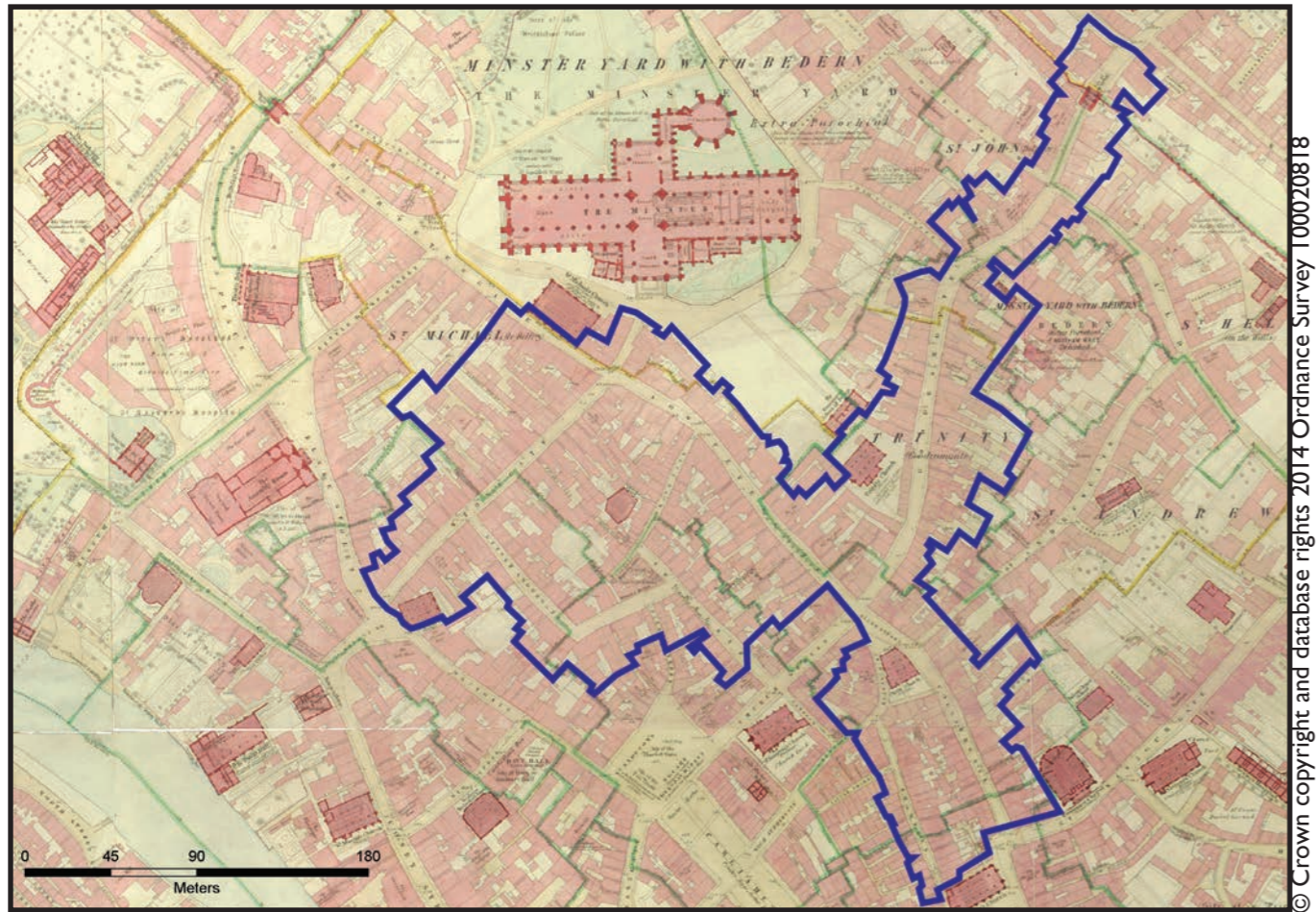
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Above: The Anglo-Scandinavian landscape.

Below: The post-medieval landscape.



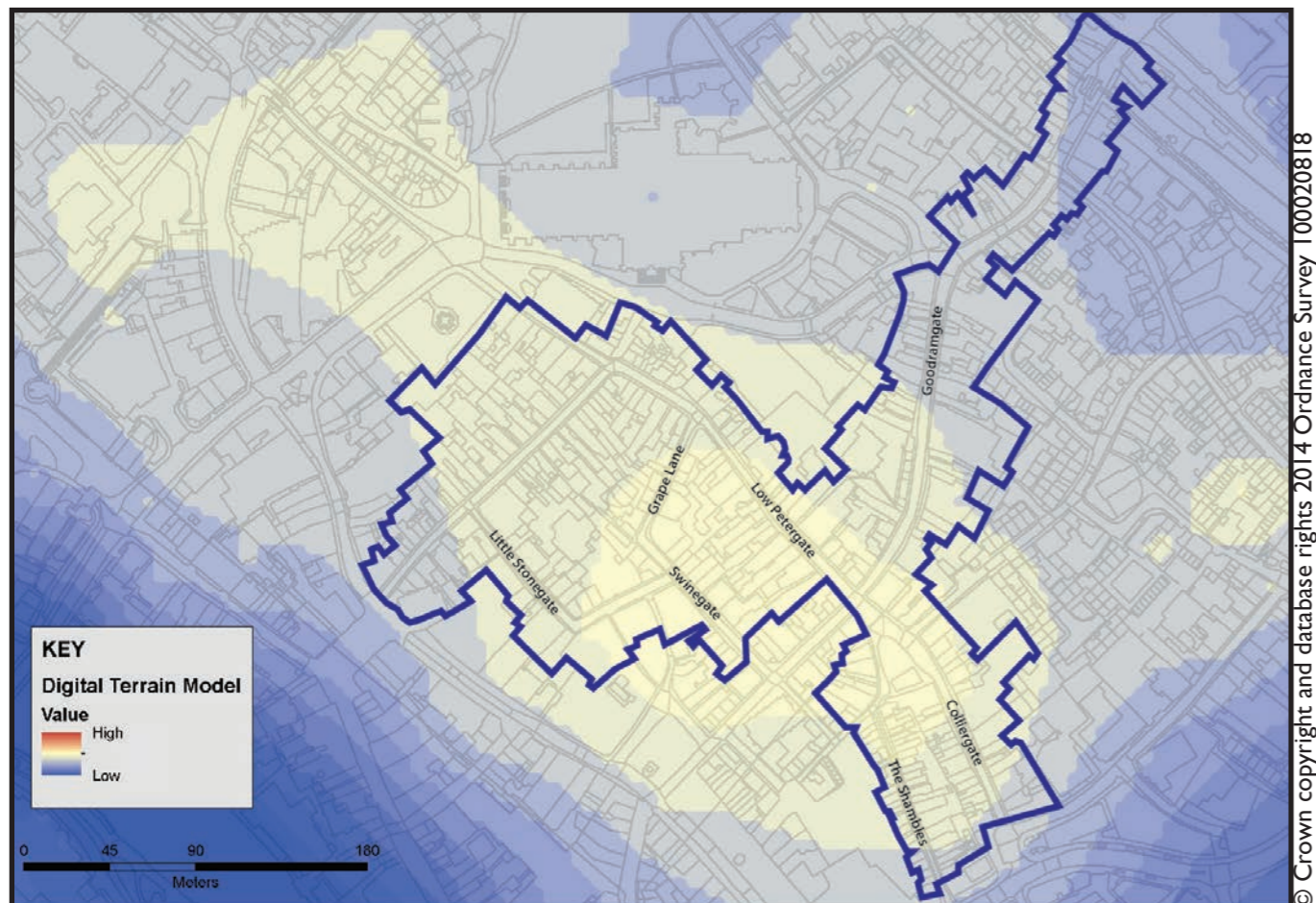
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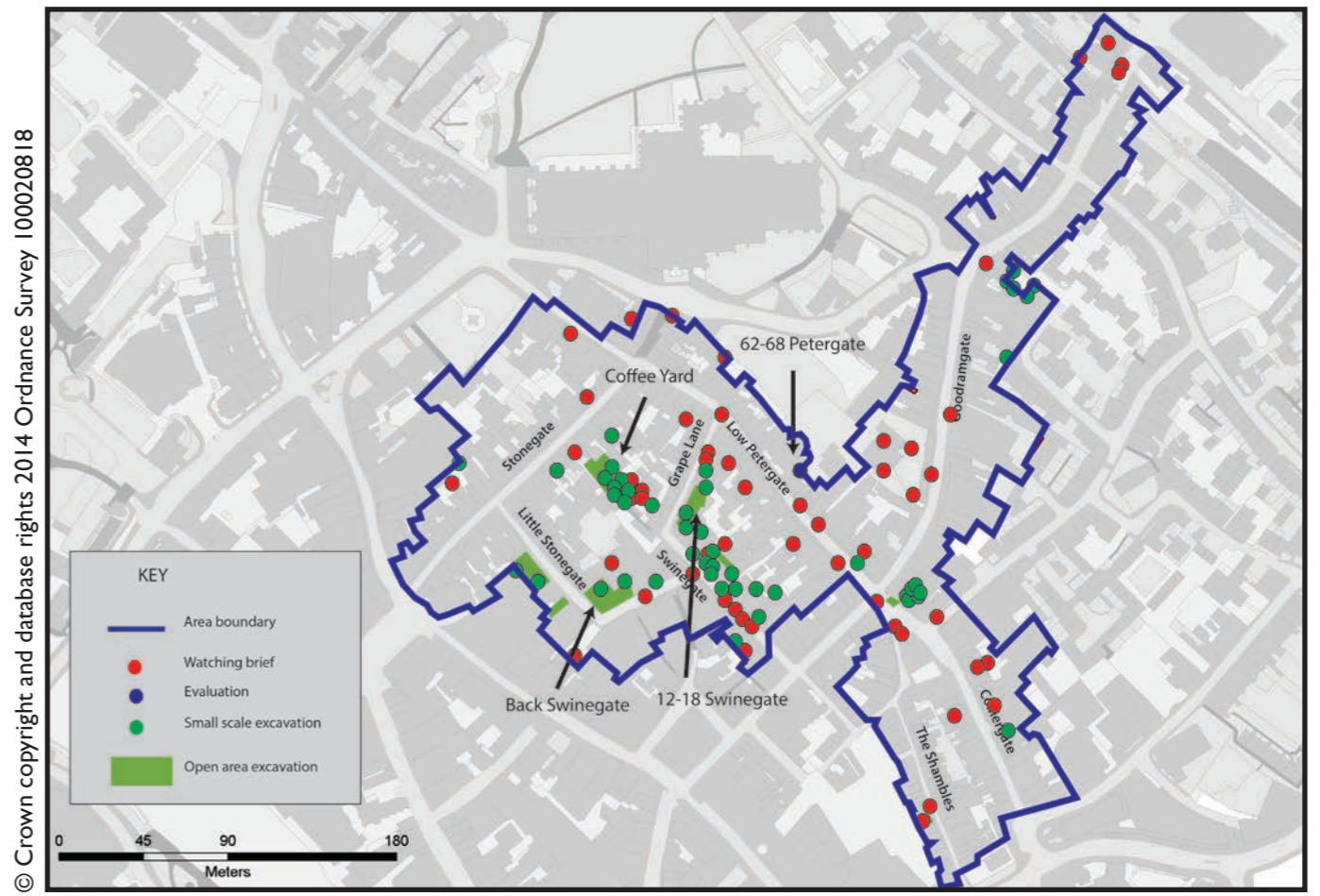
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Above: The 1852 landscape.

Below: The general topography of the area showing its location upon higher ground.



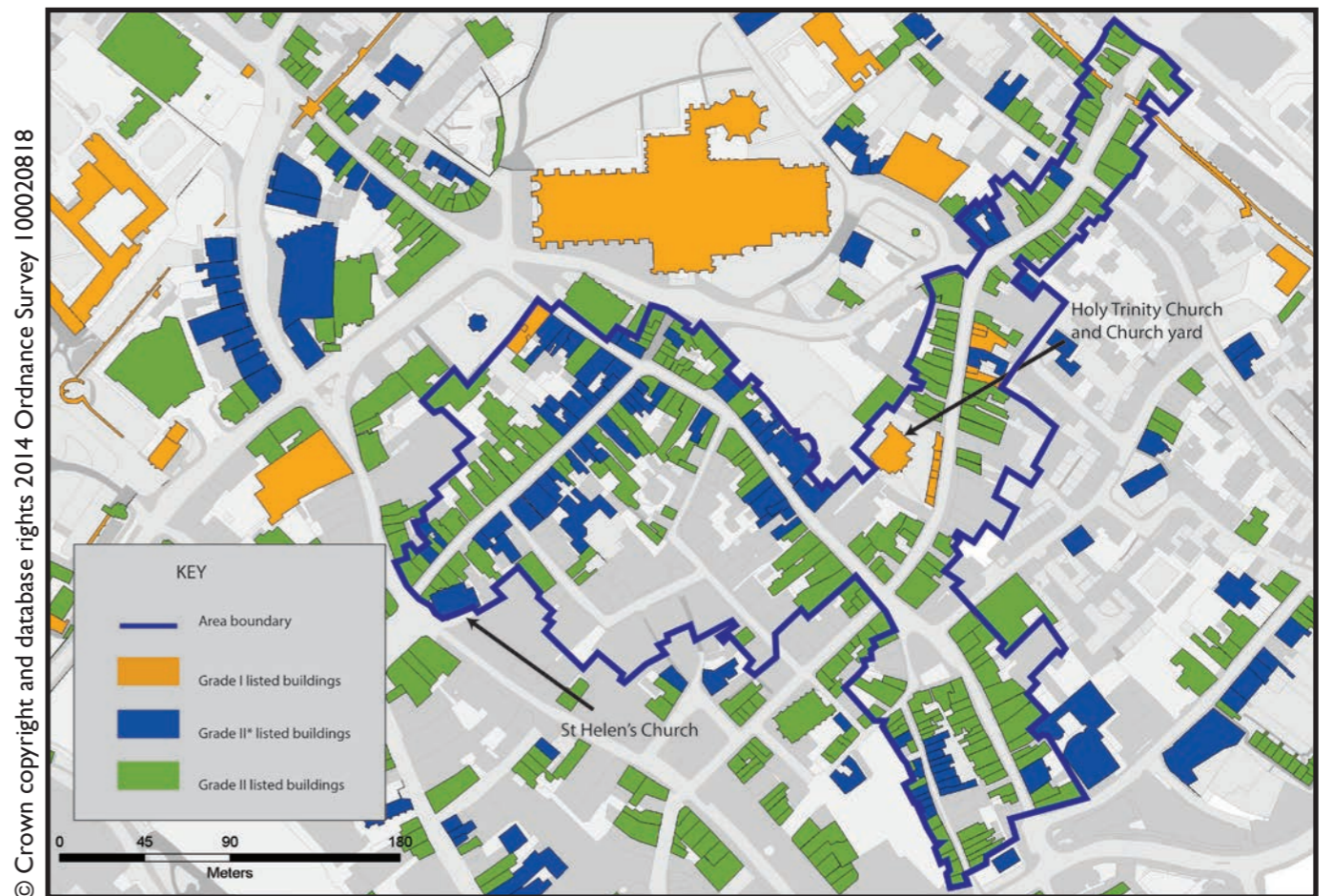
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Above: The location of archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record.

Below: Location of listed buildings.



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York City Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal- 10: The Medieval Streets

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