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**The Old Deanery
Ripon
North Yorkshire
(SAM NY 1282)**

**Archaeological Excavation
Interim Report**

**MAP 01-07-01
September 2001**

**The Old Deanery
Minster Close
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Non Technical Summary

An archaeological excavation of the Exterior Foundation Trench was undertaken, between the 10th September and the 26th September 2001, within the Scheduled Ancient Monument Area (Monument No. NY 1282) at the Old Deanery, Minster Road, Ripon, North Yorkshire. The Old Deanery is a Grade II* Listed Building dating from the Seventeenth century, with modifications in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. The area around the Proposed Development Area is known to lie within an area of known Historical and Archaeological significance.

The Excavation Area was excavated at the west end of The Old Deanery in the area of the proposed stairwell extension. The Foundation Trench comprised the evaluation trench Areas A and B at the south end, and an additional area (Area C) measuring 7.5m by 1.5m.

The initial evaluation in Areas A and B uncovered two inhumations, the northern skeleton was only seen in section and the southern skeleton was missing its skull. Both graves were orientated east to west and continued under the west wall of The Old Deanery.

The excavations uncovered a large "T" shaped cobble and clay foundation which predated The Old Deanery. This structure sealed the remains of six infants, four children (juveniles) and two adults. One adult inhumation at the northern end of the trench was left in situ.

1. Introduction

This document sets out the results of the excavation of the exterior foundation trench (Area C) located to the west of The Old Deanery, Minster Road, Ripon, North Yorkshire (SE 3147 7118: Figs. 1 & 2).

All work has been funded by the client, Express Terminals Ltd.

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2. Site Description

The Old Deanery is a Seventeenth century building with Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth century modifications, which is situated within the boundary of Ripon Minster Close (Scheduled Ancient Monument NY 1282 : SE 3147 7118 : Fig. 1) immediately to the north of the Minster. The Old Deanery is a Grade 2* Listed Building, part three storey with attics and is constructed of thick masonry walls with various existing timber and solid floors related to stories and the natural ground slope.

The area of the Proposed Extension is currently a small garden border and a path leading from a window and door on the west side of the Old Deanery to the gardens and a gateway in the boundary wall to the car park at the front of the building (Figs. 2 & 3).

The site lies on soils derived from periglacial sediments and gravel overlying drift geology of boulder clay and solid geology of Permo-Triassic marls and sandstones with gypsum over limestone.

3. Historical and Archaeological Background

Both documentary sources and excavation have illustrated the archaeological potential for this area of Ripon.

The site lies within the boundary of the ecclesiastical precinct of the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Wilfrid (Scheduled Ancient Monument No. NY 1282). A number of excavations have been undertaken within the ecclesiastical precinct (Hall & Whyman 1996 & Whyman 1997). In addition Geophysical Survey (GSB 1999 & 2000), in the gardens to the rear of the Old Deanery, has also been undertaken.

Previous investigations in the immediate vicinity of the site have suggested that this area of Ripon has been occupied from the Eighth century and that The Old Deanery stands on land donated in 1414 by Archbishop Bowett for the building of a New Bedern, or College of Vicars Choral, and a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas.

Excavation in the Deanery Gardens by Greenhaugh in 1977-8 recorded settlement activity of Eleventh century date occurring at a depth of between 0.8m - 1.4m. The survival of these earlier deposits has been explained by the presence of a thick layer of post-medieval deposits which protected the earlier activity and had not been removed by later landscaping.

A number of burials were located during the installation of the bay windows to The Old Deanery in 1859 (Finlayson 2000, p. 7).

An Archaeological Evaluation was undertaken in July 2001 (MAP 2001). Two areas located at the southern end of the proposed foundation trench were excavated: Area A measured 2m by 2m and Area B was 1.3m by 1.3m. Two adult inhumation burials were found at a depth of c. 1m below ground level and continuing underneath the west wall of the Old Deanery. These burials are to remain undisturbed and in situ by the proposed construction work.

4. Aims and Objectives

The site lays within the historic core of the City of Ripon. Sites of known historical and archaeological significance occur within the immediate environs of the Ripon Minster and Deanery.

The first phase of the 2001 programme of archaeological works was to evaluate an area immediately to the west of The Old Deanery building (Figs. 2 & 3). The archaeological evaluation indicated the nature and depth at which archaeological deposits may be encountered. In-situ burials, dating to the medieval period, were found at the southern end of the Proposed Development Area and continued underneath the western wall of The Old Deanery.

A design solution for the foundations of the new stairwell has been proposed and accepted. This will involve the spanning over the burials found during the Evaluation (Fig. 3) and preserve the burials which continue under the Old Deanery. The foundation trenches (Areas C and D) will be hand excavated by archaeologists to ensure that information recovered from the excavations adds to the interpretation of the site as a whole.

5. Methodology

Two areas were to be excavated (Fig. 3), a foundation trench west of the Old Deanery, measuring 7.5m by 1.5m to a depth of 1.2m below ground level (Area C) and the southern foundation pillar trench inside the building, measuring 1.2m square and to a depth of 2.5m deep below floor level (Area D). The second foundation pillar is to be placed in the existing basement and does not require any excavation.

After initial topsoil/overburden stripping areas were cleaned, photographed, assessed, and recorded to normal professional standards. All features/deposits were excavated to define relationships and establish chronology. All archaeological deposits were recorded on MAP pro forma sheets.

All finds were processed, bagged and labelled on site in accordance with English Heritage guidelines (AML Jan. 1995 : Appendix 2). Finds other than pottery, animal bone, brick/tile are to be classed as small finds. All small finds have been keyed into the site plans and levelled (3D recorded).

All features were drawn at scales of 1:10 or 1:20 where appropriate (Appendix 3). All recorded features/deposits have been accurately located on the site plan and keyed into fixed OS datum. All heights and depths were referenced to metres AOD.

The photographic record is made up of monochrome prints, colour prints and colour slides (Appendix 4).

Environmental sampling was undertaken as outlined in the Project Design.

The inhumation burials were exhumed under a Home Office Burial Licence.

6. Excavation Results: Interior Trench (Forthcoming)

The Interior Trench (Area D) is currently pending completion of an interior survey of the wooden floor.

7. Excavation Results: Exterior Trench

Excavations in Area C recorded three distinct phases of activity; a group of child and adult burials, a medieval cobble and clay structure which overlay the burials and Post-medieval and modern build up and service trenches.

7.1 Natural Deposits

Excavation ceased at a depth of 1m when natural deposits of limestone, cobble and pebbles in a matrix of coarse grit were reached. The natural deposits (context 2052) were observed over the whole of the trench. This deposit was identical to that established in Evaluation Area A.

The present topography of the site shows the The Old Deanery standing on a high point with the land falling to the south. Prior to excavation it was believed that recent terracing had accounted for this. Excavation showed that in the northern part of the trench a geological deposit 0.5m in depth at its deepest point and consisting of a mixed cobble and pebble in a reddish gritty matrix overlying a deposit of clean red sand (2017/2033) was either the fill of a palaeochannel or a bank of material which had been deposited on the natural slope. A 0.6m wide excavation through Deposit 2017/2033, located a sharp break of slope on the southern edge. The northern edge could not be established conclusively because of in situ burial 2036 but it appeared that Deposit 2017/2033 either changed in consistency to a much more compact deposit or the northern edge to a palaeochannel (context 2042) had been located.

Deposit 2017/2033 had been heavily truncated by the graves and structural cut features.

7.2 Burials (Fig. 4 & Pls. 1-8)

A mixed group of burials were located. In contradiction to the results of the previous evaluation of Areas A and B the burials in Area C consisted of both infants, juveniles and

adults. This composition was not only a surprise but also potentially of significance. Dating of the burials is problematic as no gravegoods were recovered and only a small number of stratigraphic relationships between individual graves could be established. The majority of the burials were orientated east - west or slight variations of this alignment and where it was possible to discern the bodies had been placed in a supine position. There was little evidence for the use of wooden coffins although all the burials were placed in grave cuts and there was also the suggestion that the infants/children had been wrapped in textiles which retained the fragile remains and prevented redistribution by animal activity. All the skeletons were in a good condition considering their age at death and the possibility that they are over 1000 years old.

Eleven burials were excavated in total with one (skeleton 2036) left in situ.

At the northern end of Area C excavation located a group of three burials which provided clear stratigraphic relationships. Grave 2038 was only partially excavated as the full extent of the grave and accompanying burial (skeleton 2036) was outside of the area required for the foundation trench. Cut in to the natural deposits this grave contained the remains of an adult male with head facing south (Pl. 1 : Appendix 6).

Immediately to the south of Grave 2038 was a smaller grave (Grave 2028) which contained the remains of a child 4-5 years at death and possibly female (Skeleton 2026 : Pl. 2). The head of this skeleton appeared to be facing north. Graves tend to be excavated to accommodate the size of the individual but in this case the grave cut is visibly over size for the incumbent. This grave does not follow the line established by Grave 2038 suggesting that there was not a regimented order for successive cutting of the graves.

Grave 2011 follows the same alignment as Grave 2028 and is immediately above, but did not disturb Grave 2028. This grave was associated with burial 2014, a child of c. 4 - 5 years at death (Pl. 3). As with Grave 2028 the grave size far exceeds the size of the burial. Although no gravegoods were recovered the cranium was located immediately below the clay and cobble structure 2008, thus providing a stratigraphic relationship for Graves 2011 and 2028.

To the south-east of Graves 2011 and 2026 was Grave 2048, orientated approximately thirty degrees off the east-west axis, this grave contained skeleton 2043, a child of c. 4-5 years of age at death (Pl. 4). This child suffered from anemia.

Between Grave 2048 and Grave 2059 the apparent lack of burials is striking. The absence of funerary activity may be explained. A small truncated feature cut 2029, filled by 2025 in the edge of the foundation cut for Structure 2008/2054 may have been the remnants of a grave cut removed by the structure. This was the only evidence for any graves in the area between the two clusters of burials. Another very shallow feature (cut 2013), filled with sandy silt and containing a small amount of human bone was situated on the western edge of Area C. This feature appeared to be a small pit or truncated cut and was not part of a grave. Therefore either the later stone structure removed traces of the earlier burials or they never existed in this area. The second apparent clear zone is seen further to the south between Graves 2019 and 2032, this time just under 2m distant. The suggestion is therefore towards clustering rather than later removal.

The second group of burials consisted of three truncated Graves 2019, 2041 and 2059 containing skeletons 2030, 2040 and 2039 respectively (Pls. 5 - 7). The graves quite clearly varied in size reflecting the age of the associated burial. Grave 2019 was the largest grave and associated with Skeleton 2030, a 7-8 year old child. This skeleton possessed evidence for pathology. Skeleton 2040 was an infant of 18 months. A further three individuals were also represented in Grave 2041 consisting of an infant aged 8-12 months at death (skeleton 2044), an infant of 10-14 months (skeleton 2045) and an adult of 14-22 years (skeleton 2046). Skeleton 2039 in Grave 2059 was an infant of only 6 months at death.

Graves 2019, 2041 and 2059 were all cut into the geological deposit of fine red sand and backfilled with the same material making it difficult to see the upper surface of the grave cuts. The edges were only seen at the level of the skeletons and then distinguished by the grey silty material that formed a shallow fringe around the body.

Graves 2041 and 2059 had been cut by a later grave (Grave 2021), which contained the remains of an infant aged 18 months at death (Skeleton 2031 : Pl. 7).

A further infant burial, skeleton 2032 (Pl. 8), in a heavily truncated shallow cut 2056 was excavated in Evaluation Area A, between and slightly to the west of the two adult burials in Evaluation Area B. This group of graves were almost 2m to the south of Graves 2019, 2021, 2041 and 2059 and suggest a third independent group of burials; perhaps reflecting family groups/plots.

7.3 Medieval Structure (Fig. 5; Pls. 9 & 10)

Removal of the topsoil and overburden revealed the remains of a cobble and clay structure (context 2008 : Pl. 9) aligned north-south with a more substantial east-west aligned wall (2054) which continued into the west facing section (Pl. 10 : Fig. 5). Structure 2008 was truncated to the west by rubble filled pit (context 2051) and a drainage trench (context 2005) to the east, only a central core remained. Both walls were of identical construction, large rounded cobbles and occasional limestone blocks bonded with clay. The level of the original foundation trench cut (context 2053) was illustrated in section. Its proximity to the present ground surface shows that the wall footing was truncated by later activity.

7.4 Modern features

Later activity was represented by the remains of a large pit (cut 2051) which cut through the deposit of dark, humic topsoil (context 2006), but also truncated the western side of 2009 (the cut for Structure 2008). Pit 2051 was filled with dressed and faced masonry rubble which also included some brick (context 2007), probably associated with the demolition of a out building and then used to create a level platform for an existing rectangular brick retaining wall, possibly a greenhouse, situated to the west of the excavation.

The modern surface water drainage trench (cut 2005) contained a saltglazed pipe (context 2004) which extended north-south along the whole length of the trench which had truncated the eastern side of the medieval cobble and clay structure 2008 and removed the point of intersection between 2054 and 2009. The deposit filling the trench (2003) was sealed by a modern gravel surfacing (2002) and stone steps (2001) that formed the present ground surface at the western side of the Old Deanery.

8. Interim Conclusions

The almost total absence of dating material from the excavation means that it is not possible to place the cemetery in a definite time period. The burials were cut in to natural deposits suggesting an early date. The alignment of the burials suggests that they are Christian. Ripon has been occupied from the Eighth century and as to whether the skeletons are Anglo-Saxon or medieval in date is unknown. This could only be resolved by the use of radio-carbon dating of one or more of the burials. The cemetery represented multiple inhumations within a very confined area, these occurred within clusters of discrete burials in individual grave cuts orientated east to west. While there appears to be some time lapse between individual burials with the inter-cutting of infant graves, the presence of skeletal remains of three additional individuals in one grave may suggest clustering of graves indicating the presence of a large population of unrelated infants and children with a high mortality rate. This would require frequent multiple inhumations in a single location and perhaps The Old Deanery site provided such a location.

Social explanations for these conditions might be a single ceremony for the burial of children from a community; or a single family that used a traditional burial plot. The burial of many individuals within a confined area might have implications for the status or beliefs of those that buried them. Again the dead children of a poor community may have been served by a relatively summary burial service or a family may have wished to keep its children physically close together after their deaths.

It is important to not see the results of this excavation in isolation. A number of burials were located during the installation of the bay windows to The Old Deanery in 1859. This suggests that the burials found in 2001 are part of a larger complex as recorded in 1859.

The burials all clearly pre-date the construction of the clay and cobble foundation for an apparently substantial building which pre-dates The Old Deanery. It is known from documentary sources that The Old Deanery stands on land donated in 1414 by Archbishop Bowett for the building of a New Bedern, or College of Vicars Choral, and a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas and it is possible that the structure found represents a building associated with the above.

Excavation established that the areas required for the external foundations for the new staircase were down to natural deposits and archaeologically sterile. In situ burials were made secure as the trench is to be left open until construction work commences. Following a discussion with the project architect arrangements were made to develop a proposal for a shuttering system that would protect the in situ burials from construction work. A timber frame would be erected to support a backfill of selected spoil from the trench excavation. The frame would remain in place after the pouring of concrete and be allowed to decay naturally.

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