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**THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL AND ST LAWRENCE
FEWSTON
NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**INTERIM STATEMENT ON THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**



JB Archaeological Services

On behalf of

WASHBURN HERITAGE GROUP

June 2009

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INTERIM STATEMENT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document is an interim statement on the results of the archaeological excavation which cleared the development area of burials adjacent to the Church of St Michael and St Lawrence. The excavation and recovery of the inhumations followed on from the desk-based assessment (JBAS 2008a) and the initial trial trenching (JBAS 2008b). These two reports were both part of the staged assessment and mitigation for Christian burial grounds as given in the *Guidance for Best Practice* developed by English Heritage and the Church of England (English Heritage, 2005).
- 1.2 The previous archaeological investigations had originally identified nine marked graves dating from the 19th century *in situ* within the area along with a potential for further graves giving a total of around 40 burials. These additional graves were dependent upon the layout of the burials following a grid pattern and that all the potential 'blanks' had been filled. The assessment also identified a potential for there to be other buried remains in a small area of apparently levelled ground devoid of grave markers. As the church is known to have its origins in at least the 14th century, there was a potential for earlier, medieval burials to exist within the proposed area.
- 1.3 However, by the end of the excavation nearly 140 inhumations had been recorded – three and half times more than originally anticipated. As well as the large number of burials a wide range of objects were recovered from the graves. These mostly related to the numerous coffins or to the remains of clothing associated with the bodies. In addition a small amount of 12-14th century pottery was recovered indicating early medieval activity around the church.
- 1.4 Currently the human bone is being washed and dried in preparation for specialist study, whilst the rest of the recovered material is in the process of being assessed for more detailed study. The detail of the post-excavation analysis and reporting is to be agreed at a meeting between all concerned parties in early July.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The area of the development totalled a little over 300m². This was subdivided into three areas, each of which was excavated in turn as the soil arising from the excavation of each area had to be stored on site for re-instatement at the end of the excavation. The three areas were all excavated in the same manner: the turf and topsoil was removed by a 3 tonne mechanical excavator using a toothless bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Mechanical excavation ceased once significant archaeological remains were encountered and the remainder of the excavation of each grave was carried out by hand.

The spoil from each area was temporarily stockpiled adjacent to the excavation for the duration of the excavation and reinstated once the excavation had been completed.

- 2.2 Due to the unexpectedly high number of burials discussions were held with the Diocesan archaeological advisor and specialist osteo-archaeologist and slightly modified, quicker methodology for recovery and recording was agreed.
- 2.3 All graves were recorded as follows:
- A written description of each grave and its contents was made with the appropriate context numbers
 - Any artefacts from the burials were numbered separately and in such a way as to be able to relate them to the original grave and their location within the grave
 - Every grave was located in three dimensions from known datum points on the church and related to height above sea-level from the Ordnance Survey datum on the western wall of the tower
 - Every grave was recorded photographically both in 35mm black and white print film and digitally at 5m pixel resolution. 1m and 2m bi-coloured poles were used as scales along with a north pointer for orientation
 - In addition features of particular significance were also recorded on 35mm colour slide
 - Where possible the details of coffin construction were also recorded
- 2.4 All remains were recovered under the Pastoral Measures Act 1983 and no material was encountered that required the Human Tissue Act 2004.
- 2.5 All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct for Archaeological Excavation (1999).
- 2.6 The archaeological advisor to the Diocese of Bradford was kept informed of the excavation timetable and visited the site on a number of occasions. Similarly the Development Control Archaeologist of the Heritage Unit of NYCC and the Planning Officer for Harrogate Borough Council were kept apprised of the progress of the works. Neither was able to visit the site.

3.0 RESULTS

- 3.1 The excavation recorded evidence for the remains of 137 individual burials along with an amount of disarticulated human bone (charnel) from the backfill of many of the graves. Due to the acidic and very stony nature of the burial environment, many of the remains were in a very poor condition. An initial analysis of the records shows the following results:

Adults/Possible adults	84	Good condition	34
Juveniles	35	Fair condition	32
Infants	18	Poor condition	41
Total	137	Completely decayed	5
		Total	137

- 3.2 Of the total of 137 burials, 96 contained evidence for the use of coffins. This ranged from one which was partially waterlogged and completely intact to the majority which remained only as a soil stain or corroded handles.
- 3.3 Due to the presence of a large number of coffins, a number of name plates from the lids were recovered. This in turn provided a list of names for individual burials additional to those named on the grave markers (see Appendix I for a list of named burials)
- 3.4 The process of washing and drying the skeletal remains for study is underway and already many of the bodies have been noted to have pathological changes. These are mainly in the form of dental conditions such as abscesses, caries and calculus but a number of cases of arthritis and other changes in joint morphology have also been noted. One skeleton appears to have undergone some form of post-mortem examination. This was the body of Elizabeth Dibb which had had the top of the cranium sawn off. A full report on the skeletal remains will be undertaken by the osteo-archaeologist once the collection has been washed and dried.
- 3.5 As already mentioned, a number of artefacts were recovered along with the skeletal remains. The majority of these objects were copper alloy pins which had been used to secure shrouds or winding sheets prior to placing the body either into the coffin or directly into the ground. The majority of the remaining finds were of buttons of various sizes, types and locations indicating the remains of clothing. The buttons were made from: copper alloy, bone, ceramic and mother of pearl.
- 3.6 Other personal items that were recovered included:
- Two copper alloy finger (wedding) rings
 - Two gold finger rings (engagement and wedding)
 - Two possible copper alloy brooches
 - One George III silver half crown (1818)
- 3.7 As well as the personal items many of the coffins were in a good enough condition for at least the partial survival of some of the coffin furniture. The commonest items to survive were the handles which ranged from simple iron drop handles through to gilded/plated elaborately cast brass drop handles on cast backing plates. The most elaborate coffins had matching shield shaped name plates and handles along with lines of dome headed brass studs along the edges. One coffin still had the fragmentary remains of cut and embossed leather decoration.
- 3.8 As well as brass name plates, there were also iron and possibly tin name plates. Unfortunately none of the iron or tin ones were legible and only three of them survived in a good enough condition to be recovered. All of the brass name plates had been hand painted in black, brown or in one case white paint with the occupants' name, age and date of death.

- 3.9 Three coffins were of particular note in that they had had glass plates set into the lids directly over the occupants face to allow them to be seen. Unfortunately none of these burials had a name plate or grave marker so a more precise date could not be established for them.
- 3.10 Due to the wet, almost waterlogged conditions, a number of small fragments of textile were recovered. These mostly appear to be pieces of shroud or winding sheet though two almost complete knitted/woven socks/hose came from one of the late 1880s graves.
- 3.11 In addition to the expected range of items from the inhumations, a small amount of pottery and one piece of worked stone was also recovered from some of the graves. Although the pottery has not yet all been washed ready for specialist study, initial observations indicate that about half of the pieces are late 18th or early 19th century in origin and probably relate to the placing of flowers on graves in various receptacles. The other half all appear to be Northern Gritty Ware which was in use from the 12-14th centuries and probably relate to the settlement around the church of that date. There are currently also three pieces which appear to be possibly Saxon or prehistoric, though this needs to be checked with a specialist.
- 3.12 A detailed record of the Hearse House prior to its demolition has been made. This record includes the internal and external elevations along with a detailed description of the roof timbers and door. A fuller record of the roof timbers will need to be made when it is demolished as it contains many re-used timbers, at least two of which have been partially burnt. This suggests that they could have been reused from the pre-1697 church, as the style of iron work on the door is early 18th century and therefore possibly quite close in date to the rebuild. Two fragments of medieval grave marker have already been noted in the stone work along with other possible re-used stone which will be checked at demolition.
- 3.13 As part of the strategy to engage with the local community, the opportunity to work on the project alongside the site archaeologists was offered to volunteers. This opportunity was also extended to archaeology, osteo-archaeology and forensic archaeology students from Bradford and York Universities. As a result of this a total of 111 volunteer days were worked on site.

4.0 POST EXCAVATION REPORT

- 4.1 As already mentioned above, the washing and drying of the human remains is underway prior to specialist study. The primary site archive (written, drawn and photographic records) will have the levels reduced to give height OD, the photographic record will be indexed and all the records will be cross referenced and concoded. An archive comprising all of the site records will be compiled and will contain completed pro formas, all drawings and photographs with indices. This archive will then be stored securely and made available for any future study.

- 4.2 The completed site archive along with the finds, their specialist reports and the report on the human remains will then be used to produce an overall report on the excavation of the development site. The exact nature and scope of this report is still to be determined at a meeting with the appropriate parties. In the meantime all the finds are being cleaned, identified, spot-dated, assessed for conservation and stored appropriately whilst awaiting the decision on the next stage.
- 4.3 A suitably detailed report on the results of the archaeological work will be produced and circulated to all concerned parties which will cover the following broad headings:

- Introduction
- Background
 - Location
 - Geology and Soils
 - Topography and Land Use
 - Historical Background
- Methodology
- Results
 - Human Bone
- Finds
 - Coffin Construction
 - Coffin Fittings
 - Small Finds from Graves (e.g. buttons, coin, pins, rings etc.)
 - Other Finds (pottery and worked stone)
- Discussion and Conclusions
- References

- 4.4 At the end of the project all the archive material will be indexed and cross referenced and stored in the new heritage centre for further potential study.

Bibliography

English Heritage (2005) *Guidance for Best Practice for Treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England*. English Heritage. Swindon.

Institute of Field Archaeologists (1999) *Code of Conduct for Archaeological Excavation*.

JBAS (2008a) *The Church Of St Michael And St Lawrence, Fewston, North Yorkshire. Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*. Unpublished Contractors Report.

JBAS (2008b) *The Church Of St Michael And St Lawrence, Fewston, North Yorkshire. Archaeological Trial Trenching*. Unpublished Contractors Report.

Appendix I – Named Burials

Named burials from grave markers

Note that due to the laying down and subsequent re-erection of some grave markers, it will not be until the plot of the grave locations has been completed that it will be certain if all of these named remains have been recovered.

George Lister	19 th July 1882	64yrs on plate or 68yrs on the monument
Mary Dickinson	6 th March 1886	66yrs
Henry Lister	19 th January 1871	49yrs
Thomas Patterson	31 st January 1865	70yrs
Joseph Patterson	10 th March 1860	82yrs
William Bramley	5 th December 1863	61yrs
Richard Robinson	22 nd September 1865	80yrs
Hannah Bramley	18 th October 1876	84yrs
James Dibb	Illegible	
Elizabeth Dibb	Illegible	
Joseph Darnbrook	7 th March 1869	78yrs
Mary Darnbrook	7 th September 1870	78yrs
Sarah Darnbrook	26 th May 1854	23yrs
Bentley Darnbrook	1 st November 1862	26yrs
Joseph Swale	29 th February 1864	1 yr
Sarah Gill	Illegible	
Richard Gill	11 th February 1884	41yrs
Grace Hutton	3 rd April 1921	74yrs
Richard Gill	18 th May 1883	78yrs

Named burials from coffin plates

Romand (or Roland) Marjirison	4 th December 1895	10months
David Lister	16 th April 1888	84yrs
Gill Wigglesworth	24 th April 1886	67yrs
Elina Wigglesworth	27 th February 1895	34yrs
John Renton Newsome	3 rd February 1892	76yrs