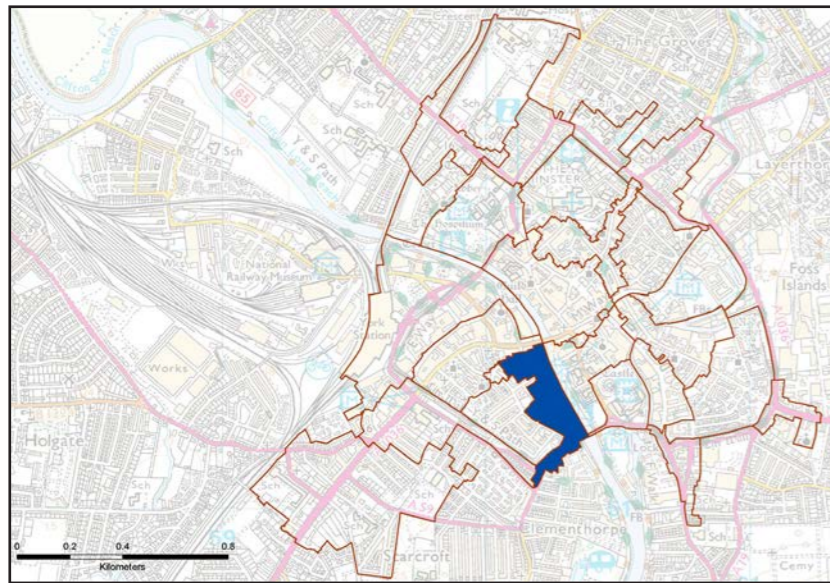


## Character area 19: Queen's Staith



The location of the character area within the historic core.

### Description

Historically, Skeldergate was York's main dockside street, bustling with activity. 20th century decline of international and domestic river-borne trade led to extensive warehouse demolition and today it is a quiet residential area with modern warehouse-style apartment buildings.

The limited number of surviving historic buildings means that this aspect of its character is less apparent than King's Staith but nevertheless significant. The historic street pattern remains and new buildings reflect a number of characteristics of their predecessors.

*Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal*

## Archaeological background

### Roman

During the Roman period, the riverside area, present Skeldergate was probably part of the River Ouse foreshore. The river was certainly much wider then. At Albion Wharf, excavations revealed anaerobic Roman deposits, 0.4m thick including a possible timber waterfront revetment overlain by stake structures (EYO2909). The area between the river and Bishophill comprises a series of natural river terraces observed in several archaeological investigations. There is clear evidence that these terraces were landscaped and developed in the Roman period as part of the civilian Colonia. A Roman building (MYO2289) of at least three rooms including a plunge bath, was observed during the excavation of a sewer trench along Fetter Lane in 1852 (EYO2706).

58-59 Skeldergate, excavated in the early to mid 1970s revealed a cobbled road surface running approximately 10m parallel to modern Skeldergate, a timber lined well and various dumps of material including possible clay and cobble wall footings (EYO2018-20). Deposits were between 1.4m and 2.1m in thickness.

The Ove Arup Study suggests a general model of the riverside area as a downwards slope running SW-NE with Roman levels between c.3.4m to 5.0m+ below ground level.

Excavations at the Friend's Burial Ground (EYO2251-52) in 1973 produced finds indicating continuous occupation from the 2nd to 19th century. Structures encountered are suggested to be related to the defences of the Roman Colonia. In addition to this, pits and metalled surfaces were encountered. At the Queen's Hotel, excavated in the late 1980s (EYO2326-34) structures dating to the late Roman period were also found. Roman deposits on this site are noted at a relatively shallow depth of 0.9m to 2.9m below ground level.

### Anglian – Anglo-Scandinavian

There is very little evidence for Anglian settlement or activity south of the Ouse although several cremation cemeteries, in particular The Mount, as well as numerous casual finds suggests that activity must have been present. The nature of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement is clearer.

Pre-Conquest remains were noted through evaluation at the NCP car park, 64-67 Skeldergate (EYO429, EYO4848 & EYO4850) at depths of fewer than 2.0m below ground level. It is expected that deposits deeper than 2.0m at this site will survive relatively undisturbed. Albion Wharf also produced Anglo-Scandinavian and possibly Anglian deposits and waterfront revetments (EYO2910-11). Anaerobic Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian successive timber structures and surfaces were recorded as being 0.5m to 1.2m in thickness at 58-59 Skeldergate (EYO2021-23).

Depths of Anglo-Scandinavian levels are noted as generally existing between 1-3.4m below ground level in the Ove Arup Study. At the Queen's Hotel site Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval deposits were truncated by modern cellars (EYO2333). Deposits were noted at c.0.9m below ground level, slightly shallower than the Ove Arup model suggested. 0.7m thick, anaerobic deposits including cobbled surfaces, pits and wattle structures dating to this period were found in the Queen's Hotel area (EYO2331). Skeldergate, Fetter Lane and Carr's lane are all probably Anglo-Scandinavian streets.

### Medieval

Skeldergate (Sceldergate c.1154 but clear Old Norse roots) was the principal riverside street of medieval York, the river crossing between Micklegate and Ousegate was bridged at an early period at the northern tip of this character area. The riverside was lined with warehouses which stored produce before it was loaded onto boats at Queen's Staith (constructed 1660).

Wharves ran from the river up to Cromwell Road and Bishophill Senior. Fetter Lane was also in existence by 1280 as Feltergayl (relating to felt makers and probably an early Anglo-Scandinavian origin).

The NCP car park, 64-67 Skeldergate revealed deep, well stratified, mostly waterlogged deposits dating from the 11th-16th century. All trenches were excavated between 0.52m to 2.0m below ground level.

Albion Wharf excavations revealed a medieval wall, recorded as 2.07m thick (EYO2907). Further stone structures and associated surfaces and dumps relating to one tenement were recorded on the other side of Skeldergate in the 1970s (EYO2026-28).

These deposits were up to 2.0m in thickness.

The south-western part of this character area impinges onto The Old Baile (MYO2802) a motte and bailey castle built in 1068/69. The castle was integrated into the circuit of city defences in the mid 15th century. The City Wall within this area survives from Baile Hill Tower to Bitchdaughter Tower (MYO1715). The length from Baile Hill Tower to the River Ouse was removed along with the Skeldergate Postern in the early 19th century.

Medieval levels are noted as generally existing between 1.2m to 3.0m below ground level in the Ove Arup Study. Some sites, such as the Queen's Hotel records contradict this general model – with medieval levels at 0.6m below ground level. Excavation at 1-9 Bridge Street (EYO2335-39), revealed part of the medieval river frontage, including 1.6m thick medieval anaerobic dumped deposits and in situ structures (EYO2335). Excavations at 52 Skeldergate revealed a cobbled surface within anaerobic deposits (EYO3262). The same site also contained a post-medieval tile dump. More walls relating to the medieval and post-medieval periods were found at the Pawson's Warehouse site and at City Mills (EYO3079-80, EYO3105-7).

### **Post-medieval – early modern**

By the 18th century Skeldergate attracted prosperous residents such as the architect John Carr. Merchants traditionally lived close to their warehouses, mostly on the western side of Skeldergate. By the end of the 19th century river-borne trade declined due to goods increasingly being transported by rail and later road. Many of the warehouses on the riverside and the triangular area between Skeldergate, Cromwell Road and Fetter Lane were demolished during the second half of the 20th century and replaced with residential blocks.

The first edition Ordnance Survey plan (1852) shows the eastern side of Skeldergate on the river frontage containing various mills, cranes and yards. On the western side the City Saw Mill and a timber yard is shown as well as what appear to be more residential properties. Also west of Skeldergate is Lady Anne Middleton's Hospital now hotel (MYO858) dating to 1829 and the sites of the British School for Girls and a Wesleyan Chapel and school.

The Friends Burial ground is also located within this character area. The majority of medieval plots shown on this plan have been destroyed by the construction of larger buildings on the riverside.

Only three historic warehouses remain in this area now converted to new uses; Varvill's Warehouse (1849), Woods Mill (c1875) and the Bonding Warehouse (1872-5 and unused since the mid-1990s). Several other industrial buildings also remain - Emperor's Wharf sawmill (1839), 52 Skeldergate and two factory buildings.

The construction of large factory buildings and warehouses will have had a negative impact on any surviving archaeology, particularly those at more shallow depths. A watching brief at the junction of Skeldergate and Queen's Staith observed a hole dug to a depth of 3.6m below ground level.

All deposits appeared to be modern. This indicates that in some areas, disturbance by services, such as the sewer in this case, can penetrate to depths where archaeology may have previously survived.

## Visible character

Quiet residential area with modern three to five storey apartment blocks reflecting historic warehouse buildings in style

Retention of historic street pattern

Some listed buildings - mostly Grade II

Riverside setting – prone to flooding

Good views along and across the river

## Sub surface character

**Ove Arup Development & Archaeology Study Research Zones:** 10, 11 and 15

**Deposit Depth (where known):** Ove Arup Archaeology and Development Study suggest high quality archaeological deposits of all periods at average depths of c.5.0m on the waterfront and deposits of average quality at c.2.0m below ground level to the west of Skeldergate

Generally across the riverside area Roman deposits are located 3.0m+ below ground level, medieval at 2.0m below ground level and post-medieval at 1.0m below ground level. The latter two periods may also produce anaerobic deposits (Ove Arup). Further west away from the riverside the general model is 2.0m to 4.0m of historic strata covered by a shallow overburden.

Deposit thicknesses vary approximately between: Roman 0.4m to 2.1m, Anglian c.0.5m, Anglo-Scandinavian 0.25m to 1.2m, medieval 0.65m to 2.07m and post-medieval c.0.35m to 0.5m although the latter is based on limited evidence.

**Period Survival:** Roman and Anglo-Scandinavian deposits including burials and structures have been found throughout the area. Medieval deposits are relatively common although 18th and 19th century construction of warehouses and factory buildings have had a negative impact on surviving archaeology in places.

In general, any area which is relatively undisturbed could contain well preserved, stratified deposits from all periods.

**Interventions (recorded on HER April 2013):** There are approximately 34 archaeological interventions, including several historic in date, 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 included in the HER.

## Significance

**Overview:** Queens Staith falls predominantly within the Ouse Waterfront (West Bank) and partly within the former Roman Colonia/West Walled City area as identified by Ove Arup. On the waterfront, deposits of a high quality dating to all periods are known to exist at an average depth of c.5.0m. Further upslope on the fringes of the Colonia, Ove Arup suggests deposits of an average quality exist at a depth c.2m below ground level, relating to all periods.

Substantial remains of high quality Roman civilian buildings, occupation evidence and riverside revetments are known throughout the area. Possible Anglian and certain Anglo-Scandinavian wharfs have been revealed on Skeldergate, in some places truncated by later cellars. Medieval and post-medieval archaeology is also present across the whole character area, often disturbing earlier deposits. Where observed, deposits include significant anaerobic material. With the limited information available it is known that substantial stratified wet and dry deposits can survive within this area at varying depths between 0.9m to 5m+ below ground level.

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

The Queen's Staith area contains few architecturally or historically significant buildings due to high levels of warehouse demolitions in the 1960s-70s. The City Walls are Grade I listed and are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There are also 16 Grade II and 2 Grade II\* (Lady Anne Middleton's Hospital and 56 Skeldergate) listed buildings. Several Buildings of Merit have been identified including the former Capaldi's ice cream factory in Fetter Lane (Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal).

**Streetscape components:** Paving is a mixture of riven English Pennine Sandstone, pre-cast concrete flags (Marshall's Saxon paving principally), and asphalt. Natural stone flags exist on Skeldergate.

Pre-cast concrete flags are predominantly used on Fetter Lane. Carriageways are tarmac as well as part of the footpath on Skeldergate (slurry sealing) and Bishopgate Street (black bituminous).

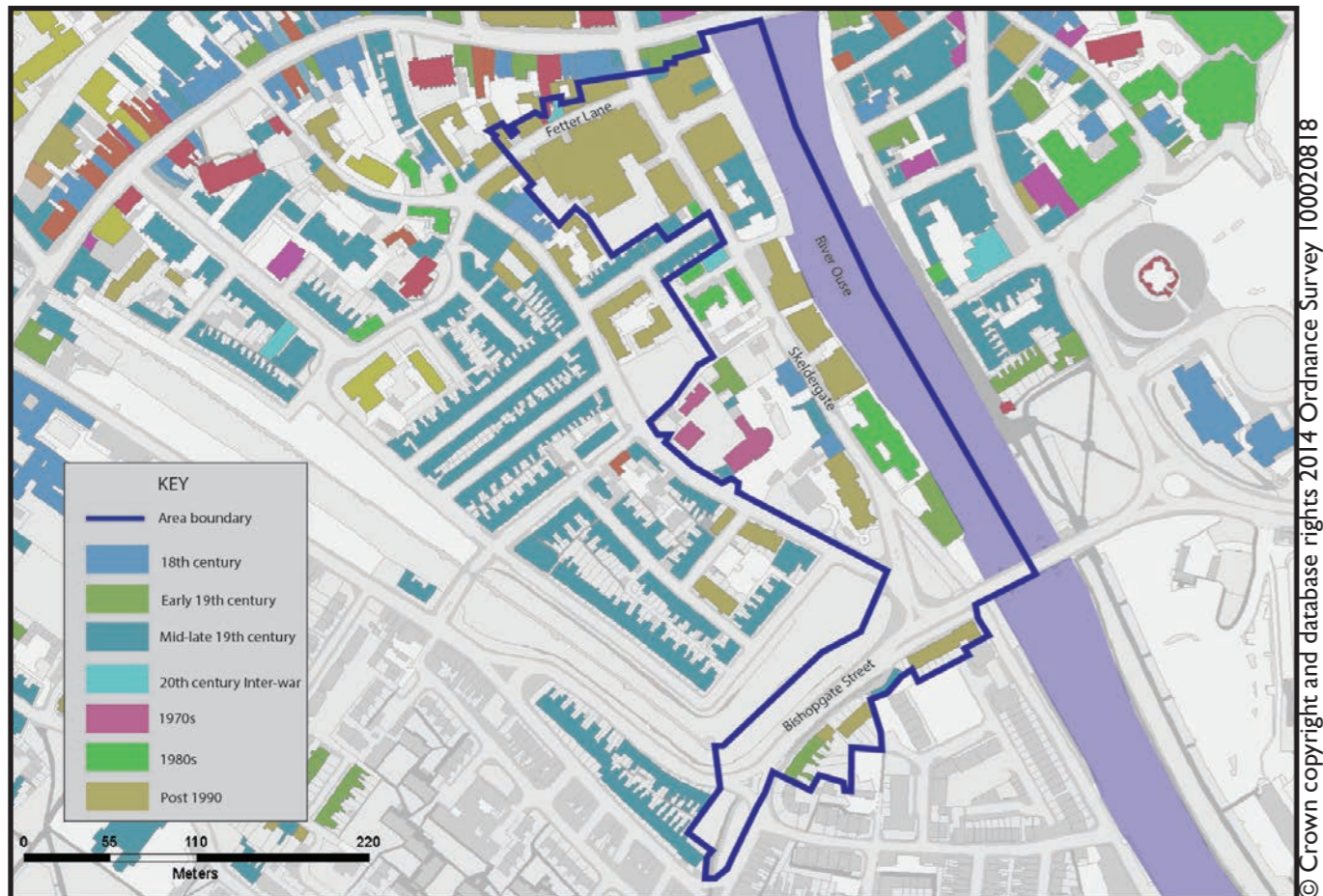
Queen's Staith and Carr Lane are cobbled.

Throughout this area, modern street lighting units, black bollards, and late 20th century traffic signage are in use. The cast iron bollards are predominantly located on Skeldergate preventing car parking on the side of the pavements.



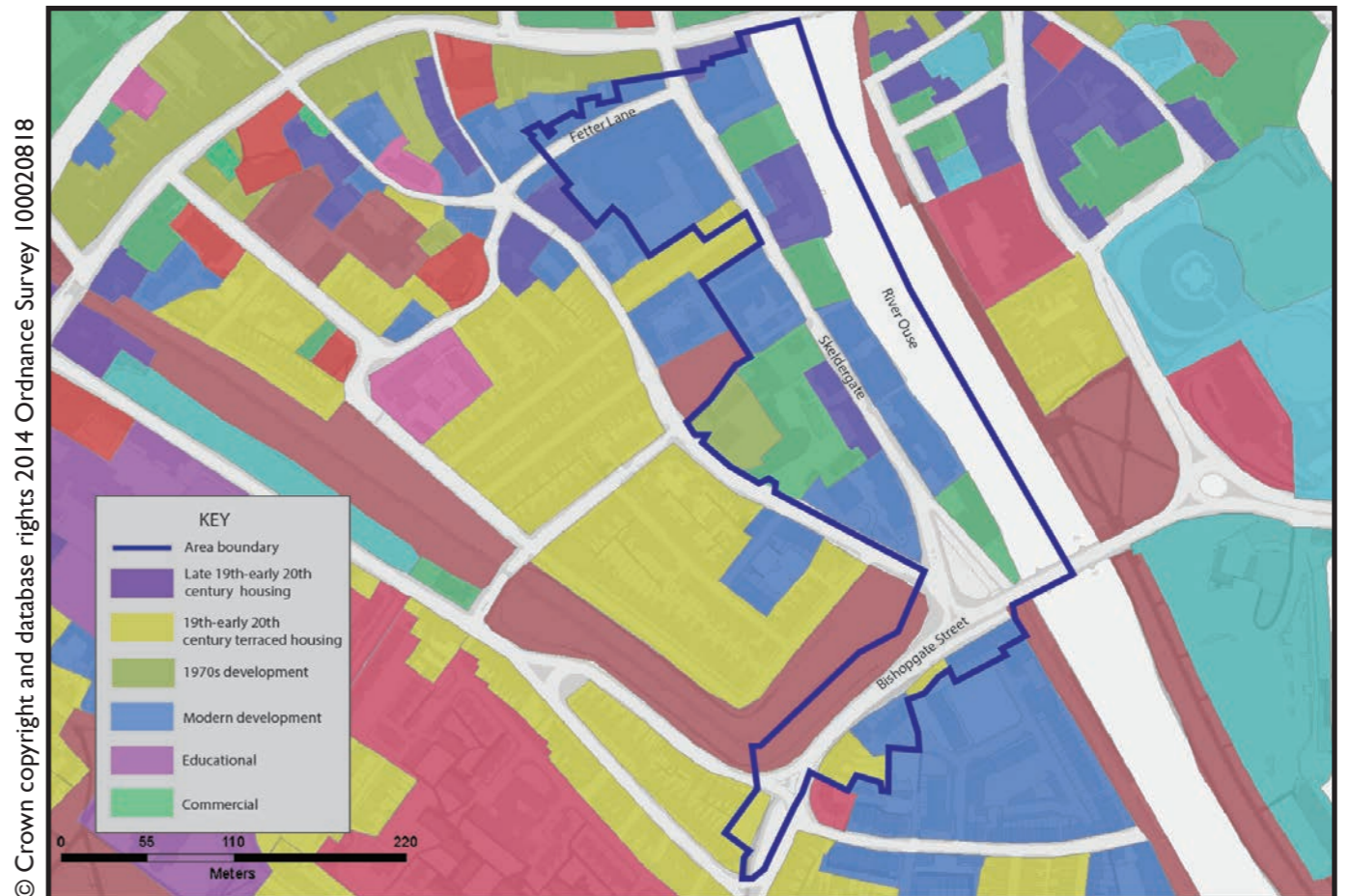
Above: Plan showing the heights of the buildings within this character area.

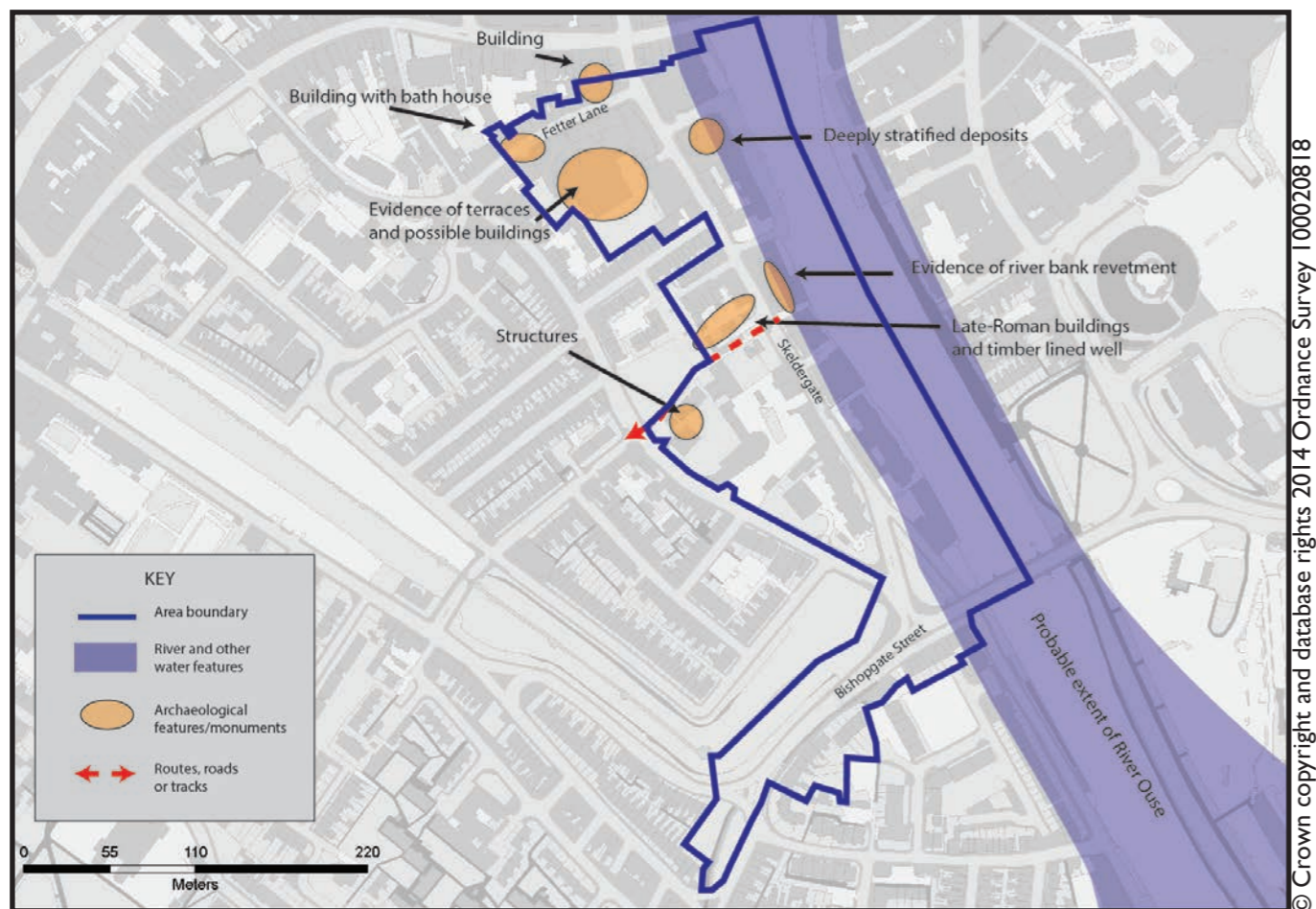
Below: Plan showing the construction dates of the buildings within the area.



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

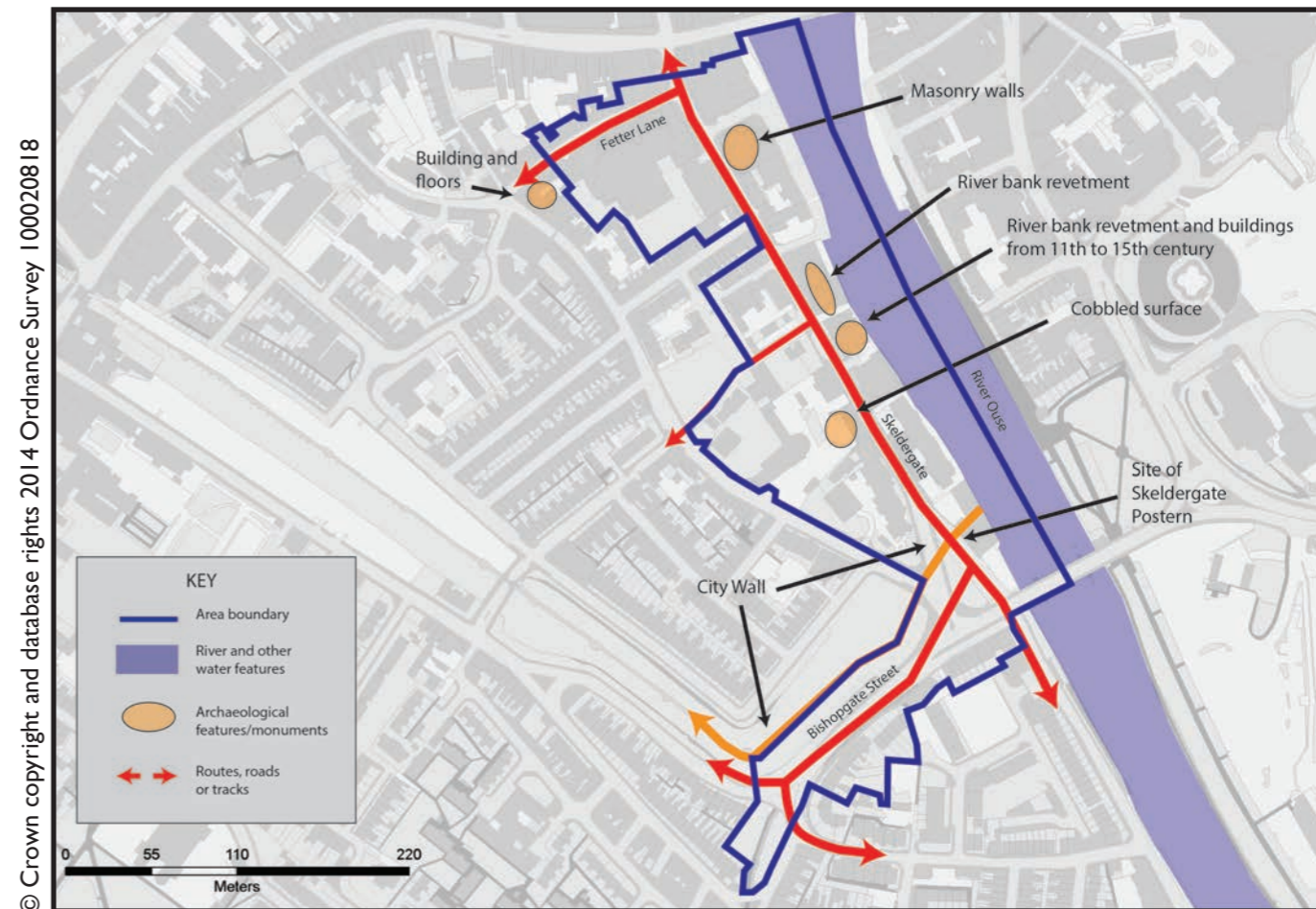
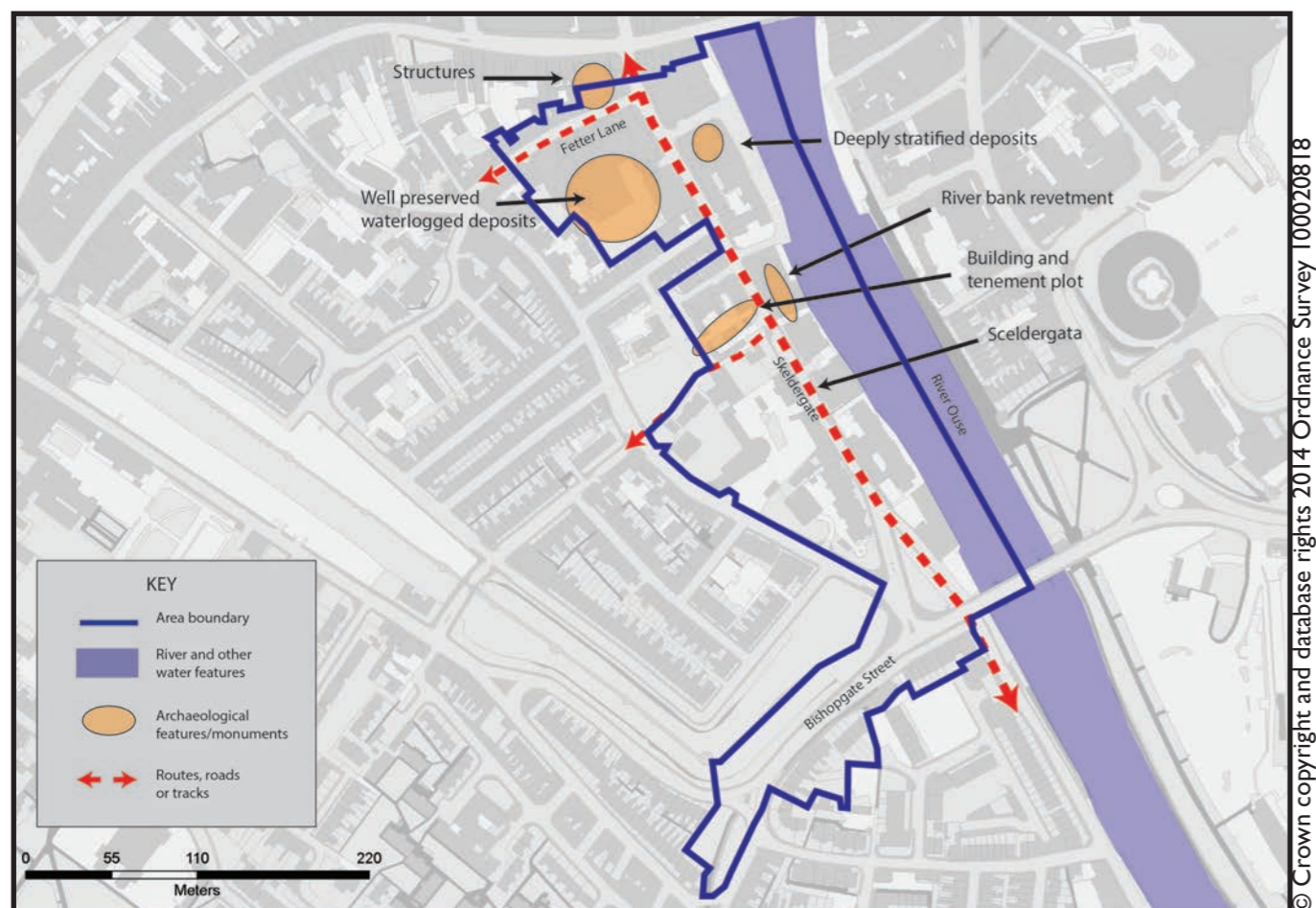
Below: Plan showing the Broad Type characterisation of the area. White roadways indicate roads or lanes visible on the 1852 Ordnance Survey Plan.





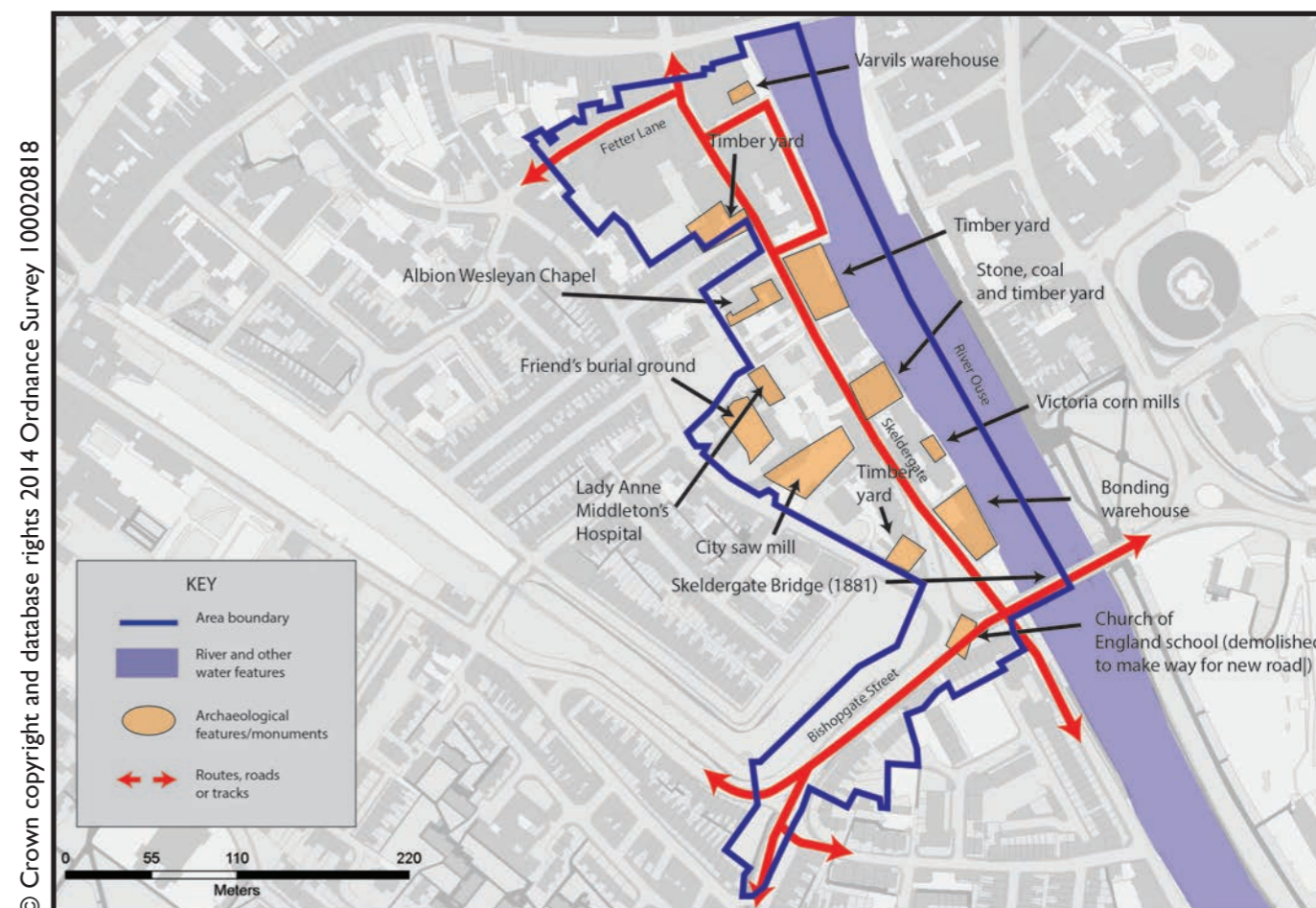
Above: The Roman landscape.

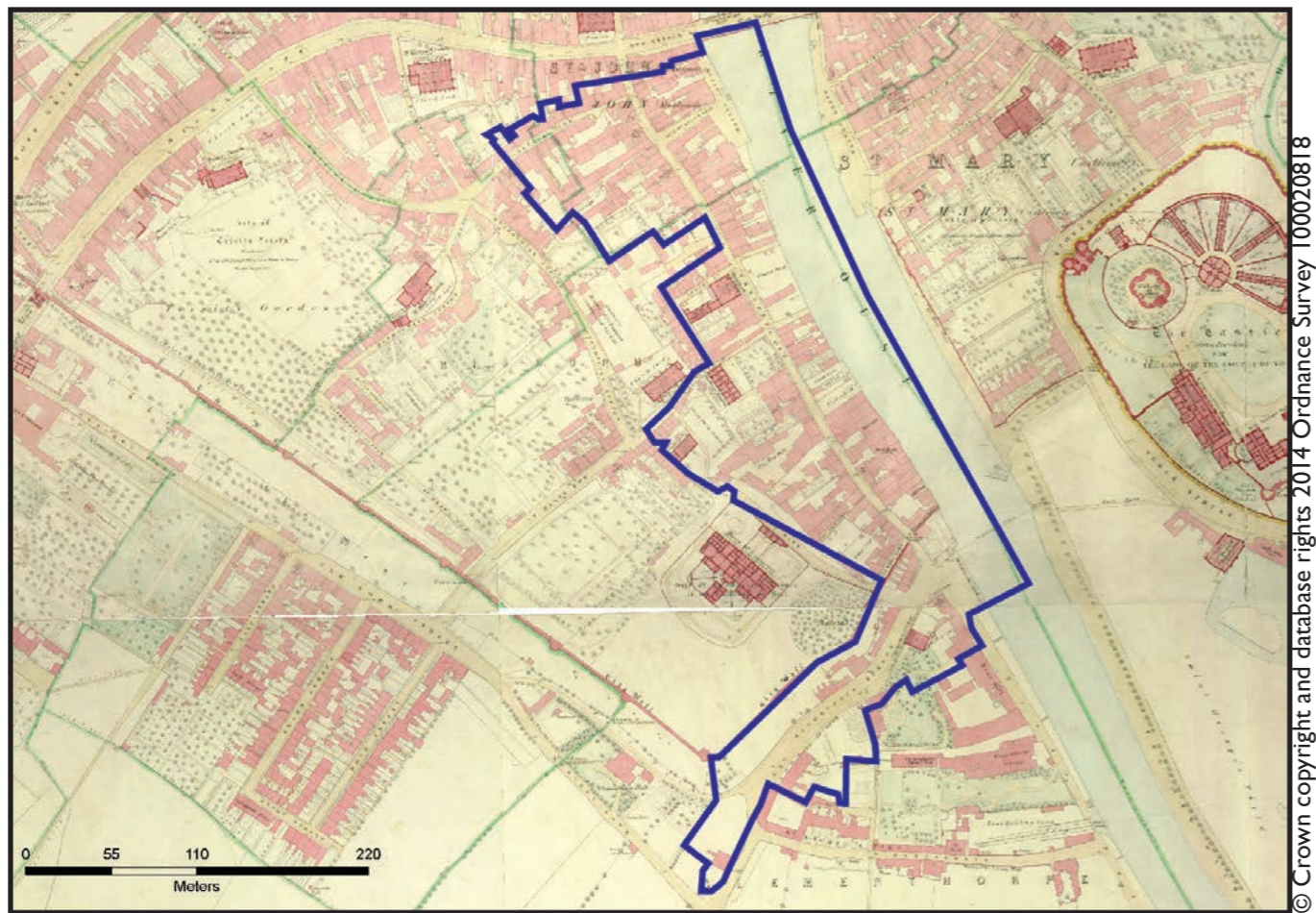
Below: The Anglo-Scandinavian landscape.



Above: The medieval landscape.

Below: The post-medieval landscape.





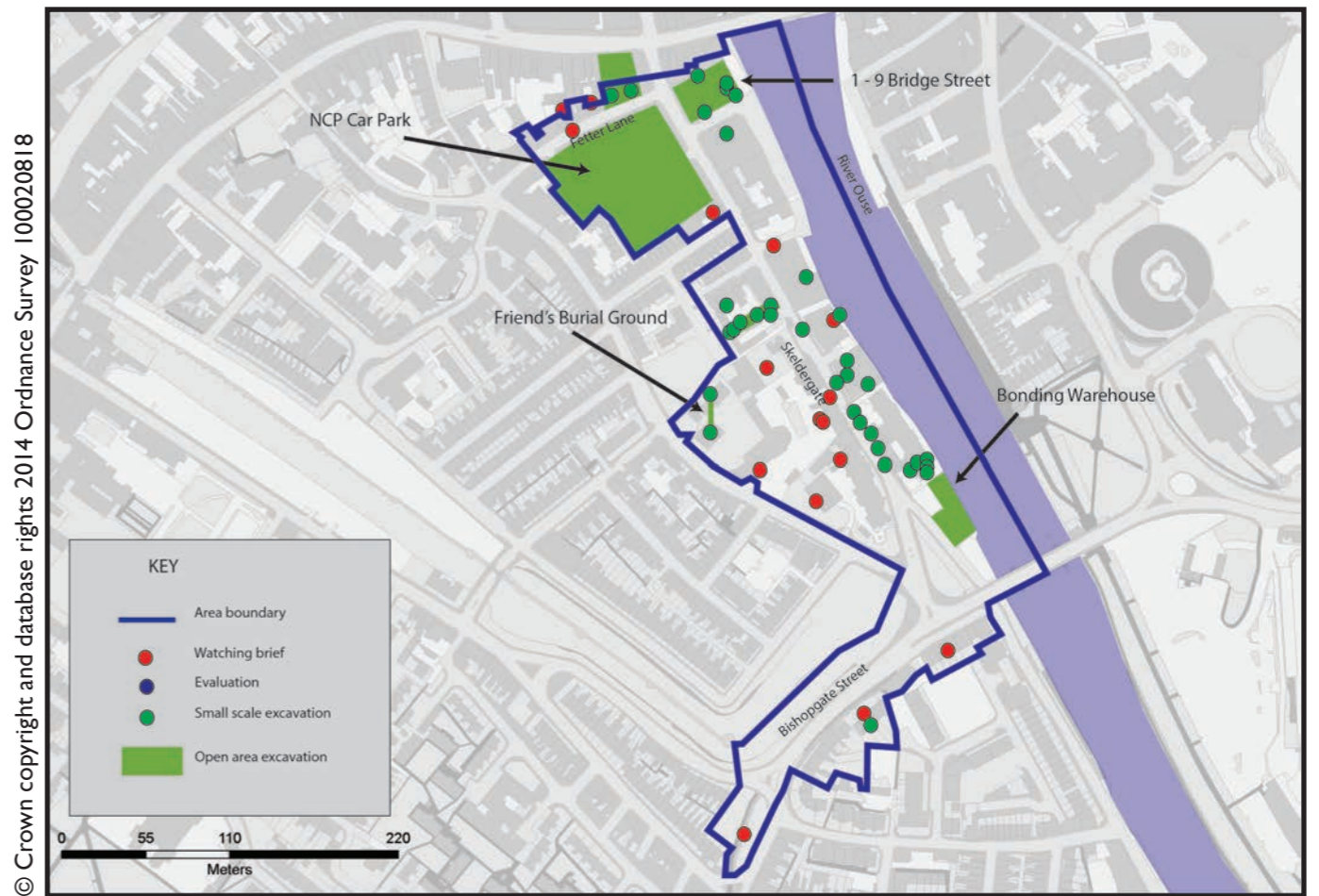
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Above: The 1852 landscape.

Below: The general topography showing the higher land to the west away from the riverside.



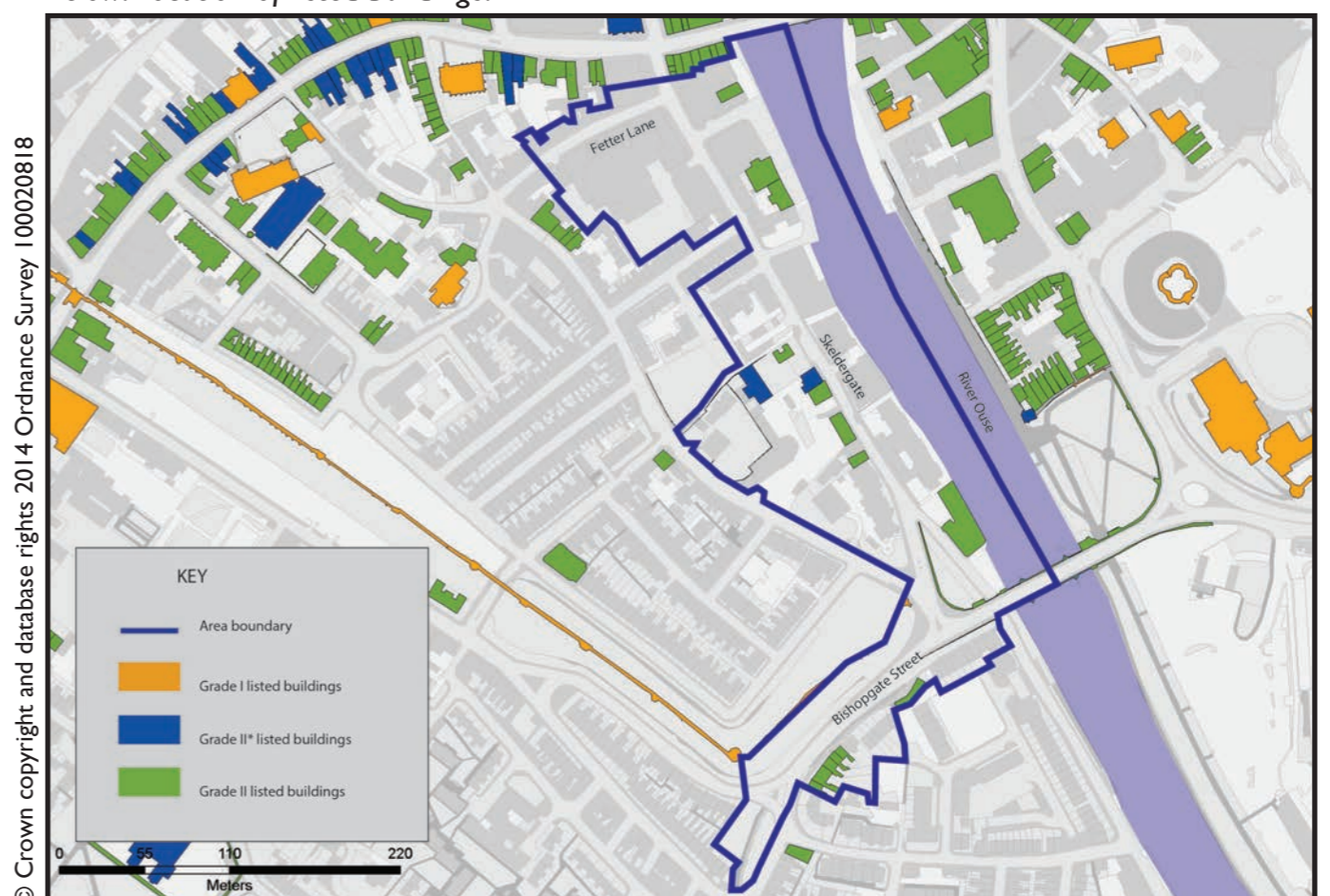
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Above: The location of archaeological interventions recorded on the City of York Historic Environment Record.

Below: Location of listed buildings.



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## Main Sources

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

Ove Arup, 1991, Archaeology and Development Study, York

York City Council Historic Environment Record (and grey literature report EYO824)

York City Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal- 19: Queen's Staith and Skeldergate

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