

Architectural Stone Assessment

Amy Jones

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A total of 48 fragments were recovered from the Blue Bridge Lane site with a further three from excavation at Fishergate House. All represented fragments of architectural limestone; however, no complete pieces were recovered. Most exhibited a high degree of erosion and extensive damage, resulting in the loss of diagnostic surface treatment such as tooling, mortar and limewash. This poor survival has made identification difficult. Further damage has also resulted from reuse.

Of the 51 fragments, 27 can be grouped together as facing stone, employed in mass wall construction. In addition, a single fragment from Fishergate House (Find number 318) was identified as core fabric, due to the absence of worked surfaces. It had subsequently been re-used as part of a composite coffin.

Mortar adheres to a number of dressed and damaged surfaces. Find number 335, for example, has much of its moulding concealed by a hard lime mortar, with additional rubble core still attached (conjoining Find numbers 334-335).

2.0 ASSESSMENT

2.1 ARCHITECTURAL PIECES

Nineteen of the remaining fragments exhibited evidence for moulding or decoration. The simplest of these were fragments of a plain chamfered base or plinth. Five such blocks survive within the assemblage, with short chamfers on one face only, suggesting bases. Find number 339, however, had the much steeper chamfered face of a plinth (Plate 1). A similar profile was identified on Find numbers 346 and 361, but these stones were too fragmentary to allow any definite conclusions to be drawn.

A further five pieces appeared to have come from columns, with three different types represented. Find numbers 343 and 370 had gently curved dressed faces, with angled sides, suggesting that they formed sections of much larger feature (Find number 343, Face B; Plate 2). These are easily mistaken for fragments of voussoir, which can also have curved faces. However, these are roughly cut, with the dressed surface reserved for the visible face. Two such pieces were found in the Blue Bridge Lane assemblage. The second column type was more angular in design, and formed part of a continuous design, probably within an open arcade. A more ornate form of column was identified from Find numbers 4403 and 906. These represent complete sections of smaller columns, 0.11m in diameter. These are likely to have been decorative rather than structural, probably adorning an arched opening.

The most decorative pieces represented sections of stringcourse, with two different designs present. Find number 348 represents a plain chamfer, fillet, hollow chamfer design (Find number 348, Face B; Plate 3). Both Find numbers 334 and 335 exhibited a more complicated profile with chamfer, fillet, hollow and quarter roll. This arrangement is of an earlier date, suggesting that more than one building is represented by the assemblage.

The remaining fragments were tentatively identified as sections of doorway, due to the presence of rebates. Find number 336 represents part of a jamb, with engaged column decoration (Find number 336, Face C). Find number 376 had a more simplified chamfer design; however, the curvature of the chamfer suggests that it formed part of the arched head of the opening (Find number 376, Face D).



*Plate 1: Chamfered face
(Find number 339)*



*Plate 2: Column fragment
(Find number 343)*



*Plate 3: Section of stringcourse
(Find number 348)*



*Plate 4: Conjoining fragments of string course
(Find numbers 334 and 335)*



*Plate 5: Fragment of doorway
(Find number 336)*

2.2 TOOLING

There were two types of tooling presented by the assemblage, with most fragments exhibiting some evidence for dressing.

The most common technique was 'striated tooling', left by axes, adzes or straight bladed chisels. The resulting pattern is identified by parallel marks on the surface of the stone, either vertical, horizontal or diagonal, and was used for both rough working and fine decorative designs. The Blue Bridge Lane fragments exhibited two grades of striated tooling. There was a predominance of fine, diagonal tooling employed on the worked faces of sixteen fragments, with a further two having vertical markings. Coarser, diagonal cuts were also visible on the unworked surfaces of seven stones. In addition, broad chisel tooling was identified on a further four fragments. Both of these techniques were used on those surfaces engaged within the wall, where fine working was unnecessary.

The second technique identified in the assemblage was 'claw tooling'. This is produced by a toothed chisel which leaves a row of small indentations on the surface of the stone. Coarse tooling was present on eight fragments, with only two examples of fine claw tooling on a sculpted surface (Find numbers 348 and 376). Two fragments had claw tooling as a secondary dressing, with the more common striated tooling visible beneath (Find numbers 349 and 376). This suggests some re-use of the stones prior to their inclusion in the boundary wall. Claw tooling has been identified by Graves (1996, 227) as appearing in York c.1200, an idea supported by Stocker (quoted in Peacock 1998, 23). If correct, it is possible that these stones originate from the original priory foundation in the late 12th century; however, the dating of tooling is an inexact science. While claw working may appear at a later date, striated tooling was not abandoned, and continued in use throughout the medieval period.

2.3 SURFACE TREATMENT

A total of four fragments exhibited some evidence of surface treatment (Find numbers 339, 343, 354, and 361). Limewash was present on all four, while traces of red pigment was recorded on three fragments. Where present, this was reserved for dressed faces, suggesting that it related to their original function, rather than any subsequent re-use.



Mason's marks were identified on only two of the fragments, although more may have been lost due to damage and erosion. Find number 353 had a simple incised cross on its upper surface. In contrast, Find number 370 had an 'M' carved into its dressed face, suggesting that the stone was partly concealed (Find number 370, Face C; Plate 6, to right).

3.0 CONCLUSION

The finds from the Blue Bridge Lane and Fishergate House sites have been combined, since both sites have produced stones of similar quality and geology, suggesting that they originate from a common source, probably the Gilbertine Priory of St Andrew, founded in 1202.

Although a high percentage of the surviving fragments represent simple facing stone, a number of more interesting fragments have survived. The quality of this stonework suggests that it came from a high- status medieval building. Of particular note are the large fragments of column and voussoirs, which originated from large arched arcades. There is also evidence for more precise decorative features such as the moulded stringcourse fragments and decorative column pieces.

Dating is more problematic. The study of tooling has yet to achieve a concise chronology which can be applied across collections; however, the range of moulding profiles present can be associated with the high medieval period. Although there is some evidence for re-use prior to the construction of the boundary wall, it is reasonable to conclude that these fragments were salvaged from the Gilbertine Priory.

The Blue Bridge Lane fragments had a secondary phase of use, as part of a boundary wall along the lane itself. This subsequent reuse is evidenced by the presence of mortar on a number of dressed surfaces, thus obscuring some diagnostic information. However, much of the damage to this stonework appears to have been caused prior to its re-use, as suggested by the presence of mortar on a number of broken surfaces. Since the priory was dissolved in 1538, with the church falling into disuse soon after (Burton 1996, 64), much of the damage probably dates to this period, when the site would have yielded a large quantity of valuable building stone.