

Assessment of the non-ceramic finds from St John’s Church, Micklegate, York (OSA04 EX02)

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Archaeological excavations at St John’s Church, Micklegate, York, undertaken by On-Site Archaeology Ltd revealed a series of earlier church floor levels separated by layers of make-up, graves, and the foundations of various walls and features (including brick pew foundations). It is clear that the floor of the church was raised on a number of occasions, to combat the flooding which the church’s position close to the Ouse made it liable to.

Many of the non-ceramic finds were identified, recorded and reburied on site. The majority of these were coffin nails and fittings. The remaining finds were submitted to the author for identification and assessment, either because their identity was not certain on site or because they were only recognised as being non-ceramic finds during processing (Appendix 1).

The finds consist of two groups: those which were associated with the structure of the church and those which were probably domestic refuse brought onto site along with other material to raise the floor level.

Description

Sixty-one non-ceramic artefacts were submitted for identification and assessment (Table 1). These finds have not had a conservation assessment nor have x-radiographs been made.

Table 1

class	Total
AMBER	1
COPP	34
COPP/IRON	2
IRON	1
IVORY	7
LEAD	3
LEAD/IRON	1
PLASTER	6
SILV	1
STONE	5
Grand Total	61

Amber

A single amber bead was recovered, from context 10043. Amber beads were produced from the prehistoric period onwards and this object cannot therefore be dated except by its context.

Copper Alloy

Bell

A single rumbler bell was recovered, from context 2011. Such bells were used in the medieval and post-medieval periods. They are shown, for example, on effigies and illustrations of pet dogs but probably had wider uses.

Buckle

A single pin from a buckle was recovered, from context 7059. It is not closely datable.

A strip of sheet metal is possibly from a buckle plate. It was recovered from context 7143. It is 9mm wide, broken at each end with a small central hole.

Candlestick

Part of a cast candlestick with a hexagonal base was recovered from context 6016. Such candlesticks are depicted in Flemish paintings of the later 14th century and later.

Chain

A fragment of chain composed of 14 interlocking S-shaped elements was recovered from context 7035.

Coins

A penny of William III, produced between 1695 and 1698, was recovered from context 6016.

Two farthings of Charles II were recovered. That from context 7100 was minted in 1673 and that from context 11000 was minted in 1672.

Hook and eye

A hook and eye were recovered from context 10006.

Jetons

Three jetons were recovered. Those from contexts 7035 and 11000 are unidentified but from their size and character are probably of late 14th or early 15th century date. They could probably both be identified by a numismatist.

The third jeton, from context 7178 is of later 16th or 17th-century character. This too could probably be identified and more closely dated by a numismatics.

Lace Chape

A single lace chape was recovered, from context 2032. It consists of a single strip of metal, folded around a lace (which could have been of textile or leather).

Lump

An irregular lump of metal was recovered from context 7016.

Mounts

Two mounts of sheet metal were recovered. That from context 2010 is circular and has a moulded relief decoration consisting of a religious scene (Christ on the cross, with a ship on either side, within a floral border). That from context 11017 is rectangular and has incised linear decoration with rivet holes at the four corners and in the centre. The first mount may have been used on a book cover whilst the second was more likely to have been used on a strap or belt.

Needle

A needle was recovered from context 1022.

Pins

Two pins were recovered. That from context 1000 has a head 3mm diameter. That from context 7016 is a dome-heading pin. The former may have been a shroud pin and the latter was probably used to decorate a coffin.

Ring

A ring was recovered from context 7040.

Strip

Fragments of a sheet metal strip were recovered from context 7177.

Thimble

A thimble was recovered from context 7066.

Tokens

Two unidentified tokens were recovered, both from context 7000. They could probably be identified by a numismatist.

Unidentified

An unidentified object was recovered from context 7035.

Composite

A spherical button with a copper alloy front and iron back was recovered from context 1019. Such buttons were common in the 19th-century and later but could have originated in the 18th century.

Iron

Most of the iron finds were identified, listed and re-interred on site. The exception is a complete pair of dividers, from context 7086. The size of this implement suggests that it might have been used in masonry.

Ivory

Five objects of ivory were recorded. All were produced on a lathe. That from context 7059 is a knob from an unknown object. That from context 7068 is a knife handle. Those from contexts 7069, 7075 and 10046 are all from composite containers in which the top and bottom are formed of separate sheets of ivory which were screwed into place by means of a thread. Context 7069 produced the hollow tube. Context 7075 produced a top, pierced by several circular holes and Context 10046 produced a similar top, pierced by a single hole. The three pieces are likely to have come from shakers, used as part of a writing set to sprinkle sand onto paper or parchment.

Lead alloy

Two fragments of lead window came were retained, as examples of the range present. One was composed of thicker metal than the other but both were of H-section. A fragment of lead rod may have been raw material from the manufacture of window comes. All three were recovered from context 2032.

A fragment of lead strip from context 7043 was pierced by several diamond-shaped holes, one of which contained an iron nail. Because of its friability, it is unlikely that this was a binding strip, although made in exactly the same manner. Its function is therefore unknown.

Plaster

Fragments of painted wall plaster were recovered from three contexts. None have the palette typical of medieval wall paintings (dominated by red ochre) and it is tentatively suggested that those from contexts 7086 and 7099 are of Roman date and that from context 7075 is of 19th-century date.

Silver

An unidentified silver coin was recovered from context 3014. The coin is of medieval character but has been clipped to remove the outer band containing the legend, and a hole has been pierced through the centre. It is possible that a numismatist might be able to identify the coin.

Stone

Two fragments of alabaster were recovered, from contexts 2044 and 7086. Both probably came from monuments of late medieval or later date although they might have come from statuary. Alabaster was mined in Nottinghamshire extensively in the later medieval period and it is unlikely that the precise source of these pieces could be established without considerable effort.

A fragment of fine-grained cream limestone from context 6025 is part of a statue with gilding. The fragment comes from the head of a clean-shaven male, probably an angel, with wavy hair of 14th-century character. A specialist in sculpture would be able to assess the significance of this piece and a geologist specialising in building stone might be able to identify the source of the limestone.

A fragment of marble from context 7006 comes from a monument (it was recovered from a feature interpreted as the fill of the construction trench for a pulpit and might therefore have come from an earlier pulpit). A geologist specialising in marble might be able to identify the source of the marble but this would probably involve isotope analyses and comparison with established databases of marble from known sources.

Finally, a fragment of Norwegian ragstone whetstone was recovered from context 6017. Such whetstones were made in southern Norway from the pre-conquest period (i.e. 10th/11th centuries) onwards.

Assessment

The earliest stratified items considered here are the fragments of painted wall plaster from context 7099, which were tentatively identified as being of Roman date and come from the backfill of robber trench 7185. This may suggest that the robbed wall was of Roman date although it is interpreted as part of the earlier fabric of St John's church. It would therefore

be worthwhile obtaining a specialist study of the plaster to see if it might perhaps be of medieval date.

A small group of other finds were recovered from deposits pre-dating the 18th-century levelling dumps. These finds therefore have a stronger case for being discarded in the church itself rather than being brought to the site. These finds include the copper alloy putative book mount from context 2010; copper alloy buckle fittings from contexts 7143 and 6029; the copper alloy thimble from context 7066; the copper alloy strip from context 7177; and one of the three pieces of ivory interpreted as parts of sand shakers. The fragment of statue from context 6025 is also from a pre-18th-century deposit.

The remaining finds are either from deposits of indeterminate age or from 18th-century and later deposits which probably include domestic refuse imported to the site. These deposits also include material of late medieval and early post-medieval date, possibly derived from disturbed levels in the church as well as material from post-medieval burials. Furthermore, it is evident that floor-raising activity took place in at least three separate periods during the early to mid 18th century, both from stratigraphic evidence and from documentary sources.

Given the wide range of potential sources of this material, only those items which can be independently dated and shown to be related directly to the church history are probably worth examining further. This limits the finds whose study might further knowledge of St John's Church to the various fragments of moulded stone (alabaster, marble and limestone), and possibly the iron dividers.

A further reason to study the finds, however, is because their archaeological context can be dated. The 18th-century deposits, as previously stated, were laid down in several episodes ranging from the early 18th century to the 1760s but there is very little material indeed which can be dated later than this. Thus, a case can be made for the study of finds where a *terminus ante quem* of c.1760/70 might be useful. This can only really be established as a result of a wider study of 18th-century artefacts from York. Therefore, all these finds should be retained for potential future study.

Retention

All these finds should be retained for potential future study. This will require a conservation assessment to establish whether or not they are chemically stable and whether any special packaging conditions are required.

Further Study

Some of the stone artefacts could be examined by geologists specialising in marble and limestones but the amount of expenditure required would probably not be justified by the

results. The same stones could probably be more closely dated and their importance assessed through submission to a specialist in medieval and later architectural stonework.

Several of the coins, jetons and tokens could also probably be identified more closely by a numismatist.

Appendix 1

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
1000	44	A	COPP	COPP		PIN	HEAD 3 ACROSS	1	1	1	FAIR; BENT
1019	48	A	COPP	COPP		BUTTON	COMPOSITE BUTTON	1	1	2	SOME DECAY; SLIGHTLY SQUASHED
1022	39	A	COPP	COPP		NEEDLE		1	1	3	FAIR; EYE BROKEN
2010	32	B	COPP	COPP		MOUNT	CIRCULAR MOUNT; IMAGE OF CHRIST ON CROSS WITH A SHIP ON EITHER SIDE; BORDER OF FLOWERS AND LEAVES	2	1	2	MIN DECAY
2011	3	B	COPP	COPP		BELL	RUMBLER BELL	1	1	8	SOME DECAY
2032		B	LEAD	LEAD		CAME	THICK CAME	1	1	10	TWISTED
2032		B	LEAD	LEAD		CAME	THIN CAME	1	1	8	
2032	40	B	COPP	COPP		LACE CHAPE	COPPER STRIP FOLDED ROUND	1	1	1	FAIR
2032	40	B	LEAD	LEAD		ROD	POSS LEAD FOR CAME MILL	1	1	7	SOME DECAY
2044		B	STONE	STONE	ALABASTER	SCULPTURE/TOMB		1	1	0	
3014	17	C	SILV	AG ALLOY		COIN	MEDIEVAL COIN TRIMMED TO ITS CENTRE WITH CENTRAL HOLE (1)	1	1	1	CORODED

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
4009	43	D	COPP/IRON	CU/FE		BUCKLE	D-SHAPED DOUBLE FRAME WITH IRON PIN	1	1	5	FAIR
6016	24	F	COPP	COPP		CANDLESTICK	HEXAGONAL CAST CANDLESTICK BASE AND STEM	1	1	169	BROKEN WITH SOME COROSION
6016	19	F	COPP	COPP		COIN	WILLIAM III PENNY 1695-8	1	1	8	SOME WEAR
6017	41	F	STONE	NORWEGIAN RAGSTONE		WHETSTONE	ROUGH FAIRLY IRREGULAR PIECE OF STONE	1	1	23	SOME WEAR
6025		F	STONE	STONE	FINE-GRAINED LIMESTONE	SCULPTURE	PART OF BARE HEAD WITH WAVY HAIR (ANGEL? SAINT?) WITH GILDING REMAINING	1	1	0	
6029	31	F	COPP/IRON	CU ALLOY WITH IRON		BUCKLE FITTING	STRIP OF CU WITH 2 RIVETS PUNCHED THROUGH TO GRIP CLOTH/LEATHER; IRON BAR HELD BY STRIP; PIN MISSING	1	1	1	MIN CORROSION
7000	4	Nave	COPP	COPP		TOKEN	17 CENTURY TOKEN	1	1	1	FAIRLY GOOD
7000	5	Nave	COPP	COPP		TOKEN	'WOLF LAVF' AT BOTTOM; 17 CENTURY TOKEN	1	1	3	SOME DECAY
7006		Nave	STONE	STONE	MARBLE	TOMB	FROM CANOPY?	1	1	0	
7016		Nave	COPP	COPP		LUMP	IRREGULAR LUMP	1	1	70	CORODED

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
7016		Nave	COPP	COPP		PIN	DOME HEADED PIN	1	1	1	SOME COROSION
7035	11	Nave	COPP	COPP		CHAIN	14 'S' -SHAPED CHAIN ELEMENTS	1	1	4	FAIR
7035	26	Nave	COPP	COPP		JETON	L14-15 JETON	1	1	1	FOLDED; SOME DECAY
7035		Nave	COPP	COPP		UNID		1	1	2	CORRODED LUMP
7040	23	Nave	COPP	COPP		RING	HOLLOW RING	1	1	6	MIN DECAY
7043	7	Nave	LEAD/IRON	PB/FE		STRIP	ROUGH LEAD STRIP WITH DIAMOND SHAPED HOLES PUNCHED THROUGH AND AN IRON NAIL IN ONE	1	1	36	NAIL DECAYED; STRIP TWISTED
7059	9	Nave	COPP	COPP		BUCKLE PIN		1	1	1	SOME COROSION
7059	8	Nave	IVORY	IVORY		KNOB	CIRCULAR IVORY BEADLIKE FORM WITH CENTRAL HOLE (3); IT HAS BEEN TORN FROM AN OBJECT IN THE SAME MATERIAL	1	1	2	WORN; TORN
7066	37	Nave	COPP	COPP		THIMBLE		1	1	3	SQUASHED/DECAYED
7068	45	Nave	IVORY	IVORY		HANDLE	KNIFE HANDLE TORN AT TANG END	3	1	3	FRACTURED; TORN
7069	10	Nave	IVORY	IVORY		CONTAINER?	CURRENTLY A TUBE WITH EXTERNAL GROOVES AT EACH	1	1	13	FAIRLY GOOD

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
							END; ONE END WOULD HAVE HAD A SCREW TOP; THE OTHER WOULD HAVE HAD A BASE				
7075	21	Nave	PLASTER	PLASTER		MOD PLASTER?	CREAM WITH YELLOW AND GREEN PAINT	1	1	11	PATCHY
7075	20	Nave	IVORY	IVORY		DISC	LID OF SHAKER FOR DRYING INK; CONCENTRIC GROOVES WITH MANY SMALL DRILLED HOLES	1	1	4	GOOD
7086	29	Nave	IRON	FE		DIVIDERS	EACH PRONG 140 LONG	1	1	107	CORODED
7086		Nave	STONE	STONE	ALABASTER	SCULPTURE/TOMB		1	1	0	
7086	30	Nave	IRON	FE		KNIFE	BLADE (10-15 BY 2-4 BY 97) AND BROKEN TANG (15 BY 6 BY 4)	1	1	16	BROKEN AND CORODED
7086	47	Nave	PLASTER	PLASTER		ROMAN PLASTER	SURFACE AND CREAM PAINT	1	1	4	GOOD
7099	42	Nave	PLASTER	PLASTER		ROMAN PLASTER	OCRE AND BLACK BANDS	2	1	7	GOOD
7099	42	Nave	PLASTER	PLASTER		ROMAN PLASTER	BLACK BAND WITH TRACES OF DEC IN MAROON AND GREY ON CREAM	1	1	2	GOOD

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
7099	42	Nave	PLASTER	PLASTER		ROMAN PLASTER	CREAM, BLACK AND MAROON BANDS	1	1	2	GOOD
7100	13	Nave	COPP	COPP		COIN	CHARLES II 1673 FARTHING	1	1	5	GOOD
7143	38	Nave	COPP	COPP		BUCKLE PLATE?	STRIP 9 WIDE, BROKEN AT EACH END WITH SMALL CENTRAL HOLE	1	1	1	SOME COROSION
7177	27	Nave	COPP	COPP		STRIP	ALL PART OF ONE STRIP	7	1	7	MORE DECAY
7178		Nave	COPP	COPP		JETON	NEURENBERG JETON L16-E17	1	1	2	SOME WEAR
10006	33	J	COPP	COPP		HOOK AND EYE	THIN DISC (DIA 18) WITH RIVET PROJECTING FROM MIDDLE AND BENT STRIP (5 BY 11) CREATING HOOK; STRIP (12 BY 40) WITH RECTANGULAR HOLES (6 BY 3) AT REGULAR INTERVALS (3)	1	1	4	SOME COROSION
10043	28	J	AMBER			BEAD		1	1	1	DECAY?
10046	49	J	IVORY	IVORY		DISC	THIN DISC WITH CENTRAL HOLE (3)	1	1	1	SCATCHED
11000	36	K	COPP	COPP		COIN	CHARLES II 1672	1	1	6	FAIRLY GOOD

context	SF No	trench	class	cname	subfabric	Form	pot catalogues.Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
							FARTHING				
11000	34	K	COPP	COPP		JETON	L14-15 JETON	1	1	2	SOME WEARING
11017	22	K	COPP	COPP		MOUNT	RECTANGULAR MOUNT WITH HOLES PUNCHED IN THE FOUR CORNERS AND A LARGER ONE IN THE MIDDLE; INCISED LINE DEC	1	1	3	MIN DECAY/FOLDED

