



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST



**TYTHE FARM, MAIN STREET,
HEMINGBROUGH, SELBY, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

by I.D. Milsted

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YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Abbreviations

YAT York Archaeological Trust

AOD Above Ordnance Datum

BGL Below Ground Level

ABSTRACT

The remains of a probable medieval cemetery were exposed during ground works at Tythe Farm, Hemingbrough. Eleven burials were identified and associated with the nearby church of St Mary's. Two large pits and a posthole were also found which were thought to post-date the cemetery and relate to agricultural activity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human remains were discovered during the excavation of strip foundation trenches in land to the rear of the main farm house at Tythe Farm, Hemingbrough (Figures 1 and 2). Planning permission had been granted for a domestic dwelling with no archaeological condition; on the discovery of burials, YAT was contracted to monitor the excavation of the trenches and to record and lift any further human remains as necessary. The author would like to record and acknowledge the cooperation and considerable assistance of the owners, Mr and Mrs Lees, throughout the works.

2. METHODOLOGY

Strip foundation trenches up to 0.70m wide were excavated by machine to a depth of 0.90m BGL, except at the western end, where the footing was excavated to 1.3m BGL to remove the root system of a former hedge, and at the eastern end, where a series of large pits necessitated excavation to a depth of 1.8m BGL (Figure 3). The northernmost trench was dug prior to YAT involvement, where the remains of at least two individuals were disturbed. It was not possible to confidently identify exactly where they had originally lain. The remainder of the footings were excavated under archaeological observation. Machine-excavation ceased on the discovery of bone and confirmation of articulation, and in total eleven inhumation burials were identified. Nine of these lay above the final formation level and were therefore recorded and lifted under licence number 10-0100, issued under the terms of section 25 of the Burial Act 1857. The other two were exposed, recorded and covered over. All of the lifted inhumations and disarticulated human bone fragments were subsequently re-buried on site.

3. LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Hemingbrough is located approximately 3 miles east of Selby, in the county of North Yorkshire. The drift geology consists of glacial clays, gravels and sands overlying Bunter and

Keuper sandstone (Geological Survey, 1967), and the general area is low-lying at around 5-7m AOD and fairly flat. To the rear of Tythe Farm, the land slopes gently westwards down towards a small stream that marks a former channel of the River Ouse, only 140m from the main street, the archaeological implications of which are discussed further below.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The settlement at Hemingbrough is recorded in Domesday and may therefore have at least Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian origins (VCH Vol 3, pp37-47, accessed at www.british-history.ac.uk). The supposed presence of Roman structures around the church was noted during the nineteenth century (Sheahan and Whellan, 1857, 621), but no confirmation of this has been found in modern times. The manor was handed to the Bishop of Durham in the 11th century, and was subsequently owned by, amongst others, the Ingram family (VCH 3).

The church, St Mary's, contains 11th and 12th century fabric but is mainly 13th century with later additions (Pevsner, 459). It is fairly large, built to a cruciform plan, and prior to the dissolution was a collegiate church with considerable land holdings (VCH 3).

Tythe Farm is situated approximately 70m north of St Mary's and, like most of the older buildings on the main street, is of 18th century date (Pevsner, 459). As referred to above, the rear garden slopes down towards the former river course, which dramatically changed 'perhaps during the early Middle Ages' (VCH 3), taking the river away from both Hemingbrough and Cliffe, which had grown up alongside it (Figure 1). The most likely scenario is that repeated flooding resulted, over time, in the former loop being cut off; it is possible that this process was assisted deliberately, but there are no records to confirm even the date of this event. The alignment of streets and houses in both Hemingbrough and Cliffe clearly reflect the former river course, which survives as a stream and dyke; the church and its graveyard would originally have occupied a position immediately by the river (Plate 20).

5. RESULTS

The earliest deposit, 1046, identified at c.0.85m BGL, was a soft, orange sand interpreted as natural. Several burials were deep enough to have cut into this, and their backfills were therefore very obvious at their base. All of the burials, however, were originally cut from within the graveyard soil, 1042, a dark grey-brown clayey sandy silt up to 0.80m thick, and given the excavation method it was not possible to isolate individual grave fills for the majority. There were three broad groups of burial as classified by approximate depth, at

c.0.50m BGL (SK 1 and 3), c.0.75m BGL (SK 5, 9 and 10) and c.0.95m BGL (SK 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11). A sample of bone and tooth was taken from the best preserved example in each group (SK 1, 6 and 10). A gazetteer of burials (contexts 1009-1041 and 1045; Plates 1-15) noting the burial position and survival of bone, and recording which burials were lifted and sampled, is provided in appendix 1, and individual locations can be found in Figure 3. It is clear from this figure that there was a minimal degree of inter-cutting, and that all the burials were aligned east-west. Only one, SK 11, contained any evidence of a coffin (Plate 15), the timber of which survived only as a stain, with the lid-plate corroded onto the bones of the torso. SK 9 and SK 10 were obviously shrouded, as they were tightly compressed within their cuts; it is very likely that this is the case for the majority.

At the eastern end of the new building, a group of two large pits and a posthole were identified at c.0.80m BGL, cut into the graveyard soil 1042 (Figure 3). In particular, pit cut 1006 was at least 3m across and 1.2m deep. The lowest fill, 1005, was a soft, black, sandy silt with a very high organic content; this was sealed by 1004, a soft grey mottled mid brown sandy silt which contained 13th century pottery (Plates 16). Immediately to the east of this was a sub-circular posthole, 1007/1008, measuring 0.50m across that contained a large preserved timber (Plate 17). The timber could not be recovered as it lay at an unsafe depth in wet deposits, and was too soft to survive mechanical excavation. This posthole was probably cut through 1043, a deposit measuring 3.5m across that was thought to be the backfill of another large pit, 1043/1044 (Plate 18). Pit 1004-1006 had been cut by a north-south aligned 19th century ceramic field drain cut, 1003. The fill, 1002, contained 14th and 15th century pottery that had clearly been disturbed from lower deposits. The drain was sealed beneath 1001, a 0.60m thick layer of firm, dark grey-brown, clayey silt with frequent animal bone and brick fragments, which was interpreted as an 18th or 19th century make-up deposit. 1001 was observed to overlie all earlier deposits across the entire site.

6. DISCUSSION

As observed above, the burials discovered at Tythe Farm are not especially dense or inter-cut, and while there are probably at least as many again in the undisturbed areas within the building footprint, nevertheless they seem to represent a graveyard that either was not heavily used, or perhaps was not in use for a particularly long time. The complete absence of burials from the south-western area, and the lack of disturbed human bone in the backfills of the pits identified in the eastern area, at least support this observation, and may indicate where the boundary of the cemetery was.

These burials are provisionally interpreted as medieval on the basis of their alignment and the complete absence of grave goods. They are therefore thought to relate to the churchyard of St Mary's. Tythe Farm lies c.70m north of the church, which would make the former graveyard very large; the scale of the medieval collegiate church, referred to above, might allow for this. It would seem probable that the land to the north of the church was sold off after the Dissolution; the college was suppressed in 1545, when passed to the Crown from the ownership of Durham, and became a vicarage (VCH 3). There are, however, no records to support this archaeological interpretation, which must therefore remain speculative. The churchyard was extended during the 19th century (VCH 3) but presumably this relates to land directly attached to it.

There is a suggestion that the burials in fact relate to the Wesleyan Chapel of 1836 that stands directly opposite Tythe Farm, but as the farm pre-dates the chapel, this would seem rather odd. Additionally, whilst the pottery in pit 1004-1006 may be residual, the eastern group of pits may be medieval and are cut through the graveyard soil, suggesting that by the 14th or 15th century the graveyard may already have been truncated by other activities, before either the chapel or the current elements of Tythe Farm were built.

A further alternative is that these burials pre-date the church, and therefore relate to the Anglo-Scandinavian burials found in similar river-side locations along the Ouse, particularly at Riccall Landing. On the basis of the evidence set out above, this interpretation is not thought likely, but the bone and tooth samples taken from burials SK 1, SK 6 and SK 10 would definitively answer this question were the funding available to process them.

The large pits in the north-eastern corner of the excavation probably represent either agricultural or back-yard activity such as rubbish disposal, which as discussed above may be late medieval in date. The large posthole is probably later than the pits, and may be part of a building pre-dating the current layout of Tythe Farm. On its own, and with no dating evidence, this cannot be taken any further. The presence of organic deposits, however, is of considerable interest as it may imply good organic survival elsewhere in this area.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research and author	I.D. Milsted
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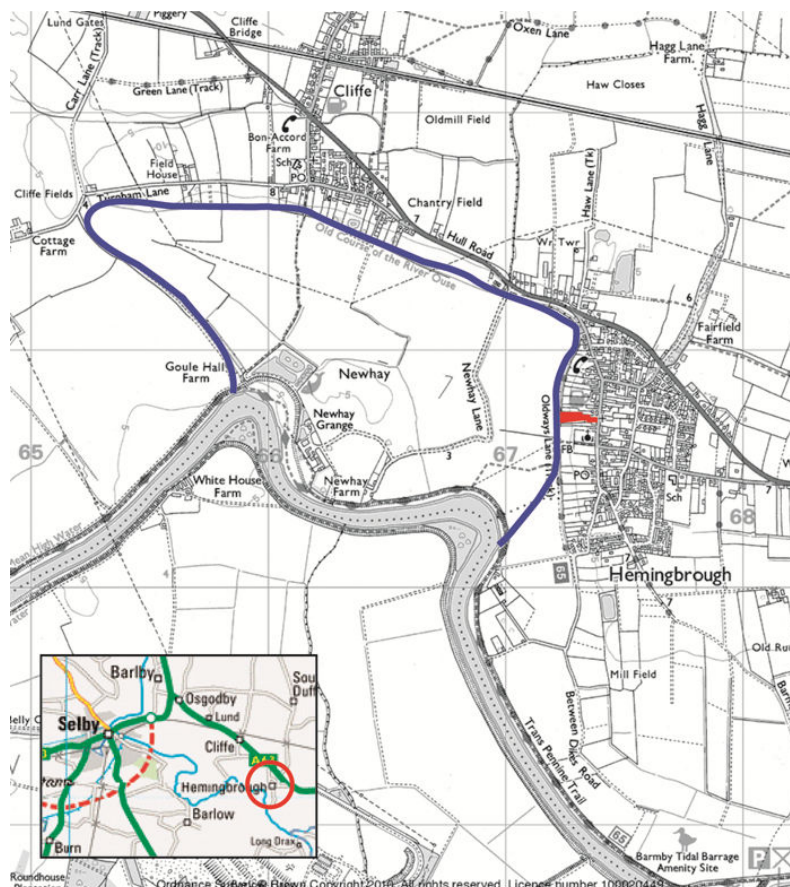


Figure 1 Site location, inset showing location of village, and main image showing former course of the Ouse in blue and the area of Tythe Farm in red.



Figure 2 New building outline shown in red within grounds of Tythe Farm

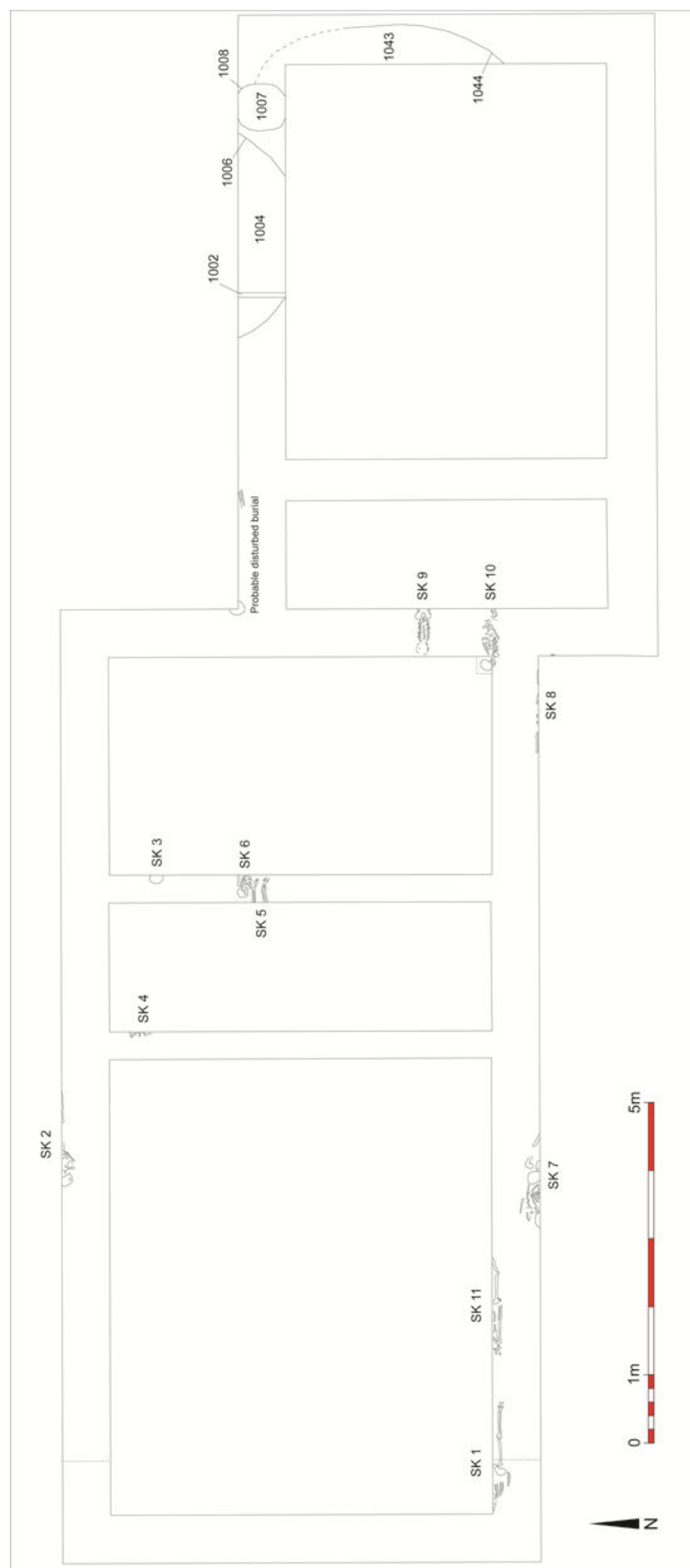


Figure 3 Location of inhumations and cut features within foundation trenches



Plate 1 Skeleton 1, context 1010



Plate 2 Skeleton 2, context 1013



Plate 3 Skeleton 2 with section, looking north-west



Plate 4 Skeleton 3, context 1016



Plate 5 Skeleton 4, context 1019



Plate 6 Skeleton 4 with section, looking SSE



Plate 7 Skeleton 5, context 1022



Plate 8 Skeleton 6, context 1025, north to right



Plate 9 Skeleton 7, context 1028



Plate 10 Skeleton 7 with section, looking south-east



Plate 11 Skeleton 8, context 1031



Plate 12 Skeleton 9, context 1034, north to top



Plate 13 Skeleton 10, context 1037



Plate 14 Skeleton 11, context 1040



Plate 15 Detail of coffin stain associated with skeleton 11, looking north-west



Plate 16 Pit backfill 1004, looking east



Plate 17 Posthole backfill 1007 with timber in situ, looking west



Plate 18 Pit backfill 1043, looking north



Plate 19 View of foundation trenches, looking north-west



Plate 20 View of St Mary's Church from the former course of the River Ouse

APPENDIX 1: GAZETTEER OF INHUMATION BURIALS

Skeleton 1

Grave fill: 1009

Skeleton: 1010

Grave cut: 1011

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.50m BGL, only right side within the trench. Cranium badly crushed, no R humerus or scapula.

Bone present: R radius and ulna, R hand, R pelvis, R ribs, R femur, R patella, R tibia, R fibula, R foot

Sample of bone and tooth taken as sample #1

Skeleton 2

Grave fill: 1012

Skeleton: 1013

Grave cut: 1014

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.90m BGL, only right side within the trench, R arm, pelvis and R leg disturbed by machine

Bone present: cranium, R scapula, R ribs

Skeleton 3

Grave fill: 1015

Skeleton: 1016

Grave cut: 1017

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.50m BGL, only skull within the trench

Bone present: cranium

Skeleton 4

Grave fill: 1018

Skeleton: 1019

Grave cut: 1020

?Juvenile, supine, aligned east-west, 0.80m BGL, badly truncated by a field drain, upper torso only.

Bone present: fragments of cranium, L clavicle, R humerus, cervical vertebrae, ribs

Skeleton 5

Grave fill: 1021

Skeleton: 1022

Grave cut: 1023

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.75m BGL, feet and lower legs only.

Bone present: R+L tibia and fibula, feet.

Skeleton 6

Grave fill: 1024

Skeleton: 1025

Grave cut: 1026

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.95m BGL, truncated by grave cut 1023 (for skeleton 5), no R arm

Bone present: cranium, thoracic and cervical vertebrae, ribs, L humerus, L scapula

Sample of bone and tooth taken as sample #2

Skeleton 7

Grave fill: 1027

Skeleton: 1028

Grave cut: 1029

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.90m BGL, left hand side only within trench, no left hand or radius, NOT LIFTED

Bone present: cranium, L scapula, L humerus, L pelvis, L femur, L tibia, L fibula

Skeleton 8

Grave fill: 1030

Skeleton: 1031

Grave cut: 1032

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.80m BGL, left side and feet only within trench

Bone present: L ulna, L femur, some of L hand, feet

Skeleton 9

Grave fill: 1033

Skeleton: 1034

Grave cut: 1035

?Juvenile, supine, aligned east-west, 0.70m BGL, very truncated, no arms, skull crushed

Bone present: cranium fragments, all vertebrae, both scapulae, ribs, pelvis, both femurs

Skeleton 10

Grave fill: 1036

Skeleton: 1037

Grave cut: 1038

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.75m BGL, disturbed by machine

Bone present: cranium, mandible, all vertebrae, L humerus, R radius and ulna, both hands, pelvis, R femur

Sample of bone and tooth taken as sample #3

Skeleton 11

Grave fill: 1039

Skeleton: 1040

Grave fill: 1041

Adult, supine, aligned east-west, 0.85m BGL, Right side only in trench, no skull – possibly rolled away to the north beyond limit of excavation, no R fibula or foot, mineralised coffin fragments present, NOT LIFTED

Bone present: mandible, R humerus, R radius and ulna, R hand, R ribs, R side of pelvis, R femur, R patella, R tibia

Disturbed burial

Fragments of skull and a tibia & fibula: 1046