



YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST REPORT

SITE ADDRESS	St. Michael and St. Lawrence Parish Church, Fewston, North Yorkshire		
CLIENT NAME	Pearce Bottomley Architects		
YAT PROJECT #	5417	YAT REPORT #	2010/87
MUSEUM ACCESSION #	n/a	GRID REFERENCE	SE 1948 5410
PLANNING REFERENCE #	n/a	AAI OPS NOTICE #	n/a

INTRODUCTION

A watching brief was maintained between 13th – 19th August 2010 at St Michael and St Lawrence Church, Fewston (Figure 1) during the excavation of service trenches associated with the new Washburn Heritage Centre building in the churchyard (Figure 2, Plates 1 and 2).

The church is mainly 17th century with an earlier tower, having been extensively re-built in 1697 (Pevsner, 200). The area of the new building was archaeologically excavated by John Buglass, during which a large number of inhumations were recovered. Of primary concern during this watching brief were inhumation burials, along with any evidence for earlier graveyard boundaries. Four burials were encountered, and were recorded, lifted and returned to the trench under the terms of the faculty stipulated by the Diocese of Bradford. The identification and recovery of burials was restricted by the depth of the trenches, which at 2.5m deep were too deep to safely work in, particularly in the eastern area of ground-works. The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts made by the contractor, R.N. Wooler, to facilitate access, particularly the widening and stepping of the trench in the western area of the graveyard (Plate 10).



Figure 1 Location of Fewston (insert) and the church

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RESULTS

A 0.60m wide trench aligned east-west was excavated by machine to a maximum depth of 2.5m below ground level (BGL) in the area west of the church tower. Around 12m west of the tower, this trench changed orientation to north-west – south-east and was dug through a breach in the churchyard wall and into the small car-park beyond it. Feeding into this main trench were two trenches running from the new building; a foul-water outlet aligned north-south and a surface water drain aligned south-west – north-east, both of which entered a man-hole that required a larger area to be excavated (see Figure 2). Additionally, a drain running north-south along the western edge of the new building was connected with the confluence of the other three. This area required a larger excavation to a depth of 2.3m BGL, where two brick-built burial vaults containing human remains were encountered.

In this area, the earliest identified deposit was a very compact, yellow-grey sandy clay, which was interpreted as natural and encountered at around 0.60-0.80m BGL. This had been cut through to insert the vaulted burials, the base of which lay at 2.3m BGL. These were aligned east-west and measured 2m x 0.70m wide, and were capped with plain sandstone flags (Plates 3, 4 & 5). They were not clearly associated with a specific grave marker, but were thought to be nineteenth century on the basis of the bricks they were built with. The backfill above the vaults consisted mainly of re-deposited natural material disturbed during their insertion; above this was a 0.60m thick layer of compact-friable, yellow-brown sandy clay with gravel lenses and fragments of nineteenth century brick. This probably represents a graveyard soil, but may be a ground make-up deposit associated with landscaping. Sealing this deposit was a 0.20m thick layer of dark grey-brown clayey silt topsoil (Plate 9).

Two further inhumation burials were encountered 12m west of the church tower, just beyond the point where the main trench changed orientation to the north-west. These were cut into a similar layer of compact, yellow-brown sandy clay to that described above, with sandstone fragments and very occasional fragments of disarticulated human bone. This was interpreted as a variation of the graveyard soil; it overlay natural clay at 1.6m BGL and was overlain by a 0.20m thick layer of topsoil. The burials were cut to a depth of around 1.5m BGL. The easternmost of the two had no discernable coffin, and only the cranium lay within the excavated area (Plate 6). The westernmost was exposed from the feet to the mid-torso, and lay inside a wooden coffin of probable nineteenth century date (Plates 7 & 8).

Around 1.5m north-west of these burials, the graveyard soil petered out, leaving only topsoil overlying a compact yellow sandy clay with frequent sandstone fragments, interpreted as topsoil (Plate 10). It was inferred from this change that the limit of the burials is within the current graveyard boundary wall.

CONCLUSION

No evidence was found for the various re-construction phases of the church known to have occurred, and this, together with a marked paucity of disturbed burials and disarticulated human bone and a fairly sparse number of graves, suggests that this part of the graveyard was extensively altered at some point prior to the nineteenth century burials described above. The most obvious occasion for this may be the 1697 rebuild of the church, when it is possible that the severe slope of the site necessitated large areas of the graveyard to be cleared to allow access for materials and subsequently re-landscaped; further fieldwork would be necessary, however, to prove this.

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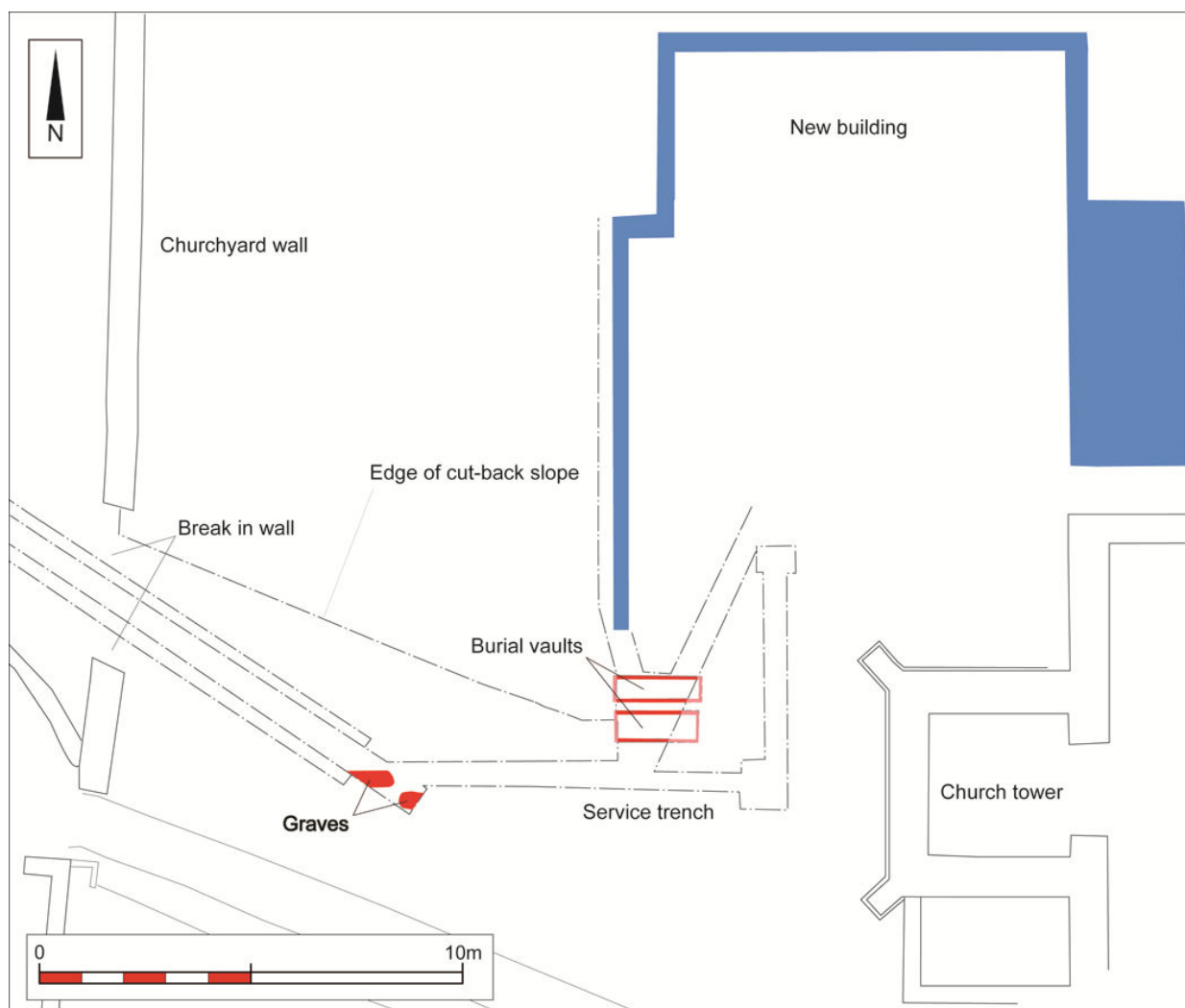


Figure 2 Ground-works plan, adapted from architect's original. New building shown in blue and graves in red.

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Plate 1 Church from north-east, showing slope of graveyard



Plate 2 Area west of the tower, looking north-west

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Plate 3 First encounter with brick-built vault, looking south-west



Plate 4 Detail of brick-built remains in east-facing section

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Plate 5 Area of brick-built vaults looking north-west, showing lower deposit sequence



Plate 6 Eastern-most burial at change of trench orientation, looking south

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Plate 7 Western-most burial at change of trench orientation, looking north



Plate 8 Upper part of western-most burial, exposed as excavation progressed

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Plate 9 Change of trench orientation, looking south-east, showing deposit sequence around burials



Plate 10 Western part of service trench, showing widening and stepping, and the limit of the graveyard soil beyond the photographic scale

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