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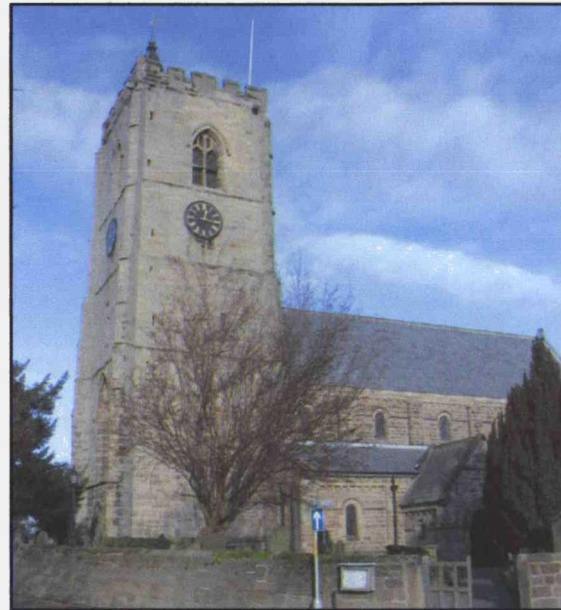
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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



ALL SAINTS CHURCH  
HIGH STREET, SPOFFORTH  
NORTH YORKSHIRE

Report on an  
Archaeological  
Watching Brief

by David Evans and Toby Kendall

REPORT NUMBER 2005/34

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*Cover illustration: All Saints Church from the south-west*

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### List of Abbreviations

YAT	York Archaeological Trust
NAA	Northern Archaeological Associates
BGL	Below Ground Level
OD	Above Ordnance Datum
NGR	National Grid Reference
NMR-NATINV	National Monuments Record National Inventory

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## SUMMARY

*A watching brief during the digging of drains at All Saint's Church, Spofforth, North Yorkshire in December 2004 recorded deposits, burials and structural remains believed to date from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Although the ground had been very badly disturbed by eight centuries or more of burial activity, it was possible to construct a provisional sequence for the burials encountered from the 12<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Structural information for the medieval church in the form of two robbed buttresses was also obtained.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During December 2004 York Archaeological Trust undertook a watching brief at All Saint's Church, Spofforth, North Yorkshire (NGR SE36485109, Fig. 1). The work involved observation and recording during the refurbishment of drain channels adjacent to the church and the excavation by hand of four new drain runs leading to three new soakaways within the churchyard (Pl. 1). The watching brief was commissioned by the Hill Rowe Partnership, Chartered Architects And Historic Building Consultants, of Ripon, North Yorkshire. The groundworks were carried out by Arcon Plant Ltd of Thorpe Arch, Wetherby.



All site records are currently stored by York Archaeological Trust under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORAT: 2004.23.

*Plate 1 South-western soakaway looking north-east*

## 2. METHOD STATEMENT

The watching brief entailed recording any deposits, features, or structures encountered in the works. The notes, including measured sketches, were entered into a site notebook and processed into a form where they could be used for the preparation of this report during May 2005. The locations of any drawn sections and areas of interest were measured

in and subsequently transferred to a large scale Ordnance Survey digital map. The work was monitored by an archaeologist at all times when digging was in progress.

Except where noted, the human bones liable to disturbance were recorded, lifted and bagged pending their reburial.

### **3. LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

The village of Spofforth lies c.5km north-west of Wetherby on the A661 Wetherby to Harrogate road. The church of All Saints is situated close to the centre of the village, immediately north of the A661, and lies on fairly level land at c.40m OD.

The geology of the immediate area is of alluvium and morainic drift overlying Lower Magnesian Limestone (Geological Survey 1974).

### **4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The watching brief was undertaken because it was thought likely to throw light on the history of All Saints church. Data for research has been largely derived from two archaeological web sites: <http://www.pastscape.org/homepage/index.html> and <http://www.ads.ahds.ac.uk/> where further information for the area around Spofforth is available.

#### **4.1 Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian (5th – 11th centuries AD)**

Relevant description of the background to this project may begin with the Anglian period. There is no evidence for the early Anglian (5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) in the Spofforth area, but recent archaeological work at Village Farm Spofforth (NGR SE 36545100) has located a cemetery which appears to have become active by the late 8<sup>th</sup> century AD (NAA 2002). This cemetery continued in use during the Anglo-Scandinavian period (mid 9<sup>th</sup>–late 11<sup>th</sup> centuries). The investigations at Village Farm also revealed a number of badly disturbed wall foundations and robber trenches which may belong to a pre-Norman church or chapel. In 1893 a part of an early 10<sup>th</sup> century cross was found built into the stairs of the present church tower.

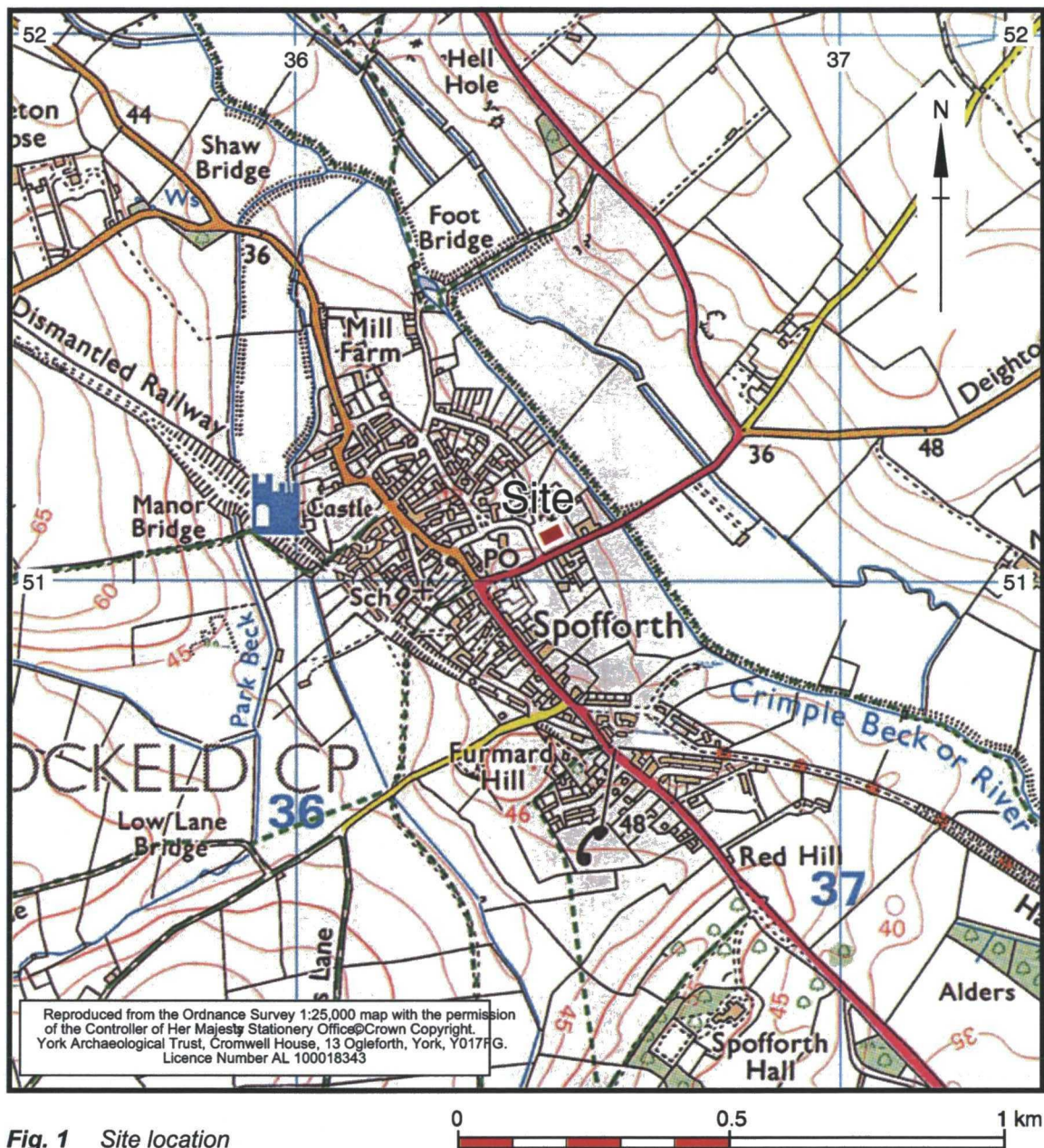


Fig. 1 Site location

#### 4.2 Medieval (11th – 16th centuries AD)

The name Spofforth is believed to be pre-Conquest in origin being derived from the elements 'spot' and 'ford'. These are of Old or Middle English (Mills 1991) derivation and together mean 'place by the ford'. Spofforth, then called 'Spawford', is mentioned in the Domesday Book. At the time of the Norman Conquest the manor was held by Gamelbar de Spofforth but after rebelling against William 1 it passed into the hands of the Percy family and it became their principal seat until the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There are references to Spofforth and

persons from Spofforth throughout the medieval period and beyond indicating a place of some importance.

According to Pevsner and Radcliffe (1967, 495), the present church has a perpendicular (14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century) west tower, but was largely rebuilt in 1855, although the south doorway and arcades represent late Norman work. The village also contains the extensive remains of Spofforth Castle (NMR SE 35 SE 6), originally founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century but converted into a fortified manor house by the 13<sup>th</sup> century (NGR SE 36035110). In addition there were a hospital of St Mary Magdalene (NMR-NATINV-53421) at NGR SE 36475107, and a so-called Armitage Chapel (NMR-NATINV-53032), at NGR SE 38044929, in the parish.

## **5. THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The discoveries in the three drain runs and associated works will be considered in turn (Fig. 2).

### **5.1 The North-Eastern Soakaway and Drain Runs**

At the base of the soakaway, which was c.2m in diameter and a maximum of 0.95m deep, was a firm but friable, light to mid reddish-brown pebbly sandy silt (1007) which may have been the natural subsoil. Two indistinct deposits were also observed and recorded at this level. Both were a loose, mid reddish-brown sandy silt (1005 and 1006) and both appeared to be the fills of cuts aligned approximately east-west. It is likely that these were the fills of graves although no human remains were noted. Sealing 1006 and 1007 was a friable, mid reddish-brown pebbly sandy silt (1003). Above this was another area of deposit aligned east-west. It was a loose, dark reddish-brown pebbly sandy silt (1004) and is likely to be another grave fill although it was not seen lower down in the soakaway. Overlying 1004 was a slightly reddish brown clayey sandy silt (1002) which was probably a disturbed graveyard soil. Above it was a modern accumulation deposit of mid to dark brown very slightly clayey silt containing occasional bone, slate and brick fragments (1001). This was capped by the modern ground surface of turf (1000). No articulated human bone was seen during the excavation of this soakaway, but disarticulated human bone was present in small quantities throughout.

A trench for a drain run was then dug from the soakaway to the north-east corner of the north aisle of the church. The part of this within c.2.5m of the soakaway was a new excavation but the remaining c.7m involved the removal and replacement of a pre-existing drain. Both parts of the trench were c.0.4m wide and 0.4m deep. The sequence was very similar to that