

SNY 11138

ENY 3326

CNY

Parish 6075

Rec'd 23.11.95

CHAPEL FLATS, RIPLEY NORTH YORKSHIRE

YORKSHIRE WATER

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
OCTOBER 1990 - SEPTEMBER 1992

SUMMARY REPORT

On the 5th of September 1991, Mr.P.Charlton of Yorkshire Water Engineering, contacted Mr.K.J.Cale Archaeological Consultant with a request to carry out and maintain an archaeological watching brief on trench excavations associated with the Harlow Hill Water Treatment Scheme.

Archaeological supervision would be required during the proposed ground disturbance within the immediate environs of the Sinking Chapel, North Yorkshire County S.M.R. NO.418, near the village of Ripley, North Yorkshire.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

Ripley

The present site of the village of Ripley is thought to be situated on or close to the Roman Road leading from Olicana (Ilkley) to Dere Street near Boroughbridge. However no archaeological evidence has been put forward to support this theory.

The Doomesday Book of 1086 A.D contains the earliest reference we have to the settlement named Ripelia which was located in the upper division of the wapentake of Claro, and the manor of which belonged to a Merlesuan.

During the late 11th and throughout the 12th Century the village and surrounding lands passed through various hands of ownership. Throughout the 12th and 13th Centuries the settlement was under the Rosses of Helmsley. It was during the early 14th century that the Ingilby family acquired the manor of Ripley.

The Ingilby family were responsible for the development and growth of this settlement. In 1357 A.D. Ripley was granted the status of market town by a Royal Charter of Edward III.

And in the mid 16th Century a major rebuilding programme was undertaken on the manor house, the result of which was Ripley Castle. The greater part of the present village dates to Sir Williams rebuild of 1827. This programme of development required the demolition of the older buildings within the village which are reputed to have dated back to the 15th Century.

The church and the chapel

The present 15th Century structure, All Saints church within the heart of the village is a transplant of an earlier chapel.

This chapel known locally as the 'sinking chapel' had also been dedicated to All Saints and was situated approximately 1/2 km to the South west of the present church. We are informed that the chapel's destruction can be attributed to the encroachment of the River Nidd.

approx
428220
459990

This can be substantiated to some degree as Sir W. Ingilby carried out a major water management scheme in 1665 A.D. which involved the straightening and excavation of new water course to redirect the River Nidd.

Further details and observations regarding the Sinking Chapel can be found within the publication Ripley, It's History and Antiquities by J. Thorpe 1866. Within which we are informed that the remains of the chapel were still clearly evident in the mid 19th Century and consisted of an east \ west aligned foundation wall estimated at being 80 yards in length.

Furthermore it was noted that lower down the slope broken gravestones and stone coffins were noted. Reference is also made to the site of an ancient field named as Chapel Garth, this was located on the " crown of the hill" and was apparently triangular in plan and walled on it's east side, agricultural improvements within the 1820's had resulted in the removal of this wall and subsequent ploughing had disturbed human skeletal remains.

It is suspected that the chapel fell into disuse during the mid to late 14th Century, the last rector of the chapel, Rev. Richard Kendall who died at Ripley on the 4th January 1429. It is worth noting that of the burials associated with the chapel a number of the local peerage including the remains the Ingilby's were exhumed and reburied within the new church.

Local tradition within the village has it that a number of the stone coffins and the weeping \ mourning cross presently found within All Saint's churchyard originated from the chapel. Furthermore it is thought that the site of the Old Rectory is adjacent to the chapel.

The Site of the Sinking Chapel and Chapel Flats

The Sinking Chapel is situated upon a shallow terrace on a steep, south west facing, wooded incline that rises up from the from the flood plain and the confluence of the River Nidd and the Old Nidd (Ripley Beck) an area of ground that is presently under arable cultivation and is known locally as Round Fleets.

The dense undergrowth and substantial deposits of leaf mould partially obscured the structural remains of what is suspected to be the Sinking chapel. These are located on the upper to mid slope of the escarpment. A single course of dressed sandstone and unworked blocks were identified intermittently running parallel with the contour of the slope and fronting a shallow and relatively level terrace.

This linear feature measuring approximately 30 metres in length was in a poor state of repair fragments of masonry littered the surrounding area and the lower slopes of the escarpment. A rapid surface inspection of the site failed to locate any further structural remains, however access to and from the site would appear to have been

gained from the north west via the shallow terrace, the present width of which would allow pedestrian access only.

The structure is in the advanced stages of decay, it has been subjected to a high level of disturbance, the trench excavations associated with an earlier pipe laying scheme have cut directly through the structure. Furthermore the stonework that is left in situ is being continually degraded and undermined by tree root and faunal activity.

There was no evidence to suggest that the escarpment had been utilised as a cemetery, the present fall of slope would appear to be unpractical for such purposes and the shallow terrace occupied by the structural remains offers little space for internments.

The fields known collectively as Chapel Flats, which are located on the level plateau to the immediate east were also subject to a rapid inspection, this too failed to establish the presence or absence of burials. The fields had all been subject to a high level of agricultural improvement and there were no earthworks or upstanding remains to indicate the location of the small triangular field, Chapel Garth. The stumps of two mature Oak or Elm trees were noted at approximately 60 metres north east of the site of the chapel and aligned north south. In a field pattern that is otherwise devoid of trees this was of some interest.

METHODOLOGY

It was recommended and agreed that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during all ground disturbance in the three areas of concern:-

- i. Round Fleets
- ii. The escarpment
- iii. Chapel Flats

The project was designed so as to gather sufficient information to establish the presence / absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological features, deposits or skeletal remains within the three areas.

No archaeology was identified during excavations within areas i and ii, however machine trenching within area iii resulted in the disturbance of human skeletal remains.

The following mitigation strategy was agreed and acted upon. That the archaeologist should:-

- a. sort the excavated spoil and recover the large quantities of unstratified bone material.
- b. clean and record the exposed sections of the machine trench.
- c. reveal, record and remove each of those inhumations disturbed during these excavations and during any further ground disturbance.
- d. monitor and record all further ground disturbance associated with these works.

The Exhumation of Burials

The remains were exhumed during the winter season and consequently the ground and prevailing weather conditions were not favourable to the revealing and recording of skeletal remains.

The burials were recovered from the trench sections stratigraphically.

The remains of each skeleton were revealed and then planned at a scale of 1:10, photographed and then recorded on individual inhumation sheets.

Observations and Summary

QUANTITY OF BURIALS

In total the remains of 128 skeletons were identified and of which 124 were exhumed, the remainder were left in situ as they did not interrupt the machine trench and were therefore beyond the remit of my brief.

CONDITION AND STATE OF PRESERVATION OF BURIALS

Approximately 1/3 of the skeletal assemblage consisted of displaced and disorientated scattered bone fragments, it would appear that these were the result of some form of earlier disturbance. Those disturbed burials located within close proximity to the surface would appear to have been disarranged by ploughing. Where as those situated at greater depths had been burials displaced by later inhumations.

The majority of skeletons were found to be in a poor state of preservation, the bone was often found to be crushed and saturated with moisture. The level of bone decomposition was noticeably higher amongst those burials located within the silty loam soils, it is possible that this advanced state of decay has been accentuated by manure having been repeatedly heaped and stored in this area of the field.

LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF BURIALS

The greater concentration of burials were located at the southern extent of the trench, with a gradual fall off in numbers towards the north. At the southern extent of the trench the burials were more intensively grouped, both laterally and vertically, tertiary burials were identified. The decrease and the eventual cessation of burials to the north, enables us to establish the probable northern extent of the cemetery.

ALIGNMENT AND TYPE OF BURIALS

The majority of all the articulated skeletons within the sample were aligned east\west, and had been interned in the extended supine position, facing east. Exceptions to this trend were few and included a east\west aligned burial that had been interned on it's left side, facing north, and a single south east\north west aligned, extended supine burial.

Although a large number of grave cut's\fill's could be defined as containing many of the burials in section, these features were less evident in plan, approximately 1/3 of the total assemblage were not contained within a cut.

Multiple graves although not common were identified along the course of the trench, and generally contained the remains of two individuals that appear to have been interned contemporaneously. A 1/4 of all multiple burials included an infant burial, which maybe indicative of family graves and kinship burials.

There was no strong evidence to indicate whether the burials had been contained within coffin like containers. The prevailing acidic soil conditions of the site does not favour the preservation of wood or any other organic material, but given that a total of five inhumations were found in association with flat headed, hand made, iron nails, it is reasonable to conclude that a un-quantified number of burials may well have been interned with a wooden, coffin like container.

Although it would be reasonable to assume that a number of the burials were also interned within shrouds, no material evidence was identified to support this.

A single inhumation was identified as being partially contained by arranged slabs of sandstone, although given that this feature was restricted to the cranium and upper torso, it would be

tenuous to assume that this burial had been contained within a stone cist or coffin like construction.

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AMONGST THE BURIALS

The poor state of bone preservation combined with the high level of recent disturbance impeded the detailed on site pathological examination of the remains, however it can be concluded that the assemblage included the remains of men, women and children.

The statistics suggest that this area of the cemetery contained an equally proportionate number of males and females, furthermore there was no indication from the distribution pattern of the burials that any form of segregation had been adopted as a burial custom.

The on site inspection of the dentition of the adult sample suggested that there were no identifiable trends in the age at the time of death, the burials reflected a broad cross section of a community.

Approximately 1/4 of the total number of burials were those of infants. These burials were evenly distributed throughout the sample area, with no significant concentrations. As previously mentioned a 1/4 of all the multiple burials were those of children, and from which it would be reasonable to conclude that these burials reflected some form of kinship grouping. The unsatisfactory level of pathological information recovered from the rapid on

site inspection has meant that further pathological examination of the sample would be beneficial to our understanding of the community's demography.

It is for this reason that Yorkshire Water has agreed to sponsor the pathology of a selected sample of skeletons. A selective sample of skeletons have been forwarded to the Calvin Wells Laboratory at the University of Bradford.

FINDS AND BURIALS

Approximately 1/10 of the skeletal assemblage was found to be associated with artefactual remains, these ranged from a fine mid 8th Century bronze clasp to lumps of iron slag.

However there was only the one instance in which it could be assumed that a find had arrived alongside a burial as a grave good. A bronze buckle and tongue, of a twisted cord type.

The bronze clasp was recovered from the silty loam top soil within close proximity to the disturbed burial, and unfortunately given the high level of contamination in the immediate area it would be tenuous to associate it with the burials, and since it has been stylistically dated to the mid eighth Century it is probable that it has arrived in it's present location as a result of secondary deposition. However it is possible that it may relate to earlier activity on the site, this speculation is supported by

the presence of such structural features cut into the sands and gravels and immediately below the burials.

The finds assemblage was largely made up of hand made, iron artifacts including flat headed iron nails, a single iron hook and two fragments of iron based industrial slag.

A single flint scraper was recovered from within the torso of the skeleton, an occurrence that would not normally merit comment does in this instance given that flint did not occur naturally on the site and a number of other worked and unworked flints were recovered from these excavations.

The finds assemblage recovered from these excavations though varied and interesting are limiting in there value as dating agents. The absence of stratified ceramics restricts our understanding of the dating and chronology of the site.

The Investigation of the Features

The detailed investigation and excavation of those features identified in the sections and on the base of the trench were not justified unless they were in any way threatened by further works associated with the installation of the of the mains pipe. Consequently the need arose to examine a number of such features.

Observations and Summary

LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION

The features were identified along the course of the trench, both within the sections and in the base of the trench, there appeared to be a noticeable fall off towards the southern extent of the excavations and a concentration of features to the centre and north of the trench.

All the features were found to be cutting the glacial sands and gravels and as such were located at the base of the trench excavations. The features were often only identifiable after the exhumation of the burials, it can therefore be concluded that the greater majority of these features pre date the burials, suggesting an alternative usage of this area of land prior to it being utilised as a cemetery.

FEATURE TYPOLOGY

Three types of features were identified within the trench excavation, these included a post holes, post trenches and large ditch like features.

Given that the majority of these features were of a similar size and form and contained a similar fill. It would appear that these features were all interrelated, and may well indicate a single phase of timber construction on the site.

The isolated post hole is the most ambiguous of the three named categories since further excavation would be the only means of

ascertaining their true relationship with the other features on the site.

Three noticeable concentrations of post holes were identified within close proximity to one another, each of these assemblages were revealed in the base of the trench, as tightly grouped clusters, however no apparent trend or alignment could be determined from their planform.

Three, narrow, linear trenches were identified within the central area of the trench, each of which were aligned east \ west and contained a number of post holes.

A single, broad and relatively deep ditch like feature was identified in the northern extent of the trench, aligned east\west. The size of this feature would suggest that rather than being a integrated component of a structure, it may well have functioned as a boundary ditch, furthermore the ditch contained one of the post trenches and as such may have supported timber palisade. The multiple fills of this feature would suggest that the sedimentation of this ditch was a natural process that may well have taken place over a long period of time, it can be concluded that the feature had ceased to function as a ditch when the cemetery was in existence, as burials have been interned within it's upper fills.

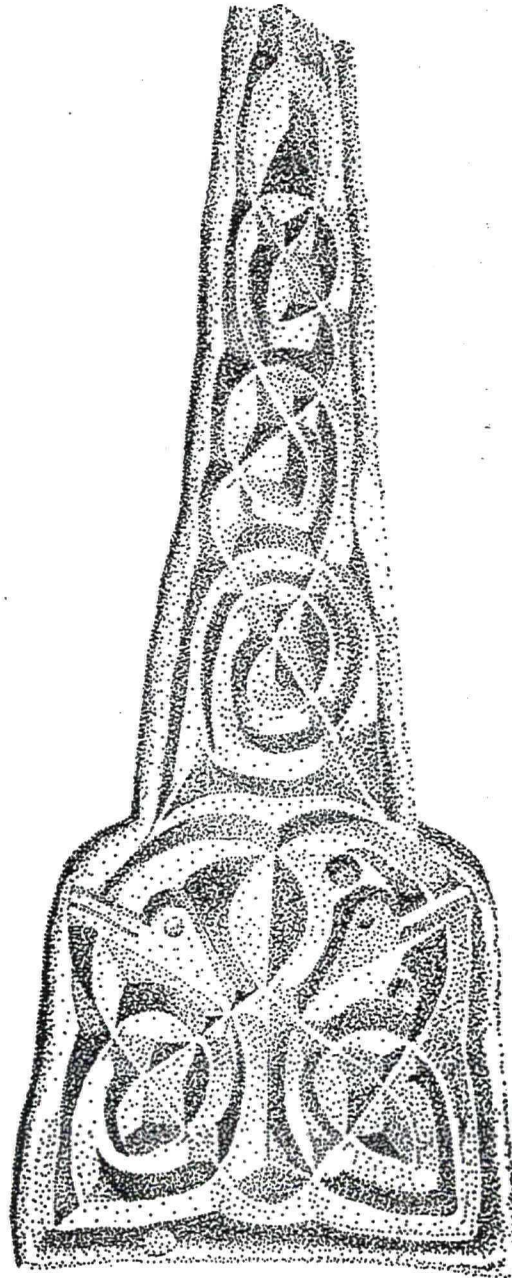
It would be reasonable to conclude that the features identified in the base of the trench excavation were contemporaneous with one another, and since they appeared to pre date the greater majority of the burials in the cemetery it is possible that they indicate an earlier occupation of the site. Unfortunately without stratified datable evidence it can only be speculated that this activity on the site may date back as far as the 8th Century.

CHAPEL FLATS

RIPLEY

NORTH YORKSHIRE

NOVEMBER 1990 - FEBRUARY 1991



Small Find

Not to Scale