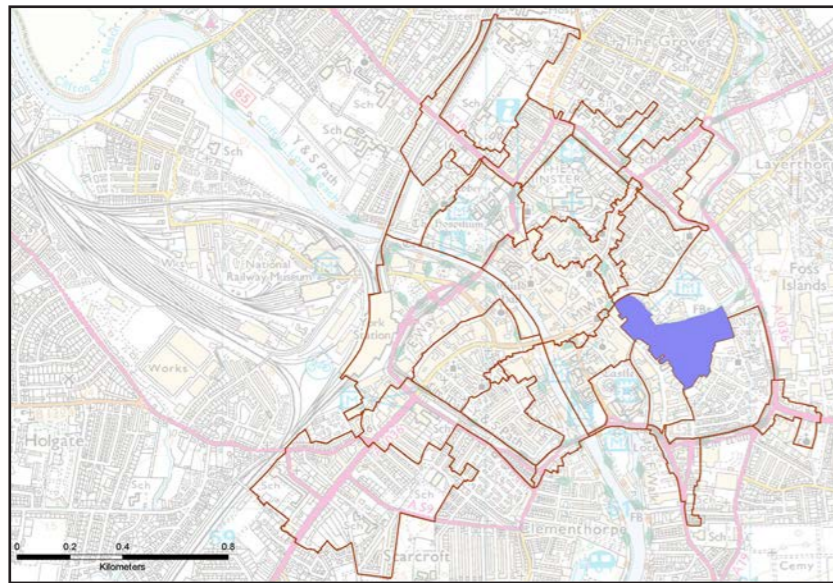


Character area 15: Fossgate and Walmgate



The location of the character area within the historic core.

Description

Fossgate and Walmgate are part of the historic Roman road from the east and continued to serve as a principal route during the Middle Ages. The 20th century decline in river trade and the creation of Piccadilly, meant Fossgate became a quiet backwater in contrast to the busy commercial centre.

Today Fossgate and Walmgate possess a picturesque and varied historic character as a result of piece-meal development over centuries. Buildings are generally three to four storeys, built from brick with tiled roofs. The area has a good mix of uses including independent shops, restaurants, pubs, offices, residential and light industry. Activity in the area is likely to increase in the future as a result of planned developments at nearby Castle-Piccadilly and Hungate

Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

Archaeological background

Roman

Evidence for Roman activity is limited. Although Fossgate itself lies within an area of known Roman civilian settlement, there have been few archaeological interventions that have produced evidence. The River Foss was much wider and shallower in the Roman period. A timber and stone structure interpreted as a possible jetty by the Royal Commission of Historic Monuments of England was observed in a newly cut well to the rear of the Malt Shovel Inn on the north side of Walmgate in 1829. This was found at c.9m below ground level. Cobbled surfaces, ditches, postholes and burials are well known throughout the Piccadilly area to the north. An excavation on George Street/Dixon Lane close to the south-western boundary of this area, revealed Roman inhumation burials (previously thought to have been removed by the brewery constructed in the 19th century) as well as small finds. Evidence of Roman activity and possible occupation was identified during excavations at 41 – 49 Walmgate and inhumations are known from St Deny's Church Yard.

Present Fossgate and Walmgate may well lie on a principle Roman route from the east which entered the legionary fortress at the Porta Principalis Sinistra, now the site of King's Square.

Anglian – Anglo-Scandinavian

As yet, there is no archaeological evidence that can be ascribed to the post-Roman/Anglian period. The names Fossgate and Walmgate are Scandinavian in origin and investigations on Walmgate in particular have revealed significant evidence of intensive occupation along the road frontages. Investigations at 41-49 Walmgate (EYO538) revealed a sequence of well-preserved and closely stratified archaeological deposits which spanned the mid 10th to the 20th century. They uncovered a complex sequence of buildings fronting onto Walmgate and the rear of buildings fronting onto St Denys' Road. There were strong indications that later burgage plot boundaries have Anglo-Scandinavian origins, if not earlier. Archaeological evidence is generally characterised by industrial and commercial activity.

Medieval

The area included several significant buildings including guildhalls and churches such as St Denys (MYO674), St. Margaret's (MYO675) and St. Anne's Chapel (closed 1555). The timber-framed Merchant Adventurer's Hall (MYO1554), built in 1357-61, is one of the finest surviving examples of a guildhall. The Hall also contained a hospital in the undercroft, which remarkably, housed the sick and the poor until 1900. The undercroft contains the earliest known bricks in York (HCCAA).

Evidence from watching briefs, evaluations and excavations have revealed that on Fossgate medieval deposits are likely to be undisturbed and are potentially waterlogged from depths of c.2m below ground level onwards (EYO111). 12th century buildings and medieval dumping were also excavated at 25 Walmgate (EYO520) as well as substantial early post-medieval remains of a bakehouse or kitchen. Further evidence of medieval dumping and deposits were provided by an evaluation to the rear of 11 Walmgate (EYO233). This investigation recorded a late 14th century brick oven which was located a mere 0.6m below ground level from its highest point. Investigations at 41-49 Walmgate strongly suggest that there was a period of around 100 years (c.13th century) when the site was devoid of buildings. Many of the medieval burgage plot boundaries, particularly on Fossgate, survive to the present day.

Post-medieval – Early modern

Following the canalization of the River Foss and the creation of Womald's Cut and various wharfs, post-medieval and early modern industries thrived in the area, such as Walkers Iron Foundry (MYO3651), the Victoria Foundry (MYO3666), Tannery (MYO3663) as well as breweries and the Rowntree Wharf Flour Mill (MYO1064). Archaeological investigations demonstrate that sub-surface industrial features survive well but in many cases has had a significance impact on any relatively shallow archaeological deposits.

However, away from industrial areas, plots on Fossgate and the western part of Walmgate have been continuously re-built from the 17th-19th centuries. At 11 Walmgate, excavations revealed late medieval- early post-medieval walls.

The top of the highest stretch of surviving wall was located immediately below the modern ground surface.

In contrast, a watching brief at Mawson's Court (EYO4260) to the north-east only produced a thick garden soil and no evidence of any structures. Post-medieval building footings, as well as part of a medieval window mullion, were noted at 75 Walmgate (EYO622).

At 13-14 Fossgate late medieval- post-medieval deposits were noted at c.2m below ground level (EYO111).

The industrial buildings themselves are of interest. For example, Walker's Iron Foundry excavated in 2006 was the first significant investigation of an early 19th century iron foundry in Britain (YAT 2006.21). The walls survived up to eleven courses high in places and features and artefacts associated with the processes of the foundry survived well.

Visible character

Medieval burgage plots can be read from the street along the whole of Fossgate and much of Walmgate

Although Walmgate is different in character from Fossgate, it is clearly a continuation of a main traditional route into the city. The effect of being different is principally due to the presence of Merchantgate, a late 19th century creation.

Picturesque and varied historic character

Sub surface character

Ove Arup Development & Archaeology Study Research Zones: 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

Deposit Depth (where known): The Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggests deposits at depths of c.3-7m. Natural ground levels vary between c.1-3m below ground level in the Walmgate area. At 11 Walmgate medieval oven structures were noted at 0.6m below ground level. A possible jetty structure was recorded in 1829 at the Malt Shovel Inn at c.9m below ground level. Depth of King's Pool at rear of 76-82 Walmgate in excess of 6m depth.

Wet Roman deposits were recorded as being 0.4m thick at 76-82 Walmgate. On the same site wet Anglo-Scandinavian deposits were noted as being 0.35-0.45m thick as well as both wet and dry disturbed medieval deposits at 0.5-0.65m thick.

Period Survival: Evidence of Roman to early modern activity has been found within the area. All periods have the potential to survive here but the depth and level of disturbance is variable. Archaeology relating to the riverside has often been disturbed by 19th and 20th century industrial development. Roman material is less common and Anglo-Scandinavian through to medieval is well represented.

Interventions (recorded on HER April 2013): There are 28 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 many interventions are yet to be recorded in the HER. See Appendix 1 for summary.

Significance

Overview: The River Foss is clearly an important factor in understanding this part of York and a glance at the topography map gives an insight into the relationship between the higher ground and those areas that must have been prone to periodic flooding. Fossgate and Walmgate cross the Foss taking advantage of a glacial moraine to the east. Although not evidenced specifically, most researchers tend to support the existence of a Roman road along this route and the fact that the area was clearly well developed by the 10th century indicate a suburb of importance by that time. Fossgate and Walmgate offer a significant opportunity to examine suburban growth from this time to the present. Where it survives, archaeological evidence is well preserved and there is a high occurrence of anaerobic deposits. Evidence suggests that relatively undisturbed patches of substantial wet and dry stratified deposits survive at depths varying between 0.6m to as much as 9.0m.

The area is also significant as one of York's largest 18th and 19th century industrial zones and as revealed through excavation, sub-surface remains can survive well.

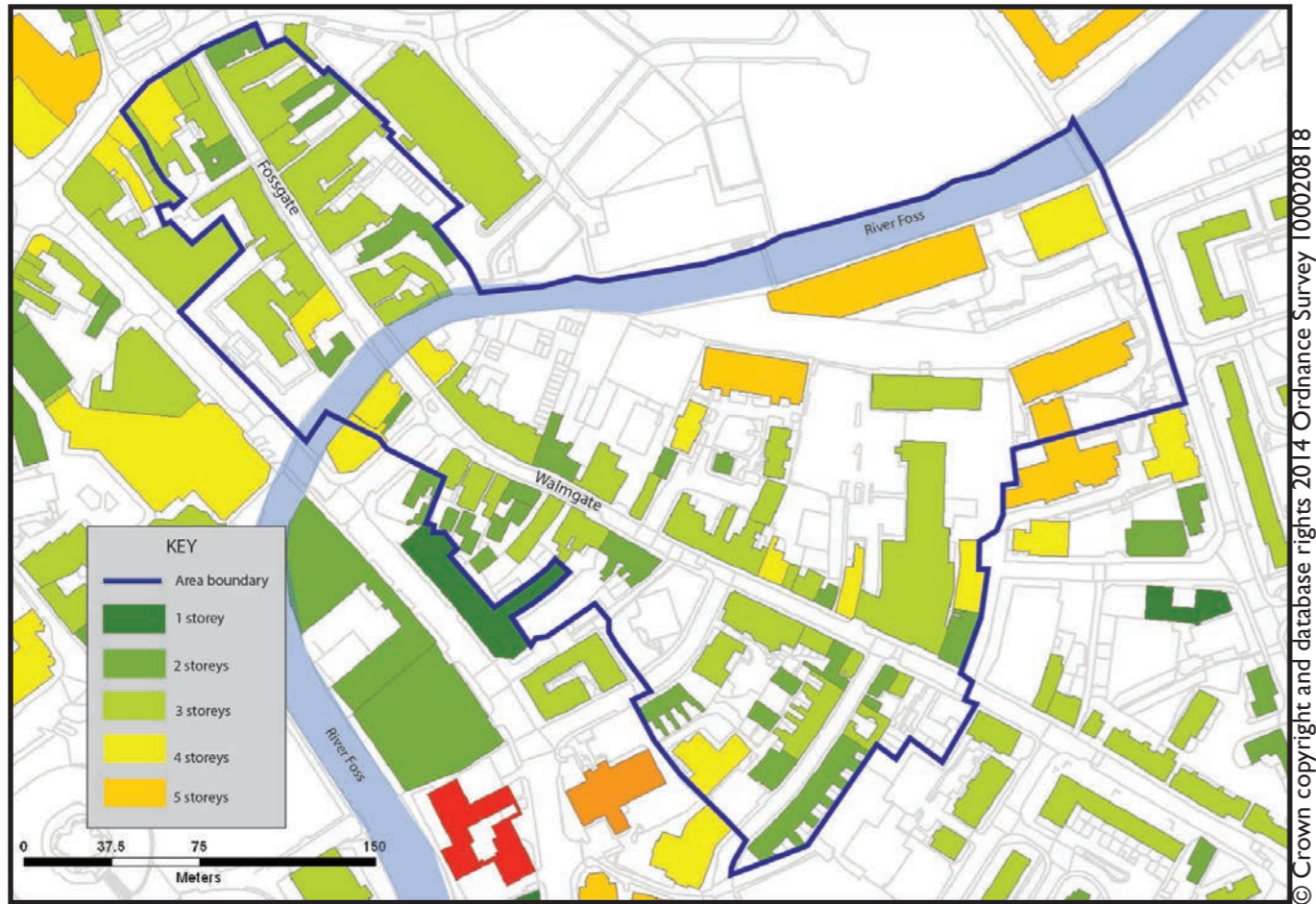
Designations: The site falls within the Central Area of Archaeological Importance and the Historic Core Conservation Area.

The Fossgate and Walmgate area contains a high number of architecturally or historically significant buildings. There are 65 Grade II listed buildings predominantly dating between the 17th to the 19th centuries and 7 Grade II* buildings, as well as two significant medieval survivals- the Merchant Adventurers Hall and St. Deny's Church both Grade I listed. The Merchant Adventurers Hall is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 234). Several buildings of merit have also been identified such as social housing on George Street, a warehouse on Hurst's Yard and the York Press building on Walmgate.

Streetscape components: Footway surfaces are varied but generally consisting of pre-cast buff coloured flagstones (450mm x 450mm Marshals Saxon - a default material for the city) on the majority of Fossgate, Walmgate and George Street.

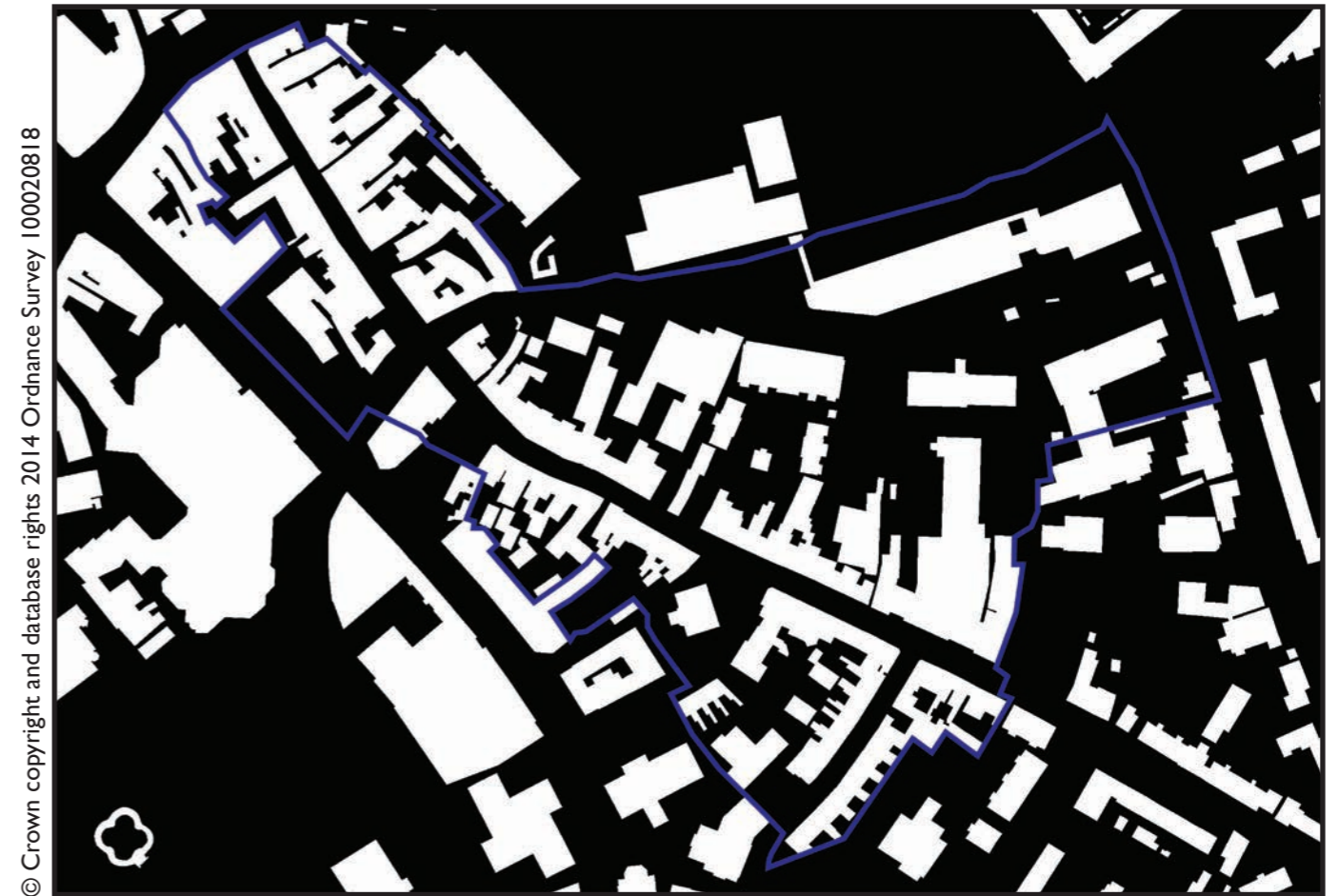
Small amounts of riven English Pennine Sandstone flags are located on both Fossgate and Walmgate near Foss Bridge. The bridge itself is surfaced with granite setts. Black bituminous covering is used on Dennis Street and part of George Street.

Traditional stable pavements exist on Walmgate at the entrances to the rear courtyards. The carriageways are generally asphalt. Throughout this area, generally modern street lighting attached to the buildings and late 20th century traffic signage are in use. Some of the street lighting is in period, lantern style. Two black iron cycle racks are situated on Walmgate but generally here the streets are fairly narrow and restricted to a one-way traffic system meaning there is not much space for cycle racks etc to clutter up the pavements.



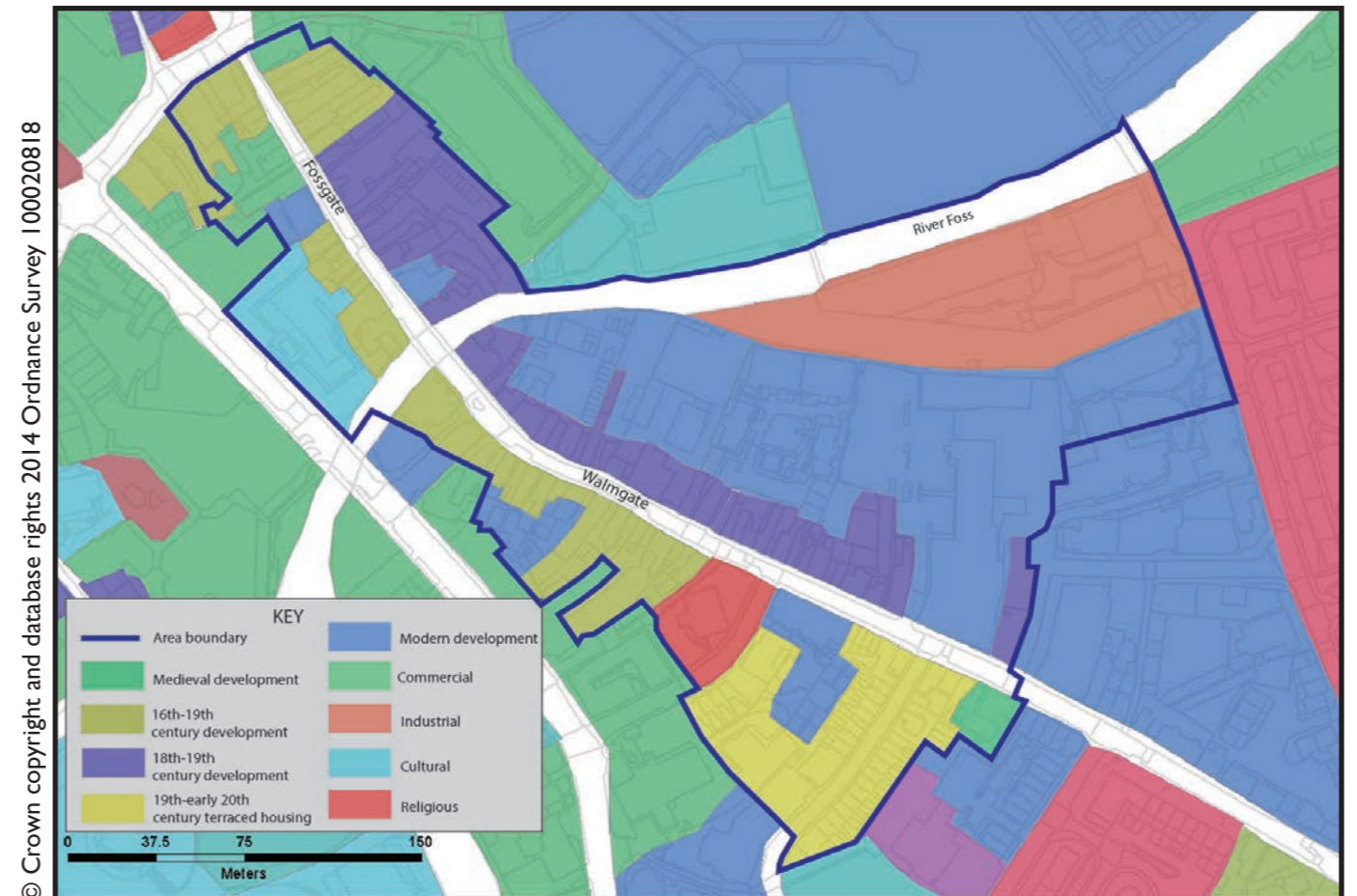
Above: Plan showing the heights of the buildings within this character area.

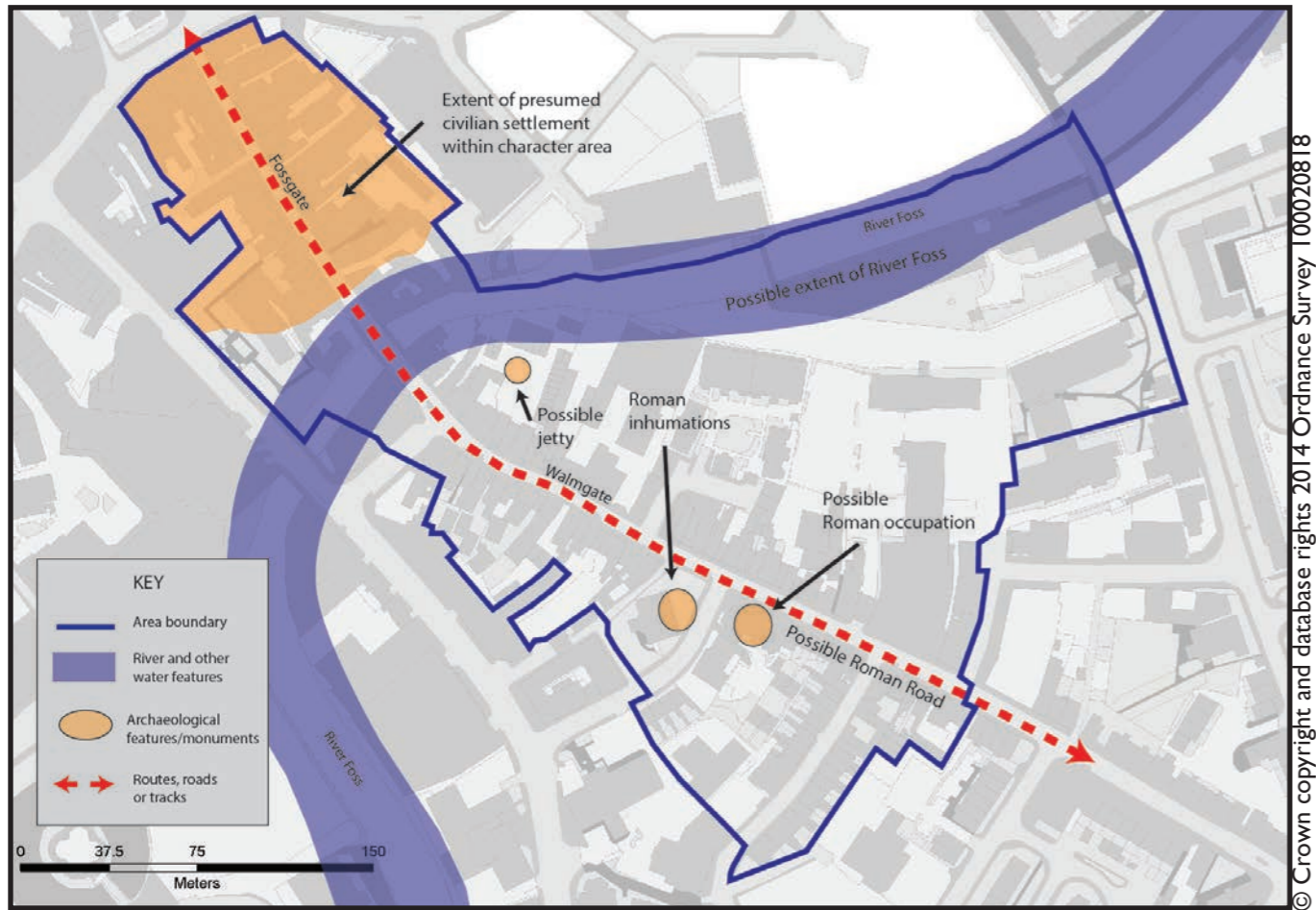
Below: Plan showing the construction dates of the buildings within the area.



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

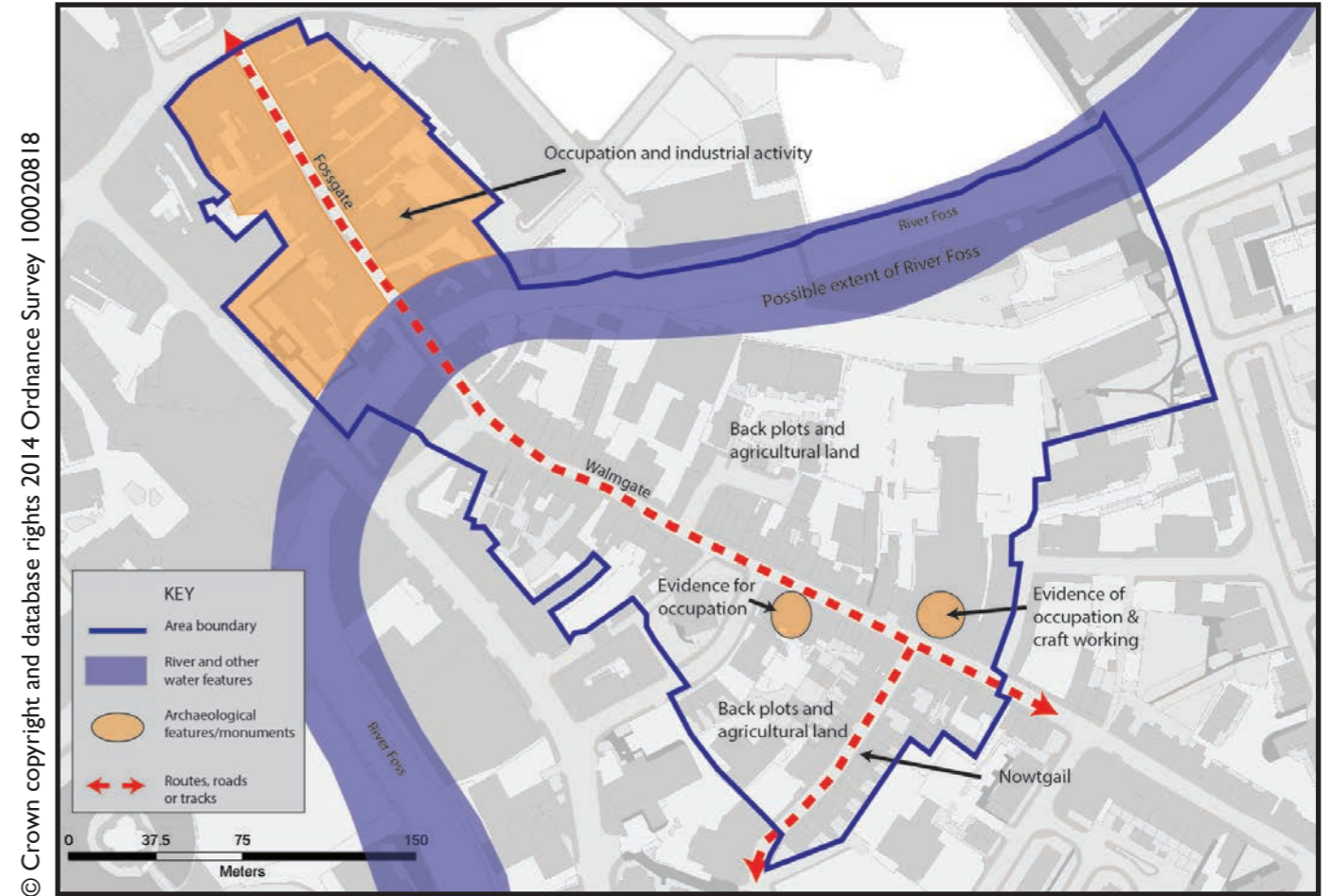
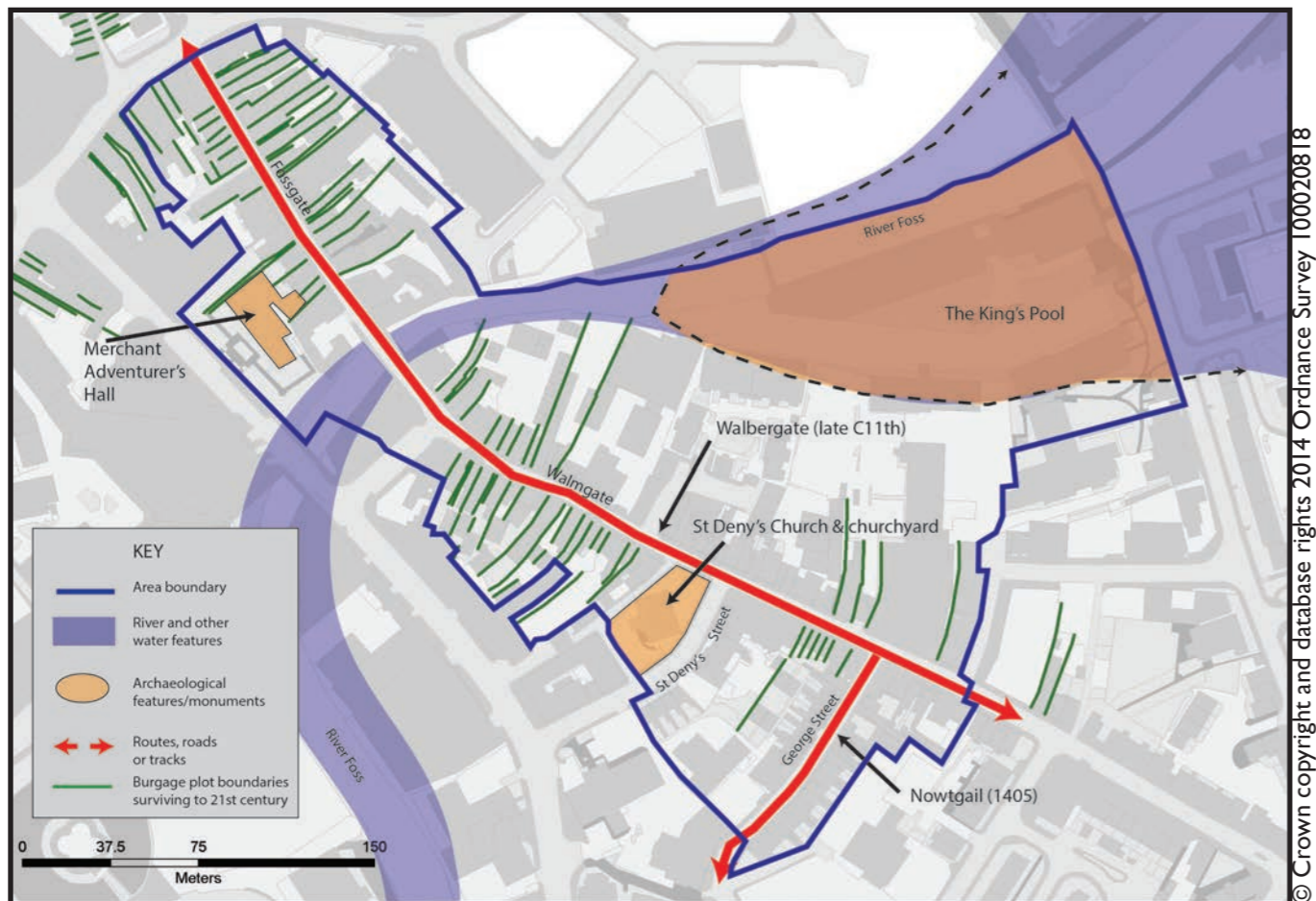
Below: Plan showing the Broad Type characterisation of the area. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan.





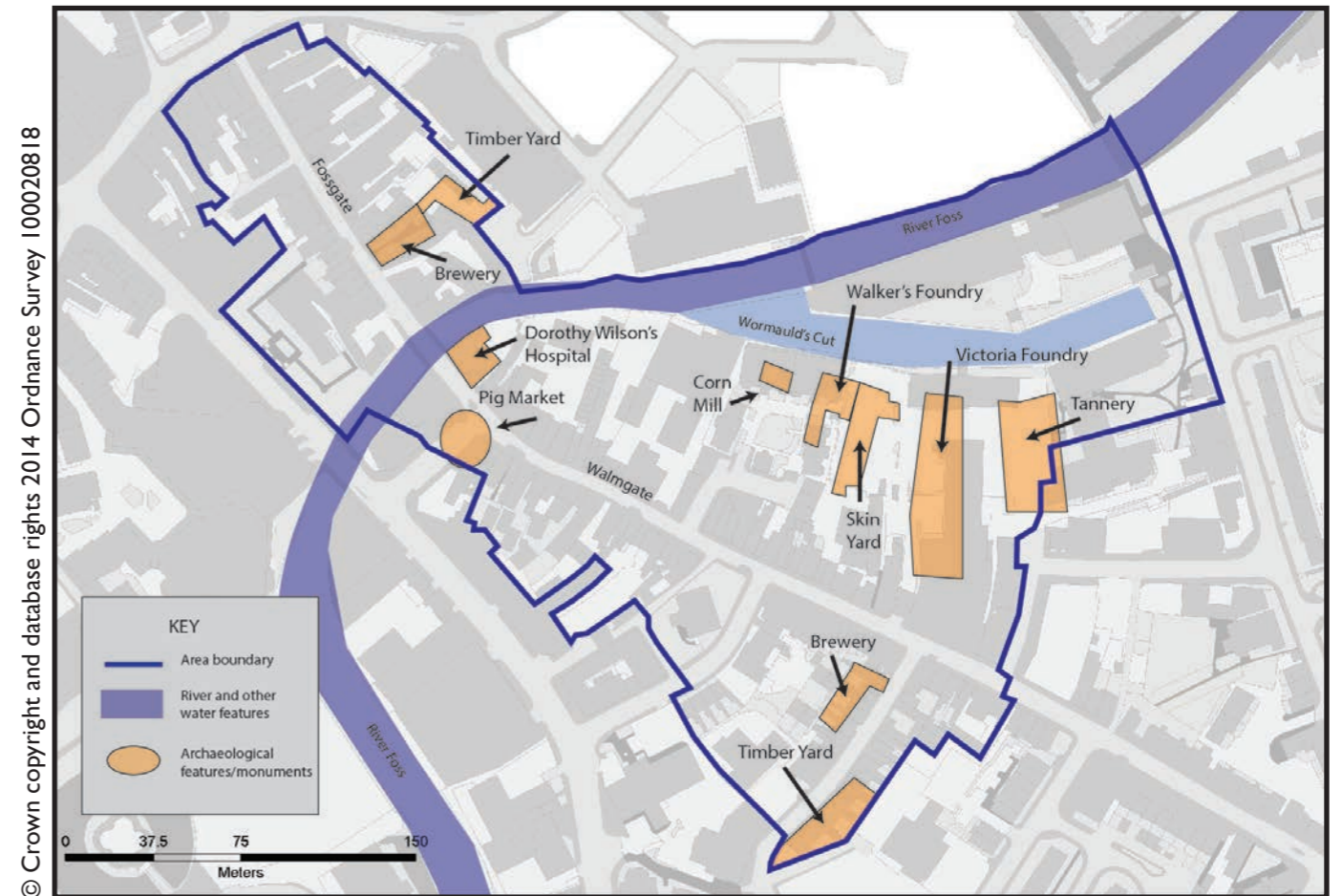
Above: The Roman landscape.

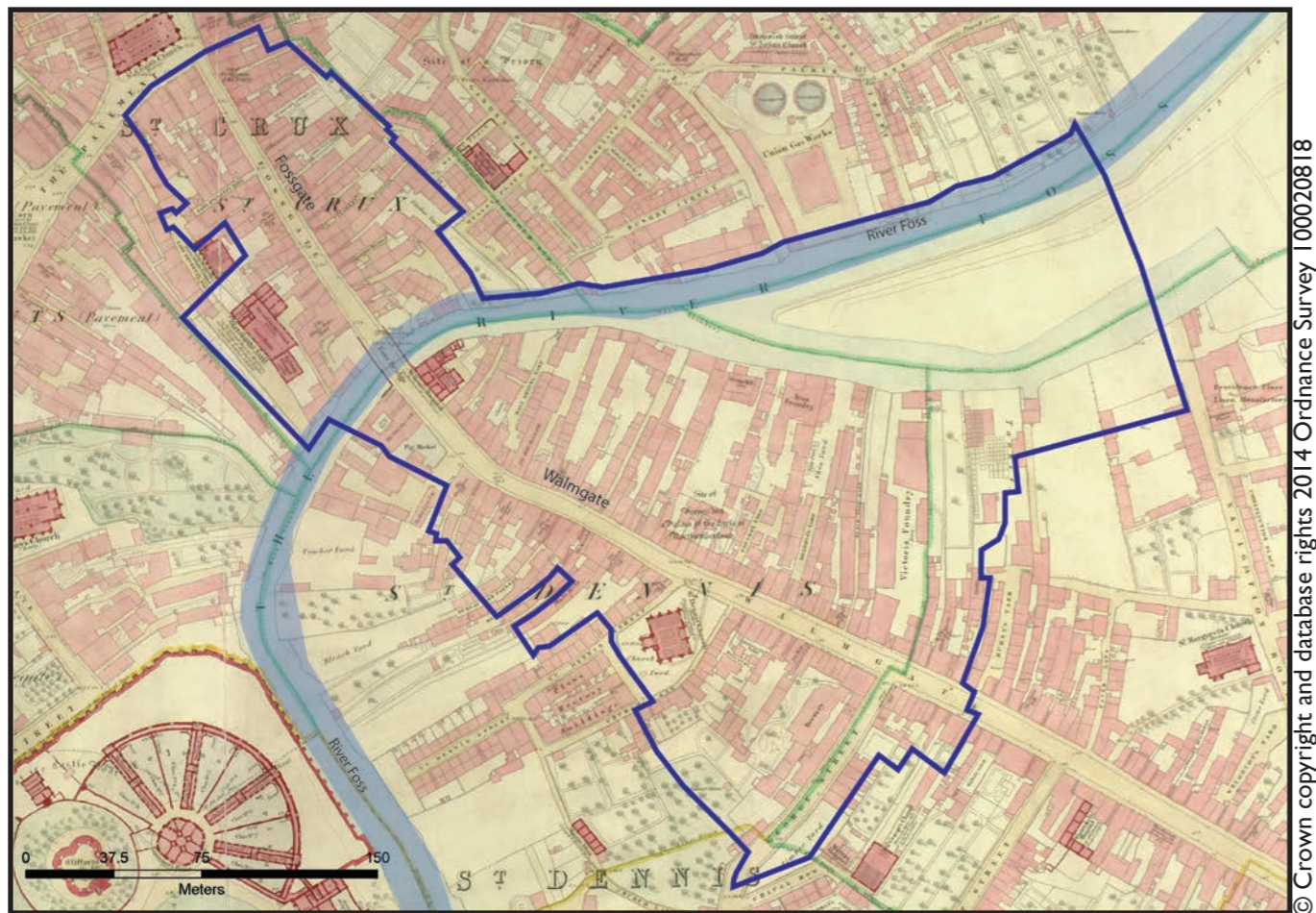
Below: The medieval landscape.



Above: The Anglo-Scandinavian landscape.

Below: The post-medieval landscape.





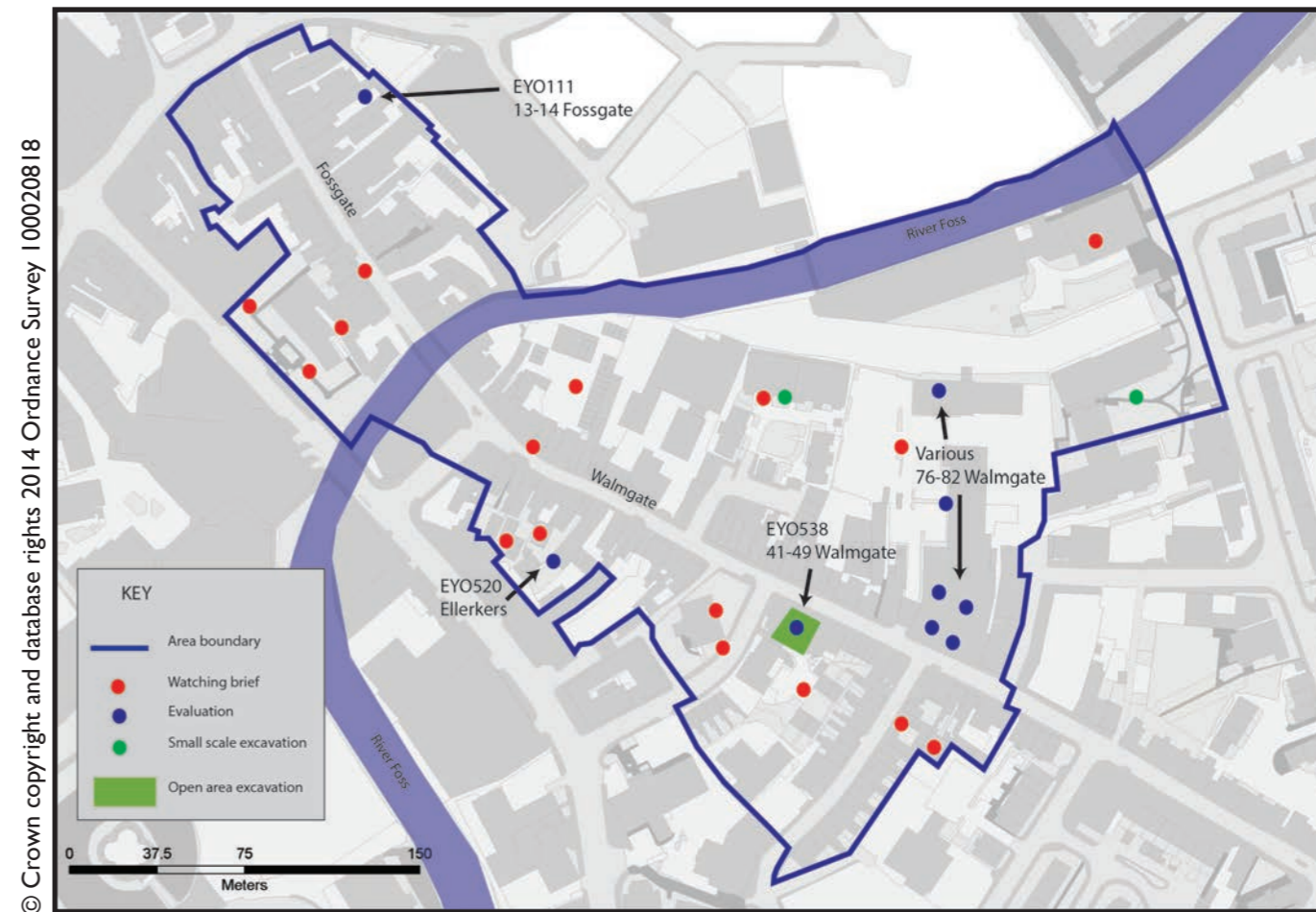
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Above: The 1852 landscape.

Below: The general topography showing the relatively low lying nature of most of the area.



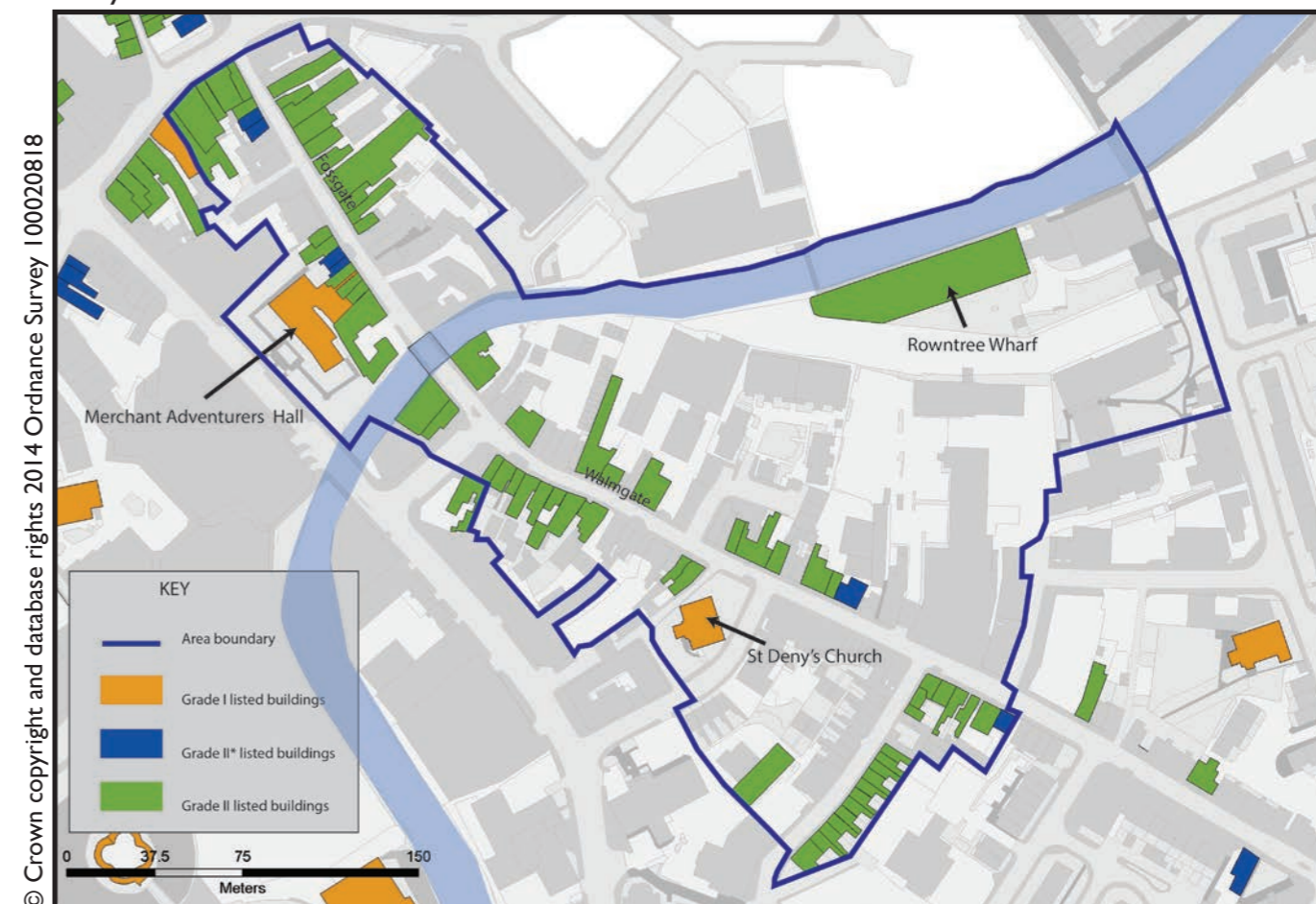
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Above: The location of archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record.

Below: Location of listed buildings. Note the Grade I listed Merchant Adventurers Hall and St. Deny's Church



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Main Sources

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Ottaway, P. 2011, Archaeology in the Environs of Roman York, CBA, York

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York City Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal- 15: Fossgate and Walmgate

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